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Knowledge and Attitudes Among Graduate Counseling Students at a Private Midwestern University Toward Transracial Adoptions

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**KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDES AMONG GRADUATE
COUNSELING STUDENTS AT A PRIVATE
MIDWESTERN UNIVERSITY
TOWARD TRANSRACIAL ADOPTIONS**

REBECCA HAMER, B.S.



Abstract Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Lindenwood University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts
1999

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to survey the knowledge and attitudes among Graduate counseling students toward transracial adoption, at a private university in the midwest. This study used a questionnaire designed to gather information on racial issues, parental roles, risk to a successful adoption and the graduate's education and training. The study identifies information on whether students will be prepared to deal with families who seek counseling as the number of transracial placements increase.

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COUNSELING STUDENTS AT A PRIVATE
MIDWESTERN UNIVERSITY
TOWARD TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION**

REBECCA HAMER, B.S.

A Culminating Project Presented to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Lindenwood University in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts
1999

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

DEDICATION

I wish to dedicate this thesis to my husband. Jim has been a constant source of encouragement and support. He has been whatever I have needed him to be over the course of my studies and the completion of this project. I could not have completed this without his love and support.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The adoption community has long debated the pros and cons of transracial adoptions. The practice of white families adopting black children began in the early 1950's and increased in volume during the 1960's, with increasing numbers of agencies making transracial adoptive placements (Grow & Shapiro, 1974).

A changing social climate has made it acceptable for women to keep their babies that have been born out of wedlock. This change along with available contraceptives and abortions reduced the number of healthy infants who were available for adoption. Many adoption agencies find that they have a large number of approved Caucasian families but a limited supply of approved waiting African American adoptive families. Some believe the myth that African American families are either not available to adopt or are not interested in adopting (McRoy, Oglesby & Grape, 1997, p. 89).

In the 1960's and 1970's, the shortage of white infants available was in sharp contrast to the number of black children who were spending their childhood moving from one foster home to another. Questions began to

be asked about long accepted assumptions that cultural differences were the reasons black unwed mothers tended to keep their children, whereas white unwed mothers usually relinquished for adoption. This was a time when agency policies and practices were looked at and questions raised regarding fair and equal access to services. It appeared services that were routinely offered to white unwed mothers were not being routinely offered to black unwed mothers. The Civil Rights movement prompted agencies to give more attention to the plight of black children (Grow & Shapiro, 1974).

This attention given to the black child resulted in an increased number of transracial adoptions. Curtis (1996) citing figures from Bartholet (1991), states that in 1968, approximately 733 transracial adoptions took place, and by 1971 that number more than tripled to 2,574. Black workers as well as white workers were involved in the practice of transracial adoptions. Black workers, concerned with the plight of black children in their caseloads, saw this practice preferable to long stays in foster care (Grow & Shapiro, 1974).

In 1972 the Association of Black Social Workers were the first group of professionals to publicly voice opposition to transracial adoptions. They cited their fear of cultural genocide and concerns for the

child's racial identity. This group, like other opponents, felt white homes could not teach African American children to (1) develop positive identity, (2) learn survival skills necessary in a racist society, and (3) develop the cultural and linguistic attributes crucial to functioning effectively in the black community (Jones & Else, 1979).

The practice of transracial adoption continues to concern professionals in the field of child welfare. These concerns have prevailed even with research that shows transracial adoptees grow up emotionally and socially adjusted, and are aware and comfortable with their racial identity. Most of the research has been done when the adoptees were very young, and on such a small number of adoptees that the research has failed to convince opponents that this practice is in the best interest of black children.

The practice of transracial adoption has continued to the present but with more caution than what occurred in the 1960's and 1970's. Two pieces of recent legislation has impacted the practice of transracial adoptions, and has the potential of increasing the rate at which they occur. These two pieces of legislation are the Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 and the Safe Families Act of 1997.

This study of counseling student's attitudes and knowledge of transracial adoptions is important at this time because of the potential for an increase in the number of transracial adoptions. Child placement agencies will be faced with the demand to move children into permanent homes in large numbers and to do this more quickly than any time in the past. Failure to meet these new strict guidelines on time frames will result in agencies losing large amounts of federal monies (Bussierer, 1996). The threat of losing funding is likely to result in timely placements of children, and it is likely that many of these children will be blacks who are placed with white families. One can only hope with the speed of placement that care will be taken to assess carefully the family's ability to handle the additional pressures that are inherent of transracial adoptions.

Some of these families may need counseling and counselors will need to be culturally skilled according to Sue & Sue (1990).

Counselors about to enter the field will need to be prepared to deal with confusion in some adoptees about where they belong and their racial identity. Adoptive parents may need help in dealing with their child. However, one challenge faced by counselors is the lack of formal training on how to deal with this special group.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to explore the status of graduate student's knowledge and attitudes toward transracial adoptions. This study may impact teaching curricula and may be used as a basis for future studies on counseling families involved in transracial adoption.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

History of Transracial Adoptions

Neal and Stumph (1993) provide a historical account of transracial adoptions. According to these authors, homeless black children were cared for by institutions and services set up by the black community soon after slavery ended. Organizations such as the Masons and other black organizations financed some of the black orphanages. Others were established through endowments of both black and white philanthropists.

According to Neal and Stumph (1993), the black child care system continued to serve as the major source of service to black children until the 1950's when black children began to be increasingly included in traditional child care services.

Adoptions was rarely considered an option for black infants, as adoption had been developed as a service for white families who wanted to adopt healthy white infants. In the 1950's and 1960's transracial adoptions of black children began after more black children entered the child care system (Neal & Stumph, 1993).

By 1971 transracial adoptions had reached an annual high of 2,575 (Simon & Alstein, 1987). This increase in transracial adoptions resulted in the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) ending its conference in 1972 with a resolution opposing transracial adoptions (Hollingsworth, 1998). In the response to the NABSW resolution and the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978, which gave tribal courts jurisdiction over American Indian child custody proceedings, some states established policies and procedures limiting transracial adoptions (Hollingsworth, 1998).

Factors Contributing to Transracial Adoptions

States have changed policies and procedures regarding transracial adoptions at various times based on a number of factors, however the number of black children in the system has been the major factor contributing to transracial adoptions. Black children and children of color are disproportionately represented among the population of children in the placement system. African American children represent approximately 38% of the children in this system that are in need of permanent homes or adoption. The large number of black children in the system was viewed

by some adoption agencies as one way to fill the gap created by the lack of healthy white infants (McRoy, 1989).

Simon & Alstein (1987) report that approximately two million Caucasian couples are seeking to adopt, and most are seeking infants. As only about 2,500 infants under two years of age were placed for adoption in 1986, the likelihood of receiving a white infant is slim for many of these couples. Given the small number of Caucasian infants available for adoption, and the growing number of African American children needing placement, some agencies are encouraging Caucasian prospective adoptive parents to consider adopting transracially (McRoy, Olgesby & Grape, 1997).

The adoption of orphaned children from other countries by American families began in the 1940's with the end of World War II (Simon & Alstein, 1977). A rise in the number of such adoptions accompanies later wars, including the Korean and Vietnam War (Silverman, 1993). In the 1960's widespread use of artificial birth control, the legalization of abortions and decreased social stigma associated with bearing a child outside of marriage were accompanied by a substantial decrease in healthy white infants available for adoption. There was however, no corresponding decrease among African American and other

children of color who were in need of permanent homes (Hollingsworth, 1998).

Hollingsworth (1998) attributes the recent increase in transracial adoptions to agencies becoming more flexible in their eligibility requirements, such as income, housing, age and family composition. Hollingsworth also points to the number of black children who are placed in white foster homes as a factor affecting the increase in transracial adoptions. The placement system gives preference to foster parents who have formed a bond with children who are free for adoption (Hollingsworth, 1998).

Other factors affecting transracial adoptions include public policies and laws such as the Multiethnic Placement Act and the Safe Families Act of 1997, which disallows the consideration of race and ethnicity in adoptions (Hollingsworth, 1998).

Opposition to Transracial Adoptions

Few issues in child welfare have aroused such intense feelings and polarized positions as that of transracial adoptions (Sullivan, 1994). Since the early 1970's, adoption practice throughout the country has favored placing children in racially matched homes. Transracial placements have

been considered a "fall back" position, acceptable only under special circumstances (Brooks, Bussierer, Barth & Patterson, 1997). The practice of transracial adoptions continues to concern professionals as well as the general public. Opponents of transracial adoptions generally make claims that children who are placed transracially may experience more difficulty adjusting to adoption. They state whites who adopt children of color may not be able to help their transracial adopted child develop skills to cope with racism, and that same race placement could be found for more children of color if agencies were more aggressive in their efforts to recruit, prepare, and support families of color (Brooks, et. al., 1997).

The NABSW has to date, presented the strongest opposition to transracial adoptions. The NABSW declared transracial adoptions cultural genocide. At their 1972 conference, the NABSW adopted a resolution opposing transracial adoptions (Hollingsworth, 1998). The NABSW position was that white families could not teach African American children how to function effectively in the community, they could not teach the child survival skills needed in a racist society, or help them develop a positive identity (Jones & Else, 1979). In 1994 the NABSW provided another position statement on transracial adoption. The group stated the adoption of an African American child should only be

considered after documented evidence of unsuccessful same race placement has been reviewed and supported by appropriate representatives of the African American community (Hollingsworth, 1998).

According to Hollingsworth (1998) the North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC) has reaffirmed its original position established in 1981. Hollingsworth states the NACAC's position regarding transracial adoptions is that placement of children with a family of like ethnic background is desirable because such families are likely to provide the needs of minority children with the strength that counters the effect of racism.

There is some apprehension about whether transracial adoptive parents can truly appreciate and help their children to appreciate their racial identity and heritage. Racial identity is hypothesized as being crucial to self-concept and psychological functioning. This relationship has been addressed conceptually from a variety of prospective, but few empirical studies have actually focused on the issue. Most of the empirical work on racial and ethnic identity has concentrated on young children. Studies that have included adolescents and adults in their sample generally, have focused on single groups and have widely disparate definitions and measures (Brook, et. al., 1997). According to Brook, et.

al., these limitations make it difficult to generalize findings and compare across studies.

Despite varying perspectives on racial matching and transracial adoptions, (Brooks, et. al., 1997) contend that race cannot and should not be ignored when making placement decisions and that children's best interest are served when all else being equal, that children be placed with families of the same racial, ethnic and culture as their own. For example, Caucasian children are rarely placed transracially (Brooks, et. al., 1997).

Supporters of Transracial Adoption

Intense feeling regarding transracial adoption exists on both sides of this issue. The strong opposition from the NABSW offended advocates, some of them were transracial adoptive parents themselves. They began to speak and write publicly in support of transracial adoptions and in opposition to same race protective policy (Bartholet, 1991). Advocates stated that same race policies resulted in retaining children in foster care longer than necessary, that recruitment of white parents did not equal the efforts made to recruit families of color, therefore families of color were given unfair advantage. They felt the same race policies gave families of color an edge in getting adoption subsidies, that screening

practices was different, that empirical studies have been biased toward studying the negative aspects of transracial adoptions. The advocates also cited the lack of empirical support for the contention these parents of color do a better job at socializing their children ethnically and racially (McRoy, 1994).

Kennedy (1994) spoke out against racial matching and felt the policy was bad for children and for what it signaled about our current attitude regarding racial distinction. Kennedy went on to say racial matching blocked some parentless children from having a permanent family. This author felt the practice of racial matching reinforced the belief that same race child placements were better and therefore preferable to transracial arrangements (Kennedy, 1994).

Relatively little is known about transracial adoptions and its effects on adoptees. Brooks, et. al. (1997) examine seven of what they consider to be most significant studies of the effects of transracial adoptions. In general they found these studies suggested that transracial adoptees were not harmed psychologically. The children are highly acculturated to the majority culture and may not have strong psychological or social identifications with their race or ethnicity. Whether these outcomes are desirable, of course, depends on individual value judgments. Moreover,

conceptual and methodological problems with all of the studies significantly limit the value of these findings (Brooks, et. al., 1997).

A number of studies have been conducted concerning the adoption of black children by white families. The consensus of the findings is the practice does not cause psychological harm to black children (Journal of Black Psychology, 1996).

Issues Impacting Families Who Adopt Transracially

With the lack of agreement on the effects of transracial adoptions, it is difficult to assess the impact on parents and children who have had this experience.

Studies have been conducted on the effects on the black child's self esteem, racial identity and on psychological well being. It is also important to examine the impact transracial adoption has on the white families who have made the decision to adopt a black child. In reviewing the literature not much was found on the effect this practice has had on parents. Information found indicated parents who have adopted transracially are in general supportive of the practice, would recommend it to others and feel they made a good decision (Simon, 1996). Simon, conducted a longitudinal study of transracial adoptees and reported the

parents felt "the major impact that transracial adoption had on their lives was that it broadened and enriched them, exposed them to a different culture, and made them more sensitive to racial issues" (Simon, 1996, p. 86).

Some factors which impacts the parents may be less obvious or of less importance to the parents. An example is the change that automatically occurs when a white family adopts a black child. A family who adopts transracially must accept the fact that their family is now a member of a minority group. Families should realize that they are not a white family with a minority child but a minority family (Melina, 1998). This change impacts the family, because people stare at their family when they enter restaurants or shopping centers because their family now includes a nonwhite member (Neal & Stumph, 1993). The decision to adopt transracially creates a family by definition that has no cultural heritage, or perhaps one that is so diverse that it loses its meaning. Parents who adopt transracially may have to deal with their child's hurt because another child makes a racial derogatory remark (Melina, 1988).

The impact of this problem is magnified if the white parent has not been prepared to deal with the likelihood that this would occur, and may not be able to help their child. These families must acknowledge that

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racism is real. They must realize that even though their African American child is being raised by white parents and live in a predominately white or integrated neighborhood, they will experience racial and ethnic prejudice and racism (Neal & Stumph, 1993).

While white parents may think they know themselves and their family members, transracial adoptive parents are required to examine their beliefs about race and ethnicity. The impact of transracial adoptions for some white parents has been the lack of acceptance of their black child by their friends and family.

In reviewing the literature for the impact of transracial adoption on the black child most of the research has been on constructs such as self-esteem, identity, and adjustment. Law (1998) reports on accounts published in the Wall Street Journal of post-adolescent blacks who had some extremely painful adjustments to being transracially adopted. Law recounts the report of events involving an adolescent who said he switched between sounding "black or white." The adolescent stated he didn't feel he was being himself around black people, stating they were not like his family. This adolescent allowed people to make jokes at his expense in his effort to fit in, and at age five he stood on a window sill while pounding his chest, shouting, "I'm a nigger! I'm a nigger!". Law (1998)

reported the experience of another black male from the same Wall Street Journal article, where a child wanted to belong so badly that he rubbed his kinky hair on a carpet in hopes of getting the straight, silky look that his white peers had (Law, 1998).

Curtis (1996) reports that Robert Carter, a professor of psychology at Teachers College of Columbia University, conducted research on transracial and biracial identity development. According to Curtis, Carter found that adoptees who seemed well adjusted and productive felt racially incomplete. They reach their twenties and thirties and are confronted by racism and prejudice but do not have the skills to cope, these are skills other African Americans acquire as children.

The impact of transracial adoption on some black children has been a painful adjustment. McRoy and Zurcher (1996) state that child development theorists find that children are aware of differences in ethnicity between themselves and others as early as age three. Black children recognize that they are darker than other members of their family. Black children learn early about the historical negative value placed on membership in their racial group. By age seven, all children appear aware of the concept "black" and many assign undesirable traits to that identity. By the time they reach second grade, many children have developed

prejudicial attitudes, and sometimes they express these through teasing or refusing association with peers who are racially different (McRoy & Zurcher, 1982).

This has a negative impact on the black child who has been transracially adopted, because they lack the social support normally present when there are black siblings or black peers. The support of black siblings or black peers can aid in dealing with negative responses of white peers. The lack of a relationship with others who share the same racial background results in a lack of a sense of belonging and acceptance. These black children want to be similar to, and be accepted by peers and family members but may not be able to for obvious difference in physical appearance (McRoy & Zurcher, 1982).

Attitudes of Professionals Regarding Transracial Adoptions

The attitudes among professionals regarding transracial adoptions has been formed by the degree of understanding and knowledge they have of families whose lives have been impacted both positively and negatively by this practice.

To determine adoption workers attitudes toward transracial adoptions (Grow & Shapiro, 1975) distributed questionnaires to 700

adoption workers at the agencies that were involved in their research on transracial adoptions. In general, the survey found the workers agreed that transracial adoptions is an acceptable practice and a better alternative for black children than long term foster care. On the other hand, they agreed that such adoptions are risky, requiring more exploration than same race adoptions and make a heavier demand on the adoptive parents. They were unanimous that the black child's identification with his heritage must be maintained even if he lives with a white family. The respondents in the study thought that compared to a white infant, it takes longer for a white couple to feel a black infant is theirs.

Social workers have been accused of vacillating on the issue of transracial adoptions. Curtis (1996), referring to statements made by Howard (1984), reported The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) has changed its standards for adoption services. In 1958 the CWLA stated that race, should not be a factor when placing a child for adoption. Subsequent versions of the standard acknowledge a preference for same race placement.

The NABSW has maintained its opposition to transracial adoptions for more than 20 years. Curtis (1996) provides the following quote of the NABSW position on transracial:

The association affirms the inviolable position of African American children in African American families, where they belong physically, psychologically and culturally in order that they receive the total sense of themselves and develop a sound projection of their future (p. 162).

The adoption community remains divided on transracial adoption. Duncan (1988) states the past sixteen (16) years of struggle about whether transracial adoptions are right, has resulted in some positive service gains for black children, at the same time it has caused considerable pain and anguish for everyone in the adoption community.

Training Needs

Counselor educators are faced with a multitude of challenges that have an impact on the counseling curriculum content and mode of delivery (Ancis, 1998). Counselors are working with a more diverse clientele, and counseling programs have begun to recognize an ethical responsibility to train professionals who can effectively service this diverse group.

The training needed for counselors who work with families who have adopted transracially are the same as for any family counselor, who is considered high functioning and effective. Peterson and Nisenholz (1995), expound on the attributes of a high functioning or effective

counselor. These authors point to research findings that have been consistent during the past thirty (30) years, and find that the quality of the therapeutic bond has the most significant impact on therapy outcomes. Peterson and Nisenholz refer to research of Herman (1993), and Marziali and Alexander (1991), that point to the greatest factor in determining the quality of the therapeutic bond as the counselor's personal characteristics.

Counselors working with families who have adopted transracially must possess these characteristics as well as being culturally competent. These counselors must be skilled in working with a blend of ethnicity and culture while being aware of their own racial identity development and how this may impact the therapeutic relationship. According to Rosenthal and Groz (1990) the demographic profile of children in out-of-home placement is becoming a profile of children of color, while the majority of the professionals working with these children are Caucasian female. Agencies are offering only minimal training to enable staff to become competent to meet the needs of families.

In addition to being culturally competent and highly effective, counselor training needs to equip counselors with knowledge of the many unique issues these families face. The training should include information which enables counselors to be realistic about racial prejudice in this

country and the impact it has on the black child in these families. Counselors need to gain a good understanding of the historical negative relationship between whites and blacks. Counselors working with transracial adoptive families should be trained in black history so they can understand and help white parents understand the world the black child will need to be prepared for.

Training should include information on how the sociopolitical system impacts minorities. The effects of poverty on the lives of minorities should be covered to aid in the understanding and appreciation of coping styles of minorities. Counselors need to be able to clarify for white couples who adopt black children, how blacks as a group have had to manage under adverse circumstances. This knowledge is important to help families formulate a fair concept of the child's native culture, and address questions their child may have.

Training should include more opportunities for counselors to have a learning experience that is more than the acquisition of knowledge. Sue and Sue (1990) state the chance for self-exploration as it relates to race is missing in most counselor programs. Counselors working with families who have adopted transracially need to have many opportunities for self-exploration (Ponterotto, Casa, Suzuki & Alexander, 1995).

Ponterotto et. al. 1995) contend that the counseling process should consider identity development theories related to blacks and whites as well as other groups. Based on these authors' assessment of what is needed in the process, counselors should be trained in the various identity development models. Counselors should use knowledge of identity models for explaining racial discord in relationships such as parental, and teacher-student (Ponterotto, et. al., 1995). An understanding of the various racial identity development theories is necessary for a clear understanding of issues related to the blending of races involved in transracial adoptions.

An understanding of how to make an assessment of the racial identity development of family members is needed. This assessment will help in determining what impact race has on functioning, behavior, values, self-concept and presenting issues. Thomas (1999, p. 36) states this type of assessment is necessary to understand what is going on. For example, the difficulty some black children experience in school may be caused by pressure from peers and the child attempting to fit in.

Training on survival strategies that parents need to impart to their black child should be included in counselors training. The survival skills needed by a black child are not the same as the skills a white child needs.

White couples who adopt a black child may not have the skill to teach these survival skills, or even know that different skills are needed. White parents may not have gotten much help during the adoption process on matters related to teaching these skills. Counselors need to be trained so they can help their clients cope with cultural conflicts in values, identity, and relationships (Pinderhughes, 1989).

Brown (1999), referring to the American Counselors Association code of ethics states:

Counselors are professionally and ethically bound to actively attempt to understand the diverse cultural backgrounds of the clients with whom they work. This includes, but is not limited to learning how the counselor's own cultural/ethnic/racial identity impacts his/her values and beliefs about the counseling process (p. 87).

Our society is becoming more racially and culturally diverse and racism and prejudice continues to be a very real factor that must be considered in counselor's training. It is important that professional and ethical counselors learn how their racial identity influences their values and beliefs about the counseling process (Brown, 1999, p. 87). Brown feels that the inclusion of awareness, knowledge and skills involving racism and racial identity development is recommended as a core element

in counseling training programs, particularly with white counseling students.

Biculturalism is the ability to live in two different worlds, to tolerate the conflict in cultural values and practices. "Practitioner must be able to help their clients achieve this state and to reduce the destructive conflict and confusion inherent in the bicultural condition" (Pinderhughes, 1989, p. 180-181).

According to Pinderhughes (1989), practitioners need to be trained in helping families achieve a sense of integration and consolidation. Full integration, according to Pinderhughes, may never be possible for some because they have been denied full access to the larger society. Some persons or groups must be able to achieve a strong coherent sense of biculturalism and be able to minimize the associated conflict and confusion. Counselors need training in how to help families minimize this conflict resulting from the effort to integrate black children into white families.

Black parenting styles differ from those of white parents (Davis & Proctor, 1989). Davis and Proctor state that black parents have two tasks in the socialization of their children; they must teach them to be human as well as how to be a minority. Minority children, according to David and

Proctor, must become bicultural if they are to function outside the black community. They must learn the values and customs of their native culture, as well as those of the dominant white culture. Black children must be prepared for entry into a culture that is not only different but frequently hostile (Davis & Proctor, 1989). Families who adopt transracially should learn some of the important skills that black parents have. These skills are needed if white parents are expected to equip their black child for a racist society.

Practitioners attempting to work with families who have adopted transracially must learn to appreciate the difficult task of socializing a black child in today's society, and should gain training that will equip them to deal with these families. It may be necessary for counselors to seek training through workshops, seminars and attendance at various cultural events, as most colleges and universities programs do not offer much that will help in understanding the issues these families may present.

In almost all human service programs, counselors, therapists and social workers are familiar with the phrase, "Counselor Know Thyself." Programs stress the importance of not allowing our own biases and values interfere with our ability to work with clients. This needs to be more than an intellectual discussion, but rather it needs to be included into training

programs and directed at having trainees get in touch with their values and biases (Brown, 1999).

Summary

Historically, adoption and race have been controversial subjects, making it difficult if not impossible for professionals to agree on what role race should play in adoption placement decisions (Brooks, et. al., 1997). Transracial adoptions have been a controversy among adoption professionals for over 20 years. Research has not provided conclusive evidence of the long-term affect on black children who have been adopted by white families. Most of the research supports the claim that transracial adoptees are not psychologically harmed by the practice (Law, 1998). The loss of racial heritage and the effect on identity and self-esteem are questions that continue to be controversial and have divided conclusions. The importance of the black child's continued connection to the black community and the black heritage is not clearly established. Some professionals feel that children placed for adoption neither have the need or the right to develop a distinct ethnic identity or awareness of culture heritage.

The review of the literature reveals black children adopted by white families do retain an awareness of their racial identity, but they also experience some confusion about where they fit into the community (Simon & Alstein, 1997). Simon and Alstein point out transracial adoptees have not established strong relationships in the black community and when they grow up, the white community treats them the same as they do all other blacks. Not only have these children lost their biological parent, they have also lost their heritage and place in the world, they are often not accepted by either race.

Divided attitudes in the adoption community over transracial adoptions is likely to continue for some time. Legislation passed limiting racial matching has had little affect on the attitudes of professionals. Regardless of personal values and views on racial matching and transracial adoptions, child welfare professionals are obligated to comply (Brooks et. al., 1997). Counselors as well as social workers who work with families who adopt transracially receive a minimum amount of training to help families who may need it.

The purpose of this study was to examine the knowledge and attitudes of students enrolled in the counseling programs, regarding transracial adoptions. It will identify equity gaps in training programs and

support consideration of expanding the curriculum to include transracial adoption.

ACTION

This is a descriptive study involving graduate counseling students.

Chapter III

METHOD

Subjects

The subjects for this study were volunteers, sought from the population of advanced students enrolled in the university's Professional and School Counseling Programs. All classes were approached and asked to volunteer for the survey.

Fifty (50) questionnaires were distributed and thirty-nine (39) were completed and returned; a response rate of 78%. The respondents ranged in age from 26 through 57 years, with a mean age of 37.33 years. The standard deviation for the respondent's age was 10.23.

The majority of the respondents were white females; 74.4% were female and 25.6% were male. There were 89.7% white and 10.3% African American respondents. The African American respondents included three (3) females and one (1) male.

Information was gathered on the respondents majors and 76.9% were seeking a degree in professional counseling. There were 17.9% seeking school - counseling degrees and 5.1% seeking dual degrees in

both areas. Of the respondents, 74% had taken the course Social Cultural Foundations.

The respondents were employed in a variety of jobs. There were eight (8) teachers, four (4) counselors/therapists, one (1) youth specialist, one (1) sales representative, one (1) provider representative, one (1) assembly worker, one (1) group leader, five (5) administrators/business owners, one (1) programmer, one (1) collection agent, one (1) consultant, one (1) bank teller, and seven (7) were unemployed. Most of the respondents were employed full-time and seeking their degree on a part-time basis in evening class.

Instrument

A five-part self report questionnaire, consisting of a total of twenty-six (26) questions was developed for this study. The purpose of the questionnaire was to examine the amount of knowledge graduate students had about transracial adoption, how they felt about the practice and whether they felt their studies had prepared them for counseling families who had adopted transracially.

Demographic data was gathered on race, age, gender and the student major.

The questionnaire was developed after reviewing various research articles and textbooks, and arriving at questions that focused on four (4) main areas that could shed light on prospective counselors' knowledge and attitudes. The research done by Grow and Shapiro (1974) on transracial adoptions was the main source used to develop the questionnaire. Information gained from Sue and Sue (1990) was also helpful in the development of the questionnaire. The four (4) main areas covered in the questionnaire are education and training, race issues, parental roles and risk to successful adoptions.

The questions require a yes/no or agree/disagree response. A cover letter with instructions accompanies each questionnaire. The questionnaire was pretested with two white parents who have adopted black children, and with two (2) faculty members who provided feedback on the relevancy of questions, clarity, and wording. The feedback was reviewed, and the questionnaire revised. In addition, the questionnaire was presented to three (3) students enrolled in the counseling program, who were not included in the sample study. These students made comments and suggestions concerning directions, recording of specific items and also provided feedback. These results were reviewed, the

questionnaire revised, and arrangements were then be made to distribute the final questionnaire.

As this is a newly constructed instrument and used mainly for descriptive purposes reliability and validity information are not available at present.

Procedures

A descriptive design was selected because there is very little information on the topic and research is in its exploratory stages. This study seeks to answer questions on the current status of counseling student's knowledge and attitudes about transracial adoptions.

Permission of instructors of various advance classes in which counseling students are enrolled was sought to distribute questionnaires to their class. In order to have the subjects and the researcher remain anonymous, questionnaires were returned to the instructor who placed them in an envelope, which was provided, and collected at the end of the class period. A total of fifty (50) questionnaires were prepared for distribution with a goal of collecting a minimum of thirty-five (35). The questionnaires were to distributed to the first fifty (50) students who volunteer. Possible sources of sampling bias may include the subject's

knowledge of the researcher and the racial make up of the subjects who are predominantly Caucasian compared to the researcher, who is black.

Knowledge of the researcher being black could impact responses that are perceived to be socially acceptable to blacks in general. The researcher attempted to deal with this problem by remaining anonymous and not being present at the point the data was collected.

Chapter IV

RESULTS

This research examined the question of graduate counseling students' knowledge and attitudes toward transracial adoption.

To assess the students' attitudes toward transracial adoptions, the questionnaire gathered information related to race, parental role, risk to successful adoptions and education and training.

Racial Issues

TABLE 1

Racial Issues % of Agreement & Disagreement

Race Issues	% Agree	% Disagree
It is important for a Black child who has been adopted by a White family to develop pride in his/her Black heritage	97.0%	2.6%
Adoptive White parents should allow their Black child to wear clothing or hairstyles that identifies them as a part of The Black race, if they so desire	92.3%	7.7%
Parents should make their Black child aware of the contributions of Black leaders	100.0%	0.0%
Counselors and other helping professionals should take courses in Black history and Black culture	81.0%	17.9%

There were four (4) questions related to race on which the respondents showed strong agreement. Over 95% agreed that it was important for a Black child adopted by a white family to develop pride in the Black heritage. Ninety-two percent (92%) agreed that the child should be allowed to wear clothing and hairstyles that identified with the black race. The respondents were unanimous in the agreement that white parents make their Black child aware of the contributions of Black leaders. Eighty-one percent (81%) felt counselors should take courses in Black history.

Parental Roles

TABLE 2

**Parental Role
% of Agreement & Disagreement**

Parental Role	% Agree	% Disagree
Is the task that a White parent has in rearing a Black child any different from the task of rearing a child of the same race? As a parent	71.8%	28.2%
Can a White parent sufficiently prepare a Black child for adulthood, if given love and security?	92.3%	7.7%
Should a White parent who adopts Black children have or acquire friends who are Black?	30.8%	69.2%
Can a Black child reared by White parents develop a sense of Black identity?	97.4%	2.6%
Is a White parent able to prepare a Black child for living in a racist society?	94.9%	5.1%

The respondent's attitudes regarding parental role reflect a positive attitude toward white families who adopt Black children, however over seventy percent (70%) felt the task of a white parent rearing a Black child is different than rearing a child of the same race as the parent. Ninety-two percent (92%) of the respondents felt a white parent can sufficiently prepare a Black child for adulthood. On the question of whites who adopt Black children needing to have or acquire Black friends, sixty-nine percent (69%) of the respondents felt white parents should not have to

acquire or have Black friends. Ninety-seven percent (97%) agreed that a Black child raised by white parents could develop a sense of Black identity and approximately ninety-five percent (95%) felt white parents are able to prepare a Black child for living in a racist society.

Risk to Successful Adoption

TABLE 3

**Risk to Successful Adoption
% of Agreement & Disagreement**

Risk to Successful Adoption	% Agree	% Disagree
A White family adopting a Black child presents more problems than the same family adopting an American Indian OR Korean child	23.1%	76.1%
Growing up in our current day society is as difficult for a Black child in a Black home as it is for a Black Child in a White home	48.7%	51.3%
While couples adopting Black children need to have greater emotional maturity and more stable marriages than do couples adopting children of their own race	38.9%	61.5%
While couples adopting a Black child should live in or move to integrated neighborhoods	28.2%	69.2%

To determine the student's attitudes regarding the risk involved in transracial adoptions, four (4) questions were asked. Over seventy-five percent (75%) of the respondents disagreed with the statement that white families who adopt Black children have more problems than they would

if they adopted an American or Korean child. About one half of the respondents disagreed with the statement that growing up in our current day society is as difficult for a Black child living in a Black home as it is for a Black child in a white home. Over sixty percent (60%) disagreed that it was necessary for white couples who adopt Black children to have greater emotional maturity and more stable marriages, than couples adopting their own race. The final question on risk to adoption asked the respondents if white couples adopting Black children should live or move to integrated neighborhoods, sixty-nine percent (69%) disagree.

Education and Training

TABLE 4

**Education and Training
% of Agreement & Disagreement**

Education and Training	% Agree	% Disagree
Have you taken any other course at this University which deals with counseling individuals of a different race or ethnic groups other than the white majority race?	48.7%	53.3%
Have you attended any workshop or seminar, outside the University on counseling individual other than the majority white race?	2.1%	97.4%
Have any of your studies at this University included information on transracial adoptions?	23.1%	76.9%
Do you feel you are knowledgeable of social issues related to transracial adoptions?	23.1%	76.9%
Do you know any white parents who have adopted a Black child?	64.1%	35.9%
Do you feel your studies at this University have prepared you to counsel with white families who adopt Black children?	35.9%	64.1%
If a course on transracial adoption were to be offered at this University, would you voluntarily enroll?	48.7%	51.3%
Should more specific training be offered in this University's counseling program on all types of adoptions?	48.7%	51.3%

The respondents were presented with a series of questions to determine the extent of their training on transracial adoption issues at the university and through outside workshops and seminars.

Over ninety-seven percent (97%) never attended a workshop or seminar away from the university on counseling individuals other than the white race. Seventy-six percent (76%) indicated their studies at the university had not included information on transracial adoption, and the same percentage, did not feel they were knowledgeable of social issues related to transracial adoption. In an effort to determine if the students had gained knowledge of transracial adoption through personal contacts, they were asked if they knew any white families who had adopted a Black child, sixty-four percent (64%) of the respondents indicated they knew a family who had adopted a Black child. Two (2) questions were posed to determine the student's attitudes about having training on transracial adoption and on all types of adoption. About half responded, they would not voluntarily enroll in such a course if offered at the university, nor did they feel more specific training should be offered in the university's counseling program on all types of adoption.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION

Summary and Findings

It was anticipated from the review of literature that the students would be supportive of the practice of transracial adoptions. The respondents show a high degree of confidence in white parent's ability to be successful in parenting a Black child even though they indicate a lack of knowledge of the social issues related to transracial adoptions. These findings of positive attitudes toward transracial adoptions are in agreement with other authors reviewed (Grow & Shapiro, 1975; Bartholet, 1991; Kennedy, 1994).

In general this study of the students' attitudes indicate they feel there is no significant difference in the task of a white parent raising a Black child and that of raising a white child. They feel the white parent can prepare a Black child for adulthood, and it is not necessary for white parents to have, or acquire Black friends. Most respondents felt strongly that white parents are able to prepare a Black child to live in a racist society.

By their responses the respondents do not feel transracial adoptions are risky. They feel a white family adopting a Black child does not present more problems than adopting an American Indian or a Korean child. The respondents indicated that these parents do not need to be more emotionally mature or that they had to have more stable marriages. The respondents indicated that it is not necessary for these couples to live in or move to integrated neighborhoods. They disagreed with the idea that growing up in today's society is as difficult for a Black child living in a Black home as it is if the child were living in a white home. Their responses indicated there would be a difference. The results were inclusive and somewhat overly optimistic. The questionnaire did not allow for the opportunity to indicate which role would be more difficult.

It is not surprising that the respondents are positive toward transracial adoptions. The majority of the respondents are white and most of the questions called for answers related to the white race and its ability to judge itself. To respond in a fashion less than positive could be perceived as being prejudiced and giving a vote of no confidence in the white race ability to rise above race and be a good parent.

Racial boundaries have developed over hundreds of years and as such have become deeply embedded in the social and psychological make

up of America. One is Black, red, yellow or white and once one is classified historically ingrained ideas and assumptions about one's place in society begins to be applied (Poneratto, et. al., 1995).

"Racism runs deep and dies hard! Scratch the surface and you'll find beliefs that are evidence of the sociopolitical climate in which we were raised" (Sue & Sue, 1990, p. 6).

Literature addresses the on going controversy around race and adoptions, which has made it hard for professionals to agree on transracial adoptions (Brook, et. al., 1997). Transracial adoptions are likely to continue and counselors and other helping professionals should be aware of the potential problems and seek the needed training to be ready to serve effectively.

Many whites avoid direct discussions on race. There is a wide spread pattern among professionals of claiming color blindness when the subject of race is brought up. Terms such as "love is color blind" and "we are all a part of the human race" are common phrases used to evade an open and honest discussion of the real problems this country continues to experience with racism and racial prejudice.

When pressed for opinions on race and matters such as transracial adoptions and interracial dating and marriages, most professionals opt to

respond in what they perceive to be a politically correct manner. Emotions are strong and run deep when black and white racial issues are connected to relations that have traditionally involved either all black or all white as in transracial adoptions.

The white race has long been perceived as the oppressor of the black race. Whether this perception continues to be a valid one is hard to sort out when attempts are made at arriving at an objective response to the issues around transracial adoption. The gains blacks have realized as a result of the civil rights laws have failed to remove the negative relationship that has existed between the races over time. The history that exists between these two races make it difficult for most blacks to accept that a white parent could instill pride in a black child.

The graduate students involved in this study who were mainly white, admit they have little knowledge of transracial adoption, yet they gave what appears to be a blind vote of confidence that whites can successfully parent a black child. The author finds this disturbing that the students not only lacked knowledge of the issues related to transracial adoptions, but showed no interest in gaining future knowledge. It concerns the author that these students are entering the counseling field and are likely to encounter families who have adopted transracially.

It appears the students, as with most who respond to questions about transracial adoptions, made an emotional response based on what they feel it should be. It is disturbing that these students, who are ready to enter the field, may encounter families who have adopted transracially and are not prepared to deal with this from a base of knowledge. It seems their responses were overly optimistic and certainly not based on facts. It is feared by the author that help offered by these counselors may also be based on emotions.

Limitations

The sample consisted of only thirty-nine (39) students and was limited to students currently enrolled in advanced classes. The subjects were all volunteers and problems associated with self-reports should be considered. The instrument used to gather this data was developed specifically for this study and there is no way of testing its reliability or validity. The sample had too few blacks, the results may be quite different with a more representative racial population.

The research presented in this study was limited to a specific group of counseling students in a Midwestern private university. These results cannot be generalized beyond the study group.

Questions for Future Research

Future research is needed on all aspects of transracial adoptions and its affect on Black children. Are transracial adoptions causing psychological harm to Black children? Is there a significant difference in a Black child's self-esteem when raised by a white family than if raised by a Black family? Is there a significant difference in the amount of psychological problems in transracial adoptees and children adopted in race?

According to literature, not much is known about transracial adoption effects on adoptees (Brooks, et. al., 1997). According to Barth (1994) adoption research has fallen short of broadening its base, therefore any research on transracial adoptions could be valuable in broadening this base on which comparison can be made.

Significance

The data in this study could be used to give the faculty at the university information to examine what current students feel about the practice of adoptions. It provides information on which the faculty can examine the content of current courses and assess if this is a subject which warrants some specific consideration. The information on training should

prove useful to the faculty in assessing whether they feel the university is adequately preparing the counseling student to counsel with this type of family. This is a time when transracial adoption can be expected to increase and this study may serve useful in providing the university with the information to make an informed decision on course content. It does provide information on which to support adding a segment into one of the existing classes to cover all forms of adoptions and the possible problems these families may face.

Conclusion

Based on the results of this study and from literature, it can be seen that the majority of people when asked about transracial adoptions, respond with a positive attitude toward the practice but lack knowledge of the issues involved. The respondents did not feel they need formal training on the practice of transracial adoption.

Adoption experts have different opinions about transracial adoptions. Some say that children should always be placed with a family with at least one parent of the same race as the child. Some feel that if adoption agencies would work with Black families and be more flexible in their regulations, they could succeed in recruiting enough families for

Black children. Other experts say that race should not be considered at all when selecting a family for a child.

Despite the experts' differing opinions, there are many transracial and transcultural families, and many more will be formed (Smith, 1994). Counselors and other helping professionals should be aware of the unique challenges these families face and prepare themselves to provide help if needed.



APPENDIX A

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APPENDIX A

TO: Lindenwood Faculty
FROM: Becky Hamer
SUBJECT: Questionnaire for My Thesis

I need your help in asking your class to **complete my questionnaire on their knowledge and attitudes about transracial adoptions,**

I need to remain anonymous. Therefore, I am requesting you pass out as many of the questionnaires as your students are willing to complete, have them return the completed forms to you, and I will collect them at the end of your class period or at a time convenient to you.

Thank you.

APPENDIX A

The University of North Carolina Graduate Students' Profile
of Christian Faith

It is requested that you use your help to help us understand the needs of our students. If you have any questions, please contact the person whose help is needed.

APPENDIX B

It is requested that you use your knowledge and abilities to help us understand the needs of our students. If you have any questions, please contact the person whose help is needed.

It is requested that you use your knowledge and abilities to help us understand the needs of our students. If you have any questions, please contact the person whose help is needed.

APPENDIX B

To: Lindenwood University Graduate Students Enrolled in the
Counseling Programs

I am doing research for my thesis and could really use your help. If you are within 9 hours of completing your studies, your help is needed.

This questionnaire is intended to gather information on your knowledge and attitudes about transracial adoptions. (Transracial adoption in this study is being operationally defined and limited to white parents who adopt Black children.)

I know everyone is busy, but if you would take a few minutes to complete the questionnaire, it would be very much appreciated.

APPENDIX B

Questionnaire
Transracial Adoption

Transracial adoption is placing a child who was not raised by their
genetic and biological parents in a family of another race or ethnic group. The
questionnaire is concerned with the placement of black children in
white families.

Questions 1-5 are to be completed for national placement of
black children.

- 1. Age of child _____ Race _____
- 2. Age of adoptive parent _____
- 3. Sex of child _____

APPENDIX C

Transracial Adoption

1. Do you have any children of your own or adopted of a different race or ethnicity?

2. If you have adopted a child of a different race or ethnicity, has it been adopted by a
white family that is aware of the child's black heritage?

3. If you have adopted a child of a different race or ethnicity, is their black child or
children being taught about their black heritage as a part of the
family's religious or cultural life?

Agree _____ Disagree _____

4. Does your adopted black child aware of its own black
heritage?

Agree _____ Disagree _____

APPENDIX C
Questionnaire
Transracial Adoption

Transracial adoption means placing a child who is of one race or ethnic group with adoptive parents of another race or ethnic group. This questionnaire is concerned with the placement of black or part black children with Caucasian adoptive parents.

Questions 1 through 3 are being requested for statistical purposes only, not to be used for identification.

1. Age _____ Gender _____ Race _____
 2. Program of study/major _____
 3. Job Title _____
- Length of employment _____

Race Issues

Please indicate your response y checking agree or disagree:

1. It is very important for a black child who has been adopted by a white family to develop pride in his/her black heritage.
 Agree _____ Disagree _____
2. Adoptive white parents should allow their black child to wear clothing or hair styles that identifies them as a part of the black race, if the child so desires.
 Agree _____ Disagree _____
3. Parents should make their black child aware of the contributions of black leaders.
 Agree _____ Disagree _____

4. Counselors and other helping professionals should take courses in black history and black culture.
Agree _____ Disagree _____

Parental Role

Please indicate your response by checking yes or no.

1. Is the task that a white parent has in rearing a black child any different from the task of parents rearing a child of the same race as a parent?
Yes _____ No _____
2. Can a white parent sufficiently prepare a black child for adulthood, if given love and security?
Yes _____ No _____
3. Should white parents who adopt black children have or acquire friends who are black?
Yes _____ No _____
4. Can a black child reared by white parents develop a sense of black racial identity?
Yes _____ No _____
5. Is a white parent able to prepare a black child for living in a racist society?
Yes _____ No _____

Risks To A Successful Adoption

Indicate your response by checking agree or disagree.

1. A white family adopting a black child presents more problems than the same family adopting an American Indian or Korean child.
Agree _____ Disagree _____

2. Growing up in our current day society is as difficult for a black child in a black home as it is for a black child in a white home.
Agree _____ Disagree _____
3. White couples adopting black children need to have greater emotional maturity and more stable marriages than do couples adopting children of their own race.
Agree _____ Disagree _____
4. White couples adopting a black child should live in or move to integrated neighborhoods.
Agree _____ Disagree _____

Education Training

Please indicate your response by checking yes or no.

1. Have you taken the course: Social Cultural Foundations?
Yes _____ No _____
2. Have you taken any other course at this University which deals with counseling individuals of a different race or ethnic group other than the white majority race?
Yes _____ No _____
3. Have you attended any workshops or seminars outside of this University on counseling individuals other than the majority white race?
Yes _____ No _____
4. Have any of your studies at this University included information on transracial adoption?
Yes _____ No _____
5. Do you feel you are knowledgeable of social issues related to transracial adoption?
Yes _____ No _____

6. Do you know any white parents who have adopted a black child?
Yes _____ No _____
7. Do you feel your studies at this University have prepared you to counsel with white families who adopt black children?
Yes _____ No _____
8. If a course on transracial adoption were to be offered at this University, would you voluntarily enroll?
Yes _____ No _____
9. Should more specific training be required in this University's counseling program on all types of adoption?
Yes _____ No _____

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