The Lived Experiences of Transracial Adoptees in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA)

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
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Abstract

There has been increasing interest in the area of transracial adoption over the past decade, as there has recently been an increase in the number of Caucasian couples parenting non-Caucasian children (Lindsey, 2012). Although much research has been conducted regarding transracial adoption, very few studies have spoken directly with transracial adoptees. The present study addressed this gap in the literature through conducting interviews with eight transracially-adopted individuals. Interviews addressed adoptees’ lived experiences, with a focus on the importance of relationships in the adoptees’ lives. Data was analyzed using grounded theory and results demonstrated the crucial importance of relationships in transracial adoptees’ lives. Additionally, it was found that a sense of understanding is paramount for transracial adoptees in these relationships. The insights gained from this study regarding the importance of open, understanding relationships can eventually be used by mental health professionals to aid adoptees and multicultural individuals.
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Chapter I: Introduction

Much interest has been shown regarding the topic of transracial adoption; especially since there has recently been an increasing number of white couples parenting non-White children (Lindsey, 2012). Understandably then, adoption has been a topic of increasing interest for researchers for the past decades. Not only has transracial adoption made appearances in pop culture (for example, Nicole Opper’s 2009 documentary, “Off and Running”, about a transracially adopted adolescent in New York City) but also has a foundation in ancient history (for example Romulus and Remus in Roman history) (Palacois & Brodzinsky, 2010).

Definition of Terms

Prior to beginning, it is necessary to define the terms commonly found in the adoption literature. The Adoption Council of Canada provides a very useful glossary, giving a comprehensive definition of many of the terms that are found throughout adoption literature. ‘Adoption’ itself is defined as the legal transfer of parental rights from birth parent(s) to adoptive parent(s), while the ‘adoptive’ is the person who is adopted and frequently refers to an adopted person who is now an adult (although this is not always the case). ‘Domestic Adoption’ is the adoption of a child living in the same country as the adoptive parent(s) while ‘International Adoption’ refers to the adoption of a child living in a different country from the adoptive parent(s). Finally, ‘Transracial Adoption’ refers to the adoption of a child of one race by a family of a different race. In terms of the countries involved, a ‘sending country’ is a country from which children are adopted. A ‘receiving country’ is the country which children are adopted into (Canada, for example)
Transracial Adoption in Canada

In Canada, transracial adoption had very tumultuous beginnings, initially fraught with political motives and private agencies. Initially, transracial adoption was a mainly post World War II phenomenon (Westhues & Cohen, 1998). This was full of controversy, as some cited altruistic motives wishing to help a child orphaned by war, while others contested this motivation suggesting that instead transracial adoption was one of the strongest forms of imperialism (Brookfield, 2008; Westhues & Cohen, 1998). That is, as stated above, many feminists saw this movement of children as imperialism because it made countries such as the US believe that they were responsible for ‘rescuing’ sending countries (Brookfield, 2008).

Often, unregulated private agencies were founded by groups of adoptive mothers, the Families for Children (FFC) and the Kuan Yin Foundation (KYF) for example (Brookfield, 2008). Major conflict existed between these private agencies and the government, with the agencies angry at the red tape surrounding transracial adoption, and the government showing concern for potential rule breaking and corner cutting by the private agencies (Brookfield, 2008).

Unlike the controversial agencies of the past, private agencies today are much more heavily regulated. For example, in Ontario, all private adoption practitioners must be licensed (Sobel & Daly, 1995). Now, these Ontario private agencies must provide counselling for birth mothers, recruit and assess potential adoptive parents, supervise the adoption placements once they have taken place, and provide foster care for children waiting for an adoptive placement (Sobel & Daly, 1995). This certainly provides more services for all involved in the adoptive triad (adopted child, adoptive parents, birth parents) than was previously available.

Currently, Canadians are able to adopt children from many more countries than were previously available (Paul-Carson, 2012). While in the past, adopted children were largely from war torn countries following conflict (post WWII and Vietnam for example), Canadians may
adopt from any country unless a moratorium is in place against that country, or the specific
country itself does not allow inter-country adoption (Paul-Carson, 2012). At present, there are
suspensions on adoptions from a variety of countries including Nepal, Liberia, and Georgia
(Canada, 2014). Such suspensions against certain sending countries are in place for many reasons,
including allegations of illegal and unethical practices, such as paying birth mothers money for
giving up their children (Pearce, 2012).

In Ontario, each agency is designated a specific country in which to practice (Paul-Carson,
2012), unlike previously, where privately created agencies (KYF and FCC for example) would
enter into countries of their choosing (albeit with much difficulty) and begin their adoption
practice on an as-needed basis in their eyes. This made it extremely difficult to adopt children
from countries where no private agency had set up or where connections between these agencies
had not been made (Vietnam for example, prior to the partnering of two private agencies making
transracial adoption from Vietnam possible) (Brookfield, 2008). Currently (in Ontario), if
adoptive parents wish to adopt from a country where no agency has been designated, they can
request that the provincial government nominate an agency for them, resulting in a larger range of
countries from where Canadians may adopt a child (Paul-Carson, 2012). Amendments made to
the Citizenship Act in 2007 have also made the process easier; as now a child adopted by
Canadian citizens will also be granted Canadian citizenship provided the adoption was in the best
interest of the child, the adoption created a genuine relationship between the parent and child, all
Canadian laws as well as the laws of the country of origin have been met, and as long as the
adoption was not one solely of convenience (Paul-Carson, 2012).

The infants available for domestic adoptions continue to decrease, as contraceptives are being
increasingly used and societal acceptance of unmarried adolescent mothers has also risen (Sobel
& Daly, 1994). Comparatively then, the number of international adoptions has been rising in past
years (Sobel & Daly, 1995). Adoption statistics from 2010 show that approximately 2000 children per year are adopted internationally and make their home in Canada (“Canadian’s go”, 2011). At this point, China is the leading sending country, followed by Haiti, especially after the earthquake in 2010 (“Canadian’s go”, 2011).

Currently, much focus on international adoption in Canada is being placed on the ‘best interest of the child’, meaning that the child comes first when decisions are made about them. That is not to say that this was not the case earlier in Canada’s international adoption history, but recently, legislation has focused on ensuring the best interest of the child is met at all times (Paul-Carson, 2012).

Overall, in Canada, transracial adoption has become less controversial and tumultuous than previously. Also, transracial adoption only continues to become more popular, as the number of children available domestically decreases. It seems as though Canada has tried to make the process smoother, providing more services for all parties involved and focusing on the best interests of the adopted child. While this certainly does help the process, it is also necessary that more research be focused on transracial adoption in order to further understand the adoptees’ experience.

**Rationale and Research Question**

As the literature review below will show, much research has been conducted on transracial adoption, including a strong theoretical framework, as well as the mental health of transracial adoptees. When investigating the literature on the theoretical framework behind transracial adoption, the importance of relationships becomes clear. That is, it is evident that relationships within the adoptive triad, as well as relationships between sending and receiving countries play a huge role in transracial adoption. For that reason, the present study intends to investigate the role that relationships play in the lives of transracial adoptees.
The literature on the mental health of transracial adoptees has provided a wealth of knowledge, although it cannot be easily summarized because results fall on both sides of the spectrum, with some studies showing an increased risk of psychological problems in transracial adoptees and other studies showing no such risk. These studies have used a variety of different measures, many using questionnaires, checklists, and self-report measures. Very few have actually asked the adoptees for their particular experiences in their own words. Lee (2003) also stressed the importance and need for researchers to engage adoptees as agents of change in their own lives and the present study hopes to do this, by asking adoptees directly about their experiences and how they personally navigate different life-relationships. Asking adoptees for their own stories and experiences should allow for true insight into the lives of transracial adoptees, and these insights may eventually be used by therapists and other mental health professionals to become more sensitive to, and aware of, the potential issues that transracial adoptees face. As Lee (2003) pointed out, in order to maintain cultural competence, practitioners must understand the issues that transracial adoptees face, and it is hoped that the present study can contribute to this type of understanding by providing valuable insights into adoptee lived-experiences.

Taken together, the present study intended to combine this theme of the importance of relationships with the method of asking adoptees directly for their experiences. With this in mind, the main research question driving this project is: How do relationships play into the lives and experiences of a transracial adoptee. Through semi-structured interviews, adoptees were asked about their connection with their adoptive families, their general experiences as an adoptee (especially with respect to different periods of life), and their thoughts on adoption in general, hopefully providing a picture of how relationships play into their lives as transracial adoptees (Appendix D). The use of such a method allowed for greater elaboration and insight into the
importance of relationships, hopefully providing truly valuable information not only to researchers and those interested in transracial adoption, but also to mental health professionals navigating our increasingly multicultural society.
Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

The following chapter will provide an overview of a few of the major theories that have been used to understand transracial adoption. In terms of adoption research, both psychoanalysis and feminist theory have been major theoretical underpinnings when investigating transracial adoption. In terms of feminist theory, many have argued that the adoption of a child from another country (and different racial background) into a white family can be considered viewing the children as commodities to be traded and exchanged (Brookfield, 2008). Laura Briggs (2003), for example, spoke about the various historical events (including World War II and the Cold War), which galvanized waves of transracial adoptions. Briggs (2003) points out that instead of focusing on the reasons for these disasters (including international, political, economic and military), the conventional images shown in the media at the time (a mother with an emaciated child for example) instead were used for politicized purposes. That is, these images paint the United States as the rescuer of these developing countries, pushing the US to intervene instead of focusing on actual solutions to the problems at hand (Briggs, 2003). Briggs (2003) has not been the only one to suggest this, and in fact one feminist has called transnational adoption the ultimate commoditization of children, suggesting that this process caters to the adoptive parents and completely ignores both the child and birth parents (Sollinger, 2001). While the feminist perspective on transracial adoption is often focused on power dynamics, feminism does comment on transracial adoption in other ways as well. Karen Dubinsky’s (2007) perspective regarding the emotional complexity involved in international adoption, for example, also demonstrates another way that some feminists analyze and understand transracial adoption.

Psychoanalysis has also been used to analyze and understand adoption. For example, Brinich (1995) has suggested that adoption provides a special look into ambivalence, the feelings
of both love and hate that exist on both sides of the parent-child relationship. He goes on to discuss the fantasies often created by an adopted person, which revolve around feelings of rejection and being unwanted, and how this may create a cycle where the adoptee tests their adoptive parents, resulting in the exact response from the adoptive parents that the child fears the most. Brinich (1995) suggests that this ambivalence is present in every parent-child relationship, but that adoption provides a special instance through which to examine and understand this ambivalence. Kaufman (2013) also cited ambivalence towards adoptive parents in her study of a young adopted child and her search for belongingness. Rejection and a feeling of being unwanted were also common threads in this case study (Kaufman, 2013). Clearly then, psychoanalysis has been used to understand adoption and many psychoanalytic concepts have been demonstrated in adoption stories.

Following this discussion, research on the mental health of transracial adoptees will be provided, investigating both positive and potential negative aspects of transracial adoption. It has been shown that research provides evidence on both sides of the spectrum, that is, some studies show increased psychological problems in transracial adoptees while other studies show well-adjusted transracial adoptees. A discussion of the benefits of transracial adoption will also be presented, with the positives demonstrated both on the individual level (for the adoptee themselves) but also for the countries involved in transracial adoption.

**Theoretical Framework**

Three of the major theories informing the understanding of transracial adoption will be discussed, beginning with psychoanalysis, then feminism, and finally postcolonialism. These particular theories are especially important within the transracial adoption literature because they have greatly impacted the way that adoption is understood and have illuminated not only the
internal experiences of the transracial adoptee, but have also provided an understanding of the groups and countries involved in the transracial adoption process.

*Psychoanalysis*

As stated above, psychoanalysis is often used to examine and understand adoption. Whether the adoption is domestic or transracial, many of the same issues arise (Lifton, 2010). Although this makes it sound like adopted children inherently suffer psychopathology as a result of their adopted status, Brinich (1995) makes it clear that adoption may highlight specific issues, but it does not in itself create them. It is clear that adoption does provide a valuable insight into parts of human nature and psychoanalysis can be used to interpret this insight (Brinich, 1995). As Young (2006) also stated, adoption itself is not pathogenic but it is the conscious and unconscious fantasies created that may be causing such difficulty. That is, these fantasies can become engrained and affect the experiences and relationships of the adopted person, thus creating difficulty.

As suggested above, in the psychoanalytic understanding of adoption, fantasies, ambivalence, and feelings of being unwanted/rejected are prevalent. Often times, an adopted child will create fantasies of their birth families and the reasons that they were given up for adoption (Mayers, 2010). For example, some adopted children will fantasize that they are bad or that something was wrong with them, thus resulting in their rejection at the hands of their adoptive parents (Mayers, 2010). These fantasies may then be used to organize the child’s personality, separation-individuation, and interpersonal relationships (Kaufman, 2013). For example, the case of Myra is often discussed with regards to psychoanalytic analysis with adopted people (Mayers, 2010; Rosengarten, 2010). Myra found out about her adoption by mistake, when hearing her adoptive mother speak on the phone. When she was finally officially told of her adoption, she
found herself angry at not only her adoptive parents for keeping that secret, but also at her birth parents for stealing her one chance at a true identity by abandoning her (Rosengarten, 2010). Because of her adoptive parents’ secrecy, Myra felt that she could not openly discuss her adoption with them and instead created intense fantasies about herself and her birth parents (Mayers, 2010; Rosengarten, 2010). These fantasies were extremely negative in nature, revolving around a feeling of being inherently bad, or having a mental illness, resulting in her abandonment at the hands of her birth parents (Mayers, 2010, Rosengarten, 2010). These negative fantasies have become engrained, changing the way Myra views herself and the people around her. Unfortunately, these negative fantasies and their far reaching influence on Myra’s sense of self and sense of others resulted in Myra acting in ways that echoed her earlier feelings of abandonment throughout her life (trying to get others to mistreat and ignore her, just as she feels her birth parents did, for example) (Mayers, 2010; Rosengarten, 2010). Clearly then, these fantasies can play a huge part in the adopted child’s life, as they become central in the child’s understanding of themselves and the world around them. In combination with this, the adoptive parents also have fantasies (e.g. of the perfect adoption, or the biological child they did not have), which may also result in projections on and reactions to the adopted child (Kaufman, 2013; Young, 2006).

One way to examine fantasies is through play in psychoanalytic analysis. The use of play has often been used when treating adopted children, as it allows children to express their fantasies and play through them (Gould, 2008). For example, Kaufman (2013) discussed a case of psychoanalytic analysis with a four-year-old adopted girl (Ella) using play. Ella was brought to therapy due to her controlling, provocative, and aggressive behaviour. Through this play therapy, Ella’s fantasies and personal adoption mythology became clear. Kaufman (2013) discussed Ella’s use of dolls to show her feelings of having two families, neither of which she fit in to. Through this play, Ella’s split psyche also became evident, as she pretended to be half-bear/half-girl,
belonging to neither the bear family nor the human family. Ella also often involved the therapist in her play, drawing her into the fantasies, sometimes representing the birth family, other times the adoptive family (Kaufman, 2013). This pulling of the therapist into the fantasies is also common in psychoanalytic analysis with adopted children (Young, 2006). Ella and the therapist went through a variety of different play scenarios, through which Ella played out her fantasies and made progress in coming to terms with her experience (Kaufman, 2013). Of course, Ella is only one of many adopted children who undergo psychoanalytic therapy using play. Another example involves the case of Sara, an adopted child who was able to learn through psychoanalytic play that she had some control over her life, contrasting her strong feelings of helplessness (Gould, 2008). Through play, Sara was able to use the toys to play through her origins, history, and to express her unmet needs for responsiveness and attention (Gould, 2008). Clearly then, using play in a psychoanalytic framework is very beneficial and can allow an adopted child to work through not only their histories, but also their fantasies and transference to the therapist.

In psychoanalysis, adoption has also been seen as a ghost story involving fantasy (as shown above), mystery, missing people, and a variety of other emotions (Lifton, 2010). Lifton (2010) says that each member of the adoptive triad have ghosts that they carry with them. The adopted child carries the ghost birth mother, ghost birth father (often acknowledged later once the child meets the birth mother), the ghost of the original baby (how the child would have been if they stayed with the birth parents), and the ghost of the golden child (the child the adoptive parents might have had). This so-termed ‘ghost kingdom’ is kept by the adopted child, allowing them an alternate reality of what life may have been and also provides a connection between the adopted child and the birth family (Gunsberg, 2010; Lifton, 2010). Lifton (2010) makes clear that the ghost kingdom is not only existent for domestically adopted children, but that transracially-adopted children also carry with them these same ghosts. The birth mother may also carry ghosts
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(of the child they gave up and of the adoptive parents for example), as do the adoptive parents (ghost of the perfect child, ghost of the birth mother). These ghosts carried by the adoptive parents may also result in projections onto the adopted child, which must also be taken into account in psychoanalytic therapy.

Often, the adopted child may visit the ghost kingdom through fantasies and dreams, commonly in the context of psychoanalytic analysis (Lifton, 2010). For example, Charlotte, an adopted girl that would show momentary dissociation (‘tune-out’ as if she were not in the present moment) during therapy, as if she was retreating into the ghost kingdom for a fleeting moment to connect with her birth mother (Gunsberg, 2010). Or in the case of Valerie, a young adopted woman who would pass into the ghost kingdom while intoxicated, trying frantically to reconnect with her birth mother by phoning hospitals and requesting birth records (Lifton, 2010).

Regardless of when and where the ghost kingdom is encountered, it is important to recognize and integrate this kingdom, as this helps the dissociation lift, and often this integration will result in a search for the birth mother (Lifton, 2010). This search and possible subsequent reunion may be difficult for all involved and it is important to realize that finding the birth mother (if that is the result of the search) does not mean that ghost kingdom will disappear, as finding the birth mother will likely activate the ghosts of the birth father and other relatives (Lifton, 2010).

Overall, it is extremely important for adoptive parents to keep the lines of communication open between themselves and their children, reducing the need to retreat into the ghost kingdom (Lifton, 2010). For transracially-adopted children, it is suggested that the adoptive parents arrange a trip to their child’s country of origin and try to obtain as much information about the birth family as possible (Lifton, 2010).

The psychoanalytic understanding of adoption also illuminates the importance of relationships both within and outside the adoptive triad. In fact, it has been said that the root of
our desire for attachment is found through our early relationship with our mothers/fathers (Gould, 2008). When these parent-infant patterns are disrupted, the child’s attachment later on can become impaired (Gould, 2008). Thus, the severing of these original relationships can contribute to future problems, and in fact Lifton (2010) suggests that the trauma of being separated from the birth mother may be core to the psychology of the adopted child. The attachment to the ghost kingdom and the need to retreat to connect to the birth family also demonstrates the importance of relationships between the adopted child and birth parents. (Mayers, 2010; Rosengarten, 2010). The secrecy regarding her adoption as well as her adoptive parent’s unwillingness to provide information about Myra’s origin resulted in anger, and also contributed to Myra’s detrimental internalized negative fantasies about herself (Rosengarten, 2010). Mayers (2010) also stated that if a child is not free to ask questions about their origins and adoption, they will likely continue to act out these fantasies, which is exactly what happened to Myra. Also, Lifton (2010) made it clear that adoptive parents should keep lines of communication open with their adopted children (domestic or transracial). Lastly, the relationship between the adoptive family (child and parents) and the therapist has also been shown to be extremely important, as a strong therapeutic alliance can provide the necessary feelings of safety and comfort for the adoptive family to experience and work through any problems.

The literature summarized above demonstrates how helpful and beneficial the relationship between the adoptee and the therapist can be. Through a strong alliance, the adoptee can work through their fantasies and acknowledge the ghost kingdom, allowing for progress and development. As Young (2006) states, psychoanalytic therapists often try to form a good working alliance with both the adoptive parents and the child. Through working with the parents, the therapist provides them an opportunity to express their own concerns and fantasies, helping not only the adopted child, but themselves as well.
Therefore, it is clear that psychoanalysis certainly plays a large role in the analysis and understanding of adoption, both domestically and transracially, with a major focus on fantasy, feelings of being rejected/unwanted, and the ghost kingdom. Through psychoanalytic analysis, much has been learned about adoption, and using psychoanalysis to assess adoption has provided much valuable insight, both into adoption itself but also into many facets of human nature.

Clearly then, psychoanalysis places much emphasis on the internal processes of the adoptee (and sometimes the rest of the adoptive triad) and how these internal areas (e.g. fantasies, the ghost kingdom, etc.) can affect the lives of those involved. Other theories, such as feminism (described below), focus more on the external factors at work in transracial adoption.

Feminism

The feminist perspective on transracial adoption places a large focus on power dynamics. With that being said, Briggs (2012) noted that there has been relative silence from feminists regarding adoption, perhaps because it is very difficult to theorize poverty and the stratification of reproduction. When feminists do break the silence on adoption, some of the theory focuses on the power dynamics between countries (sending and receiving countries), as well as between groups of women.

In terms of power dynamics between countries, feminists have noted that transracial adoptions seem to take place only in one direction, from poor countries to rich ones (Briggs, 2012). That is, transracial adoption seems to operate within the space of international inequalities regarding access to resources (Briggs, 2012). This translates to individuals, as regarding within-nations adoptions it is the wealthier women who adopt from those more impoverished and vulnerable women (Briggs, 2012). As stated above, Sollinger (2001) sees transracial adoption as the ultimate commoditization of children sending them from poor to richer countries. Briggs
(2003) also presents this view through her discussion of the photographs often displayed in
newspapers and mass media of poor countries and the women and children in such impoverished
countries. Briggs (2003) suggests that these images, for example a skeletal woman holding a
terribly malnourished child, are used for politicized purposes and direct attention away from the
structural and root causes of the poverty they show. Instead, these photos mobilize the idea of
rescue, and the perceived need for the United States (and its white citizens) to rescue these poor
countries (and the coloured children so deeply entrenched in poverty). In Briggs’ (2003) eyes, this
fits in perfectly with transracial adoption, reinforcing the ideology of white heterosexual families
being optimal for rescuing and caring for these impoverished foreign children. These emotionally
charged photos have been used throughout the decades, galvanizing US intervention in foreign
conflicts, while only further stressing the need for the rescue of foreign countries and absolving
the US of the responsibility for the military, political, and economic causes of poverty (Briggs,
2003). These photos were used for this politicized purpose not only during World War II, but also
during the Vietnam War, and to demonstrate the dangers of communism (Briggs, 2003).

Another thread running through feminist theory of transracial adoption is the conflict
between those championing the cause of birth mothers and those championing the cause of the
adoptive mothers. This issue is certainly very complicated and intertwined, and often supporting
one side (although out of good intentions) casts the other side in a more negative light (although
this too is often not the intention). With regards to the support of birth mothers, Briggs (2012)
does point out some cases in which feminists have rallied to the cause of birth mothers. For
example, Briggs (2012) cited a feminist group in the United States, which fought against welfare
reform measures in 1996 that would have seen federal support being pulled away from poor
mothers. Briggs (2012) also cites a group called the Concerned United Birthmothers (CUB),
which, as the name suggests, is a group of birth mothers who were forced to hide their
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pregnancies and relinquish their children and fought for birth mothers’ rights beginning in the 1970s. Cardello (in Briggs, 2012) cites a group of birth family members (not only mothers, but also extended family) in Brazil entitled the Movement of the Mothers of the Courthouse Square, who challenged the judge and prosecutor who authorized the adoptions of their children. Cuthbert, Murphy and Quarterly (2009) discuss how feminists have lent their voices to some campaigns of birth mothers and adoptees requesting access to birth and adoption records. They also point out that the birth mothers in these cases do fit the feminist mold of the highly gendered victim of sexual double standards and inadequate social policy. Although the support of birth mothers certainly is beneficial and can lead to wonderful outcomes, seeing them only as victims may result in the birth mothers being accrued with virtue at the cost of the adoptive mother (Cuthbert, et al., 2009). They also suggest that this plays into the dominant family ideology, which emphasizes biology and the genetic connection between parent and child. That is, the adoptive mother, when she is recognized at all, is placed in a problematic position because she is not the biological mother of the child, which counters this traditional family ideology.

In an effort to counter this dominant ideology, other feminists try to emphasize a nurturance model instead of stressing genetic inheritance (Cuthbert, et al., 2009). Often, this is done through salvaging the figure of the adoptive mother and trying to have adoptive parenthood seen in a more positive light. In fact, feminists are more likely to be adoptive mothers than birth mothers (Cuthbert, et al., 2009; Fonesca, in Briggs, 2012). For example, Shelley Park (2006) discusses adoptive motherhood as an active process of social agency. That is, adoptive mothers choose motherhood, actively rejecting the idea that a woman’s body is her identity. Many feminists realize that women are often reduced to no more than their physical body (ability to bear children) and that this normative bodily function is entrenched in the dominant family ideology (Cuthbert, et al., 2009). Adoptive motherhood actively fights this ideology and the focus on
women’s physical bodies because through adoption, women are able to choose how and when they become mothers (Park, 2006). Cuthbert, et al., (2009) also discuss Susan Bordo’s views on adoptive motherhood and her attempt to counter the biases against adoptive parents. According to their discussion, Bordo believes that adoptive motherhood is not only as good, but may even be better than biological motherhood due to its unique qualities. She believes that through adoptive motherhood (and other non-traditional types of motherhood), the traditional script of the nuclear family as well as the gender roles inherent in this script are actively challenged. Bordo goes one step farther and includes adoptive fathers in the equation and discusses her feelings of sympathy for the adoptive fathers and their alienation from the pregnancy of their partners (Cuthbert, et al., 2009). While trying to salvage the figure of the adoptive mother is certainly valiant and necessary, it does seem to create a hierarchy where adoptive mothers come out on top of birth mothers. Cuthbert, et al., (2009) are quick to point out that just because these non-traditional forms of motherhood are different from the traditional nuclear family ideology, this does not necessarily make them feminist and they may still repeat the old dominant ways, only under a new title. Also, focusing on adoptive mothers as active (according to Park) in choosing motherhood also portrays birth mothers as passive and bodily bound.

Clearly then, the feminist perspective on transracial adoption can be very conflicting, with both sides fighting for the rights of mothers (birth and adoptive). While there are good intentions on both sides, many feminists agree that these issues are urgent for women, mothers or not (Cuthbert, et al., 2009). That is, the sex, gender and reproductive stereotypes must be dismantled so women on both sides of the transracial adoption system (birth and adoptive) can be fully respected (Cuthbert, et al., 2009). Yngvesson (in Cuthbert et al., 2009) also acknowledges that feminists must recognize the complex relationships within the adoptive triad and work in the best interests involved.
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As shown, the feminist perspectives on adoption take into account not only the dynamics between groups of mothers, but also countries as a whole and the power dynamics in place between sending and receiving countries. This perspective shares some similarities with the postcolonial perspective, discussed below.

Postcolonialism

Postcolonialism often deals with the power dynamics and relationships between countries as well as models of belonging in a family sense (Edward Said’s conception of filiative and affiliative modes of belonging for example (Radhakrishnan, 2012)). Although there is not much direct work on transracial adoption, racial relations are a large focus of postcolonialism. Similar to feminism, there is also a focus on power dynamics. As Jazeel (2013) states, one of the major efforts of postcolonialism is to unsettle the balance of power. That is, there is much focus on imperialism and the domination and power structures keeping this unbalanced system in place, whereby the West makes assumptions about, and tries to hold power over, the East (Jazeel, 2013).

This shares some similarities with the feminist perspective on transracial adoption, which places focus on the unequal power dynamics resulting in the movement of children between countries, often from the poorer developing countries of the East to the more developed Western countries.

McLeod (2006) presents a discussion of novels regarding postwar migration to Britain and the postcolonial thread evident throughout these novels. In this discussion, the notions of filiative and affiliative models of belonging are discussed. While the filiative model stresses a genetic and natural-biological model of belonging, the affiliative model stresses the individual choice to belong, not bound by biology (Radhakrishnan, 2012). McLeod (2006) states that in Britain, adoption of same-race babies is still the expectation of many adoptive parents, and this only reproduces the filiative model of the family but through an affiliative channel (adoption).
Instead of fighting colonialist ideas of race, this expectation for same-race adoption endorses the idea that the ideal family contains members of the same race and that the best way for a child to grow up is with parents of the same race (McLeod, 2006). McLeod (2006) goes on to discuss a few postcolonial fictions of adoption, mentioning that they provide a good way to explore assumptions, contradictions, and costs of adoptive practices while also challenging the filiative model of family belonging. For example, in Crossing the River (Caryl Phillips, 1993), the author describes a reunion between a transracially adopted child and his birth mother. Although the reunion was not a negative experience per say, it certainly was not seen as ‘coming home’ nor was it emotionally encompassing for either party. This illustrates that while there may be a filiative (biological) connection, it does not determine feelings of ‘coming home’ and that instead, the affiliative connection between the adopted child and adoptive parents is what goes beyond filiation and divisions of race to provide that feeling of family and being ‘at home’. The concept of brotherhood also runs through the novel, but not brotherhood based on biology or racial categories. Instead, brotherhood is a series of affiliative connections in which sharing the same blood is much less important than sharing the same space. McLeod (2006) also provides examples of two other works (Small Island by Levy, 2004 and The New Tribe by Emecheta, 2000). Each of these postcolonial fictions engages the notions of race, identity and belonging, stressing the postcolonial idea of affiliative connections not bound by the constrictions of biology and genetics.

The discussion of transracial adoption in Britain continues into the present day, not only in the form of novels. In Ali’s (2013) discussion of deracialization of transracial adoption, the author illuminates the British government’s attempt to remove barriers to transracial adoption through minimizing the importance of race. Ali (2013) also makes it clear that this attempt to minimize race will not work, as it completely ignores the deep racialization and power dynamic inequalities embedded in British society and politics. One example Ali (2013) provides revolves around the
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idea that ‘a loving and stable family’ will make a good adoptive family. While race is not explicitly present in this statement, the undertones still exist. In fact, as Ali (2013) says, this ‘loving and stable family’ is strongly racialized and heteronormalized. For example, lone parent families are often seen as problematic and not suitable for an adopted child, especially when the lone parent is Black. That is, there is the belief that absent fathers causes black youth to join gangs in an attempt to achieve some form of family life. The author suggests that instead the concept of a ‘loving and stable family’ can be much more flexible and include single people, lesbian and gay couples, and those of all races. Ali (2013) finishes with the suggestion that what the government is actually doing in their attempt to reduce barriers to transracial adoption is more in line with assimilation into White British values instead of integration. Throughout this article, echoes of postcolonial ideas are clear, as the author discusses the unequal power dynamics existing even within the concept of the ‘stable and loving family’, despite attempts to deracialize the whole transracial adoption process.

Throughout the feminist and postcolonial theorizations of transracial adoption, again the importance of relationships emerges. Both the postcolonial and feminist approaches emphasize the importance of power dynamics and the relationships between sending and receiving countries. That is, there is a clear unidirectional relationship (from poorer to richer countries) that must be considered and understood. Also, in the feminist perspective, it is clear that the relationships between feminists, adoptive mothers, and birth mothers are also extremely important, as these relationships can affect the way that birth and adoptive mothers are perceived. Finally, postcolonial approaches to transracial adoption stress the importance of understanding racial relationships. The importance of understanding and accepting affiliative relationships between adopted children and parents is also emphasized.
Clearly then, relationships are central in all the theories of adoption presented here. While psychoanalysis focuses more on the relationships within the adoptive family as well as the connection to the birth family (whether this be through the ghost kingdom, or a true living connection), postcolonialism and feminism deal largely with power dynamics and relationships between the countries involved in transracial adoption. Despite these differences, all suggest that relationships can play a critical role in the life of a transracially adopted individual, whether the relationship is within the adoptive family, birth family, or involves the sending and receiving countries.

**Adoption and Mental Health**

Along with the theoretical underpinnings of transracial adoption, there has also been a large body of recent research investigating the mental health of transracial adoptees, with the thought that adopted individuals may be at a higher risk of developing psychological disorders and emotional problems than non-adopted individuals (Goldney, Donald, Sawyer, Kosky & Priest, 1996). To date, much research has focused on adoption and mental health. In fact, a comprehensive review of the adoption literature conducted by Palacois and Brodzinsky (2010) found that one of the major trends mentioned is the psychological risk that may come with being adopted.

There are a variety of reasons to suggest that transracial adoptees may be at a higher risk for psychological, emotional, and adjustment problems. According to Levy-Shiff, Zoran and Shulman (1997), children adopted into a different racial, cultural, or religious background than their origin may have more difficulty adjusting to their adoptive family and new community. These children may also face increased racism in other social settings, resulting in more integration difficulties (Noy-Sharav, 2005). Internationally adopted individuals (coming into a family of a different race) are also often older, and many have spent time in orphanages or foster
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care, potentially suffering from abuse, which may result in further adaptation problems (Levy-Shiff, et al., 1997).

Thus far, the research on the mental health of transracially adoptees has been extremely variable, with findings on both sides of the spectrum. That is, some studies cite an increased risk of problems for transracial adoptees, while others report well-adjusted individuals, no different from non-adopted controls.

Psychiatric Disorders and Suicide Attempts in Transracial Adoptees

A study by Cantor-Graae and Pedersen (2007) investigated the increased risk of psychiatric disorders in transracial adoptees, schizophrenia in particular. Using the Danish Civil Registration system, researchers were able to get data on over one million people, including ten thousand transracial adoptees. Using the Danish Psychiatric Central Register, researchers could determine the number of individuals diagnosed with schizophrenia. They found that transracial adoptees had an increased risk of developing schizophrenia compared to non-adopted Danes, with transracially-adopted males showing even higher levels than transracially-adopted women. This study then adds to the conflicting literature, suggesting that transracial adoptees are at a higher risk of developing psychological problems compared to non-adopted individuals.

Tieman, van der Ende and Verhulst (2005) investigated the prevalence of DSM-IV disorders in adolescent transracial adoptees compared to the prevalence in a sample of the general population. Using the composite diagnostic interview as well as sections of the National Institute of Mental Health Diagnostic interview schedule, the researchers found that transracial adoptees had a higher risk of psychiatric disorders. Transracial adoptees were 1.52 times more likely to meet the criterion for an anxiety disorder and 2.05 times more likely to meet the criterion for a
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substance abuse/dependence disorder. In addition, transracially adopted men were 3.76 times
more likely to meet the criterion for mood disorders than non-adopted men.

In terms of suicide attempts, a US study looked at suicide attempts by transracial adoptees
compared to non-adopted controls (Keyes, Malone, Sharma, Iacono, & McGue, 2013). Researchers found that adoptees were four times more likely to report a suicide attempt than the non-adopted controls (according to parent and child reports of child suicide attempt). There was no difference between domestically and transracially adopted individuals, as both showed this same increased risk of suicide attempts. These results echoed an earlier study by Hjern, Lindbald, and Vinnerljung (2002), which also investigated transracially adoptees in Sweden and found that adoptees were 3-4 times more likely to suffer from mental health problems, including suicide and suicide attempts.

In contrast to this evidence of more negative outcomes for transracial adoptees, an Israeli study looked at both transracially and domestically adopted individuals (Levy-Shiff, et al., 1997). Both adoptive parents and children were provided with a series of questionnaires and scales (depression inventory, state-trait inventory, etc.), as well as psychological distress and coping inventories for the parents. School teachers were also asked to report on the children’s social, emotional, and learning adjustment. Results demonstrated no significant differences in adjustment (emotional, social, learning, psychological) between the transracially and domestically adopted children. Instead, the parents showed differences, as parents of transracial adoptees reported finding family relationships more supportive and used more problem-focused coping than parents of domestic adoptees. Thus, this particular study falls on the side of the spectrum suggesting that transracial adoptees are well-adjusted, at least compared to domestically adopted counterparts.

Therefore, it is evident that the research on the prevalence of psychiatric disorders and suicide attempts in transracial adoptees is not entirely clear, and although many studies do suggest
that transracial adoptees are at a higher risk of psychiatric disorders and suicide attempts, this is
the not the case for all, and there are conflicting results suggesting psychologically healthy
transracial adoptees as well.

Self-Esteem and Behavioural Problems in Transracial Adoptees

Along with psychiatric disorders, self-esteem and behavioural problems are also
investigated as potential markers of the problems suffered by transracial adoptees. Juffer and van
Ijzendoorn (2005) have conducted a meta-analysis, reporting that transracially adopted children
are referred to mental health services more often than non-adopted controls, and adoptees in
general (transracial or domestic) have been shown to demonstrate higher levels of behavioural
problems than non-adopted controls.

A Canadian study looked at children transracially adopted from a variety of countries
compared to non-adopted controls (Gagnon-Oosterwaal et al., 2012). The Child Behaviour
Checklist (CBCL) as well as the Dominic Interactive were used to assess externalizing and
internalizing behaviours. Although very few significant differences were found overall, it was
found that transracial adoptees reported more internalizing problems than non-adopted peers.
Also, the number of transracially adopted individuals reporting a specific phobia was higher than
non-adopted individuals. Therefore, in this case, it has again been demonstrated that transracial
adoptees may be at a higher risk for adjustment and psychological problems than non-adopted
individuals. With that being said, the researchers did try to make clear that the majority of
transracially-adopted individuals within the sample were very well-adjusted.

A study on the well-adjusted transracial adoptee side of the spectrum investigated
emotional and behavioural problems in Indonesian adoptees adopted into Australian families
(now adolescents) (Goldney et al., 1996). Transracial adoptees were compared to a group of
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Australian born adolescents as well as a group of clinical adolescents (referred to mental health services). The Youth-Self-Report (YSR) inventory and the CBCL were used as measures. Similar scores on both the YSR and CBCL were found for both the transracially-adopted group and the non-clinical control group, as both reported few emotional and behavioural problems. The transracially adopted and non-clinical control group however were significantly different from the clinical group, which reported much higher levels of emotional and behavioural problems. These results imply that transracial adoptees are well-adjusted into adolescence, compared to both a clinical group and same-age non-adopted controls.

Finally, another meta-analysis conducted by Juffer and van Ijzendoorn (2007) investigated self-esteem in adopted children. They suggested that adopted children might feel rejected by their birth parents and blame themselves for that rejection, thus harming self-esteem. Contrary to that suggestion, analysis showed that the self-esteem of adoptees was equivalent to that of non-adopted controls. Further analysis of transracial adoptees’ self-esteem as compared to same-race adoptees found the same result: both groups showed comparable levels of self-esteem. Thus, this is yet another study in the vein supporting the idea that transracial adoptees are well-adjusted.

These varied results only further illustrate the variability within the literature, and even within the same study. That is, there is a vast amount of evidence for both sides of the spectrum: that transracial adoptees are well-adjusted on one side, and that transracial adoptees are more likely to suffer from psychological and adjustment problems on the other. Understandably, the studies reported use different methods, participants with different characteristics (while all involve transracially-adopted individuals, other individual characteristics may be completely different), and investigate different variables. Therefore, it is extremely difficult to form a clear picture of the mental health of transracially-adopted people. Instead, it appears as though a variety of other factors play a role in adoptee mental health and cannot be assessed by one single study.
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Factors that may increase the risk of psychological and adjustment problems for transracial adoptees include the experience of facing discrimination and social prejudice (Cantor-Graae & Pedersen, 2007) and being older at the time of adoption (Goldney et al., 1996). On the side of protective factors, characteristics include being younger at the time of adoption (Alstein & Simon, 1991), the quality and cultural competence of adoptive parenting (Mohanty & Newhill, 2006), and the ethnic identity of the adopted child (Huh & Reid, 2000; Mohanty & Newhill, 2006). Therefore, it is clear that many factors play into the mental health of adoptees, and it does not revolve solely around the adoptee but also the relationships with parents. It is also evident that studies have used a vast array of measures, including self-report checklists, questionnaires, parent/teacher reports, and hospital records to investigate reports of mental health in adoptees. Very few studies have asked adoptees for their experiences and opinions. While the use of these other measures is certainly an effective way of getting information, it does not allow the adoptee to tell their story so-to-speak. Although asking transracial adoptees about their experiences may not provide a concrete idea into the mental health of adopted people, it would allow for a new and unique insight into adoption from the unequivocal perspective of the adopted person.

While some of the research has suggested that transracial adoptees are at a disadvantage due to an increased risk of suicide attempts, behavioural problems, and psychiatric disorders, there is clearly other research that does not support this negative view. In fact, adoption has also been viewed as a positive intervention by some on both an individual level (for the transracial adoptee) but also for the countries involved in the transracial adoption process.

**Positive Outcomes of Transracial Adoption**

As seen from much of the work cited above, research on the mental health of transracial adoptees is extremely variable and many studies show no negative consequences of transracial
adoption, instead suggesting that transracial adoptees are as well-adjusted as domestic adoptees and even non-adopted peers in some cases. But, upon further investigation, there are also clear positive aspects stemming from adoption, especially given that many transracially adopted individuals suffered institutional care prior to being adopted, resulting in deprived environments and impersonal care (van Ijzendoorn & Juffer, 2005).

There are many arguments against adoption across racial lines, with major opposition coming from the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) (Simon & Alstein, 1996). The NABSW believes that Black children should only be placed with Black families, as White families cannot provide Black children with a positive sense of racial identity resulting in confused and unhappy children (Simon & Alstein, 1996). Other critics assert that allowing transracial adoption will only take time and energy away from focusing on the underlying social problems and will relieve the pressure placed on sending countries to put resources towards these problems, allowing the problems to continue to grow (Bartholet, 1993).

Despite these objections, there is reason to suggest that transracial adoption can in fact be a very positive thing, not only for the adopted children, but also for the countries and parents involved. Van Ijzendoorn and Juffer (2006) discuss the catch-up model of adoption, which suggests that adoption may in fact be a curative intervention and protective factor for those adopted children as compared to those left behind in institutional care. They suggest that many adoptees come from deprived backgrounds prior to adoption and that the drastic change in environment from impersonal group care to more personal nurturance can allow for a massive catch-up for adopted children in the areas of physical growth, cognitive development, school achievement, and basic trust. Due to potential malnutrition and neglect in pre-adoptive care, transracial adoptees may initially have impaired physical growth. However, based on work conducted at the Metera center in Athens, an almost complete catch-up of height and weight was
found for adoptees two years following adoption. That is, those adopted from Metera were found to have height and weight equivalent to non-adopted controls two years following adoption, despite physical growth deficits prior to adoption (van Ijzendoorn & Juffer, 2006). In terms of basic trust and attachment, one year after adoption from Metera, infants still showed more insecure attachments than non-adopted controls. However, when compared to infants remaining in institutional care, infants adopted from Metera demonstrated more secure attachments and fewer disorganized attachments than those infants remaining in the center. Regarding cognitive development, researchers found that adopted children outperformed siblings and peers left behind in institutions on IQ tests and in school achievement. Negligible differences in IQ were found for adopted children and those non-adopted controls. This echoes a meta-analysis conducted by van Ijzendoorn and Juffer (2005), also reporting that adopted children outperformed those remaining in institutional care on both IQ tests and tests of school achievement. These results demonstrate that there is a remarkable catch-up in physical growth, attachment, and cognition compared to those left behind in institutional care, suggesting that transracial adoption is successful in providing settings in which children can flourish (van Ijzendoorn & Juffer, 2006). There are additional factors that affect this remarkable catch-up. Van Ijzendoorn and Juffer (2006) found that being older at the time of adoption and spending more time in pre-adoptive care did related to more attachment insecurity and less catch-up in physical growth. However, even in these cases, the catch-up in other domains was still immense, and it is clear that transracial adoption is still a successful intervention, providing nourishing homes for adopted children.

Simon and Alstein (1996) discuss a four-phase longitudinal study in which interviews with both adopted children and adoptive parents took place in order to provide a better understanding of the decision to adopt transracially, the relationships between family and adopted child, as well as the children’s racial identity. Through the use of Clark and Clark’s (1958) doll procedure, they
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found an absence of White racial preference on both the part of the White birth children and the non-White adopted children. That is, children showed neither positive preference for the White doll nor negative reactions towards the Black and Asian dolls. Transracial adoption appears to provide an opportunity for children to develop and awareness of race as well as respect for physical differences. As adolescents and young adults, the transracial adoptees reported being aware of and comfortable with their racial identities. In fact, when asked, many were scornful of the NABSW’s position on transracial adoption, instead asserting that they are no less Black than any other, and stating that transracial adoption is the best possible alternative because it provided the secure and loving family they so needed.

Therefore, it is clear that transracial adoption can provide many benefits for the adopted children, as it not only provides an excellent opportunity to catch-up physically, emotionally, and cognitively but also often gives a nurturing and loving family as well as a chance to gain an awareness of race.

As stated above, much of the opposition to transracial adoption focuses not only on the children, but also on the underlying social problems and how transracial adoption may take the spotlight away from these issues. Bartholet (1993) provides a compelling summary and subsequent rebuttal of these suspected problems. It has been suggested that allowing transracial adoption may result in time and energy being taken away from the true problems but Bartholet (1993) asserts that support for foreign adoption may in fact do the opposite. That is, supporting transracial adoption may increase awareness of the problems that sending countries face by giving adoptive parents reason to identify with those children still looking for homes and by creating a more sympathetic climate for the support of children abroad. It also may provide resources through adoption fees and charitable contributions (Bartholet, 2010). Another critique of transracial adoption is that it may relieve the pressure within sending countries to deal with the
internal social problems. Again, Bartholet (1993) suggests that instead it is likely that sending children abroad for adoption highlights these social problems perhaps encouraging countries to do their best to rectify them. Finally, some critics (such as the NABSW) say that children will not receive the proper care in adoptive families as they are separated from their racial and ethnic origins. But studies have demonstrated that transracially adopted children do seem to show a healthy sense of ethnic identity (e.g. Huh & Reid, 2000). Also, Bartholet (1993) emphasizes that many of these children will not be adopted otherwise and would remain on the streets or in impersonal institutions. Thus, transracial adoption at least provides a family and nurturing care as opposed to remaining in potentially substandard care. Much criticism of transracial adoption stems from the Black community, especially due to concerns of lingering American slavery, child identity, and concerns with the foster care system (Roby & Shaw, 2006). However, with the current orphan crisis in Africa (many children losing one or both parents due to AIDS), even some of those tough critics are starting to agree that transracial adoption is a legitimate option in the context of the orphan crisis, as the positive effects for the child may outweigh potential downsides (Roby & Shaw, 2006).

Clearly then, despite the numerous objections to transracial adoption, there is evidence suggesting that, instead, transracial adoption can be a positive intervention for many children who would otherwise be left in institutions. Not only does this adoption aid the child in question, but it also potentially sheds light on the internal problems within sending countries, possibly providing more attention and resources.

**Summary of the Literature Review**

This literature review has described the theoretical underpinnings used to investigate and analyze transracial adoption, with special focus on the psychoanalytic, feminist, and postcolonial
perspectives on transracial adoption. The various findings regarding the mental health of adoptees including the potential positive outcomes of transracial adoption were discussed.

In terms of the theoretical perspectives, psychoanalysis has focused primarily on the fantasies and ghosts held by all in the adoptive triad, but especially the adopted child, and how these fantasies may be played out particularly through psychoanalytic play therapy. But, this also makes evident how important relationships are within the adoptive triad and with the psychoanalytic therapist. The feminist and postcolonial perspectives focus on power dynamics between sending and receiving countries, race relations, and the relationship between groups of women (in the feminist perspective). That is, they look at transracial adoption with an understanding of how hierarchies between groups (e.g. adoptive mothers and birth mothers, sending and receiving countries, etc.) can be formed and how this affects both sides. These perspectives also make clear the importance of relationships, and how often those relationships surrounding transracial adoption are unequal. For this reason, this research investigated the types and importance of relationships in the lives of a transracial adoptee.

It is also clear from the literature reviewed that the mental health of adoptees cannot be easily summarized. Initially, it was thought that adoptees would suffer from an increased psychological risk for a variety of reasons including poor pre-adoption orphanage care, difficulties adjusting to a new culture and religion, and experiencing racism and discrimination (Levy-Shiff, Zoran & Shulman, 1997; Noy-Sharav, 2005). This thought however has not be confirmed by all studies and although there has been much excellent research on the topic, two distinct patterns have been found: either transracially adopted individuals are found to be well-adjusted with no more emotional or psychological problems than non-adopted individuals, or transracial adoptees are found to suffer from an increased risk and prevalence of emotional, adjustment, and psychological disorders compared to non-adopted people. Also, it is evident that transracial
adoption does have many positive attributes, not only for the adopted children as well as the
sending countries as it may involve an influx of resources as well as extensive physical, cognitive,
and attachment catch-up. As suggested above, it may be beneficial to speak to transracial
adoptees, and ask for their individual experiences and thoughts. While the surveys, checklists, and
external reports do provide extremely useful information, they do not give the adoptees the chance
to speak for themselves. The ability to tell their own stories may reveal many other important
factors and thoughts that may otherwise remain undiscovered.

As stated above, the question of how relationships play into the lives and experiences of a
transracial adoptee drove this research. Throughout, this review has emphasized the importance of
relationships within transracial adoption, not only within the adoptive triad, but also with
therapists, between women, and even between countries (receiving and sending). While surveys
and questionnaires are very helpful, it is likely that using a more qualitative approach (through
interviews) would provide a greater depth of information regarding the importance of
relationships because it would allow for more elaboration and detail.

Therefore, the literature reviewed has not only summarized the theory behind adoption,
but has also illustrated the importance of understanding relationships, especially within the lives
of adoptees, which directly speaks to the need to investigate the research question. Not only did
the present research provide more of a Canadian context, but it also gave transracial adoptees a
voice and provided extremely valuable insight into the relationships and experiences of transracial
adoptees. Such insight may also eventually be used by practitioners to increase cultural sensitivity
and be better prepared to work with transracially adopted individuals, being able to better tailor
their services to clients’ needs. In the documentary “Off and Running”, Avery, a transracially
adopted adolescent only agrees to begin therapy when she is informed that the therapist has
experience with transracial adoption (Opper, 2009). This suggests that Avery wanted to speak to
someone who understands her particular experience. Similarly, VanderMolen (2006) mentions that many transracial adoptees wish to speak with a therapist that truly understands what it is like to be a transracial adoptee. The current research helped to provide this understanding of transracial adoption, which can better prepare therapists to work with clients of this background. While the insights gained by the present research cannot guarantee that therapists will fully understand the transracial adoptive experience, it did provide some insight, which may be used to help other transracial adoptees that may be struggling to understand their own adoption story.
Chapter III: Methodology

The current study used the qualitative research approach, including the transcripts of in-depth semi-structured interviews from which narrative data were gathered and used to answer the question of how relationships play into the lives and experiences of a transracial adoptee. A grounded theory approach was employed to investigate the experiences and importance of relationships in the lives of transracial adoptees. This chapter will include a rationale for using the qualitative grounded theory approach. The background of the researcher will also be presented, and potential researcher bias will be outlined. Finally, specific criteria for the selection of participants will be described as will the interview procedures.

Rationale for Qualitative Design

Qualitative research methods have been used in various disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, and psychology (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott & Davidson, 2002). Qualitative research is a broad term used to describe methodologies, which describe and explain peoples’ experiences and social contexts (Fossey et al., 2002). That is, qualitative methods place an emphasis on seeking and understanding of the meanings of human experience and action and then generating accounts of this meaning from the perspective of those involved. The perspectives of research participants are given particular emphasis (Fossey et al., 2002).

The use of qualitative research provides many benefits, including the descriptive depth acquired, its effectiveness in examining complex phenomena, and the inclusion of participants as active agents (Hill, 2005, Morrow, 2007 as cited in Ponterotto (2013)). Along with these benefits, this qualitative approach is well suited for the study of transracial adoptees because of its value to multicultural psychology. Of course, individuals of various cultures were involved in the current
study, and thus a method demonstrating cultural sensitivity and allowing participants to openly express their points of view is absolutely essential. Qualitative methods can bring greater appreciation and understanding across cultures, especially because becoming part of the meaning-making world of another person requires empathy (Sciarra, 1999, as cited in Ponterotto, 2013). Also, qualitative research may make those from collectivist cultures feel more comfortable, as it does not force participants to respond to strict instruments and protocols, which isolate individual attitudes and feelings (Ponterotto, 2013). Therefore, use of the qualitative method was well suited for the present study, as it demonstrated cultural sensitivity while allowing participants to openly tell their stories in an accepting setting. In particular, the current study used grounded theory as a qualitative method.

**Grounded Theory**

Originally developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), grounded theory has grown to be widely used in a variety of fields, including psychology, health, nursing, education, and business (Fassinger, 2005). The major aim of the grounded theory approach is to produce a theory that is grounded in the qualitative data collected from participants based on their lived experiences (Fassinger, 2005). It is through a concurrent process of data collection, coding, conceptualization, and theorization that a coherent theory is developed. This method relies heavily on the connection between the participant and researcher to construct deeper meanings fully and to give voice to participants’ experience (Fassinger, 2005). It is through this data of the lived experience of the participants, that the researcher can see how the participants construct their inner worlds (Charmaz, 1990). Given the personal nature of the data collected, often times the data come in the form of narratives provided through interviews with participants. The use of narratives seems appropriate, as it has been said that the stories told by people form the basis of who they are and what they do. It is these stories that give substance, texture, and meaning to peoples’ lives (Smith
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& Sparkes, 2006). It is through the careful reading and examination of these narratives that grounded theorists can discover common themes and the connections between these themes, finally culminating in the creation of a theory (Charmaz, 1990).

This use of grounded theory through narratives as a qualitative research method appears appropriate for the current study for a variety of reasons. First, instead of beginning with strict preconceived hypotheses, grounded theory begins with research questions, which are affirmed, checked, and refined throughout (Charmaz, 1990). Because the current research hoped to discover and explore the lived experiences and relationships of transracial adoptees through narratives, no preconceived hypotheses were formed. Grounded theory also assumes that people create realities through social interaction (Fassinger, 2005). The present research hoped to understand and investigate the lived experiences, especially in terms of relationships. Clearly relationships are based in social interaction, thus a research method focused on social interaction and social realities was best suited for a study of this sort. Finally, using interviews to collect participant narratives allowed participants to openly tell their stories and lived experiences. This allowed the researcher to engage with the participants and enter into their world as they interpret together (Bruce, 2008). As has been seen, much of the previous research has used quantitative methods including surveys, questionnaires, and checklists (e.g. the CBCL used in both Goldney et al., 1996 and Gagnon-Oosterwaal et al., 2012). The use of narrative data allowed for an in-depth exploration of the lived experience of adoptees and added to this gap in the literature. Also, the use of in-depth interviews to create narratives allowed the researcher to delve deeper into such personal and social matters (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

Participants

Eight transracially-adopted individuals were recruited for the present study (two males and six females). While this number may appear rather small, including fewer participants allowed for
more time to conduct and examine each interview in depth. Also, each participant provided rich content, allowing researchers to gain much depth of information from each individual participant.

This smaller number of participants is not uncommon in qualitative research, as Fossey and colleagues (2002) state that no fixed minimum number of participants is necessary, and that sufficient depth of information is what is truly important. Participants met all of the following criteria:

1) were transracially adopted (adopted by parents of a different racial background than their own)
2) were over 18 years of age
3) were adopted before the age of three

Participants ranged in age from 20 to 55, with a mean age of 30. Additionally, many parent-adoptivee racial combinations were represented, including Middle-Eastern-Caucasian (child-parent), African American-Caucasian, Korean-Caucasian, Caucasian-Chinese, Guatemalan-Caucasian, ethnically mixed-Caucasian, and Indian-Caucasian. All participants were told explicitly about their adoption by their adoptive parent(s).

**Participant Descriptions**

*Danny* – Danny is a 22-year-old transracial adoptee of Middle-Eastern background adopted by White parents. He has one sister who was also adopted.

*Marie* – Marie is a 35-year-old White woman who was adopted by Chinese parents. She has one brother who was also adopted.

*Jandy* – Jandy is a 32-year-old Korean woman adopted by Caucasian parents. She has four siblings. Both her older sister and her younger sister are adopted as well.

*Janet* – Janet is a 32-year-old Korean woman adopted by White parents. She has no siblings but many of her extended family members were also transracially adopted.
Karen – Karen is a 55-year-old woman who did not fully identify her heritage. She called herself ‘ethnically mixed’ adopted by White parents. She has four older non-adopted siblings.

Marisol – Marisol is a 20-year-old Guatemalan woman adopted by White parents. She has one non-adopted brother.

Toby – Toby is a 32-year-old Indian man adopted by Caucasian parents. He has one non-adopted sister.

Steph – Steph is a 20-year-old Black woman adopted by Caucasian parents. She has no siblings.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited through the posting of invitations at community centers and universities throughout the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Snowballing occurred to some degree, as some participants contacted other adoptees that then also decided to participate in the study as well. While in-person interviews were the preferred method of contact, some participants were unable to participate in an in-person interview and phone interviews were conducted instead. Upon expressing interest in participating, participants were provided with a description of the study as well as a list of the inclusion criteria (Information Letter, Appendix A), which allowed them to understand more about the study prior to their final decision to participate. Participants were contacted via email and telephone (whichever was most convenient for them). During the initial contact, they were provided with thorough information about the study and were then asked if they wished to participate following their reading of the Information Letter. Once individuals agreed to participate, a convenient meeting time and place was established and participants were able to ask any questions. All interviews (both in-person and via telephone) were conducted in the OISE Psychology clinic, allowing for a private space.
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Procedures

Once participants agreed to participate in the study, a meeting time and place was established to conduct the interview. Upon the arrival of the participant, the Consent form (Appendix B) was provided. The researcher thoroughly reviewed the Consent form with each participant to ensure full understanding. When phone interviews were conducted, the Consent form was reviewed and explained orally. Participants were also provided with a copy of the Consent form to keep. Participants also filled out a brief form collecting demographic information prior to beginning the interview (Appendix C).

Following the completion of the demographic form, the semi-structured interviews were used to gather participant narratives. One interview was conducted with each participant. Interview questions were fully composed prior to the interview, with probes designed to provoke more detailed responses (questions available in Appendix D) (Qu and Dumay, 2011). Interview questions focused on the general experience of being a transracial adoptee, with a specific focus around relationships. This protocol was used as a guideline to encourage participants to fully reflect on their lived experiences of transracial adoption. Participants were encouraged to express themselves freely and elaborate on questions posed by the interviewer. The interviews were audio-recorded then transcribed verbatim, as this reduced the chances of error in transcription. Following the transcription of the audio-recorded interviews, data analysis took place.

Analysis

As stated, the goal of this study was to gain insight into the lived experiences and importance of relationships in the lives of transracially adopted individuals. The researcher used grounded theory as the method of analysis, as outlined above. Following its completion and transcription, each interview was analyzed allowing for a familiarity with themes or concepts that may have come up in subsequent interviews. While the interview questions targeted specific areas
of adoptees’ relationships, each area contained its own unique concepts brought forth by the participants. For analysis, a multi-step process took place (laid out by Fassinger, 2005). First, open coding took place. In this stage, the transcribed interviews were broken down into concepts and these concepts were labeled, reflecting the words of the participants. These concepts were compared to each other and were grouped together into categories which best encompass these concepts.

The next step involved axial coding, in which relationships among categories were identified and further explained. These interrelated categories were then grouped into larger categories. These categories were examined to ensure that there was no duplication and that each concept had a place within a category. This constant comparison process was used throughout the data analysis phase, allowing for the constant refinement of categories as they are compared to each other and new interview data. When categorical saturation was reached, a master category list was created. That is, when no new information was being found about the categories and when the categories were complex enough to encompass all of the variation in the participants’ experience, this stage ended (Fassinger, 2005).

The final step in the process was selective coding, through which a theory of the data was formed. In this step, a core category, which integrates all other categories, was selected. This emerging theory was consistently compared to the data (interview transcripts) to ensure that all segments of the data were incorporated and that the theory was actually grounded in the experience of the participants. Memo-writing was utilized throughout as a way to keep track of concepts, categories, and discoveries made throughout the research process (Fassinger, 2005).

**Researcher Placement and Biases**

It must be acknowledged that this qualitative inquiry was not value-free and therefore I will outline preconceived ideas and assumptions in an attempt to maintain a balanced perspective
and an open mind. For this reason, I will provide some autobiographical details as well as lived experiences that might have influenced this work. I identify as a Canadian woman of Indian and Pakistani origin. I am a transracial adoptee, born in Canada and adopted before the age of one by Caucasian (American and Canadian) parents. I also have some very close friends who are also adopted (but of course these individuals did not participate in this study) and have seen their adoption experiences as well. My own personal experience as a transracial adoptee as well as the experiences of friends have clearly strengthened my connection with this research area but may also have left me with assumptions and biases that I had to keep in mind as I pursued this work.

From my own experiences, I believe that transracial adoption can be an extremely beneficial and positive experience for both adopted children and adoptive parents. That is, I believe a transracially-adopted individual can develop a healthy sense of identity and flourish in a family of a different racial background than their own. My relationship with my adoptive parents has always been and continues to be very close and loving. Also, from my own interactions with my adoptive family and members of my culture of origin (Indian and Pakistan), as well as witnessing the experiences of other adopted individuals, I hold the view that open communication is extremely important for an adoptee and a lack of this open communication can be detrimental. My adoptive family has always been extremely open to discussion and answering any questions regarding adoption and racial difference, which certainly contributed to my views.

I understand that it is essential that I remain able to identify and reflect upon these assumptions and how they may affect the work. Thus, in hopes of limiting the impact of my reactions, I kept a reflective journal in which I recorded my thoughts and opinions throughout the interview process, data analysis, interpretation, and theory formation.
Chapter IV: Results

In this section I will describe, primarily in the words of the participants, each of the three core themes that were asked about in the interviews as well as the sub-themes that constitute the core themes. Quotes from the interviews will be presented in order to illustrate and elaborate on the themes.

The first core theme addresses how participants understand their relationships with their adoptive families through the lens of their lived experiences as transracial adoptees. The subthemes in this category include the relationship with parents, siblings, and extended family. Reports of family interaction stemmed from questions focused on relationships between the adoptee and various family members (Appendix D).

The second core theme describes the participants’ experiences within the education system as transracial adoptees. The subthemes in this category are developmental in nature, progressing from experiences in elementary school, to high school, and finally college/university. Reports of schooling experiences and friendships came primarily from questions focused on the relationships transracial adoptees had during school and how they formed friendships with individuals at school (Appendix D).

The third core theme is focused on participants’ experiences with society as a whole and the reactions received from different aspects of society as a transracial adoptee. The subthemes subsumed under this category involve the participants’ experiences at work, and experiences with outside individuals (not family or friends). Unlike the previous themes, the reports of experiences with society appeared throughout the participant narratives and did not always stem from a specific question. There were questions directed towards work experiences however, which elicited many reports of work experiences (Appendix D).
The fourth and final core theme focused on participants’ experiences with the interview itself. Within this theme, participants reported how they felt about the interview and how they experienced speaking about their adoption with another individual. Reports of the interview experience came from a specific question focused on the interview experience (Appendix D).

1: Family Relationships

The concept of family appeared quite early on in the interviews and the first interview question focused on family relationships, as understandably family is one of the first and most important relationships in an individual’s life. It was quickly observed that participants’ attitudes towards and relationships with family members was overwhelmingly positive and that even during times of dissonance, “every family has their quirks”. Through the narratives, participants made it clear that regardless of the difficulties, they “do love them. I mean they are my family”. Thus, the positivity of the family theme was very quickly identified, as it seemed to pervade the participant narratives. The first subtheme revolves around the participants’ relationship with their adoptive parents. The second subtheme revolves around the participants’ relationships with their siblings (both adoptive and biological). The final subtheme revolves around the participants’ relationships with extended family members (e.g. aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins, etc.)

1.1 Relationship with Parents: Trust, Respect, and Love but “can’t get any closer.”

Within this subtheme participants reported on their relationships with their adoptive parents and how they believe these relationships were affected by the adoptive experience. When reporting on their family relationships, the majority of the participants’ narratives began with parents, and in general the relationships they described were “pretty good” and “mostly positive”. Participants reported similar experiences with their adoptive parents, that is, that they felt the relationship with their parents was quite close and that any problems were not a consequence of
being adopted. Some of the relationships also showed developmental changes, as for many participants; the relationship with adoptive parents was closer when the participant was younger and “deteriorated” somewhat with age. But, even in this case, many participants reported that this more strained relationship with age was often a result of personality or other differences not related specifically to the adoption experience. The subtheme revolving around parents was not only evident near the beginning of the participants’ narratives when the original question was asked, but also showed itself clearly throughout the entire interview, with many participants expressing “gratitude” and a feeling that “every child has some gratitude… for the adopted child there is a little bit…it’s a little bit more blatant” towards their parents during other sections of the interview. Thus, the subtheme of parents was very easily demonstrated and established throughout the full narratives.

In the following passage, Janet discussed her relationship with her adoptive parents, and the positive nature of the relationship. She did not notice any developmental changes, but instead discussed the positive relationship and explained any struggles in terms of personality and age:

“I think I have a pretty good relationship with my parents. Umm, you know, I think we are very close. I also think we’re very different, but, I don’t know any family that’s not. But I think we have a pretty healthy relationship, a pretty close relationship for the most part. I think when we have struggled it’s more of a personality issue than (pause) and maybe a little bit of an everyday valuing kind of difference than anything. An age difference mainly. My parents were a little bit older when they had me, so, I think that’s always a little bit of something. But umm, you know we’re just very different people.”

Clearly then, Janet found her relationship to be a very positive one, with any problems being a difference in age or personality instead of an issue with her adoption. Janet identified her relationship with her parents as remaining positive throughout, but this was not the case for all participants. For example, Marisol did notice a developmental change, with a special emphasis on the age of 12, where the relationship with her mother changed dramatically. Despite this, she
discussed how this change was a result of personality and conflict style as opposed to anything specifically related to her adoption:

“Say before I was 12, I would have considered myself to have had a close relationship, like a really close relationship with both of them where I felt like I could trust and respect and love them sort of like, freely, but after that and seeing their, their similar personalities, so they conflict so much, I felt like that was really hard because they both have said and done things to each other and obviously if I got caught in the middle, sometimes to me. That has made it very difficult for me to trust and respect them like before, to levels before I was 12… But it, that’s, the level of love has just never been the same since I was 12. And it’s unfortunate but I can’t get any closer.”

Although Marisol does not note a developmental change in her relationship with her mother, like Janet she points out that these relationship difficulties are due to personality factors instead of something related to her adoption specifically. Similar to Marisol, Toby also mentioned that his relationship with his adoptive mother could be considered close when he was younger, but became more strained as he grew up (especially reaching puberty). Again, he said that this has more to do with “hitting puberty” and his mother not being “an easy person to get along with”:

“I never saw myself or felt myself different and I think my foster mother deliberately was to bring me up as quote-un-quote normal as is possible. And also part of her strategy was that I should umm, feel like a normal kid and when I look back I can say maybe that strategy wasn’t 100% sound but it made for a very unmm, it made for a very worry free and sort of normal childhood, I could say. Once I started hitting puberty, and then sort of the relationship between my mother deteriorated somewhat… she wasn’t an easy person to get along with.”

Similar to Marisol’s account, Toby also noticed a developmental change in his relationship with his birth mother around the age of puberty, but also like Marisol, he indicated that the strain in the relationship was not a result of adoption and began around the age of puberty.

Janet, Marisol, and Toby all discussed their relationships with their adoptive parents. While Janet found that the relationship had been smooth overall, both Marisol and Toby cited difficulties with their adoptive mothers (both Marisol and Toby were brought up by single parents), beginning primarily around the time they reached puberty. The participants reported that
any difficulty in their relationships with their adoptive parents stemmed mainly from being “different people” and from “personality issue[s]”, but in general, the relationships were considered to be quite “close”.

1.2: Relationship with Siblings: very diverse, ‘kind of like opposites’

Participants’ reports of siblings (primarily adoptive siblings) generally appeared following a report of parents when participants were asked specifically about their sibling relationships, and similarly, the relationships with siblings were reported to be generally “positive”, with one participant stating that “I think that probably helped me a lot in that I had a sister”. Although not all of the participants had siblings, and those that did reported varied relationships (between being “very close” and “being very different”), this was not a result of the siblings reacting negatively to the adoption. In fact, one participant highlighted that her sibling “was excited” about having a sister. Instead, “it’s more their personalities”, which cause any difficulties between siblings.

Participants reported two different categories of sibling-relationships, where some participants noted very close sibling relationships throughout, while others experienced some degree of tension, thus leading to the creation of further subthemes subsumed under “Relationship with Siblings”.

1.2.1: Relationships with Siblings: Very Positive

Within this subset of the subtheme “Relationship with Siblings”, the participants reported very positive relationships with their siblings where there was little tension and the relationships were described as quite close.

Danny’s relationship with his sister showed a developmental pattern, which changed with age. In his case, the relationship showed more difficulty when he was younger but as he and his sister grew up, the relationship became closer. He noted his belief that arguing within a sibling
relationship is normal, and that any siblings are likely to go through this, adopted or not.

Regardless of the arguing that did occur, he reported that the relationship is now close and tension-free:

“mhmm, yeah I have one sister who was adopted as well but she’s 100% white so she looks pretty much just like what my parents’ children would look like. Umm, so my relationship with my sister, it was pretty rough at first, we would fight and argue all the time, which I think is pretty normal with siblings and uhh, we’ve kind of grown pretty close over the past few years even though she is away.”

Danny identified that his relationship with his sister was “normal”, and included arguments and fights, just like any other sibling relationship would have. He did not believe that these arguments related to his adoption, and in fact has developed a much closer relationship with his sister in recent years.

Marie also reported a very positive relationship with her sibling and she found the relationship to be positive overall with no mention of arguments or tension:

“I have one adopted sibling, younger brother who is 5 years younger than me that we adopted from Hong Kong when I was about seven. We see each other and hang out, and we have a positive relationship”

Marie identified a very positive relationship with her brother and made it clear that even to this day they “hang out” and she still finds the relationship to be good. Marie was not the only participant to discuss very positive relationships with siblings, as Jandy also identified a close and positive relationship with her siblings, both older and younger:

“I think that probably helped me a lot in that I had a sister who was also adopted from Korea and she was older. You know, my older sister, my older sister is awesome! And my younger sister is adopted as well, she’s got special needs. So, my upbringing, my younger sister is 3 years younger, my older sister is 4 years older and for most of my life, we were always together.”
So, in Jandy’s case, the relationship with her siblings was very positive and she found that having a sibling who was also adopted from the same country of origin was a very helpful experience for her.

Thus, Danny, Marie, and Jandy all experienced extremely positive relationships with their siblings, which were generally free of tension. In Danny’s case, he did experience some arguments with his sister when he was younger, but he stated that arguing is “perfectly normal” within any sibling relationship and asserted that now their relationship is “close”. Both Marie and Jandy discussed their relationships with siblings who were also adopted, and they both found these relationships to be quite positive. Marie reported a close relationship with her brother and did not mention any tension while Jandy discussed the positive relationship she has with both of her siblings, including how helpful it was for her to have an older sister who also went through the adoption experience. Although each participant had a slightly different relationship with his or her siblings, the positivity in each relationship is clear. That is, each participant discussed the positive aspects of the relationship with their siblings, from “being close” and “hanging out” to finding the sibling relationship to be helpful.

1.2.2: Relationships with Siblings: “kind of opposites”

In the second subset of the subtheme “Relationship with Siblings”, participants reported relationships with siblings that involved more tension. That is, these relationships showed a developmental pattern and around the time of puberty, much tension was experienced in the sibling relationship. These relationships did not fully recover and the participants would not consider these relationships overly “close”. Despite this, the participants did not blame this tension on their adoptive experience but instead identified that it was likely a result of “personality differences” and physical “distance”.

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Toby discussed his relationship with his sister and what he believes has impacted that relationship. While he did state that the relationship is not close at present, he asserted that this lack of closeness did not relate to his adoption per se, but instead related to personality differences and physical distance:

“When we were children we were quite close, but then again, because she was 6 years older than me, she was just a regular girl, you know, Caucasian girl, from that country, and doing the things that she did. She had lots of boyfriends, she had, you know she went out lots, she had a regular social life and so, we were just very different in many different aspects. And so there was a little bit of estrangement as well between her and me. Right now we’re not extremely close I would say, umm, but that’s mainly my fault to be honest, because yeah, I mean it’s also because I live in Canada and she lives elsewhere.”

While Toby’s relationship with his sister cannot be characterized as “close”, he pointed out that the strain in the relationship came from he and his sister being “very different in many different aspects”, and a result of their physical distance. This identification that any strain is a result of other factors (like personality) is indicated in Marisol’s report of her relationship with her brother. Similar to Toby, she mentioned that she and her brother are “kind of opposites”, and this is what kept their relationship from becoming extremely close:

“I guess I’ll tackle my brother first since it’s a little easier. We are very very different. I mean I would like to say we are kind of opposites. I think we get along and we don’t argue or anything but we just have very little in common and it’s, just very different personalities, so there aren’t too many topics that we can talk about without it being a bit of a difference of opinions that aren’t going to really be resolved. So I guess we keep it kind of topical and we get along, but it’s not the deepest relationship in the world, that’s for sure.”

Marisol continued by making a point of noting that her brother was excited about having a sibling, suggesting that the adoption was actually seen as a positive thing, and instead it is their vastly different personalities that affect the relationship:

“He was really excited to have another sibling… I think we had a close relationship when I was a child.”
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Marisol clearly makes the point that her brother experienced her adoption with excitement and positivity and stated that the difficulties between them result from their extremely different personalities.

The accounts of Toby and Marisol illuminate the nature of the relationships that participants had with their siblings. While Toby found that he initially had a close relationship with his sister, there was “a little bit of estrangement” as they grew older. Marisol described a similar experience with her brother, where they “had a close relationship” as children but now they are “kind of opposites” and have many “difference[s] of opinions”. The common thread running through these three accounts is that each participant notes that the difficulties in the relationship were not a result of the sibling reacting negatively to the adoption of the participant. Instead, any relationship strains were due to differences in personality, just like any other siblings (biologically related) would experience.

1.2.3: Relationship with Siblings: Summary

Participants’ relationships with their siblings showed two distinct paths, where some experienced tension in the relationship while others experienced very positive relationship, relatively free of tension. Danny, Marie, and Jandy all described very positive relationships with their siblings where they “get along” quite well. Even in cases where there were arguments (in Danny’s experience), these were identified as being very “normal”, “like any sibling relationship” and gave way to a very positive relationship later on. In Jandy’s case, she even identified that having an older sibling who also went through the adoptive experience likely helped her in her own development.

The second avenue seen in the narratives was those sibling relationships that were not as smooth and these participants experienced more tension within their sibling relationships. For
these participants, a developmental trajectory appeared where sibling relationships were experienced as quite positive prior to puberty, but after puberty these relationships deteriorated somewhat. Despite this deterioration, these participants did not blame their siblings for these problems nor did they attribute them to the adoption itself. In fact, Marisol made it very clear that her brother was excited about her adoption and saw the adoption as a positive thing. Instead, these participants attributed the strain in the relationship to personality and distance factors, rather than anything specifically to do with adoption.

Overall, the relationships between participants and their siblings were described as being very positive. In some cases, very little tension was experienced and participants described the relationships as “very close” and “a big help”. In other cases, the sibling relationships were fraught with tension and began to deteriorate particularly around the time of puberty. Even in these cases, however, participants were still able to identify positive aspects of these relationships and did not blame their siblings for these strained relationships.

1.3: Relationship with Extended Family

Relationships with extended family members emerged in the narratives following the reports of both parents and siblings when participants were provided with probe questions regarding their extended family relationships. Not all participants maintained relationships with their extended families (e.g. aunts, uncles, grandparents, etc.). Those who did experienced varied relationships where one participant expressed feeling “closer to my grandparents than to my adoptive mother” while others experienced some reservations, felt “awkward”, and a sense of “disappointment”. Regardless, the majority of participants mentioned positive aspects to their relationships with their extended family members. In cases where reservations were felt, the individuals mentioned that this might be their “own volition” causing these reservations. Thus,
this subtheme was further broken down to demonstrate the two patterns observed in the data. In one group, the participants experienced positive relationships with their extended family free of tension and discomfort. The other group reported difficulties in the relationship, but often times this was not the result of their own perceptions and internal processes.

1.3.1: Relationship with Extended Family: “get along”, “good relationship”

In the first subset of this subtheme, the participants described very positive relationships with their extended families. Although this does not mean that these relationships were always overly close, they were reported as being positive and the participants discussed “getting along” with their extended family members, with relationships free of tension.

In Jandy’s narrative, she discussed her relationship with her extended family and the changes that occurred for childhood to adulthood. Although she admitted not being very close with her extended family during her childhood, she does point out that they grew closer into adulthood. Although she mentioned that they are not very close, the relationships are still full of care. Additionally, she did point out that this lack of closeness was a result of age and distance, not any problems between family members:

“I was so they were almost too far of an age gap that I didn’t really know them very well. But we see each other now and we all get along, but not very close in that way. But every family has their quirks, but on the whole it’s nothing serious. We all care about each other”.

Thus, although Jandy’s relationship with her extended family might not be extremely close, she did make it clear that she does get along with her family and that as a family, all members care for each other despite any quirks. While Jandy described “care” in her extended family relationships, Toby described a “close” relationship with his extended family, his grandmother and aunts in particular. In fact, he described his relationship with his extended family members as being close than his relationship with his adoptive mother:
“I had a good relationship with my grandparents and my aunts as well. So my grandparents were really (pause) I was closer to my grandparents than to my adoptive mother.”

Like Jandy, Toby also had a positive relationship with his extended family. In his case, however, the relationship was described as being “closer” than with his adoptive mother. Janet’s experience with her extended family was somewhat different than Jandy and Toby, as many of her extended family members were also adopted. Regardless, she found her relationship to her extended family to be quite “nice”, and she finds that with her extended family, adoption is completely “normalized”:

“I’m not the only one who is adopted. Most of my cousins are as well. So I think, I don’t know, it seems very normalized, like really normalized. It’s fun, it’s nice!

These participants, then, reported very positive relationships with their extended family members. Both Jandy and Toby reported that these relationships were “close”, filled with “care”, and relatively tension-free while Janet saw the relationship with her extended family to be “fun” and “nice”. When any “quirks” within the extended family were experienced, participants reported these as being “nothing serious”.

1.3.2. Relationship with Extended Family: ‘awkward’ and ‘holding me back’

For other participants, the relationships with extended family members were described as being somewhat less comfortable and contained more tension. Despite the fact that these relationships were not always easy, participants did not blame the difficulty on their family members. Instead, they mentioned that this might stem from “something of [their] own volition” causing these reservations.

In Danny’s report of his extended family, he mentioned that his feelings of being left out do not stem from the actions or words of his extended family as they “include [him] on everything”, but instead are due “stuff of his own volition”. He makes it very clear that his family
members “treat [him] the same as [his] parents do” and include him “100%” but that regardless, he still finds that something within himself has “been holding [him] back”:

“I don’t really notice any difference, they don’t look at me any different and they treat me the same as my parents do, you know just 100% included, I’m their nephew, there’s no if, ands, or buts about it. They’ve always done a good job of making me feel like a family and including me on everything, so it’s just stuff of my own volition that’s been holding me back.”

Danny’s account demonstrates that he finds his extended family to be fully inclusive, that his family members included him “100%” and always did a “good job of making [him] feel like a family”. Instead, what held him back, in his words, was his “own volition”; something within himself not related to his extended family. While Danny reported that his extended family makes him feel included, Steph found her relationship with her extended family to be more uncomfortable. Although she did state that her extended family sometimes reacts to her in “hush hush” way, she acknowledged that this is likely a result of these family members trying to make her comfortable and not offend her. That is, they do not have malicious intentions and instead are making her uncomfortable in their attempt to keep from offending her:

“I think the extended family found it odd that they adopted. I mean I talk to them, but not as much as ‘come over whenever, my door is open’, it’s awkward to go alone and that kind of thing. So I wouldn’t go alone. In Peterborough I have my mum’s parents. I wouldn’t go there alone. They are always hush hush. Like as though speaking will make me feel offended when or I don’t know. So I think they thought it would make me feel hurt or something, but no.”

Unlike Danny, Steph experienced a more tense relationship with her extended family and finds any interaction “awkward”. Despite this, she recognized that her extended family members likely did not intend to make her uncomfortable and the discomfort actually stems from their attempt to stop her from being offended. Karen also experienced some discomfort and a feeling of “disappointment” from the lack of understanding she experienced in her extended family relationship. She expressed her “disappointment” that her extended family members could not understand her experiences as a transracial adoptee:
“So you know you feel a disappointment that they can’t, that you only will understand if you have been in that situation. Seriously, I’m looking for someone who can relate to it in that way. But to expect that from someone, I’m not sure if that’s fair.”

Similar to Steph’s account, Karen also experienced some discomfort in her relationships with extended family members, but in her case, she felt “disappointment” at her extended family members’ inability to “understand” her “situation”. Despite this, she did assert that as much as she wants her family members to “understand”, she is not sure if that expectation of understanding is “fair” to make of an extended family member.

1.3.3. Relationship with Extended Family: Summary

As in some of the previous subthemes, the subtheme of adoptees Relationships with Extended family members also exhibited two patterns. Some participants described extended family relationships relatively free of tension, full of comfort and “care”. Although Jandy did say that she was not “that close” with her extended family, she did make it clear that they “get along” and that any quirks are nullified by the “care” that exists within the family. Toby’s relationship with his extended family was described as even closer, and in fact he reported being closer to his extended family than to his adoptive mother. Janet found that adoption was ‘normalized’ in her family and that this helped to create “fun” and “nice” relationships.

Other participants described their relationships with their extended family as “awkward” and even felt some “disappointment”, but even in these circumstances, participants did not blame their extended family members and recognized that it was something “of [their] own volition” that might be causing these reservations.

Thus, although the participants described differing experiences, many were able to identify some form of positivity within their experiences. Even when participants described discomfort in their extended family relationships, they identified that this discomfort likely came from
something within themselves. Additionally, when this discomfort was described as being a result of family member actions (as in Steph and Karen’s cases), the participants identified that these actions were not meant to cause discomfort and instead were the family member’s attempts to avoid causing offense or a lack of “understanding” that could not be fairly expected from family members.

2: School and Friends

Following a discussion of family, participants shifted to speaking about their schooling experiences and their experience with friends. These reports stemmed from a question on schooling and experiences within school as well as a question focused on friendship formation and how transracial adoptees create and maintain friendships. Although initially it was thought that schooling and friends might be two separate themes, they were closely intertwined and thus the data suggested that these two components should be put together in one theme. For example, when speaking about friends, one participant referenced college as the place where “I had a lot of Korean friends and they were so, it was a very kind of neat experience”. This combination of schooling and friends was common within participants’ narratives. Another participant also referenced friendships when discussing schooling, but this time the focus was on early school experiences, by stating “I think having strong relationships with some history with people is really important to me. Umm, some of my closest friends I’ve known since pre-school and kindergarten”. Clearly then, the combination of schooling and friendship was very common in the narratives and lent itself very well to the development of this combined theme.

2.1: Elementary School

The sub theme of elementary school friendships/relationships was quite apparent in the participants’ narratives, with all participants referencing “childhood”, “elementary”, and “grade
school” friendships at some point upon being asked questions about their schooling experiences. With regards to elementary school, participants described their experiences as "pretty great" and although they would sometimes notice the difference between themselves and classmates/friends, "it didn't really make a difference". One participant put it succinctly when she stated that "I knew I was different and wasn’t like other people, but I never felt like that was a problem". In some cases, participants did experience instances of "being made fun of", but even then they found that this "was no big deal". In fact, some participants even found that they foraged long lasting friendships beginning in elementary school, with one participant saying, "people that I’ve had in my life since elementary school and we’re a really close group and we all love each other".

Within the subtheme of “Elementary School” then, two distinct subsets of experiences appeared. One group of participants found that they did experience “being made fun of” in elementary school and experienced some incidents early in their schooling. Despite this, they did not attribute these incidents to malicious intent but instead saw it as an opportunity to learn. Additionally, these participants still asserted that they were able to make and maintain friendships in elementary school and were not affected by the “incidents”.

2.1.1: Elementary School: “Incidents”, “Learning Experience”

For some, the elementary school experience involved some incidents where participants experienced classmates/peers “saying something” about their adoption. However, even when these “incidents” were experienced, participants seemed to view these as a “learning experience” for the children making the comments.

Janet discussed her experiences in elementary school and her friendship formation at that time. Although she did reference potential incidents of someone "saying anything about
adoption", she made it clear that this was not out of malicious intent and that this period of her life resulted in her making close friends:

"I feel like maybe the only time someone did say anything about adoption or my ethnicity was in elementary school when we were all too little to have learned or have been told. You know I think having strong relationships with some history with people is really important to me. Umm, some of my closest friends I’ve known since pre-school and kindergarten, so I have friends that I really value and that I’m still pretty close to that go all the way back from there".

Janet intertwined friendship and schooling in her account of her elementary school experience and although she noted possibly having someone remark about her adoption, she found elementary school to be a place where she began to form a history with people who have since become her dearest friends.

In a similar way, Steph also referenced learning and how she experienced some questions about her ethnicity in elementary school. In her case she saw these questions as a learning experience, providing the other children with a chance to learn about families and how they can be formed in different ways with various combinations of individuals. Again, the focus was not on any form of malicious intent and instead focused on "learning" and gaining understanding:

“I think the kids didn’t know what to call me. Because I didn’t have the accent of an African or something like that, so I think they already judged me as something but when they found out my background, the people who came to pick me up from school, it was very confusing for them, they learned that not in every family does the father and mother conceive and have a kid."

Steph, like Janet, experienced some reactions to her adoption in elementary school but similarly, she attributed these reactions to her fellow classmates’ lack of knowledge on families like hers. She viewed these incidents as a learning experience, allowing her classmates to see different family dynamics and compositions.
Jandy’s experience in elementary school (including the friends she made there) was also quite positive and even when she did experience an incidence of being made fun of, it did not bother her. Instead, she felt like she did have friends and did not feel as though other kids even thought about her “difference”:

"I umm, was made fun of once when I was when I was in first grade or something and I was with my older sister, who stuck up for me and so, that was kind of no big deal. So all my friends were friends and I didn’t feel like they thought anything about it. I think that kids are pretty colour blind in general, umm, and so I knew I was different and wasn’t like other people, but I never felt like that was a problem and it didn’t hold me back in school"

Jandy, similar to both Janet and Steph, experienced an incident regarding her adoption in elementary school, but also did not find that this was “a big deal”. Like Janet, she also intertwined school and friendship, as she identified her friends in elementary school as individuals who “didn’t think anything about” her adoption.

For Janet, Steph, and Jandy, elementary school did come with “incidents” and occasions where other children made comments related to adoption. Instead of seeing this as an extremely negative experience, the participants did not see these incidents as a “big deal”. Rather, these incidents were viewed as a potential learning experience for the children, allowing them to better understand different family dynamics and relationships. Also, participants still referenced forming friendships in elementary school and were not hindered by these ‘incidents’ in terms of friendship creation. Although Janet experienced “someone saying something” about her adoption in elementary school, she realized that it is because kids are “too young to have learned” and does not attribute this to any malicious intent. Steph reported a similar experience to Janet, but also sees this as a “learning experience” for the other children instead of seeing it as a personal insult. In Jandy’s case, she also experienced “being made fun of once” but this did not bother her and instead, she found that generally her being a transracial adoptee did not affect her whatsoever in
school or with her friends. Despite these different experiences, the overall tone of elementary school was positive, with participants reporting good experiences both with school and with the friends they made there. When any problems did arise, participants realized that this was not because the others harboured any malicious intent, but instead was because the other children “didn’t know any better”.

2.1.2: Elementary School: “Lots of friends”, “no problems”

For other participants, the elementary school experience was consistently positive with no reports of any adoption-related incidents. In these cases, the participants reported making many friendships and having no problems “fitting in” or “being bullied.”

Marisol found that her experience of “being different” was extremely positive. That is, it resulted in other children being very interested in her and wanting to befriend her more frequently because of her “difference”. While she did identify herself as being different from her friends and classmates, this difference was not a problem for her and in fact resulted in positive relationships as opposed to “incidents” or “being made fun of”:

"I never had problems fitting in, and in terms of feeling different, I obviously thought like ‘I’m not white’ (laughs) so I’m obviously different, but I didn’t have a problem with that and it never came up. Umm, I would say though in elementary school, because we really only had one class that we followed throughout. I always had lots of friends, and people are kind of drawn to you. At least in my neighbourhood they were drawn to you if you weren’t white."

For Marisol then, her “difference” was a positive force; drawing individuals to her and contributing to her forming many friendships in elementary school instead of resulting in “incidents” of any sort. Marisol was not the only participant who described positive elementary school interactions, as Toby also discussed having many friends in elementary school, and in his case he never “even felt different” from the others in his elementary school environment:
“grade school was actually pretty great and I never had any problems. I never had the sense that I was different. I had a normal childhood, I had a lot of friends. I never felt different from other children, I mean I was never harassed or bullied for being different. Umm, I had a lot of friends”

So, similar to Marisol, Toby also had a very positive grade school experience where he had many friends and never experienced bullying or any “incidents” of being made fun of. However, unlike Marisol’s report, Toby asserted that he did not feel different from his friends and other children in grade school, especially because he never experienced bullying for “being different”. Similarly, Danny also described positive experiences in elementary school, and in his case he found that many of his closest friends stemmed from his time in elementary school. These friendships have continued into adulthood and Danny reported that these friendships have become “family”:

“I can have lots of acquaintances and be friendly, but people that I actually consider to be friends is a really small group, probably 6 or so people, but they’re people that I’ve had in my life since elementary school and we’re a really close group and we all love each other. Yeah, yeah, I mean we consider each other family, you would do anything for each other”

In Danny’s experience, elementary school was a very positive time of friendship formation, resulting in strong, “family”-like friendships that have remained into adulthood. Thus, for Marisol, Toby, and Danny, elementary school was an extremely positive experience filled with friendships. While Marisol reported noticing her “difference”, she asserted that this difference did not cause any problems and in fact she served as a positive factor. Toby also had a positive grade school experience where he “always had friends”. Although his report differed from Marisol in that he did not experience feeling “different”, both Toby and Marisol had positive experiences and never lacked friends or experienced “being made fun of” during that part of their lives. Danny’s experience went one step further, and for him, elementary school was a place that allowed him to form some of his dearest friendships, which existed well into adulthood. Although
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these experiences are all somewhat different, with some experiencing difference and others finding that this difference was not a factor at all, each one demonstrated very positive elementary school experiences. These participants formed many friendships, some which continue to this day, and did not experience “being made fun of” during their elementary school years.

2.1.3: Elementary School: Summary

Similar to the Relationships with Siblings theme, the Elementary School theme also appeared to split into two distinct patterns. That is, some narratives demonstrated an elementary school experience where “incidents” did occur and participants were at times “made fun of”, possibly as a result of their adoption experience. Other narratives, on the other hand, demonstrated very positive elementary school experiences free of “incidents” and full of friendships, some of which continued well into adulthood. Although in some cases “someone did say something” about adoption in elementary school, participants who experienced these “incidents” did not attribute them to malicious intent. Instead, these participants identified that the children in elementary school are “too young to have learned”. Participants saw these “incidents” as a “learning experience” rather than as a personal insult. Thus, these elementary school experiences were generally positive and often resulted in the formation of many friendships where “friends were friends, and didn’t think anything about [my difference]”. Even in cases where this difference was noticed and was “made fun of”, participants were able to identify that elementary school was still a positive experience and that the other children just “didn’t know any better”.

2.2: High School: ‘it was fine’, ‘made to feel special’

The subtheme of high school followed quickly after elementary school in the participants’ narratives when probe questions focused on the high school experience were asked. Similarly, their reports of friendship were heavily tied in with their reports regarding high school with many
participants discussing the friends they made “while in school”. Many participants reported high school as a place where they “never really had any trouble”, and where their transracial adoption “never really made much of a difference”. Participants said that any issues they faced likely had nothing to do with their transracial adoption because “in high school we all knew stuff. We all knew better”. Participants rarely mentioned having any problems in school, and found that they were able to form friendships quite easily. When problems were encountered, most participants believed that “it was more a personality thing, and maybe just more developmentally.”

For Jandy, her experiences in high school were “fine” and she did have some difficulties at that time. She clearly indicated that these difficulties likely had very little to do with her ethnic heritage or experience as a transracial adoptee. Instead, she believed that it had more to do with herself, her personality, and her development in general:

“It was fine overall. It wasn’t terrible. I don’t think being transracial had anything to do with that. I never blamed that on my ethnicity or anything like that. I think it’s more a personality thing, and maybe more just developmentally. I think there’s a lot to it and I never really thought of it as an ethnic, transracial issue. At that point I had moved from a different environment and left my friends, and really lost motivation then, I just wasn’t very confident in myself and I don’t think, I don’t think it has to do with, because of ethnicity. It was more about what I did to myself.”

In the excerpt above, Jandy discussed her struggles in high school. Regardless, she made it clear that these struggles were more personal, stemming from a loss of motivation, rather than anything relating to her ethnicity or experience as a transracial adoptee.

Jandy was not the only individual to discuss difficulties in high school unrelated to the transracial adoptee experience. Toby also briefly mentioned some difficulties during high school, but he, like Jandy, also made it clear that these likely did not related to his transracially-adopted status. He also asserted that his overall experience was quite positive, especially with regards to
the friends he made, and that people were in fact drawn to him because of his different background:

“And, I have to say to the credit of my classmates and my friends that if anything, I was made to feel special, I had, what I could call ‘positive racism’ where people treat you special and make you, you know, want to be your friend because you’re different. I did have problems with school but they were just mostly academic problems. I had no problems making friends. In fact it probably was a positive thing that I was a bit different because that made people more interested and I had a lot of friends, it was easy to make friends.”

In Toby’s experience, although he expressed some difficulties, he found that individuals were drawn to him and he was able to make a lot of friends, again suggesting the deeply intertwined nature of schooling and friendships in the lives of participants. In fact, Toby was not the only individual who experienced this “positive racism”, as Marisol also spoke about her difference being a positive facet, in that others were drawn to her because of it. This also provided the opportunity for her to be more open about her cultural heritage. Overall, she found high school to be a positive experience, where she never had difficulties making friends and experienced no conflict:

“I don’t think it ever really played a part. I mean usually I just, I’ve never had problems making friends. So I didn’t have any conflicts over being different than my peers. So then I could be more open about my cultural identities and they didn’t question it. I always had friends and nobody ever, a lot of people liked the colour that I was. So they were always drawn towards me.”

Therefore, like Toby, Marisol also found that high school was a very positive space for her, as she formed many friendships and had the opportunity to be more freely open about her cultural heritage without worry of classmates’ reactions.

Through these accounts, it is evident that in general, high school was a relatively positive experience where participants found that they were able to make friends quite easily. In fact, in both Marisol and Toby’s cases, their experience of being adopted actually served them well as people were drawn towards them because of their difference. Marisol’s experience was very
positive overall and she reported no problems in school. Toby and Jandy on the other hand did express some problems in high school, but both identified that these problems likely had nothing to do with their ethnicity or transracial adoption. Instead, they likely stemmed from personal characteristics or struggles with academics rather than anything to do with ethnicity. Regardless, the common thread throughout these accounts is the assertion that high school was generally positive and that any issues did not stem from their transracial adoption. In fact, many found that their lived experience as transracial adoptees served them well, as it drew classmates to them, resulting in many friendships formed.

2.3: College/University: “diversity”, “accepted”, and a “very positive experience”

The last subtheme subsumed under the theme of School and Friends is the experience the participants had in college/university. This topic appeared immediately after the reports of high school in all of the participants’ narratives when they were asked about their university/college experienced. These college/university experiences appeared to be a very important aspect in most participants’ lives. Many participants found that this period of their lives was a time to explore their roots, where there was “enough diversity there that nobody cared”. Another participant described college as being “completely cosmopolitan and everyone was accepted so that was great”. It was in college/university that many participants were able to form connections with individuals of their ethnic heritage of origin, which most found to be “really great”, and they were often able to connect more thoroughly with their roots. Thus, college was clearly an important time in the lives of the participants, and this was clearly demonstrated in the narratives through the many positive experiences participants reported about their time in college/university.

Marisol found that she was pleasantly surprised at university by how open and accepting others of similar ethnic heritages were towards her. In addition, she found that in university,
opportunities presented themselves for her to travel and truly explore her heritage in ways she was unable to do before. She initially expressed concerns about whether others of her heritage would accept her, but she found that she was readily welcomed:

“They, they have accepted me! I have quite a few indigenous friends now. ‘It’s awesome. And I didn’t know this until I was in university and was meeting indigenous people, and it was like ‘no no, most of us are very open minded and accepting’ and when I went back to my cottage I extended myself and they were like ‘yeah, obviously, if you want a friend or want to find out more about our cultures. Maybe similarities with your culture’, it was a surprise, but a welcome one. I’ve been through UofT on another trip for indigenous health where an email came into my inbox about these opportunities and I was like ‘oh, yes, perfect’, because I didn’t know they existed! So that was great”

As evidenced in the excerpt above, university was a very positive time for Marisol, as she was able to connect with individuals of her ethnic heritage and was able to explore her heritage in a way that was not possible before. Not only did university provide the first real opportunity for her to fully connect with individuals of her ethnic heritage, but it also provided the opportunity to travel and explore her ethnic heritage on a new, deeper level. The experience of connecting with one’s heritage through meeting culturally similar individuals was not something only Marisol expressed, as Janet also found that she was able to connect with individuals of her cultural heritage while in university. She found that these individuals were also extremely welcoming and consistently included her in their activities, connecting her to aspects of her heritage that she had previously never experienced:

“College was a completely different experience. I went and you know, just the diversity, it was just a completely different context so no one gave me any trouble ever. I guess the only weird thing in college was, I met a lot of Korean people for the first time, which was great. It was interesting. But man did I eat a lot of good Korean food for the first time. That was amazing. I had a lot of Korean classmates and they were so, it was a very kind of neat experience. They were like ‘you’ve been using the wrong soap, you’re Korean. You need to use this soap” or “Come to our hair salon because they’re Korean, like you, and your hair. Obviously you’re not going to the right place”. So that, it was a really kind of, a very positive experience.”
Again, like Marisol, Janet found university to be a very diverse atmosphere, where she was able to connect with others of her ethnic heritage. This provided the first opportunity for her to experience aspects of her heritage that were previously unexplored, an experience she truly enjoyed. While Janet found that she was able to interact with classmates of her ethnic heritage in a new way, Jandy explored her ethnic heritage through travel while in college, allowing her to truly connect with her roots. Her time in university allowed her to travel to her country of origin and truly experience the culture there; an experience she found both powerful and enjoyable. This also allowed her to connect with many individuals of her ethnic heritage in her country of origin:

“So by the time I got to college, I think that was when I got more serious about my background. I ended up going to China on a semester abroad which was really awesome for me. So, that was a big trip for me. I learned a lot about my culture, my heritage, and just had a chance to learn how blessed I was. And just the relation, I just felt comfortable in China with people who are more like me I guess, which is interesting. I did some Korean studies in the summer, so I studied in Korea and that gave me whole new perspective on Korean families and Koreans are just so hospitable and so generous umm, I just felt so at home. And I love the food. And there are some things that I’m kind of like ‘oh that kind of make sense because I do that all the time and it’s so common here’

Therefore, it is clear that university was a profound time of exploration and connection for Jandy. Not only was she able to travel and experience her ethnic heritage first hand, but she also found herself fully welcomed into this culture, making her feel truly “at home” and helping her understand herself better.

Evidently then, college/university was a very important time for the participants, as it provided a chance for them to investigate and participate fully in their ethnic heritages, which often times they did not have the opportunity to do before. Marisol found that she met other individuals of her ethnic heritage while in university and was fully accepted by them; something she was pleasantly surprised by. She also found that the university itself provided opportunities to travel and fully engage in her heritage in new ways. Janet also found that it was in university that
she made friends with others of her ethnic heritage. Similar to Marisol, she was openly accepted by these new friends and they actively included her in cultural activities. Finally, like Marisol, Jandy also had opportunities to travel while in university. In her case, she was able to fully engage in studying her heritage and being fully immersed, which she truly enjoyed. Throughout the accounts, it is clear that college/university was a time of positive exploration; a space allowing transracial adoptees the opportunity to engage with their cultural heritage both through travel and through connection with others of their heritage of origin.

3: Society

The final major theme captured by the data revolved around the opinions of society, that is, others outside of the participant’s immediate family and friends. These appeared throughout the narratives, often intertwining themselves with discussions of friends and schooling. For example, one participant discussed “a friend’s boyfriend” and his uncomfortable assertion that “all kids who are adopted are drug addicts and homeless”. Therefore, this theme was also easily identified, as it appeared throughout participants’ narratives, not always tied to a specific interview question, and was discussed by all study participants at some point. Often, the reports revolved around participants experiencing others “offering opinions without being asked” and “demanding an explanation for why my family is the way it is”. Reactions from society sometimes even came from others of the participants’ ethnic origin, although these reactions were not always negative. In some cases, these reactions from individuals of the participants’ ethnic origins were about inclusion, almost “he’s one of us”. In other cases the reactions were more divisive and the participants experienced others of their own ethnic origin almost judging them for actions “that you just don’t do” if you are from that ethnic group. In general, however, the reactions from society were positive except with regards to outsider opinions (not from work), where the reactions held a more “negative tone”. The first subtheme focused on the participants’
experiences at work and how colleagues reacted to them. The second subtheme focuses on participants’ experiences with outsiders (those not a part of their immediate family, friends, work colleagues, or interview process).

3.1: Work

Following their reports of schooling, many participants also reported their experiences in their work environment. Although not all of the participants have work experience, those that did all spoke about their “work environment” and the way that they believe their transracial adoption experience has affected this environment, if at all. In general, participants described the environment as “good for the most part” and that any discrimination faced “doesn’t have anything to do with [their] heritage” or just “affects them indirectly”, but instead relates to other factors. In fact, a few participants mentioned that their ethnic heritage worked “in [their] favour” and they were able to “play both sides of the fence if [they] needed to”. Overall, the majority of the participants found that their work experiences were positive and that, even in times of difficulty, it was not directly related to their heritage or ethnicity. There were two distinct patterns that emerged in the participants’ narratives regarding their work environments. Some participants felt as though they experienced some indirect effects of their status as transracial adoptees and heritage, resulting in some discomfort. Other participants found that their heritage difference was a positive factor in their work-lives, thus allowing them to connect more closely with others of their heritage or “blend in” when necessary.

3.2.1: Work: “Indirectly Affected”

In terms of work experiences, some participants found that their experience as transracial adoptees and their heritage differences did affect them in some ways. That is, although these were not necessarily identified as negative experiences, participants did feel as though their transracial
adoption and heritage might have affected them to some degree and changed the way they interact with colleagues, sometimes creating uncomfortable situations. It should be noted, however, that these participants did not blame their colleagues and understand that these types of situations may happen to others as well.

Marie discussed her experiences at work and how her relationships at work might be affected by her transracial adoption. She found that she is indirectly affected by her transracial adoption, in that she explains her situation before anyone has a chance to ask. This is not because her work colleagues demand an explanation but instead stems from her experiences growing up, where adults expected an explanation resulting in her feeling that she should provide an explanation for her colleagues before they begin to ask questions:

“umm, I would say that it sort of indirectly affects me. Just because, you know, growing up and feeling like people were demanding expectations right and left, I almost feel like I open with it. You know, like early on in a relationship. Most people that I’ve worked with have known this about me, which is strange because I don’t necessarily know a ton about their, you know, families, their parents, you know. I almost feel like I am just like ‘well there it is’, let’s just get this out of the way so it can stop being, in case they come back”

Marie felt as though her experience as a transracial adoptee may have indirectly affected her at work, but even then, this was not because of her colleagues and their expectations, but instead came from her own previous experience. While Marie did not bring up incidents of discrimination, Jandy did acknowledge experiencing some discrimination at work. However, like Marie, Jandy also believed that this discrimination is indirectly related to her ethnic heritage as a transracial adoptee. That is, she looks younger than she actually is and she believes that this did result in some discrimination:

“I guess the only thing I would say about my race is that just because… because I’m (ethnic heritage) I look younger. So that actually has played a part at work because I look so young, but I’m much older. So it takes people a while to realize that I’m more intelligent than they might have assumed. That is the only issue that I’ve had just because of my ethnic make up,
because I tend to look longer. Even for Koreans I look young. But yeah that’s the discrimination I get. It’s for being too young and maybe not being taken seriously. Whereas I have 15 years of marketing experience. Very knowledgeable on the job, so yeah.”

While she did believe that her younger appearance may have be related to her ethnic heritage, she also recognized that this slight discrimination may also happen to others who look younger than their actual age, regardless of their ethnic heritage:

“It’s yeah, interesting. I’m not sure if that happens when you look young in general, but it’s annoying. And they’ll come around, they usually do, it’s just that it takes longer.”

From Jandy’s excerpt, it can be seen that she has experienced a degree of discrimination, although like Marie, she attributed this only indirectly to her ethnic heritage and transracial adoption and also recognized that this might happen to any individual who looks younger than their actual age. Both Marie and Jandy identified that their status as transracial adoptees (and subsequent heritage differences) may have affected them indirectly with regards to their work environment. Marie found that she discloses her status very early on, as it stops colleagues from “asking questions later” while Jandy finds that her heritage makes her look younger than her chronological age, resulting in colleagues taking her less seriously than her experience would dictate. Interestingly enough in Marie’s case, her colleagues could not be reacting to her being a visible minority as she is white, adopted by Chinese parents. Thus, she anticipates that her colleagues will react to her racial difference from her brother (who is Chinese), and thus discloses her transracial adoptive status early on to avoid these later questions. Regardless, neither Marie nor Jandy cite this as direct discrimination and recognize that these situations likely happen to others as well. Marie recognizes that it is not her work colleagues that pressure her into disclosing her transracial adoption status, but that it is her childhood experiences that have made her react this way. Jandy also recognizes that the indirect discrimination she faces is “annoying” but does
acknowledge that colleagues will “come around” and does not directly blame them for their perceptions of her age.

3.2.2. Work: “feeling welcome” and “good at blending”

Another subset of participants found that their heritage and status as transracial adoptees was a positive factor in their work lives. For these individuals, their heritage or ability to “blend” served them well at work, allowing them to make connections with colleagues in ways that might have not have been possible otherwise.

Unlike the perceived pressure to disclose transracial adoption status and indirect discrimination described by Marie and Jandy, Marisol found that her transracial adoption experience served as a benefit in her work environment and instead resulted in positive experiences. She met another individual of her ethnic heritage at work, and she found that this person was extremely kind and inclusive:

“One of my co-workers for a little while, he was, he was actually (his heritage) and he was my brother’s friend. And so my bother said, ‘my sister is going to be working here next year. She’s adopted and she’s from (country of adoption) so obviously his friend, being (his ethnic heritage), also heavily invested in his culture, always made me feel really welcome, especially if I wanted to learn about things… even if it was about (his ethnic heritage), it’s kind of close to (her country of adoption) (chuckles) so, or if he had any friends, so that was really nice”

Marisol experienced positive connections at work as a result of her adoption and found that she was able to learn more about her heritage from colleagues. While Danny did not mention learning from colleagues per say, like Marisol, he also cited his experience as a transracial adoptee as a positive factor in his work life. He found that he was able to “fit in” with Caucasian individuals at work:

“actually, well yeah in that sense then, it actually kind of works to my benefit because, (laughs), like white people, they might look at me different but once they start talking to me they realize that ‘he’s one of us’. he’s just normal’.
In addition to being able to “fit in” with Caucasian individuals at work, he also described being able to “blend” with others who are of different racial backgrounds, allowing him to work well and integrate with both groups:

“But I can also have, like I was a valet for a while so I worked with a lot of Black people of really lower class, so they would always look at the white people like ‘screw those guys’, then they would look at me and go ‘you know what we’re talking about’, and I could kind of get in with them and be like ‘yeah dude, screw those guys’. I could kind of play both sides of the fence if I needed to. Yeah I’m pretty good at blending”

Therefore, Danny’s experience at work, like Marisol’s, was also positive, as it allowed him to ‘blend’ with different groups of people, depending on the job at hand. Thus both Marisol and Danny found that their work experiences were very positive, in part because of their ethnic differences. Marisol found that she was made to feel very welcome and was able to form a connection with someone at work who was of a similar ethnic heritage to hers. She found this to be a very good experience, making her time at work more positive. Danny also found that his heritage allowed him to connect with individuals at work, but in his case he found that his ambiguous ethnic appearance allowed him to ‘blend’ with individuals of many different cultures, making his work relationships much smoother. Although Marisol and Danny did have slightly different experiences with regards to work, they both found that their adoption and ethnic heritages were positive factors for them, allowing for better work relationships and experiences than might not have been possible otherwise.

3.2.3: Work: Summary

Participants’ narratives showed two patterns with regards to their work experiences and the relationships formed there. In the first section, participants discussed their thoughts that their status as transracial adoptees resulted in indirect discrimination. In one case, a participant explained that she felt compelled to explain her adoption early on, as it would prevent colleagues
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from asking questions at a later point. Another participant described that because she appears younger (something she stated might be related to her ethnic heritage), she is often not taken as seriously as would be expected given her experience.

Other participants, on the other hand, described very positive work-related experiences that were free of any discrimination. For these participants, being a transracial adoptee actually facilitated work relationships, allowing participants to “get along” and “blend” more easily with individuals at work, thus making work experiences smoother and more pleasant.

Although these two types of accounts seem very different and distinct, the common thread across these accounts was that they were all identified as relatively positive. Even in cases where discrimination was experienced, the participants just saw this as “an annoyance” instead of a “major issue” and identified that this was “indirectly” related to their transracial adoption experiences, instead of pinpointing adoption as a direct reason for their experience at work. For other participants, their experience as transracial adoptees at work was considered a very positive thing as it facilitated connections and allowed for participants to easily work with individuals of all ethnic heritages, something that might not have been as easily accomplished otherwise.

Overall, work experiences were identified as generally positive, and even in cases of “indirect” discrimination, participants acknowledged that these incidents were not “major issues”.

3.3: Outsider Opinions

The final subtheme is focused on the opinions of outsiders (not immediate family, friends, school, interview, or work individuals). This subtheme showed itself in the data very quickly, as participants mentioned experiences with outsiders throughout their narratives from “when [they] were kids” up until “this day”, and these accounts were not tied to a specific interview question. Unlike the other themes, this subtheme had a much more “negative tone”, and many participants expressed their feelings that “others are pushing their strong opinions” and expecting them to
"know things they don’t know” because of their ethnic backgrounds and adoption experience. Some experienced this in “the looks [they] get from others” while others would “just come right up to [them]” and comment. It was these outsider opinions that were the most difficult on the participants and resulted in the most internal struggle.

This subtheme is further subdivided into “looks” and “comments”, as some participants primarily described receiving “looks” from outsiders, while others have experienced “direct comments” on a more regular basis.

3.3.1: Outsider Opinions: “getting looks”

For some of the participants, it was the looks they experienced from others that were most difficult on them. These were not isolated incidents, and occurred in many different places with many different groups of people.

In the following passage, Steph discussed some of the reactions she received from others when she was seen outside with her adoptive parents. She found that she primarily “gets looks” from others as opposed to people commenting directly, but she still found this uncomfortable and “odd”:

“Some people have strong opinions. I see that we’re not the same, and we get those kind of looks or whatever when we are going on the street or whatever. Especially since it’s stark white and black. So it does look like I’m a mistress or something. Especially with the whole sigma with the interracial thing, especially black and white. It’s so odd. It’s so odd”

Steph reported experiencing “looks” from others when she is with her adoptive parents, feeling as though others are making judgments on her relationship with her family members without knowing the truth about their relationship. The experience of “receiving looks” was not unique to Steph’s account, and Danny also mentioned experiencing looks from others when he was seen with his adoptive family. This has become more common as he has gotten older, as he has begun to pay more attention to social cues:
“I feel like as I got older I picked up a lot more on the social cues and how people look at me, so I’m sure part of that is me being self-conscious about it but I know I’m not making all of it up. Yeah, like I remember at my sister’s wedding, you know they were doing all the photographs like at the church right there and they were ‘ok, let’s all do the immediate family of the bride’ and then so I stepped up there and I could tell the photographers were looking at me like ‘what the hell is this guy doing over here’."

Danny’s experience further demonstrates the increasingly negative tone exhibited through this subtheme. Like Steph, he has also experienced “looks from others”, feeling as though he is being judged whenever he is seen with his adoptive family. Marie referenced an incident similar to both Steph and Danny, where she received looks and perceived that outsiders were making assumptions based on seeing her with her adoptive family, although in her case, her adoptive family is the ethnic minority (Chinese) while she is of the societal majority (white). Marie clearly stated that these reactions are difficult for her, but that this is just “how it goes” when you are a transracial adoptee:

“And so like, I’m just always going to be, when I go to the table, nobody is going to walk up to the table when we’re ordering and assume I’m part of the family. You know, probably assume I’m somebody’s wife. So you know, it’s just sort of like, it sucks. But you know, kind of how it goes.”

Therefore, for some participants, it is the looks they received from others that were the most difficult for them. For Steph, she felt as though others who saw her walking with her adoptive parents were judging her and identified interracial stigma as a major cause of these looks. Danny, too, experienced looks when being seen with his family. He also identified that this has worsened with age, as he became increasingly aware of social cues (and thus these ‘looks’), as he grew older. Similar to both Steph and Danny, Marie also reported the assumptions that others make when she is seen with her adoptive family. Although she pointed out that as transracial adoptees this is just “how it goes”, she does also make it clear that these experiences are not enjoyable and difficult. In general, the participants perceived these experiences as very negative,
contrary to the majority if the other experienced described previously, demonstrating the negative tone of this particular subtheme.

3.3.2. Outsider Opinions: “comments” and “demanding an explanation”

For other participants, their experiences with outsiders involved specific comments made to them, often relating to their adoption or ethnic difference from others. These too were perceived as very negative, and were difficult experiences for the participants.

Toby discussed his interactions with individuals who have similar interests to his and the impression that he received from these individuals. He mentioned his interest in interacting with Caucasian individuals with similar interests, but he felt as though they did not accept him and that they felt as though he could never “fit in” to their discussions:

“and sometimes when you know, I think, some Caucasian people that I could be friends with, I probably would have had more things in common with them, but I think there is a bit of that tribalism. I had an experience when I went to sort of a gathering, there were some Caucasian people talking about music and classical music and that happens to be something … that I’m knowledgeable in. I wanted to join in, and they wouldn’t, I could see that they had a problem with me joining in. They, they were polite but they were kind of like, what would you know about it, and it turned out that I knew more than they knew about it, but, they didn’t, in their minds it wasn’t, they couldn’t really fit it in that I would be knowledgeable about classical music”

He then continued to point out his belief that ethnicity shouldn’t matter, but that in reality, it does affect him and that he feels as though people define him by his transracial adoptee status as soon as he tells them about his background:

“There is deep within me this idea that it shouldn’t really matter umm, but the reality is unfortunately that it does matter…When you tell people, especially when you tell them early on, they start umm, you start being defined by it and I don’t necessarily want to be defined by it. I also don’t want to be the freak where people. Where people start asking, focusing only on that and then asking questions about that but then don’t really, you know, because it me it’s just a biographical detail”
The reactions that Toby has experienced go beyond just one incident and have clearly affected him in many different situations. He felt as though his experience of being a transracial adoptee was used to define him in a negative way, affecting his interactions with others, preventing him from engaging with individuals with whom he might have common ground. While Toby cited indirect references to people directly commenting on his adoption, Marie referenced a specific incident, which continued to affect her well into adulthood. In her case, these comments began in her childhood and she continues to experience uncomfortable situations even into adulthood.

In the following passage, Marie described her experience as a child and the types of reactions she received from adults when they heard about her adoption, specifically, she felt as though an explanation was being demanded from her:

“This would go for adults when I was a kid, people almost demanding an explanation for why my family is the way it is. I mean ‘I can see you look different, please explain this to me’ and so I had like, a giant tattoo across my face or something, that I put their intentionally, and that they were somehow now entitled to an explanation. It was the biggest frustration.

In addition to feeling as though an explanation was being demanded from her, Marie also described her experience with specific comments being made towards her as a child:

“Just the things that adult would say, they just shock me now, especially because I am an adult. I’d always think as a kid ‘maybe it’ll make more sense when I get older’ but then you get older and you’re just like ‘no, you’re an idiot’. I mean people would just come up to me and say like ‘oh well, I could never love an adopted kid as much as I would love my own kid’

Marie’s case is one of the most extreme mentioned by participants, but well demonstrates the negative tone taken by this subtheme. That is, as a child, she experienced direct negative comments, which continued to affect her into adulthood. Like Marie, Marisol also experienced direct negative comments regarding adoption, although in her case, these comments were made in general about adoption and not referenced specifically to her:
“One of my friend’s boyfriends, I just remember the moment when it did and he’s like ‘aren’t all kids who are adopted drug addicts and homeless?’ or something like, it was so, I was considered a really balanced person in his opinion, so I was like ‘whooaaa, I really have to intervene here’. That’s not right at all.”

Marisol’s account also represents a rather severe case, but still demonstrates the negative tone of this subtheme. She has also experienced very negative comments regarding adoption, although in her case, she wanted to intervene and correct these statements if possible.

For these participants, then, it was the negative comments they received that were most difficult for them. Toby’s account was not as direct, but he did find that he was blocked from joining discussions about his interests because others cannot believe that he would be able to contribute. In addition, he also found that he is defined by his adoption by many people, and is made to feel like “a freak” when people focus only on his adoption and nothing else. Marie and Marisol experienced more direct negative comments about adoption. Marie had many comments made specifically to her as a child, and found that these have continuously affected her into adulthood. Marisol also experienced comments, but in her case they were not directed towards her in particular. Still, she found these comments to be offensive and felt the need to speak up and combat the assumptions that outsiders were making.

3.3.3: Outsider Experience: Summary

Overall, this subtheme was the most negative of all the themes observed in the narratives. In most cases, the participants had positive experiences in their relationships with others (family, friends, school, work, and the interview experience), but when it came to outsiders, the relationships were more difficult.

Participants reported two distinct types of experiences with outsiders. Some participants received “looks” from outsiders, typically when they were with their adoptive families, while other participants reported having comments made to or around them regarding adoption. Steph,
Danny, and Marie all reported experiencing “looks” from outsiders when seen with their adoptive families, whether they were walking down the road, at a large function (a wedding), or at a restaurant simply dining with family. Toby, Marie, and Marisol reported experiencing comments about adoption. Toby discussed his experiences trying to meet others with similar interests and expressed his feelings that Caucasian individuals he hoped to befriend instead made him feel unwelcome and unfit to join their group. In addition to the looks she received (as described in the 3.3.1), Marie also discussed the comments that adults made to her when she was a child about her adoption and her feeling that everyone was “demanding an explanation” from her. Marisol also experienced comments, although in her case they were not directed at her. Regardless, she still found these comments to be offensive and unfair, suggesting a tense relationship with outsiders. Regardless of whether they experience looks, comments, or both, all of the participants have struggled with the opinions of outsiders and have found this to be “the biggest frustration”, stating that “it’s not alright at all”. Clearly then, these encounters with outsiders have been the most difficult experiences for the participants, and they were and continue to be deeply affected by the “looks” and “comments” they received.

4. Interview Experience

The interview itself provided a unique opportunity to explore transracial adoptees’ lives and relationships, as it provided an opportunity for adoptees to speak about their experiences with another transracially adopted individual (the researcher). For this reason, understanding the adoptees’ experiences with the interviews was of great interest. Thus, in addition to the questions about relationships, a specific question about how adoptees experienced the interview was also included.

4.1: Interview Experience: “totally comfortable” and a time to “think critically”
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All participants discussed their experience with the interview and how they felt about discussing their lived experiences as transracial adoptees with a relative stranger (myself). This subtheme developed very well, as participants consistently expressed that they “actually enjoyed” the interview process and found that “it wasn’t awkward” for them. For some, once I disclosed that I was also adopted, they “felt totally comfortable” and enjoyed the feeling that “I totally know what you’re talking about”, only further supporting the idea that many adoptees wish to speak with someone who understands their particular experiences. Finally, many of the adoptees also talked about how the interview experience made them “think critically” and really “consider their experiences”, which they also quite enjoyed.

Toby discussed his experience with the interview in a very positive light. He pointed out that it was a very good experience for him, allowing him to open up about areas of his life that usually went unmentioned:

“It was very good. I was actually looking forward to it and it was a good experience. Because as I mentioned, I don’t know if I said this, I don’t normally talk about it and I don’t like it when even friends or coworkers start asking questions. It was a very good experience, very interesting. I also had some thoughts that I wrote down before I came here so it wasn’t like, umm, the answers that I had, some of it I had already thought about, umm so I wasn’t, nothing really that came out of the blue ”

For Toby then, the interview experience was very positive, as it allowed him to explore parts of his life that he usually does not discuss, and even encouraged him to prepare ahead of time, bringing thoughts and questions with him. Other participants echoed Toby’s experience, as Marisol also discussed having a very positive experience with the interview process. She also mentioned that many people may not have the chance to discuss their adoption experiences, so being able to speak with someone who understands was beneficial:

“It was good! I actually didn’t know how it was going to be. Talking about it with a stranger, but I think as long as you told me, as soon as you said that you were adopted, I felt totally comfortable anyways talking about it. If it was someone who wasn’t adopted, maybe I
would be more concerned about what I was saying or something, I don’t know, it would have been a little weird. And that’s good, I mean I wasn’t nervous, I was calm… I really liked the interview process, very casual. And I do like the idea of, obviously speaking about it is always good especially if some people haven’t spoken about it with someone, or not very often, I always like speaking about it, it’s interesting. Even the kind of questions you’re asking right? It makes me think maybe I haven’t necessarily considered that before”

It is clear that Marisol also found the interview process to be a very good experience, and like Toby, it provided a chance to speak about things that are usually left unsaid and to delve deeper and think more fully about one’s own experience. In addition, she also suggested that speaking to a fellow adoptee was helpful and allowed her to feel more comfortable expressing herself and her experiences. Janet described her experience in a similar way and expressed that the interview was positive for her, allowing her to be open about lived experiences as a transracial adoptee. She also pointed out that she enjoyed being able to speak with someone who understands her experience, as this is not something she often has the chance to do:

“I thought it was really positive, I mean, I don’t normally, I hate to say this, but I’ve never really had an open relationship, or open conversation with my cousins even about this, it’s, there’s a narrative word given but you’re not really supposed to discuss it maybe? I don’t know, there’s a little bit of a grey zone around that in our family, so I feel like, it’s nice to be able to have a conversation and to hear your experience a little bit, and to know. It’s interesting to just be like ‘I totally know what you’re talking about, I hate when people do that”, I don’t know, it’s just, it’s very pleasant, it’s very nice to be able to do that.”

Janet continued by mentioning that the interview process also allowed her the chance to “really examine” and “think critically” about her experiences, which was something she truly enjoyed doing:

“It’s just nice to think about it a little more clearly and critically, or to think about it in a slightly different way, or to really examine it and kind of know why you feel certain things. Umm, so I thought it was really nice”

Clearly then, Janet also identified her enjoyment of the interview process, in particular the opportunity to speak with another adoptee and discuss with someone who understands the
experience of being transracially adopted. She also mentioned her appreciation of the opportunity to think critically about her experiences, something she had previously been unable to do.

Overall, the participants found the interview process to be quite positive and many remarked on how much they enjoyed being able to speak openly about their experiences, something that they rarely do even with friends and family. Toby found that the interview process was something he looked forward to and he enjoyed being able to openly discuss his adoptive experience. Marisol reported a similar feeling regarding the interview, that is, that the process was positive for her and she found that she enjoyed the opportunity to more fully consider her own experiences. Lastly, Janet also agreed that the interview process was positive and also appreciated the opportunity to clearly and critically explore her own experience. Overall, this theme was extremely consistent, with all narratives saying that the interview process was positive and that it provided the participants with a chance to express themselves openly, only further suggesting the need for studies such as this, furthering our understanding of transracial adoptees’ experiences. As Marie so succinctly says, “Oh, well I talked to this person, at least this person is doing research and will do something to further the cause”. Therefore, it is clear that participants do want others to have a better understanding of their experiences of being a transracial adoptee and studies like the present can help to offer this understanding.

5. Summary

The results of the present study illuminated four core themes, which were further delineated into subthemes. The three core themes were relationships with family members, schooling and friendships, societal reactions to the transracial adoption experience, and finally the interview experience.

Within the Family Relationships theme, participants discussed their relationship with their adoptive parents, their siblings, and their extended family. With regards to relationship with
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parents, the common report through all of the participants’ narratives was that the relationships were generally positive. In cases where there was difficulty within the relationship with parents, participants made it clear that this difficulty had nothing to do with their adoption. Instead, they believe that any conflict experienced had to do with “personality” and being “very different people” than their adoptive parents.

The relationships with siblings were more diverse and two distinct patterns emerged. For some participants, the relationships with their siblings were described as extremely positive and in some cases “helpful”, while for others, the relationships were marked with tension. Those participants whose experiences fell into the first pattern discussed their closeness with siblings and in one case a participant described how helpful it was to have an adopted sister, someone who went through the same adoptive experience. Those participants who described sibling relationships with more tension mentioned developmental changes in these relationships, where the relationship deteriorated beginning around the time of puberty. Although these two patterns seem quite different, with one suggesting smooth, comfortable relationships and the other pointing to tension, participants with both of these experiences identified their sibling relationships as positive overall. Even when participants discussed tension and deterioration in their sibling relationships, they made it clear that this was not because of their sibling reacting to the adoption and instead identified that problems stemmed from personality differences and physical distance. Additionally, they did not blame their siblings for this deterioration, and in some cases were even able to identify the positive aspects of the relationship with their sibling.

When it came to the reports of the extended family, participants also described two different patterns. For some participants, the relationship with extended family members was described as relatively tension-free. That is, these relationships were described as positive and marked with care. For other participants, the extended family relationships were not identified as
being quite as smooth. For these participants, the relationships contained more tension and discomfort. However, despite the fact that these relationships were described as “more difficult”, participants did not assume that their family members were trying to cause any discomfort. One participant made it very clear that his extended family members were nothing but inclusive with “no ifs, ands, or buts about it”, and that instead he was holding himself back in some way. Another participant, while she did acknowledge that her extended family members did make her uncomfortable, mentioned that the discomfort likely stemmed from her family members’ misguided attempts to keep from offending her. Thus, although participants experienced varied relationships with their extended families, overall the relationships were described as “positive”, and any discord experienced was not attributed to malicious intent.

Within the School and Friends theme, the participants discussed their experiences in elementary, high school, and university/college. Intertwined within these reports of schooling was the theme of friends and the creation of friendships throughout schooling, so much so that school and friends became intertwined in one theme. The participants’ narratives showed two distinct patterns when discussing elementary school and the friendships formed there. Some participants experienced “incidents of being made fun of” in elementary school, while others described extremely positive experiences filled with friendships and no reports of ‘incidents’. While these two types of account appear different on the surface, they share an underlying theme of positivity and an overall good experience in elementary school. Participants that reported these “incidents” neither saw them as a “major issue” nor blamed their classmates. Instead, many of these participants referenced learning and viewed these “incidents” as learning opportunities for classmates, providing them with the chance to see different family dynamics. In fact, many of the participants who did experience “incidents” also pointed out that they formed many friendships and connections with classmates that were very positive. The participants who did not experience
“incidents” also identified elementary school as a time where they were able to make many friends, and in some cases these friendships lasted into adulthood, where the friends made in elementary school “became like family”. Overall, the experience in elementary school and the connections formed there were reported to be very positive. In many cases, being adopted did not factor into the experience, but even when there were “incidents”, these were not seen as “major issues” and instead were viewed as learning experiences, never stopping participants from forming friendships and strong connections.

Following the reports of elementary school, participants discussed their experiences in high school and the relationships formed during this time. Similar to the general theme seen throughout the elementary school accounts, participants’ accounts of high school were also seen to be quite positive. Although some participants did cite problems in high school, they identified these as being primarily academic and personal, rather than anything related to adoption. In many cases, participants mentioned strong friendships that began in high school and additionally, many mentioned that others were actually “drawn to” them as a result of their difference, resulting in a very positive, friendship-filled experiences.

The last element of schooling and friendship that was reported by the participants was their experiences in college/university. College/university was described as a time for exploration, allowing participants to delve into their ethnic heritages in new and exciting ways. Many cited the increased diversity they experienced in college/university, making them feel very comfortable and able to explore their heritages through previously unexplored channels. For many participants, this period provided the first opportunity to truly engage with others of their ethnic heritage and they were able to form close friendships with individuals of their ethnic heritage of origin. Additionally, participants described their experience of travel (sometimes facilitated by the university), allowing them to truly experience their culture of origin in a very real way. Overall,
participants described college/university as a very positive, diversity-filled experience, allowing them to explore and connect with their ethnic heritages, both through travel and through connection with individuals of their ethnic heritage.

Within the Society theme, participants discussed their experiences in their work environment and their experiences with outsiders. Participants were asked about their experiences in their work atmosphere. Within this report of work experiences, two patterns emerged. Some participants described experiencing “indirect discrimination” and having their adoption play an indirect role in their work-life and work-relationships. In these cases, the participants found that they either felt compelled to explain their situation so colleagues would not ask questions, or that they did not receive the respect dictated by their experience as a result of their appearance. Despite this, these participants did not blame their work colleagues and recognized that these situations could happen to others as well. Other participants described their work experiences as positively affected by their experience as transracial adoptees. These participants described being able to connect with others at work better because of their difference. That is, one participant formed relationships with individuals of their ethnic heritage of origin at work while another found that he was able to “blend” with individuals of all different ethnic heritages, making work a much smoother and more comfortable experience. Despite these two patterns observed, in general work was described as a positive experience. Even when “indirect discrimination” was experienced, participants did not blame their colleagues and acknowledged that these situations likely happen to others as well.

The second subtheme subsumed under the Society theme was the opinions of outsiders. This subtheme pervaded the narratives, as mention of outsider opinions appeared throughout all of the other themes. As evidenced in the narratives, this subtheme held the most negative tone, with many participants reporting very negative experiences with outsiders and their opinions on
transracial adoption. Participants experienced outsider opinions through two distinct channels, “receiving looks” and “receiving comments”. Therefore, this subtheme was further broken down into those two categories. Many participants reported “receiving looks” from others, especially when they were seen with their adoptive families. They discussed the perceptions that outsiders have of them and found these experiences to be quite difficult and negative. Other participants received “direct comments” from others regarding adoption. In some cases, these comments began in childhood and continued to affect them well into adulthood. These comments from outsiders resulted in participants feeling unwelcome, not included in groups, and even encouraged them to stand up and try to combat the comments. It is evident from the narratives that the outsider opinions were the most negative experiences described by the participants. Unlike the positive tone of the other subthemes, this particular subtheme was very negative and participants described negative experiences with outsiders across the board.

The final theme focused on the participants’ interview experience and adoptees were asked how they experienced the interview and what the experience of speaking about their adoption with a relative stranger (the researcher) was for them. When discussing their experiences with the interview process, the participants were very consistent, with many citing their enjoyment of the process. Some participants specifically mentioned that oftentimes transracial adoption is not openly discussed, even within adoptive families. They appreciated the opportunity to openly discuss their adoption, especially with someone who understands the adoptive experience on a personal level. Participants also brought up the idea that the interview provided them with opportunity to think more critically about their adoptive experience, examining their own thoughts in new ways and allowing them to think about aspects of their lives that they previously left unexamined. Clearly, participants found the interview experience to be a very positive one, providing the opportunity for a critical examination of their adoptive experience.
while also allowing for an open discussion of adoption with someone who understands from personal experience.

Overall, participants described a range of experiences as transracial adoptees. Four major themes were covered, including family, schooling and friendship, society, and finally the interview process. Within each of these themes and subthemes, participants described their experiences and relationships with others and how these relationships might have been affected by their experience as transracial adoptees. In general, the experiences described were quite positive, with many good and positive relationships discussed. Generally, even when difficult situations were described, participants were still able to identify positive aspects and acknowledge that the individuals involved in these difficulties likely had no malicious intent. The exception to this was the experiences described in the Outsider Opinions subtheme, subsumed under the broad theme of Society. While the participants did not claim malicious intent in these cases, they did discuss very negative experiences causing more prominent alienation and discomfort, something that was not seen in the other themes.
Chapter V: Discussion

The present study sought to better understand the lived experiences of transracial adoptees, with a special focus on understanding how relationships play into these lived experiences. Participants’ narratives clearly highlighted a variety of different relationships experienced by transracial adoptees, and these relationships were the main focus of the narratives. Relationships with a variety of different people were described, including family members, friends, work colleagues, and others they come across in the community. It is evident that relationships are very important in the lives of transracial adoptees, and that these relationships affect the transracial adoptees in a variety of different ways. The major research question focused on how relationships play into the lived experiences of transracial adoptees and the narratives made it very clear that relationship play a major role. Great emphasis was placed on relationships, and there was a particular focus on a sense of understanding within those relationships. That is, relationships in which the adoptee felt understood and respected, where the other individual tried to appreciate and engage in the adoptees’ experiences, were considered to be very positive and important. In general, the participants experienced positive relationships, but they especially enjoyed those in which the other person was able (or tried) to understand or contribute (positively) to their experience as transracial adoptees.

The lived experiences, particularly focusing on the importance of relationships in the adoptees’ lives, will be discussed beginning with family relationships (parents, siblings, extended family), followed by school/friends (elementary, high school, university/college), and finally reactions from outsiders (work, societal reactions). This chapter will begin by reviewing and discussing the results gained from the participants’ narratives. Next, the existing literature will be used to validate and support the concepts being discussed. Finally, a mid-level theory gleaned from the discussion will be established and presented.
Family Relationships: Resolving Tensions Through Mutual Understanding

One of the major aspects of participants’ narratives was the presence of family relationships, clearly demonstrating the importance of these relationships for the adoptees. Generally, these relationships were described as quite positive across the board and even when struggles were identified, these were not blamed on family members. That is, positivity was described in each type of family relationship (with adoptive parents, siblings, extended family members) and positive features were evident despite some reports of difficulty.

With regards to the relationships that adoptees had with their adoptive parents, these relationships were described as being pretty good and mostly positive. This did not mean that they were free of tension however, and relationship struggles and deterioration were described at some points. Despite this, there was a consistent trend to view relationships with adoptive parents as positive with any difficulties being explained as a difference in personalities. From these accounts, it appears that any strain experienced in the adoptive parent-child relationship was not a result of the adoption itself, but stemmed from personality differences, especially around the age of puberty (De Goede, Branje & Meeus, 2009). Thus, these adoptive parent-child relationships appear to be similar to any non-adoptive parent-child relationship, where conflicts are a normal occurrence, particularly around the age of puberty (De Goede, et al., 2009; Laursen, Coy, & Collins 1998). Reports of conflicts around the age of puberty are in line with previous research on the development of parent-child relationships, as a meta-analysis showed that parent-child conflict tends to increase from early to middle adolescence (ages 12-15) (De Goed, et al., 2009; Laursen et al. 1998). Additionally, Laursen and colleagues (1998) also suggested that the intensity of parent-child conflicts is at a peak during the time of puberty. Puberty is a time of great transition, both for the adolescent and for their parents, as adolescents are experiencing heightened emotional lability as well as big changes in autonomy and social relationships (Laursen, et al., 1998). Thus,
it is reasonable that these changes would result in an increase of conflict around this time. Therefore the research supports the notion that the adoptive parent-child relationships are similar to any other parent-child relationship, where conflicts arise around the age of puberty. Of course, the adoptive parent-child interactions contain additional elements that may affect the relationship, such as being of different ethnicities (Baden, Treweeke & Ahluwalia, 2012), but still, similar patterns in terms of conflict remains like that of a non-adoptive parent-child relationship.

Interestingly though, the results of the present study are in contrast to some of the findings from the psychoanalytic literature regarding adoption and the effects on the parent-child relationship (Mayers, 2010; Rosengarten, 2010). Mayers (2010) discussed the case of Myra and the difficulties experienced when she found out about her own adoption. Myra found out about her adoption by mistake, leading to a variety of difficulties and struggles. When she was officially told of her adoption (after finding out by mistake), many conflicts and difficulties arose between Myra and her adoptive parents, causing Myra to retreat into her own negative fantasies and distance herself from her adoptive parents. The results of the current study however are not in line with Myra’s case, especially as no participants in the present study found out about their adoption by mistake, and all were told explicitly by family members. While conflicts were experienced in the adoptive parent-child relationship, these were not a result of the adoptive experience and adoptees were able to maintain positive relationships with parents despite any conflicts. One factor that may contribute to this difference between Myra’s case and the current study is the openness found within the parent-child relationship. Lifton (2010) makes clear that open communication is essential in the adoptive parent-child relationship and in Myra’s case, this open communication was not present (Rosengarten, 2010). Unlike the adoptees in the present study, Myra did not feel as though she could be open with her parents about her adoption and thus retreated instead (Mayers, 2010). This contrast underscores the importance of open, honest communication, as it is
clear that it helps adoptees maintain positive relationships with their parents. This also points to the importance of understanding within the relationships. It seems as though with open communication comes a sense of understanding, which supports these positive relationships. Although only few studies have investigated the importance of open communication and understanding in the adoptive parent-child relationship, there is some support for the idea that open communication is crucial. Levin and Currie (2010) support the importance of open communication as they demonstrated that those adolescents with open and easy communication with parents reported much higher life satisfaction than those adolescents that had communication difficulties with parents. Additionally, Hawkins (2007) found that communicative openness between adoptive parents and openness was positively associated with adoptees’ self-esteem and their sense of adoptive identity, again suggesting the importance of open communication within the adoptive family.

With regards to siblings, the relationships were described as relatively positive overall, where all were able to describe positive aspects in their relationships with their siblings. There was tension described in some of these relationships and participants did report some difficulties in their relationships with siblings, but again, these were attributed to different personalities and physical distance. Thus, these sibling relationships seemed to be similar to what any other non-adopted sibling relationship would be like; including some arguments and disagreements (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). These arguments and difficulties were likely not a result of the adoption or any adoption-related difficulty, but instead seem to be more a function of personality, age differences, and physical distance. The literature on sibling relationships shows that conflict is also normal in non-adoptive sibling relationships and in fact, Furman and Buhrmester (1992) reported that siblings are often rated as the highest source of conflict. Regardless of these conflicts however, previous research has also demonstrated that sibling relationships are very important
and generally positive (Rienso, Juffer, & Tienman, 2013; Oliva & Arranz, 2005). Rienoso and colleagues (2013) asserted that siblings are a very important part of an individual’s life and the ties between siblings are generally strong. A study by Oliva and Arranz (2005) also investigated individuals’ perceptions of their relationships with their siblings and found that the majority of the participants reported positive assessments of their sibling relationships, stating that their siblings provided companionship, trust, and friendship. Thus, previous research demonstrates that while conflicts within the sibling relationship are completely normal, these relationships are still generally positive and reported as being very important in an individual’s life. The present results support the claim that sibling relationships are generally positive and that conflicts are entirely normal within these relationships, as the participants reported relatively close and loving relationships with siblings, not changed by the adoptive experience. Instead, these relationships were similar to any other non-adopted sibling relationship, including some degree of normal and healthy conflict. Additionally, these close sibling relationships are supported by the affiliative model of belonging, as outlined by Radhakrishnan (2012). The affiliative model does not stress the importance of biology or genetics and instead posits that individuals have the choice where they belong. With regards to the sibling relationships described, it is clear that these relationships are generally positive and even when there are struggles, these do not have to do with a lack of belonging. Thus, the filiative model (focused on genetics and biological connections), also described by Radhakrishnan (2012), is not necessary to form a strong, familial sibling relationship and instead an affiliative connection, focused on the choice to belong and a connection that goes beyond biology, is what connects adoptive siblings. This too further stresses the concept of understanding and open communication, as though there is an understanding that the adoptee and their siblings are connected and related, regardless of the difference in heritage and birth parents. This understanding appears to be very important for adoptees and contributes to the generally
positive relationships found between siblings. The strong connection and understanding between siblings regardless of genetic connection was supported by Samek and Reuter (2011), as they found that both biologically connected and adoptive siblings reported similar levels of emotional closeness (including perceptions of trust, love, and care). Furthermore, they also found that adoptive siblings were more likely to report greater closeness when they were from families that contained more open communication, again stressing the importance of this communication within the family relationships (Samek & Reuter, 2011).

The relationships with extended family members were somewhat variable, with some reporting very positive relationships and others reporting tension and discomfort. Again though, this tension was not blamed directly on the extended family members’ malicious intent, but instead resulted from something within themselves or family members’ misguided attempts not to offend. While there has not been much literature surrounding the relationship between adoptees and their extended family members, a study conducted by Levy-Shiff and colleagues (1997) did suggest relatively supportive relationships, as both the domestic and international adoptees in their study rated their level of social support to be moderate from extended family members. Despite the near 20-year gap, the results of the present study are congruent with Levy-Shiff et al. (1997)’s results to some degree, as there were some reports of positive, supportive extended-family relationships. In other cases, however, extended family relationships were fraught with more tension, discomfort, and conflict. The particular types of conflict demonstrated in the extended family relationships again point towards the importance of understanding and open communication. The majority of these conflicts stemmed from the extended family’s lack of understanding of the adoptive experience, resulting in awkwardness and discomfort for the adoptee. Of course, extended family members likely do not wish to cause any discomfort, but this lack of understanding does contribute to strain and discomfort within the relationship, as the
adoptee does not feel able to be fully open or engage fully with their extended family. The concept of the filiative model likely played a role here as for some, the extended family (and sometimes even the adoptee) likely experienced some difficulty regarding the lack of biological connection/genetics within the family relationship (Radhakrishnan, 2012). Although this was likely not the intended purpose, this confusion and lack of understanding resulted in some conflict and difficulty within these relationships.

Clearly then, the family relationships of transracial adoptees appear to be generally positive. It has been suggested that transracial adoptees might have more difficulty being integrated into their adoptive family because of the potential differences in race, culture, and religion (Levy-Shiff et al, 1997). That is, it is possible that transracial adoptees may struggle to integrate because they lose the connection to their own heritage while being unsure of how to fit into the heritage of their adoptive family (Levy-Shiff et al., 1997). The results of the present study did not support this claim and instead showed positive family integration and relationships, where adoptees were clearly able to develop their own sense of identity within their adoptive families and were able to form positive, generally open relationships with family members. So, despite the concerns presented by Levy-Shiff and colleagues (1997), in the present study, transracial adoptees did not seem to struggle with integration into a family of different heritage, culture, and religion. Instead, adoptees were able to integrate and form positive relationships with family members while developing their own sense of identity. Of course, conflicts are still present in these relationships, but these too are in line with the literature on family development, as conflicts are a normal facet of any family relationship (e.g. De Goed, et al., 2009; Furman and Buhrmester, 1992). What is clear is that open, understanding communication, as pointed out by Lifton (2010), is absolutely crucial for adoptees in the formation of their relationships with family members. When transracial adoptees feel as though they can be open with their family and have a
sense of understanding, the relationships seem to be more positive. That is, when the adoptee feels understood, as though they can openly communicate and be fully accepted by their family members, the relationships are more positive. Family members contribute to this open and understanding communication by supporting the affiliative model of belonging, as described by Radhakrishnan (2012). That is, many family members did not place importance on biological and genetic connections but instead tried to be fully inclusive, providing a loving and nurturing atmosphere, and allowing the adoptees to feel included, understood, and free to be open.

There are some that hold very negative perspectives on transracial adoption (for example, the National Association of Black Social Workers), believing transracial adoption only leads to the raising of confused and unhappy children (Simon & Alstein, 1996). These groups claim that transracial adoption is not only prejudicial against minority families but also that White families cannot provide marginalized children with a positive sense of racial identity (Simon & Alstein, 1996). In contrast to the negative perspectives that some have of transracial adoption, the reports of family relationships in the present study speak to the positive outcomes that can stem from transracial adoption (Simon & Alstein, 1996). The ‘catch-up’ model of adoption, as described by Van Ijzendoorn and Juffer (2006), posits that adoption may be a curative intervention and protective factor for adopted children compared to those left in institutional care. Research on this model suggests that adoption provides a successful environment in which adopted children can flourish and grow (Van Ijzendoorn & Juffer, 2006). The results of the present study are in line with this ‘catch-up’ model. Although this model was not discussed specifically, it is evident through the positivity demonstrated that the family relationships provided transracial adoptees with the nourishing and successful environment as suggested by the ‘catch-up’ model. The results of the present study are also in line with the research by Simon and Alstein (1996). In their study, Simon and Alstein (1996) investigated the parent-child relationship and racial identity through
interviews with adopted children and their adoptive parents. They found that transracially adopted children were better able to develop respect for physical difference and race, likely in part because their adoptive families were very confident in the atmosphere, relationships, values, and lifestyles that they were providing. That is, the adoptive families provided opportunities to experience both the adoptees’ own cultural heritage and the adoptive families’ heritage (Simon & Alstein, 1996). Additionally, the adoptees in the study reported being comfortable with their racial identities and were scornful of the negative perspectives of transracial adoption. Instead, they asserted that transracial adoption is a positive thing, as it provides secure and loving families while also providing the opportunity to develop a healthy sense of identity. The results of the present study are also in line with Simon and Alstein’s (1996) findings as the positive family relationships described also point to the idea that adoption provided a generally secure and loving family. While the family relationships described in the present study were not perfect and conflicts were experienced, the positive tone of the relationships and the descriptions of close family relationships are in line with the findings of Simon and Alstein (1996). While the adoptees in the present study were not asked for their perspectives on whether transracial adoption is a positive or negative intervention, their reports of positive family connections and relationships indicate that the adoptees in the present study also found the secure and loving families that the adoptees in Simon and Alstein’s (1996) study described.

In the present study, family relationships were mainly described as positive, with adoptees experiencing support and care in their relationships with family members. This does not mean that the relationships were without struggles and conflicts were described within these family relationships, but these reports of conflicts are closely aligned with the current literature on family development. It is also clear that open communication and a sense of understanding were crucial for the transracial adoptees in the present study, a concept that is also supported in the literature,
suggesting that open communication facilitates positive relationships (e.g. Levin and Currie, 2010; Lifton, 2010; Samek & Reuter, 2011).

School and Friends: Developing ethnic identity through learning experiences and cultural exploration

The second major aspect of relationships covered in the present study revolved around schooling and the relationships formed there. These experiences of elementary, high school, and university/college were often intertwined with mentions of friendships formed during these periods.

The theories often used to analyze transracial adoption (including psychoanalysis, the feminist perspective, and postcolonialism) did not appear as much in these parts of the narratives, except for suggestions of the feminist perspective (especially Briggs perspective on the stigmatization of transracial adoptees (2003)). Experiences across schooling were described and many friendships were reported during these schooling periods. In elementary school, two distinct patterns of experience emerged. For some, elementary school was a very positive time, where they formed and maintained many friendships. Some actually identified their ethnic difference from their peers as being a positive force, as they believe that their ethnic difference attracted people to them, creating more friendships; an experience that some adoptees called “positive racism”. It is possible that this “positive racism” experienced by some was not meant to be positive and instead was a way of further stigmatizing the adoptees, identifying them as different (somewhat echoing the feminist perspectives delineated by Briggs (2003), where the difference in ethnicity between the White parents and the racialized children was seen as further stigmatization, implying that the child needed to be ‘saved’ by the White family). Interestingly, this notion that people were drawn to the adoptees because of their difference was seen as a very positive thing, allowing for the formation of more friendships. This too suggests that understanding and
appreciation of difference is crucial for transracial adoptees. Even during school, adoptees enjoyed having others appreciate and understand their difference in some way.

Other times, however, transracial adoptees experienced incidents of being made fun of or having someone comment on their adoption; as though the adoption and ethnic difference from family was noticed and pointed out by classmates and peers. The concept of the filiative and affiliative models of belonging are echoed in the elementary school experiences of transracial adoptees (Radhakrishnan, 2012). In the filiative model, biological and genetic connections are emphasized while the affiliative model stresses belonging beyond biological connection and instead focuses on the choice to belong (Radhakrishnan, 2012). It is as though the others in elementary school did not yet understand the many ways that families can be formed (including transracial adoption) and expected families to be formed according to biology and genetics (the filiative model). When confronted with the affiliative model (Radhakrishnan, 2012), there was some degree of confusion and a lack of understanding of how a family could be created without a biological connection. This lack of understanding of ethnically different family constructions is not surprising given the literature on the development of understanding ethnicity and race (Quintana, 1998; Seele, 2012). In Quintana’s (1998) review of the development of children’s understanding of ethnicity and race, he makes the point that children of elementary school age often conceptualize ethnicity based largely on physical features (such as skin colour) and do not connect these to any social implications. Seele (2012) also supports this physical features based assessment of ethnicity by children as his study identified that young children tend to base their judgment of ethnicity on features such as skin and hair colour. Given this primarily literal understanding of ethnicity, it is understandable that children at this age would not understand a family construction such as transracial adoption; where parents and adopted children were of different ethnicities (Quintana, 1998; Seele, 2012). Adoptees however did not view these
incidents as negative and instead identified them as learning experiences, providing classmates with a chance to learn more about different family compositions and understand a bit more about the transracial adoption experience. It is clear that adoptees were identifying the importance of understanding within the relationships with elementary school classmates and friends. It was not that classmates were trying to cause offense or make fun, but it was that they did not yet fully comprehend the adoptive family make-up (a notion also supported by Quintana, 1998 and Seele, 2012). By viewing these incidents and questions as learning experiences, adoptees were providing an opportunity for their elementary school peers to learn more about adoption and develop a better understanding of the transracial adoptive experience in particular. This wish for understanding then was present even at an early age, indicating its importance to adoptees and highlighting their desire to interact with those who understand and appreciate their experiences. Additionally, the adoptees’ positive interpretations of those who were drawn to them because of their difference may indicate their enjoyment of forming friendships/relationships with individuals who do appreciate their unique experiences as being transracially adopted (and thus ethnically different). VanderMolen (2006) has stated that many transracial adoptees wish to speak with someone who understands the transracial adoptive experience, and the results demonstrated here support that claim. Perhaps adoptees enjoyed having others drawn to them as a result of their difference because it suggested that their classmates were interested in understanding and appreciating their transracially adoptive experience in some way.

With regards to high school, it was found that it was generally a positive time, with few incidents. Some difficulties and problems did arise during this time but these were generally seen as relating to something other than adoption (for example lack of motivation or difficulty with academics). The occurrence of academic and other difficulties in high school is well documented and thus it is no surprise that transracial adoptees also face these difficulties in their high school
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experience (Benner & Graham, 2009). Benner and Graham (2009) found that grades/academic performance tends to decline in the transition to high school, as does engagement in school activities. Some of these difficulties may be in part due to the increasing homework difficulty, the need to study more intensely, and the increased responsibility for academic success (Newman, Myers, Newman, Lohman, & Smith, 2000). Thus, the transracial adoptees’ experiences of struggling with academics in high school are in line with what most non-adopted high school students’ experience (Benner & Graham, 2009; Benner, 2011). So, it is not the adoptive experience itself that results in any difficulties experienced during high school, but instead this difficulty results from other factors that are well documented in the current literature, such as increasing academic difficulty and increased responsibility (Benner & Graham, 2009; Benner, 2011). What was unique for transracial adoptees in high school was the concept of “positive racism”. Similar to what was described in elementary school relationships, adoptees described situations where classmates were drawn to them as a result of their difference. That is, they felt as though their ethnic difference from their classmates served as a positive force, interesting their classmates and promoting friendship. While the literature remains relatively silent on this the concept of “positive racism”, it is interesting that adoptees continued to identify this as a positive force. It is possible that this positive racism experience is more in line with some ideas found in the feminist perspective. According to Briggs (2003), the difference between the White adoptive family and the ‘marginalized’ child instead represented a further stigmatization of the adoptee and such differences were used to promote the idea that these children needed to be ‘saved’ by white heterosexual families. The attraction to difference that the adoptees experienced might have actually been a form of stigmatization, but interestingly enough the adoptees themselves identified this attraction to difference as a positive force, thus suggesting that they appreciated creating relationships with those who noticed and possibly appreciated their unique experience. Finally,
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with regards to high school, it seems as though the occurrence of incidents had drastically decreased, suggesting a greater level of understanding in high school where others understood and appreciated different family compositions. The literature regarding the development of understanding ethnicity and race supports the notion that individuals at high school age would better understand and respect adoption and ethnic difference (Umana-Taylor, Lee, Rivas-Drake, Syed, Seaton, Quintana, Cross Jr., Shwartz, & Yip, 2014; Quintana, 1998). For example, Quintana (1998) found that the adolescents he interviewed conceptualized ethnicity more subjectively, understanding that ethnicity is more personal and tied to identity rather than something based solely on physical characteristics. Similarly, Umana-Taylor et al. (2014) also pointed to the increasing cognitive abilities developed in adolescence, allowing them to conceptualize ethnicity in ways beyond solely physical characteristics. Finally, Moshman (2011) pointed out that increased perspective-taking skills are developed during adolescence, indicating the capacity to better understand both one’s own and other’s ethnicity in a more full way. Thus, the results of the present study are in line with the current literature suggesting that high school would represent a time of increasing understanding, where adoptees would not face the same incidents and would find classmates to be more open and understanding towards their adoptive experiences. Following this period of increased understanding in high school, many adoptees continued their schooling and described very positive experiences in University/College.

University/College appeared to be a very powerful time of exploration for transracial adoptees; where they were truly presented with the opportunity to explore and examine their ethnic heritages in new ways. The relationships formed during college/university seemed to be crucial for transracial adoptees, as these relationships allowed for a greater understanding of ethnic heritage. Universities/Colleges were identified as being very diverse atmospheres, where people of all different backgrounds were present and respected. Dendson & Bowman (2013)
asserted that there is an increasing presence of diversity in university, and many culturally diverse universities specifically create varied educational experiences for students allowing them to prepare for and engage with our increasingly diverse world. Universities/Colleges often provide many opportunities to travel through international exchange and other travel related programs so it is reasonable that transracial adoptees would find many opportunities to travel to their country of origin during this period in their lives (Chak & Makino, 2010). Travel also offers many benefits including providing the opportunity to learn about history and culture (Petrick & Huether, 2013), so it is also reasonable that this travel would have provided these benefits to the adoptees as well. An additional benefit that these travels offered to the adoptees was the opportunity to meet, engage with, and form relationships with others of their ethnic heritage.

The development of a healthy sense of ethnic identity is often described as being important for the mental health of transracial adoptees (Huh & Reid, 2000). Some ways that this type of ethnic identity can be explored is through travel to an adoptee’s culture of origin or through interacting with individuals’ of one’s own ethnic heritage (Huh & Reid, 2000). It has also been suggested that planning a trip to the adoptee’s country of origin is advised because it allows the adoptee to gain as much information as possible regarding their heritage (Lifton, 2010). Although Lifton (2010) states that this trip should be planned by the parents for the child, a trip of this type would likely be important for an adoptee regardless of how it was planned. The results of the present study concur with the research that a sense of ethnic identity is very important in the life of a transracial adoptee, as it is clear that these opportunities to travel and meet others of one’s ethnic heritage were crucial to adoptees. Adoptees truly enjoyed these connections, again suggesting how important these relationships were to them. It is almost as if these cultural connections provided a link to their heritage, allowing them to more fully explore and understand their own backgrounds. This sentiment echoes the results of Huh and Reid (2000) who found that
Korean adoptees enjoyed forming relationships with other Koreans, because it allowed them to discuss and explore their backgrounds with someone who can provide an understanding and appreciation of the culture. This enjoyment of the formation of these ethnic connections supports the research on the importance of ethnic identity in transracial adoptees’ lives. It also points to the importance of these connections in the adoptees’ lives and the crucial role that these relationships played in their lives (Huh & Reid, 2000). Through these connections, adoptees were able to connect with others who could contribute to their understanding of themselves and their backgrounds. This allowed them to not only find others who understood their cultural heritage but also promoted a sense of self-understanding and identity, both of which were thoroughly enjoyed by adoptees. Similar to the results of the present study, Hoffman and Pena (2013) found that the transracial adoptees in their study also expressed deep appreciation for forming cultural connections and traveling to their country of origin. The adoptees in their study expressed enjoyment at finding the support and understanding of others of their cultural heritage (Hoffman & Pena, 2013). Thus the importance of understanding is again illuminated here, as adoptees in the present study also clearly valued and appreciated the relationships that they were able to form with others who understood their culture and were able to provide a deeper understanding of their cultural background and heritage. Although the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) opposed transracial adoption in part because they assumed that a White family would not be able to provide a sense of positive racial identity for a marginalized child (Simon & Alstein, 1996), the present study suggests that transracial adoptees can in fact develop a healthy sense of ethnic identity and can form strong and meaningful connections with others of the same ethnic heritage.

Throughout schooling then, the importance of positive, understanding relationships was stressed, where adoptees could feel as though their difference was appreciated and where they
could be open. Elementary school allowed the opportunity for adoptees to provide an understanding of different family compositions and promote understanding. This desire for understanding relationships continued through high school and truly blossomed in university/college, where adoptees found deep connections with others of their ethnic heritage who could provide not only a sense of understanding of cultural experiences, but also promote a sense of self-understanding and discovery.

**Society: Experiencing a lack of understanding from those outside the family and friends**

The last major area of relationships and lived experiences illuminated in the present study were the societal reactions experienced by adoptees, that is, reactions from societal outsiders who are not part of the adoptees family and friends/classmates. It was here that a major contrast was seen and some strong negativity began to emerge, primarily when it came to the opinions of others. Although some experiences were described as positive (especially with some work colleagues), the majority was seen as quite negative and in many cases the adoptees felt both a lack of belonging and a sense of being discriminated against.

Generally, adoptees felt as though they were being discriminated against in their interactions with others outside of their friends and family, although these incidents of discrimination were not always considered intentional. In fact, some adoptees discussed what they called “indirect discrimination”, where discrimination was not intentional but occurred because of the adoptees’ difference from those around them. These cases of “indirect discrimination” occurred in their relationships with work colleagues and were not considered to be intentional. Some of the discrimination involved feeling forced to explain oneself and one’s cultural heritage to avoid being asked questions later, while other discrimination focused on perceived lack of experience due to appearing younger than one’s actual age. In the first case, that meant that adoptees felt required to provide an explanation for their unique situation even when they did not
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wish to do so. In the second case, adoptees felt as though they were not receiving the respect they deserved and instead were being disrespected on the basis of appearing younger than their actual age. These types of indirect discrimination are well documented in the literature, so it is not unreasonable that adoptees would also experience these types of incidents (Taylor, McLoughlin, Meyer, & Brooke, 2013; Van Laer & Janssens, 2011). It has been found that younger individuals in the workplace do experience discrimination as a result of their age, so it makes sense then that those who look younger might also face this same discrimination (Taylor et al., 2013). Van Laer and Janssens (2011) called the incidents that many ethnic people experience at work ‘subtle discrimination’. In their study, they found that many individuals of ethnic backgrounds felt forced to talk about their cultural and religious affiliations with work colleagues. They also made it clear that often these incidents of subtle discrimination are not intentional on the part of colleagues; instead, these incidents are entrenched in everyday interactions and are unintentional (Van Laer & Janssens, 2011). The results of the present study concur with these findings, demonstrating that the type of indirect discrimination described is common for those of a different ethnic heritage, not solely transracial adoptees. What is evident again here is the lack of understanding and open communication, as seen in previous sections. That is, while it is unintentional (as supported by Van Laer & Janssens, 2011), it is as though some work colleagues do not understand the adoptive experience and this results in some form of indirect discrimination. While this lack of understanding often improves, as it was identified that this indirect discrimination usually lessens with time, it still points to an initial lack of fully open communication and understanding on the part of work colleagues with regards to transracial adoption.

In other cases, however, adoptees felt more directly discriminated against, where the looks and comments received were perceived as more intentional. While experiences with work colleagues did involve some indirect discrimination, these incidents were not seen as intentional.
In terms of experiences with others outside of family, friends, and work colleagues, however, there was much more negativity experienced. The adoptees reported receiving both looks and comments on a regular basis, where adoptees felt that others were looking at them with judgment about their unique situations. Oftentimes, these experiences occurred in everyday situations, especially when adoptees were seen with their family members. Regardless of when and how they occurred, these interactions clearly had quite an effect on adoptees and caused much distress, demonstrating that even the smallest negative interactions can have quite a large effect.

It is not entirely surprising that many outsiders reacted in negative way to the transracial adoptive experience, as adoption is generally portrayed quite negatively in the media (Kline, Chatterjee & Karel, 2009). In fact, Kline and colleagues (2009) found that over 25% of the news stories they investigated portrayed transracial adoption as negative and, in these articles over 60% identified transracial adoptees as deficient in some way. Given this negative portrayal in everyday media, one can understand how these reports might affect those that do not understand the transracially adoptive experience in a more personal way (Cline et al., 2009). Additionally, as seen earlier, the reports on the mental health of transracial adoptees provide variable results; with some studies suggesting that transracial adoptees are at a higher risk for mental health difficulties (e.g. Cantor-Graae & Pedersen, 2007) for a variety of reasons, including difficulty adjusting to their adoptive families and facing increased incidents of racism (Levy-Shiff, et al., 1997; Noy-Sharav, 2005). Although much literature does actually demonstrate that transracial adoptees are at no higher risk than non-adopted controls (e.g. Juffer & van Ijzendoorn, 2007; Tienman et al., 2005; Gagnon-Oosterwaal et al, 2012), it is understandable that outsiders might take a negatively biased view towards transracial adoptees and their mental health. The concept of the filiative versus affiliative model of belonging is demonstrated here, as it is likely that outsiders expect to see a filiative model of belonging between families (Radhakrishnan, 2012). In the filiative model,
genetic and biological connections are emphasized whereas the affiliative model focuses on the choice to belong and a sense of belonging beyond genetic/biological connection (Radhakrishnan, 2012). When outsiders are confronted with the affiliative model, they react in ways that are seen as quite negative, almost demanding an explanation for why the adoptive family does not fit the filiative model they were expecting. What is clear is that adoptees face a lack of understanding and open communication from many outsiders. As mentioned, many adoptees wish to speak with someone who understands their experiences (VanderMolen 2006; Oppener, 2009). When transracial adoptees encounter outsiders, however, it is as though these individuals make assumptions instead of trying to understand the full story and thus do not demonstrate any understanding for the unique experience of the transracial adoptees. Thus, adoptees are often not able to experience these understanding relationships with outsiders because these relatively short interactions are not open and are often fraught with assumptions as opposed to a sense of open understanding. Furthermore, the interactions that adoptees have with societal others are often short (and sometimes do not even involve any form of conversation, for example when adoptees experience looks from others). Literature demonstrates that prejudice and stereotyping of this sort occur automatically and that although these automatic processes are malleable, it takes time and effort to change these automatic perceptions (Blair, 2002). Thus, it is feasible that outsiders would make these snap assumptions, and because the relationship is not ongoing, they would not make the effort to modify and change these assumptions.

Although most of the interactions with outsiders were perceived as negative and involved some level of discrimination (either subtle/indirect or direct through looks and comments), not all interactions were seen as discriminatory. In fact, there was some positivity described in some interactions, where adoptees were able to blend with others and form connections with others of their own cultural heritage. Previous research on colleague/work relationships has found that
being able to share and form positive relationships with work colleagues contribute to higher work and life satisfaction (Jiang & Hu, 2015). The positive experiences described by some adoptees are in line with this claim, as those who described the ability to connect with work colleagues reported good experiences at work, as though they were satisfied and happy with their work experiences. For adoptees that had these positive experiences, it is as though they were able to find a sense of understanding about their cultural heritage from others at work, which contributed to their positive work relationships and experiences. That is, instead of feeling as though they were required to explain their circumstances or face judgment as a result of their unique backgrounds, they were able to form connections and acceptance of their cultural heritage from others who shared similar heritages.

Although there were some positive relationships described with others in society (particularly with work colleagues who were of a similar cultural heritage), it is clear that the reactions from others can greatly affect adoptees, as they are consistently confronted with discrimination and feelings of being judged for their unique circumstances. Thus, it appears as though transracial adoptees are not seen very positively in society, as seen from the reactions that others give to adoptees as well as the negative portrayal of adoptees in the media (Kline, Chatterjee & Karel, 2009). It is understandable that experiencing frequent instances of discrimination and judgment would make transracial adoptees feel as though they do not belong and could cause difficulties in the development of ethnic identity and self-image. With regards to the development of self-image and ethnic identity, it is clear that adoptee identity development is a very complicated process (Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004; Langrehr, Yoon, Hacker, & Caudill, 2015). This process is made especially complicated for transracial adoptees as they often do not have contact with their birth families, do not look like their adoptive families, and do not have what has been called a ‘biological mirror’ (Hoffman & Pena, 2013). That is, transracial adoptees
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can only reference their own appearance and cannot look to their adoptive parents for reference on their appearance (Hoffman & Pena, 2013). Add to this the discrimination that transracial adoptees face (demonstrated by both the present study and other research), and it is reasonable that ethnic identity development and self-image would be negatively affected (Freundlich & Lieberthal, 2000). A report by Freundlich and Lieberthal (2000) found that the majority of transracial adoptees (they spoke with Korean adoptees in particular) felt discriminated against on the basis of their race, adopted status, and physical appearance. Many transracial adoptees also reported instances of being told that they were different from others (specifically told by those outside the family) and feeling as though explanations were demanded from them with regards to their unique adoptive situations, an experience that was also reported by adoptees in the present study (Freundlich & Lieberthal, 2000). Often, this discrimination lead to feelings of not belonging, as though they did not ‘fit in’ (Freundlich & Lieberthal, 2000; Tigervall & Hubinette, 2010). This treatment by outsiders did cause problems for transracial adoptees as it caused them to question themselves and wonder if in fact they did owe an explanation for their circumstances (Freundlich & Lieberthal, 2000). Additionally, many transracial adoptees found that the discrimination, racialization, and questioning that they experienced often made them want to deny their ethnic heritage, hide their ethnic identity, and made them feel less positive about themselves (Freundlich & Liberthal, 2000; Tigervall & Hubinette, 2010). Although the present study and other previous research has demonstrated that transracial adoptees are able (and often do) form healthy senses of ethnic identity, it is also evident that the negative reactions of societal others can negatively effect an adoptees self-image and identity (Huh & Reid, 2000; Freundlich & Lieberthal, 2000; Tigervall & Hubinette, 2010).

Attachment and connection to one’s ethnic/nationality has also been seen as important in the development of ethnic identity as well as one’s self-image (Huh & Reid, 2000; Freundlich &
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Lieberthal, 2000; Langrehr et al., 2015). Given the way that societal outsiders react to transracial adoptees (with questions, stereotyping, and often discrimination), it is interesting to see how transracial adoptees’ attachment and connection to their own ethnicity and ethnically similar others is affected. Transracial adoptees are consistently associated as being part of their birth culture and are often stereotyped as such; even though their actual lived cultures are usually much different (Baden, Treweeke, & Ahluwalia, 2012). So, it is reasonable that these assumptions and stereotyping might affect the way adoptees attach to their ethnic groups. Adoptees often reported incidents of being discriminated against particularly based on their race, ethnicity, and physical appearance (Freundlich & Lieberthal, 2000), so it is interesting to examine their attachment and understanding of their ethnic group given these societal reactions. As it turns out, connection and attachment to group ethnicity is generally a very positive experience for transracial adoptees, despite the discrimination they often face as a result of their ethnicity (Langrehr & Napier, 2014).

It has been suggested that in-group contact is significant in the adoptees’ development and that early involvement in ethnic heritage activities (for example culture camps and language classes) positively affects transracial adoptees (Langrehr & Napier, 2014). Thus, it appears as though connection to ethnic group seems very important for adoptees’ development. With regards to transracial adoptee development, Baden, Treweeke and Ahluwalia (2012) proposed a model of reculturation; the process of reclaiming a culture that is neither the same as the adoptive parents’ culture nor the dominant culture of the adoptees’ lived environment. Baden et al. (2012) posit that a crucial step in the reculturation process is immersion in birth culture including interacting with others of the same ethnic heritage, traveling to the country of origin, and creating deep connections with the ethnic group. They stress that this step in the reculturation process helps adoptees affirm group membership and form an attachment to their ethnic origin (Baden, et al., 2012). Reports from transracial adoptees both in the present and other studies confirm that this
immersion in birth culture and forming an attachment to ethnic origin is extremely important (Huh & Reid, 2000; Langreh et al. 2015; Freundlich & Lieberthal, 2000). Freundlich & Lieberthal (2000) found that many of the transracial adoptees that visited their country of origin reported the experience to be a positive one, making them feel welcome, understood, and included. Additionally, many of the transracial adoptees in Langreh et al. (2015)’s study reported that being attached to others of their ethnic heritage (their ethnic group) helped them feel more comfortable and accepting of their own ethnic heritage. Thus, it is evident that despite the stereotyping and discrimination that transracial adoptees often face from societal outsiders, connection and attachment to ethnic heritage is usually a positive force, allowing adoptees to feel understood, included, and more comfortable with their ethnic heritage.

Transracial adoptees then appear to face discrimination, comments, looks, questioning, and stereotyping from societal others (those outside family members, friends, and classmates). This pattern has been found not only in the present study but is also supported by previous literature (e.g. Taylor et al., 2013; Janssens, 2011). It seems as though adoptees face a marked lack of understanding from outsiders who make assumptions and stereotype without being willing to understand the complex situations at play. This lack of understanding and the experiences of discrimination do have a negative impact on transracial adoptees self-image and ethnicity (Freundlich & Lieberthal, 2000). Being attached and connecting to one’s ethnic heritage/in-group, however, can help to build and strengthen transracial adoptees self-image and ethnic identity, as these in-group experiences provide a sense of understanding, inclusion, and comfort (Langreh et al., 2015).

**Discussions: Summary**

The narratives from the present study illuminated four themes that were very important in the lived experiences of transracial adoptees including the relationship with family members,
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relationships with friends/classmates, the reactions from societal others, and the interview experience. When it comes to family members, the relationships were described as mainly positive. This does not mean that the relationships were without conflicts and there were struggles described in the relationships, however these types of conflicts are consistent with the current literature on family relationships (De Goede, et al., 2009; Laursen et al., 1998). For the most part, these conflicts often stemmed from other factors such as personality and physical distance, and were not seen to be anything out of the ordinary (De Goede et al., 2009; Laurensen et al., 1998). Additionally, these relationships emphasized the importance of open communication and a sense of understanding between family members and the transracial adoptee, as this seemed to allow the adoptee to feel included and open in expressing themselves fully. The importance of open communication and understanding has been demonstrated before, as it has been shown that open communication serves as a positive force within a family and contributes to a greater sense of life satisfaction and a more positive sense of ethnic identity and self-esteem in transracial adoptees (Levin and Currie, 2010; Lifton, 2010; Samek & Reuter, 2011). This also speaks to the positives that can stem from transracial adoption. Although some groups hold relatively negative perspectives on transracial adoption, it is clear that transracial adoption can create nurturing families with positive relationships (Simon & Alstein, 1996).

In terms of friends and school, transracial adoptees also described positive experiences, although there were difficulties described in some cases. The incidents that occurred in elementary school largely reflected normal child development, as they stemmed from fellow classmates lack of understanding of transracial adoptees’ unique ethnic situations, which is common for those of elementary school age (Quintana, 1998; Seele, 2012). Any difficulties in high school were not a result of adoption but again were in line with the struggles that many adolescents face during this time of great transition (Newman et al., 2000; Benner, 2011).
College/University, on the other hand, stood out as a time of deep exploration and understanding of cultural heritage. Through connection with cultural others and travel to the country of origin, transracial adoptees were able to better understand themselves and form deeper connections with their heritage, an experience that was considered to be very powerful and positive (Hoffman & Pena, 2013).

Lastly, transracial adoptees found that they were affected by their interactions with societal others (those outside family, friends, and classmates). Unlike the previous themes, the reactions from societal others took on a very negative tone, with many instances of discrimination. Although there were some positive relationships formed with work colleagues, these usually stemmed from a mutual understanding of cultural heritage. The instances of discrimination experienced are not surprising given the literature on the types of discrimination that ethnic individuals face (Taylor et al., 2013; Freundlich & Lieberthal, 2000; Tigervall & Hubinette, 2010). These negative experiences do have a deleterious effect on transracial adoptees and caused them to struggle with their identity, their self-image, and their concerns that they owe an explanation for their unique circumstances (Freundlich & Lieberthal, 2000; Tigervall & Hubinette, 2010). Despite this however, adoptees are able to form healthy senses of ethnic identity and often this is supported by exploring and connecting with their cultural heritages through travel and through meeting others from their in-group (Langrehr & Napier, 2014; Langrehr et al., 2015).

**Mid-Level Theory**

Data from the present study were analyzed using grounded theory. The grounded theory analysis of the results provided a wealth of data, allowing for the creation of a mid-level theory, capturing some aspects of the importance of relationships in the lived experiences of transracial adoptees. That is, the use of grounded theory allowed for the creation of a model of the data,
which included all aspects of the participants’ experiences and was fully grounded in the connections and patterns found within the narratives (Fassinger, 2005; Fossey, 2002).

Figure 1. Model of how relationships play into the lived experiences of transracial adoptees.

Visually, the model (see Figure 1) is represented by a large oval containing multiple rectangles. The large circle represents the lived experiences of the transracial adoptees, as all of the relationships formed take place within the context of the adoptees’ lived experiences. The results of the present study suggest that adoptees’ relationships tend to fall into two categories: generally positive or generally negative. Although, of course, even these positive relationships
contain some struggles, these do not appear to be specific to transracial adoptees, as these struggles are seen in the relationships that non-adoptees have as well (De Goede et al., 2009; Laursen et al., 1998). Thus within the circle, the first large rectangle (on top) represents the realm of positive relationships experienced by transracial adoptees. Within this rectangle is the concept of open communication and a sense of understanding, which have been demonstrated to be crucial for transracial adoptees in their lived experiences and the relationships they form. The importance of open communication and understanding was demonstrated not only in the present study, but has also been shown to be crucial in the relationship literature (Levin and Currie, 2010; Lifton, 2010; Samek & Reuter, 2011). It has been shown that open communication and understanding within relationships promote higher life satisfaction, a greater sense of ethnic identity, and higher self-esteem. Thus it is clear that open communication and a sense of understanding are of central importance in the positive relationships that adoptees form (Levin and Currie, 2010; Samek & Reuter, 2011). The second large rectangle represents the negative relationships experienced by transracial adoptees and here, there is a marked lack of understanding and a lack of open communication. Both the present study and the current literature demonstrate the negative outcomes that occur when societal outsiders do not approach transracial adoptees with a sense of understanding and communication, as this causes adoptees to feel less positive about themselves, makes them wish to hide their ethnic identity, and makes them question themselves and their backgrounds (Freundlich & Lieberthal, 2000; Tigervall & Hubinette, 2010). Thus, negative relationships are formed when societal others do not approach transracial adoptees with a willingness to be open and promote understanding. Within the rectangle demonstrating the positive relationships, there are three smaller rectangles containing the groups with which adoptees express these positive relationships (family – including parents, siblings, and extended family; school/friends – including classmates and friends; work colleagues; and the interview.
experience). The results of the present study demonstrate that adoptees are able to form positive relationships with each of these groups just as non-adopted individuals can, and the literature supports the development of these relationships. That is, it has been shown that adoptees are able to form positive relationships with parents, siblings, and friends/schoolmates and that these relationships provide positive outcomes for the adoptees in terms of providing support and a sense of understanding (Hawkins, 2007; Rienso, Juffer, & Tienman, 2013; Oliva & Arranz, 2005). These four smaller rectangles are loosely arranged in a developmental pattern (from left to right), as transracial adoptees generally form relationships with their family members first, followed by schoolmates (elementary, high school, then university/college), then they form relationships at work, and lastly they experienced the interview process.

The circles lying along the bottom side of the top rectangle represent the conflicts/struggles that the adoptees do face even within their positive relationships. The results of the present study demonstrated that even these positive relationships contained some elements of difficulty and conflict, but that these conflicts were not directly related to the adoption and instead stemmed from other factors such as age and personality, just like what occurs in non-adopted individuals relationships (De Goede, et al., 2009; Laursen et al., 1998; Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). Each circle corresponds to a specific relationship category, with the arrows pointing from the specific conflict to the relationship it affects. The existence of these conflicts is supported by literature. The literature on family relationships has demonstrated that conflict is a normal facet of family life and often this conflict stems from factors such as emotional changes, the onset of puberty, and personality factors (De Goede et al., 2009; Laursen, et al., 1998). The research on child development and schooling also supports the idea that incidents are normal within school and that as individuals develop, the instances of incidents related to a lack of understanding of ethnicity decrease (Quintana, 1998; Seele, 2012). Lastly, it has also been shown that individuals
of ethnic descent often face incidents of ‘subtle discrimination’ in the workplace, but that this is not intentional, suggesting that the experiences of the transracial adoptees in the present study were not out of the ordinary (Taylor et al., 2013; Van Laer & Janssens, 2011). These conflict circles lie along the bottom of the top rectangle (partially inside the rectangle, partially outside) to represent that these conflicts often stem from a lack of understanding (outside the rectangle) but are often rectified through promoting a sense of open communication and understanding (inside the rectangle). As mentioned, the importance of open communication and understanding has been shown in the literature, and this again rings true with regards to the conflicts experienced by transracial adoptees. That is, both the results of the current study and previous research demonstrate that many normal conflicts can be rectified by developing an increased sense of understanding of ethnicity and promoting open communication (Hawkins, 2007; Lifton, 2010; Samek & Reuter, 2011). Thus, the mid-level theory proposed here suggests that transracial adoptees will be able to form positive, supportive relationships with others when those others (including family members, friends, classmates, and work colleagues) approach with a willingness to communicate openly and understand the adoptees’ unique circumstances.

As stated, the bottom rectangle represents the negative interactions in adoptees lived experiences. Within this rectangle there is a noted lack of open communication and understanding, as these deficits resulted in these negative and difficult interactions. It has been demonstrated that interactions with societal others are often very negative because these individuals tend to make snap judgments and stereotypes without taking the time to understand the full situation (Blair, 2002). It has also been shown that these instances of discrimination result in transracial adoptees questioning themselves, their identity, and their sense of belonging, suggesting that like the adoptees in the present study, these instances of discrimination result in discomfort and pain (Freundlich & Lieberthal, 2000; Tigervall & Hubinette, 2010). The length of
the rectangle is identical to the length of the top rectangle to represent the ongoing nature of these outsider experiences across all developmental periods in the adoptees life (as these reactions occur throughout, from childhood to adulthood). Therefore, in this case, the mid-level theory suggests that when others do not approach transracial adoptees with openness, understanding, and a willingness to communicate, the interactions and relationships formed take on a very negative tone where adoptees feel pressured, stereotyped, and forced to question themselves.

In summary, the relationships transracial adoptees form all take place within the context of their lived experiences. The majority of these relationships are generally positive and do come with a sense of understanding and open communication. While of course conflicts exist within these relationships, these often stem from a lack of understanding and are often rectified through the others gaining this understanding with time. With regards to outsider opinions however, these are seen as negative experiences within the lived experiences of transracial adoptees, often because they represent a marked lack of understanding and communication.
Chapter VI: Conclusions

In the present study, eight transracially adoptees were interviewed in the hopes of gaining insight into their lived experience, with a particular focus on the importance of relationships in their lives. It was clearly demonstrated that the lived experiences of transracial adoptees are diverse, but that regardless, relationships play an important role in these experiences. That is, transracial adoptees placed a huge emphasis on their relationships with family members, friends, classmates, work colleagues, and societal others. Their narratives were full of reports of relationships and it was very clear that these relationships affected their lives and their experiences in many ways. Throughout family, schooling, and daily societal experiences, relationships played a crucial role in the lives of transracial adoptees. The results of the present study also made clear that a sense of understanding and open communication is paramount for adoptees as they form the relationships in their lives. This sense of understanding allowed adoptees to feel more comfortable, welcome, and open with their ethnic heritages. Many positive relationships were formed in part due to this sense of understanding and the conflicts experienced in relationships often stemmed from this (largely unintentional) lack of understanding. These accounts demonstrate how crucial understanding relationships are for adoptees and point to the need for further research to promote this sense of understanding. In this final chapter, limitations of the present study as well as the implications of the results of the present study for both future research and therapeutic practice will be presented.

The interview itself provided a unique experience for both the researcher and the participants to interact with individuals who have also been through the transracial adoptive experience. For that reason, understanding the interview experience for the adoptees was of interest. The results highlighted two specific things about the experience that adoptees found
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affected them in positive ways. First, the interview provided an opportunity for adoptees to think critically about their own experiences and process areas of their lives that often otherwise go unmentioned even with family and friends. Secondly, the interview provided an opportunity for adoptees to speak with someone who understood their transracial adoptive experience. Although the principal researcher did not discuss her own adoption openly during the interview, she did disclose her status as a transracial adoptee. Once this disclosure was made, the participants reported feeling totally comfortable and said that it was pleasant to speak with someone who understood their specific experience. Although adoptees often felt able to speak with their family members and friends (especially because of the understanding relationships they experienced), it is evident that they did not often speak openly about their adoption with many other individuals. The psychoanalytic perspective of adoption makes the point that it is important to keep the lines of communication open, allowing the adoptee to talk about and explore their adoption (Lifton, 2010; Mayers, 2010). Therefore it is evident that the opportunity to speak about one’s adoption can be a very important experience, and the interview provided that opportunity. This speaks to the need to have open discussions about adoption and to provide a space in which adoptees can think critically and process with someone who understands their experience in at least some way.

The enjoyment expressed regarding the interview process speaks directly to the purpose of the study and this reported enjoyment is aligned with both pop culture references and the existing research on transracial adoption. As stated previously, one of the aims of the present study was to provide insights regarding transracial adoption that can be used by mental health professionals in working with transracial adoptees. Adoptees made it evident that speaking with an understanding individual can be a very positive and powerful experience. The psychoanalytic analysis of adoption also adds support to this point with the assertion that the relationship between therapist and adoptive family (parents and child) is very important (Lifton, 2010). With a strong therapeutic
alliance, the adoptive family has a better chance of feeling safe and comfortable enough to express themselves openly and work through any problems (Young, 2006). Although the understanding and information gleaned from the present study cannot provide mental health professionals with a full understanding of the transracial adoption experience, it may help therapists to better understand some of the struggles that adoptees may face. The importance of speaking to a therapist who understands the transracial adoptive experience is also supported by Avery, the focus of the “Off and Running” documentary (Oppener, 2009). In the film, Avery, a struggling transracial adoptee, agrees to take part in therapy only when she can speak with someone who has experience with transracial adoption. Although present study did not focus on the experiences of transracial adoptees in therapy, it was evident that speaking with an individual who understands the adoptive experience can be a very positive experience. The importance of understanding and open communication is clearly visible here, as adoptees truly appreciated the opportunity to openly discuss their experiences with an understanding individual. Finally, VanderMolen (2006) also stated that many transracial adoptees wish to speak with therapists who understand what it is like to be a transracial adoptee, and the participants in the present study suggest this feeling as well, as they reported their true enjoyment at speaking with someone else who has also been through the transracial adoption journey.

Limitations

The present study contains a number of limitations that must be considered. First, there were a small number of participants in the present study, making the sample unrepresentative of the population. Although the study was open to parent-adoptive pairings of all racial combinations, of course not all combinations found in the population could have been represented in the eight interviews that were conducted. While there was a range of ethnic backgrounds (including Korean, Middle Eastern, African American, East Asian, South American, and White), there are
many ethnic backgrounds that were not a part of the present study. Thus, the lived experiences reported by the present study cannot be assumed to represent the lived experiences for all transracial adoptees. Future research would benefit from including a larger sample size and conducting more interviews. Also, the present study did not analyze the potential effects that gender has on adoptees’ lived experiences. Within the present study, there were more women participants than men and no analysis was conducted regarding the potential differences between how men and women experienced adoption. Future research may benefit from examining potential gender differences and including an equal number of men and women. Additionally, the accounts provided by the participants were generally positive overall. While it is possible that this is the experience of many adoptees, it is also possible that the present research attracted a specific subset of transracial adoptees. Speaking about ones lived experience can be difficult and may bring up uncomfortable memories, therefore it is possible that those individuals who had negative experiences did not wish to participate because they did not want to re-experience these painful parts of their lives. This would bias the sample, as it would leave only those with more positive experiences to share. Furthermore, the researcher may have introduced some bias into the interpretation of the results, as she is also a transracial adoptee with a very positive adoptive experience. Although measures were taken to ensure objectivity, such as the completion of a reflexive journal throughout the research process (as mentioned earlier), it is still possible that the researcher viewed such positivity as it likened to her own experience, thus providing this positivity more weight than it actually holds. Finally, the questions asked during the interview provided a wide breadth of information, talking about all many lived experiences and a wide range of relationships. This breadth, however, may have resulted in less depth, where adoptees did not have the opportunity to fully discuss each type of relationship. Future studies may benefit from providing a more in-depth chance to speak about each relationship type.
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Implications

Despite the limitations described above, the present study also provides many benefits and implications both for further research and practice. As this study was focused on the lived experiences of transracial adoptees, it provided very valuable insights into the situations and relationships that adoptees are faced with in their daily lives.

Implications: Future Research

While much research has been conducted on transracial adoptees, very few studies actually ask adoptees for their experiences. Additionally, very little research has been conducted on transracial adoptees in Canada. The present study was able to add both a Canadian perspective and direct insight from adoptees.

The present study also provides a strong basis for future research with transracial adoptees. The present study has made it very clear that transracial adoptees have extremely diverse experiences and relationships and, although the questions were broad in hopes of attaining a breadth of valuable information, of course not every aspect of relationship and lived experiences could be explored. Further research could focus on further illuminating the lived experiences and relationships of transracial adoptees in hopes of providing additional, more in-depth insight. In particular, it was found in the present study that a sense of understanding is crucial for transracial adoptees and this was also supported by the literature, which suggests that open communication and understanding promote positive relationships, higher self-esteem, and better sense of ethnic identity (Hawkins, 2007; Levin & Currie, 2010). Thus it might be beneficial for future research to investigate how adoptees experience this sense of understanding using qualitative methods, as these methods clearly provide great depth and breadth of valuable information. Also, an additional focus of the literature was the mental health of transracial adoptees and the research has been
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extremely variable, with some results suggesting that adoptees are at a higher risk for psychological problems and others stating that adoptees are at no higher risk than anyone else (e.g. Cantor-Graae & Pedersen 2007; Levy-Shiff, et al., 1997). As seen from the present study, asking adoptees for their lived experiences provides a wealth of valuable information. Although the present study did not investigate adoptees’ mental health and was focused on lived experiences, it may still be beneficial for future research to conduct a similar study asking adoptees about their mental health and the mental health system. In combination with the understanding gained regarding lived experiences, a greater understanding of adoptee mental health would allow for a greater understanding of the potential difficulties that multicultural individuals, transracial adoptees in particular, face with their mental health. It would also help provide additional insight for mental health professionals who wish to aid multicultural individuals and transracial adoptees in their mental health journeys.

Implications: Psychology Practice

It is also evident from the results of the present study that relationships are crucial in the lives of transracial adoptees. In particular, those relationships that provide some degree of open communication and understanding of the adoptive experience and their unique cultural experiences are most important. As stated previously, one of the major aims of the present study was to provide insight into the lives of transracial adoptees, which can then be used by mental health professionals in the hopes of becoming more fully aware of and sensitive to the issues that transracial adoptees face. Adoptees in the present study made their enjoyment of speaking with another adoptee very clear, and although the insights gained in the present study cannot fully illuminate the adoptive experience, they can provide valuable information for professionals hoping to engage with and better serve multicultural individuals, transracial adoptees particularly.
As Young (2006) asserted, the relationship between the adoptive family and the therapist is extremely important, and hopefully insights such as the ones gained in this study can help to strengthen and improve the therapeutic relationship through increased understanding.

Specifically, the importance of understanding and open relationships was demonstrated by the present study and this can translate into direct recommendations for therapists who wish to work with transracial adoptees. Both the present study and the literature suggests that society in general has a relatively negative view of transracial adoption and thus many transracial adoptees face prejudice in the form of looks and comments (Kline, Chatterjee & Karel, 2009). It was also demonstrated that it was open and understanding relationships that meant so much to adoptees. Thus, therapists working with transracial adoptees should ensure that they are aware of their own biases and assumptions and are able to manage these during the therapeutic relationship. It has been shown that adoptees are often concerned about the strong opinions that counsellors may have regarding adoption, so this makes it even more crucial that therapists be aware and manage their own biases and assumptions throughout the therapeutic process (Langrehr et al., 2015). Langrehr and colleagues (2015) also found that adoptees stress the need for warmth and openness in the therapeutic relationship while also emphasizing the importance of a therapist who is familiar with adoption-specific issues. That is, adoptees stated that they wanted a therapist who was sensitive to the complex feelings and experiences of marginalization that many adoptees face on a regular basis (Langrehr et al., 2015). Therefore, therapists should ensure that they can be fully present in the therapeutic relationship, providing a space where adoptees can speak openly. Given that that adoptees want a therapist who is understanding of issues that adoptees face, empathic listening will be crucial in these relationships and the therapist must be able to provide a space free of the assumptions and judgment that transracial adoptees regularly face. Furthermore therapists working with transracial adoptees will also have to ensure that they approach adoptees
without demanding explanations from them and instead approach the relationship with openness and the willingness to listen. Finally, the present study has demonstrated that many transracial adoptees view their experiences and relationships as generally positive even though society generally seems to perceive transracial adoption as negative. Thus, it might be beneficial for therapists to also approach adoption from a strengths perspective, recognizing that adoption can be positive and can provide benefits and strengths as well as difficulties. This is not to say that therapists should focus only on positive aspects of adoption and neglect any possible negatives, but it would be beneficial just to remember that adoption is not always negative and can come with positive aspects, strengths, and supportive relationships.

Canada is becoming an increasingly multicultural country, and as it continues to grow in this way, it will be increasingly necessary for Canadian research on multiculturalism to be at the forefront, allowing us to better prepare, welcome, and include others into our vast cultural mosaic. Studies such as this one, and others focused on multiculturalism and promoting sensitivity and awareness, will be crucial in further building, creating, and supporting this cultural mosaic.

**Conclusion**

The lived experiences of transracial adoptees are diverse but it is clear that relationships play a major role. Throughout families, schooling, and daily societal experiences, relationships play a crucial role in the lives of transracial adoptees. The present study wished to gain a better understanding of these relationships and how they affect adoptees’ daily lives. Through in-depth interviews it was demonstrated that a sense of understanding is paramount for transracial adoptees as they form relationships in their lives. This sense of understanding within the relationships allowed adoptees to feel more comfortable, welcome, and open with their ethnic heritages. These accounts demonstrate how crucial understanding relationships are for adoptees and point to the need for further research to promote this sense of understanding. It is hoped that research of this
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type will lead to further insight, allowing for a greater understanding of transracial adoption and promoting greater cultural sensitivity within the mental health system. As Canada is at the forefront of multiculturalism, it is necessary for Canadian research to be at the forefront also, promoting cultural sensitivity, inclusion, and understanding.
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Appendix A: Invitation and Information Letter

INVITATION AND INFORMATION LETTER

Research Study
Transracial Adoptions: Understanding the Importance of Relationships in the life of a Transracial Adoptee

I am a master’s student in the Counselling and Clinical Psychology program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. I would like to invite you to participate in a qualitative research study as the thesis research component of my degree requirements.

WHAT IS THIS STUDY ABOUT?
I am conducting a study to understand the lived experience of transracial adoptees as well as the importance of relationships within the lives of transracial adoptees. I would like to find out more about the lived experiences of transracial adoptees, how they feel about their own adoptions, and how their relationships with others have played into their experience of transracial adoption.

I am looking for individuals who are:
• male or female transracial adoptees (adopted by parents of a different race than themselves)
• are over the age of 18
• were adopted before the age of 3

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?
You will be asked to participate in one interview that will last for between one and two hours (along with time to ask questions about the process you have just undergone).

In the interview, you will be asked to talk about your experience as a transracial adoptee in general, as well as the importance and experience of relationships in your life. The interview will be conducted by Sabrina Simmons.

Should you wish to participate in this research, please contact me and we can arrange a suitable time and space in which to meet for the interview.

DO I HAVE TO PARTICIPATE?
Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may refuse to participate at any time, decline to answer any questions, and even withdraw during the course of the interview without any negative consequences. The information you provide will remain completely confidential and no one else will be informed about your participation in this study, as you will be invited to provide a pseudonym by which you will be identified. In addition, your gender and all other personal details you provide, which may even remotely identify you, will not be used either verbally (in discussion or seminars), or in any written form.
LIVED EXPERIENCES OF TRANSRACIAL ADOPTEES

ARE THERE ANY RISKS AND BENEFITS TO PARTICIPATING?

Risks
- questions may bring up some uncomfortable memories or thoughts

Benefits
- sharing of your unique lived experience may help you gain further insight into yourself and your own situations
- sharing your experiences of transracial adoption and relationships within transracial adoption may help other transracial adoptees coming to terms with their own experiences
- the understanding of transracial adoption and relationships can inform therapists, enabling them to be better prepared to aid other transracial adoptees and multicultural populations

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE INFORMATION AFTER I HAVE PARTICIPATED IN THE STUDY?

All of the information collected as a result of your participation in the study will remain strictly confidential. The data may be used for publication in journals or books, and/or for public presentations. Regardless of the method of presentation, your identity will certainly not be revealed. The data will be retained for a period of 3 years by the principal researcher, Sabrina Simmons. It will be kept in a securely locked cabinet, and will only be accessible to the principal researcher and the supervisor, Dr. Roy Moodley. Tape records taken during the interviews will be erased within a month of the transcripts being completed, and prior to destruction they will be kept on an encrypted portable hard drive.

We would be more than happy to offer you a copy of the research results once they are available. If you would like this copy, please fill out your name and mailing/e-mail address under the section “Request to Receive Summary of Results” on the Consent Form.

Should you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant, you may contact the Research Ethics Review Office via telephone (416-946-3273) or email (ethics.review@utoronto.ca).

If you have any questions about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you for considering participation in this research.

Sabrina Simmons (MA Candidate)
OISE, University of Toronto
Clinical and Counselling Psychology
252 Bloor Street West
Toronto, ON, M5S 1V6
Email: sabrina.simmons@mail.utoronto.ca
Appendix B: Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Research Study
Transracial Adoptions: Understanding the Importance of Relationships in the life of a Transracial Adoptee

1. Please read this form very carefully
2. If there is anything you do not understand about the invitation and information letter or if you wish to ask any questions please speak to the researcher named at the end of this form.
3. Please check that all information on the form is correct. If the information is correct and you understand the explanation, then please complete sections 1, 2, and 3 and sign the form below.

I understand that I will be participating in a research study examining the lived experiences and the importance of relationships in the lives of adult transracial adoptees. I have read the information letter describing the purpose and procedures of the following study.

I understand that my involvement in this study consists of participating in one semi-structured interview that will last for at least an hour (and will include time to ask any questions I may have following the interview). I understand that some of the questions will relate to my lived experiences as a transracial adoptee as well as my relationships as a transracial adoptees (with family, friends, community members, etc.). The interview will be conducted by Sabrina Simmons (Masters candidate) from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto.

I understand that my participation in this research is completely voluntary. I understand that any information I reply will remain confidential and that no one will know of my participation in the study. I may refuse to participate at any time, decline to answer any questions, and even withdraw during the course of the interview without any negative consequences. I understand that that the information gathered in the study may be used for publication in journals or books, and/or for public presentations, but my identity will in no way be revealed. In addition, my gender and all other personal details, which may even remotely identify me, will be used neither verbally in discussions and seminars, nor in any written form.

I understand that the data will be retained for a period of 3 years by the principle researcher, Sabrina Simmons, and will be kept in a secure location, only accessible to the principal investigator and the research supervisor, Dr. Roy Moodley. The tape recordings acquired during the interview will be erased within a month of the transcripts being completed.

I understand that there are very minimal risks involved in my participation (due to the potentially emotional nature of the questions) and that several benefits may result, as outlined in the information letter. I understand that I an receive written information about the results of the study by providing my information at the end of this form.
1. **VOLUNTEER’S DECLARATION OF INFORMED CONSENT**

**YES** I have been given a written explanation of the study by the investigator named on the form, including full details of any potential psychological risks, my rights, and what I am to do throughout the study. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions.

**YES** I have had enough time to think about the study, and to decide without pressure if I would like to take part.

**YES** I understand the decision is up to me and that I can withdraw from the study up to the final stage of data analysis.

**YES** I understand that I am free to answer some questions and not others.

**YES** I have been assured that all information collected in this study will be held in confidence and if presented (in a conference, journal, book, clinical meeting) my personal details will be removed.

**YES** I agree that the researcher may withdraw me from the study should I experience any ‘psychological distress’ in the study.

**YES** I therefore agree that I will take part in this study

Name: _______________________________________ Date: _________________

Signature: ____________________________________

2. **DECLARATION OF RECEIPT OF INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

I have received a copy of this Consent Form: 

Yes  No

3. **REQUEST TO RECEIVE SUMMARY OF RESULTS**

If you would like to receive a summary of the results of the study, please fill out the information below

I would like to receive a summary of the results of the study: 

Yes  No

Please send me the summary via:  E-mail  Mail

Name: 

Address:  

E-mail: 

4. **RESEARCHER RESPONSIBLE FOR CONDUCTING THE INFORMED CONSENT PROCESS:**
I confirm that I have explained the nature of the research and supplied the volunteer with an information letter explaining the nature of this study and volunteers’ participation.

Name: __________________ Signature: __________________ Date: ________________
Appendix C: Demographic Information

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Research Study
Transracial Adoptions: Understanding the Importance of Relationships in the life of a Transracial Adoptee

1. Participant’s name(s): _____________________
2. Participant’s pseudonym: _____________________
3. Gender: Male    Female    Other
4. Age: ______
5. Age at Adoption (best estimate): ________
6. Ethnic Heritage (origin): ________
7. Ethnic Heritage of Adoptive parents: ________
8. What ethnic heritage do you identify with? ________
Appendix D: Interview Questions

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Research Study

Main Theme: Lived experiences of transracial adoptees in the GTA

Question 1: Can you tell me about your relationship with your adopted parents and siblings?
Some prompt questions include:
• How did this connection with your adoptive family start?
• How was the connection with your parents when you were young, how is it now? – whether you live with them or not?
• Can you tell me a bit about your home life? Your relationship with your siblings, grandparents/extended family?

Question 2: Can you tell me about your experiences in school? How about work?
Some prompt questions include:
• how have you found your schooling as a transracial adoptee
• what was elementary school like for you? High school? University?
• What were your schooling experiences like for you?
• How do you find your work? What has your experience been like for you?

Question 3: Can you tell me about your friendships and what the experience is like for you?
Some prompt questions include:
• how have you found making connections with friends/peers?
• Where have you formed these connections?
• Have you found your connections changing with time? (developmental)

Question 4: Can you tell me a bit about what you thought of the interview process?
Some prompt questions include:
• do you feel as though we covered everything?
• Is there anything you would like to add or discuss?
• Is there anything you would like to explore further?
RECRUITMENT FLYER

PARTICIPANTS WANTED FOR RESEARCH STUDY

ARE YOU TRANSRACIALLY ADOPTED?
IF SO, WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU ABOUT YOUR LIVED EXPERIENCES AS A TRANSRACIAL ADOPTEE.

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

Principal Investigator
Sabrina Simmons (MA candidate in the department of Applied Psychology and Human Development)

Eligibility for this study:
• you are a transracial adoptee
• you are over 18 years of age
• you were adopted before the age of 3

Interested in Participating??
If so, please contact me as soon as convenient. We’ll have a brief discussion about the study. Once confirmed, we can set up a time/place for the interview in a place that is suitable for us. Interviews will last for 1-2 hours.

Possible Risks:
Although very unlikely, some questions may be perceived as a source of emotional/psychological distress. A list of resources will be provided for you if you would like to follow up with someone.

Possible Benefits:
This study offers not only personal benefits but also benefits the scientific community. You may gain a greater understanding and insight into yourself and your experiences. Plus, the findings may benefit mental health professionals increase their cultural sensitivity and be better prepared to work with transracial adoptees and other multicultural populations.

Confidentiality:
Your information will remain confidential and NO original names will be used.

Participation and Withdrawal:
Your participation is COMPLETELY voluntary. If needed, you can withdraw from the study and this will not result in any penalty or negative consequences.

Contact:
Please contact Sabrina Simmons via phone: 647-515-3754 or email: sabrina.simmons@mail.utoronto.ca
Appendix F: Counselling Resources

COUNSELLING RESOURCES

Gerstein Crisis Centre
100 Charles Street East, Toronto, Ontario
1045 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario
(416) 929-5200
website: http://gersteincentre.org/

Toronto Distress Centre
10 Trinity Square; Toronto, Ontario
700 Lawrence Ave. West, Toronto, Ontario
(416) 408-4357 (408-HELP)
website: https://www.torontodistresscentre.com/

The OISE Psychology Clinic
Suite 7-296
252 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario
(416) 978-0620
website: http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/psychservices

Counselling and Psychological Services at the University of Toronto
Room 111
Koffler Student Services Centre
214 College Street, Toronto, Ontario
(416) 978-8070
website: http://caps.utoronto.ca/main.htm

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Services
1001 Queen Street West, Toronto, Ontario
250 College Street, Toronto, Ontario
33 Russell Street, Toronto, Ontario
(416) 535-8501

Family Service Toronto
355 Church Street, Toronto, Ontario
(416) 595 – 9618
website: http://www.familyservicetoronto.org/

Jewish Family and Child Services
4600 Bathurst Street, Toronto, Ontario
(416) 638-7800
website: http://www.jfandcs.com/