Between Two Worlds: A Phenomenological Exploration of Experiences and Understandings Related to Race for Black Transracially Adopted Emerging Adults

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BETWEEN TWO WORLDS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF EXPERIENCES AND UNDERSTANDINGS RELATED TO RACE FOR BLACK TRANSRACIALLY ADOPTED EMERGING ADULTS

by

Kyrai Antares

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology Western Michigan University August 2020

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BETWEEN TWO WORLDS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF EXPERIENCES AND UNDERSTANDINGS RELATED TO RACE FOR BLACK TRANSRACIALLY ADOPTED EMERGING ADULTS

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The current study provides a rich description of experiences and understandings related to race for transracially adopted Black emerging adults who were raised in Michigan or Ohio by White parents. Current adoption policy requires that race not be considered as a factor in foster and adoptive placements, and there is no required multicultural, race-focused training for White adoptive parents of children of color. This study begins a new line of research looking closely at the stories of transracial adoptees of a specific age group, racial identity, and geographical location of upbringing. The intention is to gain a better understanding of the experiences and understandings related to race for transracial adoptees, the racial socialization that is given to adoptees by White parents, and the influence of childhood and adolescent conditions on the development of racial understandings and identity for adoptees.

This study is a hermeneutic phenomenology, focused on the stories of nine participants told through in-depth interviews and digital journal entries. A focus on maintaining participant voices throughout the project was paramount, and true to the hermeneutic phenomenological research method. The lens of the white racial frame was applied to results in order to give context to racialized experiences for transracial adoptees. Nine participants contributed their stories to this study through journal entries, in-depth interviews, and member checking interviews. Participants were between the ages of 18 and 28, identified as Black/African American or Biracial with Black parentage, were adopted and raised by White parents, and were
raised in Michigan or Ohio. Seven themes emerged from the data: (a) Memories and Reflections: The Uniqueness of Growing up Transracially Adopted, (b) Race Mattered (Identity), (c) Between Two Worlds, (d) Growth in Black Identity, (e) Views of Family Related to Race, (f) The Political is Personal, and (g) This Is Me. Each theme is expanded upon by two to three subthemes.

The phenomenon of experiences and understandings of race for transracially adopted emerging adults reflects and expands previous research on transracial adoption, addressing common TRA topics like self-esteem, adjustment, and racial identity, and also adding information about group identity development and the relevance of racial politics for participants. Results of the current study provide personal narratives of adoptees that show the salience of race throughout childhood and into emerging adulthood. The richness of the description of participant experiences and understandings of race offer information that informs adoptive practice, training, and policy, as well as transracial adoptive parenting. Results also inspire implications for research and counseling psychology practice related to transracial adoption. This narrowly-focused study brings the voices of a specific group of Black transracially adopted emerging adults into the TRA research conversation, and shows the importance of participant-driven narratives. Moving forward, such narratives will ideally become influential guideposts in adoption policy and practice.
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We are woven through these words and pages. “Only one mountain can know the core of another mountain.” ~Frida Kahlo

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Transracial adoption (TRA) has been a controversial issue in the United States for many decades (Barn, 2013; Feigelman, 2000). Transracial adoption occurs when infants or children are adopted by parents of a different race (Baden & Steward, 2007a). It is estimated that 2.5 percent of households in the United States include adopted children (Samuels, 2009; Smith et al., 2011), and approximately 40 percent of those adoptions are transracial (Leslie, Smith, & Hrapczynski, 2013). Domestic transracial adoption describes adoptions that take place within a country, whereas international adoption refers to those that occur between countries. According to the National Survey of Adopted Parents (NSAP), an estimated 54.5 percent of transracial adoptions are international, with the remaining split between approximately 25 percent domestic transracial adoptions from the foster-care system, and 20 percent are private domestic transracial adoptions (Smith, Jacobson, & Juarez, 2011).

Transracial adoption brings the complexities of wider societal race relations into a family. In an ideal world, differing racial backgrounds within a family might not have associated risks, but instead might be embraced as an opportunity for the entire family to grow toward a truly multicultural existence, rich with acceptance and understanding. However, our world is not ideal. Racism is a real and persistent component of our world. Even in the face of agreement among scientific and psychological professional communities that race is a social construction, and not a genetic or biological reality, racism persists (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Because of our shared history related to race in the United States, there are continued psychological, emotional, and practical results of that history. All citizens live a racialized existence, even if on an unconscious level, simply because racism is an ever-present thread through the history of the
country, leaving psychological impressions, and emotional responses. Perhaps most pervasive is the common associations of skin color to stereotypical assumptions about people (Feagin, 2010). Racism is a context in which everyone in United States culture is steeped. It is “normal,” and therefore, a default (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The societal issues that exist related to race in the United States and in the world come into the family in the case of transracial adoption, on both conscious and unconscious levels. With this in mind, it is imperative to provide extensive training to potential transracial adoptive parents, including intense confrontation of biases, the deconstruction or breaking down of unconscious conditioning around race, and parental socialization practices related to race.

Interestingly, race-focused awareness and skills training for transracially adopting parents is not required. In fact, widely accepted interpretations of the Multiethnic Placement Acts (passed in 1994 and amended in 1996) assert that requiring race-focused training would be in violation of the law, because the act prohibits the consideration of a child’s race, ethnicity or national origin in foster and adoptive placements (McRoy & Griffin, 2012). This act follows the tradition of the fourteenth amendment, which does not allow racial classifications to be used unless strong public policy reasons can be given to support such classifications (Park & Green, 2000). According to those making decisions related to adoption law, influential enough research support rooted in the experiences of transracially adopted child outcomes related to race does not yet exist. This stance is in opposition to the National Association of Black Social Workers, as well as many scholars of transracial adoption issues (Park & Green, 2000; Samuels, 2009). As discussed in more detail in the literature review that follows, there has been criticism of transracial adoption research that followed the Multiethnic Placement Act. For example, some studies interview parents to learn about the adjustment of their children, rather than interviewing
the children themselves (Lee, 2003). In addition, there are many different constructs being examined in order to measure adjustment (Lee, 2003). Self-esteem (an individual characteristic) is often measured in quantitative studies, but there is rarely any examination of group identity, which is a salient aspect of living as a racial minority (Taylor & Thornton, 1996). In addition, international and domestic transracial adoptions are often combined in samples (Lee, 2003).

John Raible (2006)—an adult, Biracial, transracial adoptee and scholar on transracial adoption—asserts that too many adoptive parents remain unprepared to address important and unavoidable issues with their children: racial identity development, antiracism advocacy skills, and cultural awareness. Indeed, in a study of 81 private and public agencies handling transracial adoptions, Vonk and Angaran (2003) found that cultural competence training of any kind was provided only approximately 50 percent of the time. It was not discussed whether training related to racial/cultural awareness included training in understanding whiteness, white supremacy, systemic racism, or white racial identity development, topics that are critical for White persons to address. In addition, Vonk and Angaran found that for the most part, training was provided by employees of the agency, and the trainers were usually White females. While it is a strength that some cultural competence training is given to adoptive parents, approximately half of transracial adoptive parents still receive no guidance or training by adoption professionals related to race as they go through the process of adoption. It is unclear, as well, what the trainings that do happen teach about race and cultural awareness, and from what theoretical perspective the training comes. Hence, of the 50 percent of agencies in the Vonk and Angaran study that provide some form of cultural competence training, it is still completely unclear how adoptive parents are being engaged with the topic of race and cultural competence.
The absence of formal training specifically focused on race is a salient issue in transracial adoption because White parents do not, by default, have the experiential instruction that comes with living with daily racism and discrimination (Raible, 2006; Vonk, 2001). In addition, White parents have the choice, due to their racially privileged status, whether to grow in racial awareness and racial identity (Taylor & Thorton, 1996). White parents are largely unexposed to diverse perspectives (Raible, 2006). Research suggests that transracial adoptees tend to grow up in predominantly White environments, and rarely have interracial contact (Langreher, Thomas, & Morgan, 2016; Smith, Jacobson, & Juárez, 2011). Therefore, the question remains whether White parents could possibly provide the racial socialization needed to prepare Black children for adult life in a racialized society like the United States (Langreher, Thomas, & Morgan, 2016; Samuels, 2009).

A consistently found aspect of racial socialization within Black families is preparation for bias (Hughes, Rodriguez, Smith, Johnson, Stevenson, & Spicer, 2006). Black families dealing with discrimination on a daily basis understand the importance of preparing their children for the world in which they will live. Without this aspect of racial socialization, transracially adopted children of color may reach adulthood still unprepared, psychologically and emotionally, to handle the realities they will inevitably face as people of color in the United States (Raible, 2006). Encounters with discrimination and prejudice will likely occur as these children grow into independent adults and leave the family home. McRoy and Grape (1999) found that participants in their qualitative study focused on skin color in adoption began having more of these encounters with discrimination and prejudice during college, which in turn spurred a new phase of identity exploration and development. As emerging adults, they will have to navigate
situations in which they are seen through a lens of negative stereotypes, and have to disprove assumptions of professors, peers, police, teammates, bosses, etc.

Raible’s (2006) position is further supported by several transracial adoption studies. For example, in a qualitative study consisting of interviews with 25 multiracial transracial adoptees focused on the experience of being raised by White people, the following themes emerged: (a) the centrality yet absence of racial resemblance, (b) navigating discordant parent-child racial experiences, and (c) managing societal perceptions of transracial adoption (Samuels, 2009). These themes are related to racial difference, pointing to the importance of comprehensive racial awareness training for transracially adoptive parents and the undeniable presence of racializing experiences for transracial adoptees. Such a training would have to include an intentional explanation of whiteness and white racial identity, thorough instruction on systemic racism, narratives of adoptees and parents from which to learn, specific instruction on handling instances of discrimination and racism, the importance of building the counter-narrative of anti-racism, the importance of consistent, close relationships with people of color, and what it means to become a multiracial family. The statements made by adoptees in Samuels’ (2009) study were extremely telling in this regard. One adoptee poignantly stated, “Even though your family’s there with you, you’re still always alone” (p. 87). Another participant stated, “They can only teach me what it means to be like them” (p. 88). For biracial participants, it was unshared Black heritage that was salient, rather than shared White heritage (Samuels, 2009). One participant stated:

You know my parents never discussed race with me. EVER. I think they felt that if they ignored my ethnicity, it would kind of go away. And a lot of other kids would ask me questions. But by the time I was 10, the questions turned into insults (p. 87).
Due to lack of training and the largely unconscious nature of White racial socialization, racial socialization practices of White parents with Black children are, by default, largely derived from familial and systemically informed belief systems of the parents. Parents serve as interpreters of the social structure in which the family lives, and provide a buffer between children and the society (Taylor & Thornton, 1996). The interpretation of social structure by White parents is, by default, rooted in whiteness. Whiteness is a cultural identity or a position in society that entails unearned structural advantage (Twine & Steinbugler, 2006). In other words, Whiteness is the lens through which White people are conditioned to see the world. Whiteness is, in general, a societal lens not in alignment with the experiences of Black and Biracial Black children. Feagin (2011) points to the presence of what he terms the white racial frame (an old and continuing racial framing of U.S. society) in transracial adoptive parenting. He states that the parents interviewed in a 2011 study of TRA parents (Smith, Jacobson, & Juárez, 2011) regularly think, act, and interact out of the white racial frame. For example, the parents interviewed regularly spoke of discrimination and racism only as personal prejudice, excluding the recognition of the reality of racial oppression as institutionalized and foundational in the U.S. (Feagin). Smith et al. (2011) point specifically to race lessons from White parents that are rooted in the white racial frame: (a) Caretaking of Whites: We can choose to educate them, (b) Celebrating diversity: Be proud of where you come from, (c) Getting along with Whites: Have a peaceful heart. A closer examination of these lessons and their meaning follows in the literature review.

White TRA parents also tend to function from one of several paradigms regarding racial socialization practices: (a) cultural assimilation, (b) enculturation, (c) inculcation, and (d) child choice (Lee, 2003). Cultural assimilation is the choice to employ parenting behaviors that
downplay the racialized experiences of children and the acculturation of children into the majority (White) culture. This paradigm most commonly results in adoptees coming to identify more strongly with the majority culture than with their birth culture. This paradigm is born of the white racial frame in that the default in these families is whiteness, without regard for the importance of the adoptees’ heritage. Enculturation involves White parents making an effort to teach their adopted children about their birth cultures, and instill knowledge and pride through cultural education and experiences. This paradigm sometimes results in adoptees identifying in a bicultural or fluid way, to incorporate both birth and adoptive cultures. Racial inculcation is a paradigm about which there is little empirical research. It involves parents teaching their children to deal effectively with racism and discrimination. It is an acknowledgement of the white racial frame and systemic racism, and a taking of responsibility for preparing children of color to live in a racialized society. Transracial adoptive parental belief in racial inculcation has been found to predict whether parents talked to their children about discrimination and racism in school (Lee, 2003).

Child choice is the fourth paradigm for TRA parents. It involves giving children the choice of how to identify racially and culturally. DeBerry, Scarr, and Weinberg’s (1996) study shows that White parents often share culturally educational experiences with their Black children initially, but that this effort trails off as the child approaches adolescence, and the parents become more ambivalent. The criticism of this socialization approach is that the responsibility for how to be raised in relation to race is left to the child. If children sense their parents’ ambivalence, they might suppress their own interest in their birth cultures (Lee). This approach also gives parents a way to avoid dealing with their own racial identities, and a way to ignore the needs of their children in terms of preparation for discrimination. There is some parallel and
some difference between these paradigms and four orientations toward approaching communication about ‘race’ within multiracial families identified by Orbe (1999): (a) Embracing the Black experience, (b) assuming a commonsense approach, (c) advocating a color-blind society, and (d) affirming the multiethnic experience. The TRA family is one type of multiracial family, and these four communication styles overlap some with Lee’s (2003) identified TRA approaches to racial socialization. These communication styles and racial socialization approaches will be discussed at greater length in chapter two.

Identified race lessons, transracial adoptive parental paradigms for racial socialization, and communication about race reflect some common themes present within transracially adoptive families. The years spent with the family, and in the home, are the main influence on a transracially adopted child. Therefore, the chosen parenting paradigm and racial communication approach have an influence on how a Black transracially adopted child meets the world. Baden and Steward (2007b) acknowledge the importance of the parent either affirming or discounting their adopted child’s racial and cultural identity, and how this choice influences the identity development process for adoptees. Research has shown that White people who adopt transracially, both domestically and internationally, most often raise their children in predominantly White spaces (Barn, 2013; Lee, 2003; Smith et al, 2011). Therefore, it is important to investigate how living in predominantly White environments and receiving race lessons from White parents (and important others, i.e., teachers, religious leaders) might influence transracial adoptees into adulthood, as they leave the protective buffers of the White nuclear adoptive family of their childhood (Raible, 2006). Smith et al. (2011) define race lessons as race-based messages, beliefs about Blackness and Whiteness, rules, standards, statements, or expectations about race and how to cope with matters of racism. How might racialized
experiences be understood, interpreted, internalized, and/or processed? Some of the available literature focused on transracial adoption consists of interviews of parents, not adoptees (Barn, 2013; Lee, 2003). Studies have been conducted on adoptees’ adjustment, educational outcomes, and racial identity. However, these constructs give only a small window into the experience of being a transracially adopted person in the United States. In addition, the studies that do include adoptees often have samples of children or teens, not emerging adults (Shireman & Johnson, 1986; Simon & Alstein, 1995). Because an emerging adult faces a greater level of independence, which includes more unprotected interaction with the adult world, the voices of Black emerging adult transracial adoptees may provide a picture of the perspective that grows from being a Black emerging adult who was raised by White parents. In addition, there are very few studies that investigate transracially adopted adults’ retrospective views of their childhood in terms of preparation for the racialized world to be experienced in adulthood. Raible (2006) calls for such research, noting that adoptees are often conceptualized as perpetual children, and that it is vital to consider how adult adoptees are experiencing race.

**Purpose of Study**

This study seeks to add to the transracial adoption literature through an examination of US born, domestically adopted, self-identified Black or African American (including Biracial with Black/African American parentage), transracially adopted, emerging adults’ understanding of everyday experiences related to race, and how that understanding relates to the influential race lessons (as defined by Smith et al., 2011, previously), racial socialization practices, and communication approaches employed by White parents during childhood. The reason for this examination is to provide a greater understanding of the salience of race for domestically adopted transracial adoptees, and what, if anything, are common needs regarding race and racial
socialization in childhood. Gaining insight from the perspectives of Black emerging adult adoptees based on their understanding of experiences related to race will add to the literature by providing a clearer understanding of the relationship between socialization related to race in childhood and the processing of experiences related to race in emerging adulthood. The specific focus of this study will add to the understanding of a certain cohort at a certain time in history. This cohort would be people born between the years of 1982 or 1983 and 1999 or 2000. Technically, this would place the target population in the category of “Millennials,” who are those born between 1980 and 2000, and are the first generation to come of age in the new millennium (Pew Research Center, 2017).

The remainder of this chapter provides descriptions of important concepts (race, ethnicity, culture, racialization) and use of terminology. This information is included with the intention of implementing a language with an established shared meaning. A description of the chosen theoretical lens informing the researcher is provided in order to acknowledge the paradigm through which this research project will be viewed. This is important because of the many ways in which race and racism can be conceptualized and understood. The researcher’s theoretical lens helps to describe the intention of and inspiration for this study. Lastly, a brief orientation to the literature review that follows is provided.

**Description of Concepts**

Transracial adoption involves the intertwining of differing races and cultures, and thus intersects with the complex issues surrounding race (Kirton, 2000). Race, ethnicity, and culture are terms used to describe and categorize people. Racialization is a process that occurs when race is ascribed meaning in a society. Because of the layers of meaning associated with these
words, and the different ways these words are used by people, it is important to describe my working understanding of these concepts in the current study.

**Race**

*Race* is a term with varying definitions and conceptualizations in academic literature. Baden and Steward (2007a) explain that race has been commonly understood as heritage with a group based on geography and a common set of physical characteristics such as skin color, hair texture/color, and facial features. However, Baden and Steward acknowledge that such a definition reifies race as though it has a biological basis, so they refer to race as a social construction rather than a scientific classification. Kirton (2000) states that the existence of race in any scientific, biological or genetic sense has been widely discredited. Dennis (1995) explains that genetically, more variation is found among people of the same race than people of differing racial categories. Even while race does not have any genetic or biological basis, it is an important socially and legally constructed system of meaning in our society (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). This system affects identity formation and life experience (Samuels, 2009). In other words, for people of color, race is very real, because it is an idea that is widely shared, and this idea influences how people are treated. Even though there is no genetic basis for this societal reality of race, it is felt as a real phenomenon, and, therefore, must be considered.

**Racialization**

Racialization is a term that has been used in academic literature as an attempt to move further from the concept of race as a genetic reality, and, instead, switch attention to the processes through which ideas about race originate and develop historically (Kirton, 2000). Racialization is the act of making race appear real. Kirton cites the European racialization of Africans as the most powerful example of entire groups being racialized and treated collectively
as a race. The historical roots and current effects of racialization are relevant within the topic of transracial adoption. As McRoy and Grape (1999) state, there are aspects of socially imposed racial categories that must be addressed: (a) differences in racial socialization experiences, (b) socially recognized phenotypical characteristics that cause people to classify other people as certain races, and (c) racial identity formation, or the process of coming to understand one’s own identity as a person of a certain race, both personally and as part of a group. Kirton (2000) reminds us that we resist the consequence of racial thinking, and yet we are forced to accept its importance.

As Samuels (2009) states, the racialized social and political history of the United States is inextricably intertwined with the history of adoption in the United States. Indeed, Black children and their White parents cannot escape being racialized since their life stories take place within a racialized society. In the literature review that follows, a discussion of important historical events that have contributed to the complexities of transracial adoption is included.

**Ethnicity**

*Ethnicity* is a term commonly referred to as a group of people sharing a common culture, religion, language or nationality (Hughes et al., 2006). Baden and Steward (2007a) state that ethnicity includes values, customs, and ancestry. Kirton (2000) describes ethnicity as pertaining to a shared common descent and cultural heritage (language, religion, customs, values, etc.). Some aspects of ethnicity can overlap with aspects of race and culture. Therefore, distinguishing racial, ethnic and cultural socialization can be confusing (Hughes et al., 2006).

Baden and Steward (2007a) point out some problems with the term ethnicity in relation to transracial adoption:
Ethnicity bridges aspects of both race and culture, but does not allow for clear distinctions between them. Furthermore, use solely of the term ethnicity can be problematic given the ease with which individuals may choose to use the term ethnicity as an excuse to focus on the more familiar and less threatening concepts of culture and cultural activities as opposed to the very important, sometimes uncomfortable, and clearly socially constructed meanings that accompany race. (p. 93)

Baden and Steward (2007a) recommend the use of the terms race and culture in transracial adoption research, with the justification that these terms maintain the distinctions that they find vital to understanding the lived experience of transracial adoptees. In this way, the realities of a racialized world classifying people as belonging to certain racial groups, as well as personal cultural practices can be distinguished and included.

**Culture**

*Culture* is referred to as traditions, history, beliefs, practices, and values (Baden & Stewart, 2007). These are passed down over generations in both explicit and implicit ways. Culture has also been used in reference to expressions of tradition: festivals, food, rituals, or styles of dress. Culture is an important concept in relation to transracial adoption in that there can be contradicting identities in transracial adoptees. For example, a transracially adopted child may have a phenotypical appearance consistent with a socially designated (and perhaps personally claimed) Black racial identity, but, because of the home, community, and school environments, might engage in cultural practices more consistent with a White cultural identity (Baden & Steward, 2007b). This points to Lee’s (2003) assertion that transracial adoptees are seen as racial minorities in society, but are sometimes perceived (by others and themselves) as members of majority culture due to adoption into a White family.
Use of Terminology

For the purposes of this review, the focus will be on race and culture, as well as racial and cultural socialization. The choice to focus on these terms and concepts is related to the historical and theoretical links between transracial adoption, race, and culture in the United States, which will be explored further in the following section covering the history of domestic TRA. Specifically, the focus will be on Black/White dynamics in TRA.

In this document, the term *White* will be used to refer to transracial adoptive parents who are of European/Caucasian descent, and the term *Black* will be used to refer to domestically adopted, US born, transracial adoptees who identify as Black, African American, or Biracial with Black parentage. Transracially adopted children may have several intersecting identities that are relevant to their development, and adoptive parents might also claim intersecting identities that affect parenting practices. However, racial and cultural identities will be the focus of this study. This focus is not meant to dismiss the presence of other possible identities, but to intentionally bring emphasis to issues centered on race and culture in transracial adoption. The term ethnicity will be avoided when possible, due to the potentially confusing overlap with race and culture described above. The term *racialized* will be used to describe the process of one’s race becoming salient. For example, incidentally, when a transracial adoptee experiences being negatively stereotyped as a Black person in the United States, they are experiencing racialization; their race is suddenly an important factor in the situation.

Theoretical Lens: The White Racial Frame

This study incorporates the theoretical lens of the white racial frame, developed by Feagin (2010, 2013) as a way to understand systemic racism, its historic roots, and its contemporary form. This model will be a framework through which to view adoptee experiences
related to race, patterns in race lessons provided by White parents, and parental race paradigms. This section describes the theoretical lens and briefly discusses a qualitative study conducted on transracial adoption that incorporates the white racial frame explicitly. This description is included because the lens of the white racial frame will inform the review of literature that follows.

Systemic racism refers to the foundational presence of racism within the United States; specifically, within its systems of government, economics, land ownership, housing, education, health care, criminal justice, and employment. The foundational presence of racism began with the intentional extermination and removal of people indigenous to North America, and continued with the forced enslavement of Africans to be used as free labor in the United States (DiAngelo, 2016). These major components of United States history began an infusion of racialization and inequality into the laws and customs that formed the country, and continue to be followed contemporarily. The existence of systemic racism causes racism to be a default presence in the United States (considered “normal), overtly and implicitly affecting everyone through positions of hierarchical power based on skin color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Systemic racism is described by Feagin (2010) as including a wide assortment of practices that are racist: (a) unjustly gained economic and political power of White people, (b) continuing resource inequalities, (c) the rationalizing white-racist frame, and (d) major institutions created to preserve White advantage and power.

The white racial frame (Feagin, 2010; 2013) is a model explaining and describing systemic racism. The white racial frame outlines the historical building blocks and lasting systemic constructs that maintain and perpetuate White supremacy and racism in United States culture. The white racial frame is a conditioned conceptual map that influences cognition, and
filters out ideas and experiences that do not fit (Smith, Juárez, & Jacobson, 2011). Feagin (2013) describes the white racial frame as an organized set of racialized ideas, stereotypes, emotions, and inclinations to discrimination that are passed down from generation to generation both explicitly and implicitly. This frame is especially persistent because it is embedded deeply in United States social structure. The white racial frame is recognizable across layers of society from the personal to the systemic. It includes individual bias, but it is also a multifaceted and multilayered system into which we are all born and socialized in the United States. For example, even if a person does not use racial slurs, somehow that person is aware of the commonly and historically used racial slurs and negative stereotypes about different racial groups in the United States. This shows how even without explicit instruction; the white racial frame and the result of that frame are programmed into the minds of people. It is especially important to consider that on an unconscious level, White people in power are influenced by negative stereotypes held societally, and this influences hiring decisions, mortgage approvals, admissions choices, and other daily interactions that impact major life arenas.

Viewing transracial adoption within the context of the white racial frame and systemic racism, the controversy about transracial adoption can be seen as a byproduct of a systemically racist society. To see the systemic context, White people must engage in a critical examination of the racially oppressive society created by ancestors and perpetuated into contemporary times (Feagin, 2010). Because of the unique, historically rooted, dehumanizing racial framing of Black Americans that began with the enslavement of African people for labor in the North American colonies, the modern-day experiences of Black Americans are tied to that specific history and the framing used to justify slavery. Likewise, the modern-day experiences of White Americans are tied to the specific history and framing of White people as the “owners” of other
human beings. Because of these unique historical facts, Black transracial adoptees should be considered as a unique population, and not grouped with other racial minorities. While all racial minorities are positioned below White people on the racial hierarchy in the United States, the Black experience in America is not the same as the Native American, Latina/o, Asian American, or Arab American experience. One can see that the disproportionate number of Black children in the foster care system awaiting adoption (Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2008; Lee, 2003), the lack of recruitment of Black adoptive families (Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2008; McRoy & Griffin, 2012), and the fact that most foster care workers in charge of decisions about child removal and family preservation are White women (Barn, 2013). These facts are a reflection of the racialized power differential that weaves through all United States institutions.

As with any systemic influence, the conditioned “normal” of racism trickles down to the personal and familial level. Transracial adoptive families tend to live in mostly White neighborhoods, and transracial adoptive parents tend to send their adopted children of color to mostly White schools (Barn, 2013; Lee, 2000; Smith et al., 2011). At the same time, several White parents in Smith et al.’s (2011) stated that they intended to teach their Black children about racism and their Black heritage. Even so, a range of awareness related to patterns associated with whiteness have been found to be present among White transracial adoptive parents. For example, Smith, et al. found that the White transracial adoptive parents they interviewed possessed racial knowledge of a particular type, and used that knowledge to make sense of the world around them, and to parent their Black children. This knowledge then became the frame provided to Black children through which they were expected to understand their experiences around race. Two White mothers used their racial knowledge to decide that the negative statements made by their Black children about White people were inappropriate and
should be discouraged. This parental response echoes identified common components of the white racial frame that make it difficult for White people to see racism: (a) entitlement to cross-racial trust, (b) individualism and (c) racial arrogance (DiAngelo, 2016). Individual adoptive parents do not invent the racial knowledge. It is taken from the larger society that is rooted and steeped in systemic racism. This knowledge is absorbed and performed in relationships between White adoptive parents and their Black children (Smith, et al.).

The theoretical lens of the white racial frame provides a way to examine transracial adoption within the historically rooted social context in the United States. After all, if racism were not a primary social context in the United States, transracial adoption would not be a focus of study, research, and social inquiry. As Baden and Steward (2007a) remind us, transracial adoption has been referred to as cultural genocide by African American and American Indian organizations, and by developing countries from which White American people have adopted many children. The systemic lens acknowledges that we are all a product of a racialized society, and that the first step toward being able to transcend or alter that paradigm is to become aware of its constant and pervasive presence.

Orientation to Literature Review

In the literature review chapter, the historical context of transracial adoption is described. In addition, a critical review of transracial adoption literature follows. This critical review includes sections examining literature related to adoptive identity development, adjustment, self-esteem, and racial identity – all of which have been considered important factors for transracial adoptees in the past. Racial socialization is addressed as well, because of the strong influence of parents on racial identity development and understandings of race. Because this study focuses
on Black transracially adopted emerging adults, also included is a review of literature examining the Black emerging adult experience for those who have not been transracially adopted.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

This study examines how Black emerging adults understand their experiences related to race, and how prepared Black transracially adopted emerging adults feel for life as Black people in a racialized society. The following review of transracial adoption literature contains two sections. The first provides an illustration of the systemic and historical context in which the lives of Black, transracially adopted emerging adults are situated. A history of domestic transracial adoption in the United States, as well as a description of the controversy surrounding domestic transracial adoption is provided. Historical and contemporary adoption policy changes are also discussed.

The second section provides a critical review of existing empirical transracial adoption literature. Commonly held concerns about transracially adopted children that have been studied are reviewed, including adoptive identity, adjustment, self-esteem and racial identity. Black transracial adoptees who are emerging adults will have been influenced by their parents in terms of how they understand their experiences related to race. Much information is available about the common ways Black parents prepare and teach their children regarding race. Some is known about the common ways in which White parents teach their White children about race. Literature exploring parental socialization and racial socialization practices is also reviewed, including White socialization practices among White parents with White children, Black socialization practices among Black parents raising Black children, and White parent socialization practices in transracial adoption. Because this study focuses on Black transracially adopted emerging adults, also included is a review of literature examining the Black emerging adult experience for those who have not been transracially adopted. This section provides a
potential peer comparison with transracially adopted Black emerging adults’ experiences that may or may not contrast.

**Historical Context of Domestic Transracial Adoption in the United States**

Adoption agencies were created in the 1920s to serve White couples seeking to adopt healthy, White infants (McRoy & Griffin, 2012). Official domestic adoption of Black children by White parents began as early as 1939, but was extremely rare (Massati, Vonk, & Gregoire, 2008; Herman, 2008). Most adoptions among Black adoptive parents and Black children occurred informally, among family and friends, and were termed “fictive kin” (McRoy & Griffin, 2012, p. 39). This is because until the 1960s, Black parents were more likely to be offered foster care than adoptive placements (McRoy & Griffin, 2012). When adoption services were extended to Black children, they were strictly segregated with race matching practices (Herman, 2008). Race matching policies resulted in Black children waiting in foster care longer than White children. There were fewer available Black adoptive parents, in part because of racial discrimination during the adoption approval process. Due to systemic racism, another aspect of this lack of Black adoptive parents was a general lack of resources, employment, and assets for Black families compared to White families. Most agency adoption workers were White. Also, there was an absence of training for placement workers in recruitment and retention of Black adoptive families (McRoy & Griffin, 2012).

The Indian Adoption Project (1958-1967) marked the first large scale movement in transracial adoption (Baden & Steward, 2007b). During the Indian Adoption Project, 395 Native American children were placed with White, mainstream families. The program’s director, Arnold Lyslo, declared the program to be proof of a decrease in racial prejudice (Herman, 2008). During the same period in US history, the US Children’s Bureau began including race in their
adoption reports. This change spurred awareness of the 50,000 Black children in need of adoption in 1950. The National Urban League Foster Care and Adoptions Project, and Adopt-A-Child were both founded in the 1950s. People working within these organizations began promoting adoptions of Black children nationally. Adopt-a-Child workers placed more than 800 children before running out of money five years after the program’s inception (Herman).

Prior to the 1960s, racial matching of adoptive parents and children was emphasized in order to decrease the differences between families formed by adoption and birth (McRoy & Zurcher, 1983). However, “by the 1960s and 1970s, with the availability of effective contraception, legal abortion and increased social acceptability of single parents raising children, adoption agencies faced a dramatic decrease in the number of healthy White infants available for adoption” (McRoy & Griffin, 2012, p. 39). There was a growing over-representation of Black children in foster care, and some adoption agencies began to see transracial adoptive placements as a viable solution (Taylor & Thornton, 1996). The social climate of the Civil Rights Movement, and the efforts of some to move away from racial segregation also influenced adoption agencies to increase transracial adoptions (Herman, 2008). Continuing this trend, other social organizations began promoting transracial adoptions. For example, during the 1960s, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the National Urban League called for the consideration of transracial adoption (McRoy & Griffin, 2012). Transracial adoptions were also promoted by a movement toward permanency as a primary goal within foster care and adoption. This meant that a child being placed permanently in an adoptive home was favored over children drifting in the foster care system. Therefore, if a greater number of White adoptive families were readily available (for a myriad reasons), transracial adoptions were seen as a positive move toward permanency for children (Kirton, 2000).
Controversy Surrounding Transracial Adoption

The increase in transracial adoptions was met with opposition from both White and Black professional communities, and began a long-standing controversy. In 1958, the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) stated that children would integrate more easily into a community if they shared racial characteristics with their adoptive families. The CWLA changed their position in 1968, stating that there did exist families capable of providing a home to a child of a differing racial background, and that this option should be considered (McRoy & Griffin, 2012). In 1972, the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) passed a resolution strongly protesting domestic TRA and concluding the following: “Only a Black family can transmit the emotional and sensitive subtleties of perceptions and reactions essential for a Black child’s survival in a racist society” (p. 2-3). The NABSW also refuted claims that Black families would not adopt, asserting that the obstacles in the adoption process have always served the intentional purpose of screening out Black adoptive families (1972). One year following the NABSW’s statement, the CWLA changed its position once again, stating that same-race placements were preferable to facilitate family and community integration (McRoy & Griffin, 2012). While this debate was taking place, opposition to the transracial adoption of American Indian children gained momentum. In 1978, the Indian Child Welfare Act was passed, which was designed to reverse the practice of removing Native American children from their families and tribes, and begin promoting stability of Indian tribes and families by keeping children with families of their own heritage (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute; Lee, 2003). The Indian Child Welfare Act made it extremely difficult for Native American children to be adopted by non-native parents (Herman, 2008).
The success of the Indian Child Welfare Act renewed a focus on finding same-race adoptive parents for Black children (McRoy & Griffin, 2012). The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act was passed in 1980 and implemented in 1981. The act required agencies to work toward birth family reunification for children in foster care. It also provided economic assistance to adoptive families of children with special needs. Black children were often included in the special needs category (Hollingsworth, 1998; McRoy & Griffin, 2012).

Other factors besides legislation seemed to be influencing the disproportionate number of Black children in care. For example, many agencies continued using race-matching policies when looking for adoptive homes, but there was a low rate of approval of Black adoptive families. In addition, there were powerful special interest groups representing White families who wanted to adopt infants (McRoy, 1999). For Black families, high adoption fees were a barrier, as well as difficult selection criteria, like adoptive mothers not being able to work outside the home (McRoy).

Several organizations gradually began to take on stances that favored same-race adoptions, but supported transracial adoption as an option when a same-race family was not available. The North American Council on Adoptable Children and the National Committee for Adoption issued statements supporting transracial adoption in the event of a same-race placement being unavailable in 1981 and 1985, respectively (McRoy, 1999). The NABSW also eventually altered their stance to state that same-race adoption was preferred, but transracial adoption should be considered under certain circumstances (McRoy & Griffin, 2012).

**Adoption Policy Changes**

In 1994, the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) was passed, which “prohibited the denial of a placement ‘solely’ based on race, but allowed for the consideration of the child’s
cultural, ethnic, or racial background and the capacity of the prospective foster parents to meet such needs” (McRoy & Griffin, 2012, p. 41). The new act took effect in October of 1995 (Hollingsworth, 1998). The intention behind the new law was to address concerns that race-matching was preventing the placement of Black children in adoptive homes (McRoy & Griffin). The passing of this law was related to White foster families engaging in court battles over race-matching policies preventing them from adopting their Black foster children. These parents argued they were being discriminated against because they were White, and that race-matching was not in the best interest of a child if it was preventing permanence with families who have been long-term foster parents to that child (Jennings, 2006). In 1996, there was an amendment to the act, the Interethnic Adoption Provisions (IEP). This amendment changed the language of the law so that agencies were prohibited from considering race in decisions about placements. This new law was controversial because it made same-race placement irrelevant in agency decisions on adoptions. Written into the legislation is a requirement for agencies to recruit diverse foster and adoptive parents. However, agencies are also required to enact “colorblind” adoption policies (McRoy & Griffin, 2012).

In an attempt to assess the effectiveness of MEPA and IEP, the US Civil Rights Commission launched an examination in 2007. The examination considered whether MEPA effectively (a) removes barriers preventing permanent placement of children, (b) decreases amount of time in foster care prior to permanency, and (c) actively recruits diverse foster and adoptive parents. In addition, the investigation looked into the effects of transracial adoption on children’s development. A report entitled, *The Multiethnic Placement Act: Minority children in state foster care and adoption*, was generated to explain the results of the examination (McRoy & Griffin, 2012). Those writing the report concluded that MEPA had failed to remove barriers
to permanency for Black children awaiting adoption (Evan B. Donaldson Institute, 2008). While there has been an increase in the rate of transracial adoptions, there is still a disproportionate number of Black children waiting for adoption (McRoy & Griffin, 2012). Another conclusion after the examination of MEPA was that there has been no improvement in the amount of time spent waiting in foster care. In fact, Black children spend an average of nine months longer in care than White children (US Government Accountability Office, 2007). One negative outcome of MEPA is that because agencies are required to follow “colorblind” procedures, some agencies stopped requiring multicultural training (which is training potentially including, but not specifically focused on race) as a part of the process of preparing parents for transracial adoption. Agencies have expressed fear of being found in violation, and losing federal funding, for placing emphasis on race in the placement process (Evan B Donaldson Institute; McRoy & Griffin, 2012). This interpretation of the law is not completely accurate. Multicultural training, which could include training related to race, is permitted, if it is given to all foster and adoptive parents going through the agency, regardless of the race of the child(ren) being fostered or adopted (McRoy & Griffin, 2012). Multicultural training, while sometimes offered to families going through the process of transracial adoption, is not a requirement by law. In addition, the term “multicultural training” is quite vague in that it might be an umbrella term that includes race, but could also include topics of ability, gender, and sexual orientation. In a survey of a random sample of 195 public and private adoption agencies, Vonk and Angaran (2003) found that about half of adoption agencies provided relevant to all of their adoptive parents, whether or not those parents were adopting across race.

The controversy over transracial adoption is still active today. Because of the racial demographics of children in foster care awaiting domestic adoption, transracial adoption is a
current issue worthy of attention in the literature. The Administration for Children and Families Adoption and Foster Care Analysis Reporting System shows the majority of children waiting to be adopted (over 500,000 total) are Caucasian (40 percent), African American (26 percent), or of Hispanic origin (21 percent) (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013). As shown in the report generated by the US Civil Rights Commission, concerns about transracial adoption have not been resolved by legislation such as MEPA and IEP. Following is a description of the primary concerns about the effect of transracial adoption on children found in the literature.

Critical Review of Empirical Transracial Adoption Literature

According to Lee (2003), transracial adoption research generally falls into three categories: (a) descriptive field studies on psychological outcomes for transracial adoptees (usually focused on self-esteem and/or adjustment), (b) descriptive field studies on the racial and cultural identity development of transracial adoptees, and (c) studies describing racial/cultural socialization styles and competence of transracial adoptive parents (most recent of the three categories). A nascent area of transracial adoption research attempts to connect theories of systemic racism with the transracial adoption experience.

The first section of this critical review examines transracial adoption literature related to category a and b above; primary historical and contemporary concerns about transracial adoption and outcomes for adoptees. These topics include: Adoptive identity development, adjustment and self-esteem, and racial identity. Within the section focused on racial identity, there are two subsections: racial identity and transracial adoption, and methodological caveats related to studies on transracial adoption and racial identity.

The second segment of this critical review addresses category c above, racial socialization and parental approaches to transracial adoption. This topic is approached by first
addressing existing, systemically informed paradigms related to race. Next, literature focused on Black racial socialization is reviewed, which is followed by literature related to White racial socialization. Then, literature looking at racial socialization by White transracial adoptive parents is included. Studies looking at White TRA parent perspectives and also White TRA parent racial socialization behaviors are reviewed as well.

The third segment of this critical review examines relevant literature focused on the population of focus in the current study: Black emerging adults. Literature related to racial, ethnic, and cultural identity exploration and systemic inequalities faced by this population is reviewed.

**Primary Concerns about Transracial Adoption**

As shown throughout the history of the transracial adoption controversy, there are many concerns about transracial adoption. This section offers a brief description of research showing the common elements found in the adoptive identity development process, and a review of literature focused on adjustment and self-esteem, and racial identity. Also included are methodological caveats revealed in TRA research.

**Adoptive Identity Development.** The adoptive identity development process concerns how each individual person constructs meaning about her/his adoption intrapsychically, within relationships with family, and in relation to the social world beyond family (Grotevant, Dunbar, Kohler, & Esau, 2000). In addition to coming to terms with not living with their birth family, adopted children may face (a) attachment complications; (b) physiological and cognitive effects of lack of prenatal care or drug/alcohol use on the part of the birth parent; (c) grief (both conscious and unconscious); (d) psychological, emotional and physical effects of neglect; and/or (e) psychological, emotional and physical effects of abuse (Grotevant, 1997; Newton Verrier,
Resilience is also a potential outcome of early adversity, which can assist in positive outcomes for adopted children (Juffer & van IJzendoorn). Being adopted further complicates the already challenging process of development in terms of identity, adjustment, and feelings of belonging for Black children in the United States (Baden & Steward, 2007a). Differences and similarities with members of both the adoptive and the birth family are a common preoccupation for adoptees, even when racial differences are not present (Grotevant et al., 2000). Coming to terms with oneself in the context of both family and culture are primary tasks in the adoptive identity development process, and these tasks are complicated by the social contexts of the white racial frame and systemic racism. Added to the task of developing an identity as an adopted person is the task of adapting to one’s status within the context of an oppressive dominant culture (Grotevant, 1997).

Adolescence would be a natural time for adopted children who do not look like their families to begin to ask the question, “Who am I?” or “Can I fit in?” “Where do I want to fit in?” “To which group do I have responsibility or allegiance?” “Must I choose, or can I live in both worlds?” (Grotevant, 1997, p. 9). As a result, some discord could arise within TRA families. For example, in the documentary film, *Closure* (Tucker & Lee, 2013), Angela, a Black young woman, who was raised by White parents with several siblings of different races looks for and finds her birth parents. One of Angela’s siblings, who was White and the biological child of both parents, expressed that she felt her sister’s choice to look for her birth parents was disrespectful of the parents who raised them. Angela’s sister stated that she felt Angela was ungrateful and selfish for pursuing her quest to find her biological roots. Eventually, the sister became supportive of Angela, but it took some time. This story is an example of the
complexities that can arise for transracial adoptees related to personal identity, family identity, autonomy, and belonging.

Adjustment and Self-Esteem. One of the arguments of opponents of TRA is the concern that the unique TRA situation might interfere with the adjustment of the transracial adoptee (Feigelman, 2000). Several studies have actually found adjustment for Black TRAs to be quite similar to adjustment for same-race adoptees. The difficulty with this literature is the lack of agreement about how adjustment is defined and measured. In the five studies reviewed below that focus (at least partially) on Black transracial adoptees, there are many different methods for measuring adjustment – including quantitative, qualitative, and mixed method designs. In studies examining adjustment for Black TRA children and adolescents, race is not a primary topic of exploration. Rather, self-esteem and behavioral outcomes are more common. This is interesting considering race is the primary reason for the comparison between transracially and same-race adopted children.

Park and Green (2000) point out that both legal and scientific evaluations of children’s well-being define adjustment and maladjustment in individual terms, without considering the importance of the children’s perception of their connection to the part of themselves mirrored in their racial or ethnic group, and their perception of how their racial group is perceived by society. For example, in a 1997 study of 34 TRA teens (age 16-19), Vroegh reported results from a longitudinal study examining adjustment of Black transracial adoptees compared with same-race adoptees. The questions in the study asked about (a) quality of parent-child relationship, (b) self-esteem, (c) perception of parent satisfaction with child school performance, and (d) perceived quality of life compared to peers. Participants were also administered the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale. No questions about the parent-child relationship focused on race. Interviewers
noted adjustment problems in 24% of TRA participants, and in 22% of same race adoptees. Those who did not get along with siblings did not mention race as a reason for discord, but they were not asked about race, specifically, in this context. It could have been that these families viewed race as a taboo topic, as do many people in the United States (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; DiAngelo, 2016). One question in the study asked about race; it focused on the racial demographic of the transracial adoptee’s friend group. Most TRAs reported that they had Black friends (74%), but that their closest friends were predominantly White. Vroegh (1997) concluded that TRA participant adjustment problems were similar to the general adolescent population in the United States.

Shireman and Johnson (1986) explored adjustment and racial identity of same-race Black adoptees with two Black parents (n=45), transracial adoptees of White parents (n=42), and same-race Black adoptees of single Black parents (n=31). This study focused on two adoption agencies that handled voluntary adoptions in the city of Chicago. The adopted children were placed with their families prior to the age of three, and interviews took place when the children were eight. Both parents and children were interviewed. Assessments of adjustment were made through direct observation of the children, parent report, and data reported with the Vineland Social Maturity Scale (Doll, 1935). Interviewers considered both the number of problems reported by the parents and the severity of those problems. Interviewers assessed that transracial adoptees displayed similar adjustment to same-race adoptees and single-parent, same-race adoptees. Shireman and Johnson reported that 45 percent of adoptees showed excellent adjustment, 33 percent showed good adjustment, and 22 percent showed difficulties with adjustment. What comprises adjustment in this study is vague, and the assessment of adjustment is not thoroughly explained by the researchers, so the results must be taken with caution.
Another study looking at adjustment was conducted by Simon and Alstein (1994). In their qualitative longitudinal study, they interviewed interracial adoptive families four times (1971, 1979, 1985, 1991). By the time of the third interviews, researchers were able to complete interviews with 89 Black TRA children (111 TRA children total) who had been interviewed at both previous times. At the time of the fourth interviews, researchers were able to contact 82 of the families previously interviewed. At the time of the fourth interview, all participants were young adults. In the first interviews, when the TRA children were young, there seemed to be a general acceptance of racial differences among parents and children, and no presence of problems related to race or adoption. The second interviews revealed a different picture. The children were entering adolescence, and it was found that for every five families without difficulties, there was a family who described problems, admittedly related to transracial adoption. At the third meeting, the difficulties seemed to have stopped.

Also of note during the third meeting, children reported less interest in culture or race specific activities initiated by parents. At this point, researchers administered a self-esteem scale, which measures self-respect and self-worth. Black TRAs had almost identical scores as scores of TRAs of other races and White adoptees. Of Black TRAs, 95% said they approved of TRA as a good alternative to staying in foster care or institutions when a Black adoptive home was not available.

Several studies used samples that included international transracial adoptees and non-Black, domestic transracial adoptees, making them less applicable to the current study, which focuses on Black, domestic transracial adoptees. For example, one report given by Burrow and Finley (2004) used data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health to attempt to show a comparison between adolescents in differing adoptive racial groups. Of the sample of
609, only eight participants were Black and adopted by White families. Brown and Finley stated that any findings related to Black children adopted by White families, due to this small sample size, would have to be termed exploratory. In addition to studies showing small numbers of Black, domestic transracial adoptees, some studies also erase distinctions between racial groups in research. For instance, in a 2016 study, Arnold, Braje, Kawahara, and Shuman compare differences in ethnic socialization and psychological measures among non-adopted and transracially adopted youth. However, no information is provided in the study about the racial identity of participants. Participants were simply deemed to be ethnic minorities, with no explanation of what that means, which leaves out the specific social context important in understanding results of such studies.

Feigelman (2000) conducted the only quantitative study found that included effects of discrimination on adjustment. Feigelman utilized data from a 1993 longitudinal follow up with TRA parents at a time when the adoptees were young adults. This study examined transracial and same-race adoptees, and again included a much smaller number of domestic, Black adoptees than international adoptees. The sample consisted of transracially and same-race adopted children: 58 Black children transracially adopted by White parents, 442 Korean and Vietnamese born children adopted by White parents, 46 Colombian born children adopted by White parents, and 96 White children born in the United States and adopted by White parents. In this study, parents filled out the Global Assessment Scale (GAS; Endicott, Spitzer, Fleiss, & Cohen, 1976), which is a measure of overall functioning. Parents also responded to an index of dysfunctionality, which consisted of five questions about behavior problems (i.e., expulsion from school, problems with the law, drug and alcohol problems, counseling for emotional problems).
The adoptees themselves, with an average age of 23 at the time of data collection, were not interviewed.

In Feigelman’s (2000) study, parents of Black TRA young adults reported that their children experienced trouble with the police more frequently than Latino/a TRA young adults (30.3% compared to 21.1%), had more frequent problems with drugs or alcohol than Latino/as (28.1% compared to 21.1%), and ran away from home more frequently than Latino/as (33.3% compared to 26.3%). This study also found that discrimination against the transracial adoptee, and discomfort about their appearance were significant correlates associated with adjustment difficulties. Families living in racially diverse neighborhoods reported that their children experienced less discomfort related to their appearance. A major limitation of this study is that results are based on parent report rather than responses from the adoptees themselves. Another limitation of this study is the disproportionate number of international adoptees in the sample (n = 151) compared to the number of Black or Latino/a, domestic adoptees (n=33, n =19). In addition, there is no comparison of transracial adoptees of color with same-race adoptees of color. The only comparison group is White children adopted by White parents. It is interesting to note that the author of the study referred to discomfort about race or racial difference as discomfort with appearance. It is unknown whether the author was somehow commenting on the socially constructed nature of race, or if race was being avoided (either consciously or unconsciously) in the data collection. This study suggests a relationship between adjustment and racial identity that has been overlooked in other studies.

The wide variety of constructs used to assess adjustment cannot easily be compared between studies. Without a consistent definition and operationalization of adjustment, it might be better to focus on the specific factors measured rather than using an umbrella term with
varying components. It does appear, though, that self-esteem reports were fairly consistent across studies, showing that transracial adoption has little to no influence on the development of self-esteem. However, self-esteem was measured at varying ages, and from different regions of the country, and a variety of social classes and neighborhoods. This is important when considering the results of Simon and Alstein’s (1994) longitudinal study which showed changes in the number of problems related to TRA as the children grew into adolescence. It would be interesting to look at reported self-esteem for specific age groups from similar socioeconomic backgrounds and geographic areas, and then compare to other specific age groups, socioeconomic backgrounds and geographic areas to see if these factors caused any variance across groups. When these variables are not consistent across studies, generalization to all transracial adoptees becomes questionable.

Another factor that could influence reports of self-esteem is the discernment between personal self-esteem and group identity. Taylor and Thornton (1996) explain that personal self-esteem and factors related to group identity, like racial identity, are not the same phenomenon. Personal self-esteem refers to how a person evaluates the overall self, unrelated to racial/ethnic group, whereas group identity is a bond with a racial group with common culture and origin. Because of this distinction, someone might report strong personal self-esteem, but may have weak ties to their racial group (Taylor & Thornton). Thus, in addition to self-esteem and the various measures of adjustment listed above, it is vital to consider racial identity and group membership in the case of transracial adoption.

**Racial Identity.** Several transracial adoption researchers have found that adjustment and self-esteem among transracial adoptees is not too different from that of same-race adoptees (Baden, 2007; Feigelman, 2000; Shireman & Johnson, 1986; Vroegh, 1997). However,
researchers focused on TRA have found that racial identity is an area in which differences are exhibited in adoptees (McRoy & Zurcher, 1983; Feigelman, 2000). In adoptive families that are not transracial, researchers have found that during adolescence, a preoccupation with one’s adoptive status is common (Hayes, 2008). It would follow that in transracial adoptive families, the adoptive status is more obvious because of visible markers and questions from people about race and culture.

DeBerry et al. (1996) stress the importance of racial identity, particularly racial group orientation, for Black transracial adoptees due to the racial minority status of African Americans. Strong racial identity and group identification serve to aid Black people in coping with prejudice and discrimination, as well as prevent isolation and marginalization (Taylor & Thornton, 1996). Racial identity has been defined as the extent to which transracial adoptees use racial self-descriptors and are proud of or comfortable with their race (Lee, 2003). Grotevant (1997) considers cultural and racial difference to be a primary factor with which TRA adoptees must contend during the process of adoptive identity development. In the following subsection, studies focused on the racial identity of transracial adoptees that included Black participants are reviewed. The second subsection addresses methodological caveats related to transracial adoption research on racial identity.

Transracial Adoption Studies Focused on Racial Identity. The Shireman and Johnson (1986, 1987) study introduced above, was a longitudinal comparative study of Black children transracially adopted by White parents \( n=42 \), Black children adopted by Black parents \( n=45 \), and Black children adopted by a Black single parent \( n=31 \). Both interviews and a quantitative measure were used in the study. The Clark Doll Racial Preference Test (Clark & Clark, 1958) was used to assess racial preference at ages four and eight. In addition to the doll test, children
were asked how they identified racially. Parents were asked about the racial composition of their neighborhoods and schools, and their attitudes about how they would like their children to identify racially.

Shireman and Johnson found that the pattern of racial identity development for Black children raised by White parents differed from that of Black children raised by Black families. Black children adopted by Whites showed as strong a Black preference at four years of age as Black children adopted by Black people. However, by the age of eight, this was reversed, with the Black children being raised by White people having a lower Black preference than Black children being raised by Black parents. Shireman and Johnson note that the racial identity of Black children raised by White parents does not intensify over time, whereas intensification is present over time for Black children raised by Black parents. This difference in racial identity development is further supported by a meta-analysis conducted by Hollingsworth (1997) of four data sets from Shireman and Johnson’s 1980 longitudinal study. Hollingsworth concluded that transracial adoptees had lower combined racial identity and self-esteem scores than non-adoptees. Effect sizes were larger when racial identity was examined separately from self-esteem (-.52 compared to -.38 when combined with self-esteem).

Shireman and Johnson (1987) also asked White parents how they wished for their child to identify racially. Eleven out of 42 TRA parents expressed that they wished their child to identify with the Black race. The remaining parents wished their children to identify as White, as human, or as no race (Shireman & Johnson, 1987). All but two of the Black children being raised by White people lived in all White neighborhoods. It was reported that the White parents relayed stories of incidents in which children in the neighborhood used racial slurs against their children, but the parents dismissed this as common teasing in childhood. Parents also reported
that while they understand their child’s need for contact with Black people, they were not willing to alter their lifestyle to make that happen.

Simon and Alstein’s (1994) longitudinal qualitative study, introduced above, followed TRA families over a period of 20 years. Interviews took place in 1971, 1979, 1984, and 1991. In 1971, 204 parents and 366 children were interviewed. Simon and Alstein utilized interviews and the Clark Doll Test (Clark & Clark, 1958) in the first interviews, finding that the children did not express a White preference, and that the family relationships seemed to be unaffected by racial differences. At the time of the second interviews (1979), which were with parents only via telephone, 133 parents were successfully contacted. Most of the children were about to enter adolescence. One in five parents reported problems in the family that they attributed to transracial adoption. The most frequent report was that of theft. Parents stated that their children of color were taking things from their siblings and parents (money, bicycles, etc), and they wondered if this had to do with difference in race and the child being adopted.

Additional information on racial identity for transracial adoptees was reported by Simon and Alstein (1994) based on the third and fourth phase of data collection. During phase three of the Simon and Alstein (1994) study, parents (n=83) and TRA Black children (n=89), as well as other children in the home who were White or Asian (n=129) were interviewed. These interviews took place in 1984. During phase four, which took place in 1991, Simon and Alstein report finding 83 families who gave them contact information for their adult TRA children. A specific number of interviewees for this phase was not given. Simon and Alstein combine their report of phase three and four related to racial identity by stating “as both adolescents and as adults…..” when giving results. Overall, these researchers state that participants “were clearly aware of and comfortable with their racial identity” (p. 19). Some participants stated that they
might have different cultural tastes than Black people living in an inner city, but that they saw the Black experience as varied. One respondent stated that her parent’s choice to raise her in an integrated neighborhood made a difference in her racial identity, and that she is fully comfortable with her identity. Only five percent of Black TRA adolescents and adults agreed with the stance of the National Association of Black Social Workers that transracial adoption was cultural genocide. One Black male stated that this position promoted separatist ideology. Many interviewees discussed that having a permanent home was more important than the race of their parents. Simon and Alstein conclude that transracial adoption causes no particular problems or trauma for children.

One seminal study on the experiences of TRA was focused exclusively on domestic adoption. McRoy and Zurcher (1983) conducted a mixed methods investigation into the perceptions of and attitudes toward racial identity in 30 domestic transracial adoptive families and 30 domestic same-race adoptive families. The theoretical base for their study was symbolic interaction theory, “which assumes a person’s self-definition develops from interpersonal relations in a social world” (p. 16). McRoy and Zurcher found that parental racial orientations and their associated behaviors were directly related to the perceptions of racial identity held by the children. Children with parents who had a Strong White Orientation associated less with Black people, held to common stereotypical beliefs about Black people, emphasized human identity over racial identity, had mostly White friends, and dated White people. In addition, they were given a higher social status by their White peers. In parallel, TRA children raised in mixed neighborhoods by parents with a Multi-Racial Orientation had sustained and frequent contact with other Black families, felt more positive about their racial identity, and were less likely to hold to White-oriented attitudes and behaviors. As noted above, this result was found in
Feigelman’s study as well, which included results that showed TRA children expressed less discomfort related to their appearance when they lived in a racially diverse neighborhood. As reflected in the summaries below, subsequent research provides more detailed exploration of important factors related to TRA and identity development for adoptees.

In their quantitative ten-year follow up study to the Minnesota Transracial Adoption Project (Scarr, 1981), DeBerry et al. (1996) studied Black, (n=130), Asian (n=21), Native American (no n given), Latino (no n given) transracial adoptees and European American/Caucasian (n=25) adoptees’ racial identity orientation. DeBerry et al. (1996) found that Black TRA children raised in White communities struggled with discomfort with their appearance and with interactions with other Black people. They also found that while biculturalism was emphasized at the time of the first interview, by the second interview Eurocentric orientation had increased and Afrocentric orientation had decreased.

In a cross-sectional survey study, Benson, Sharma and Roehlkepartain (1994) included 27 Black transracial adoptees from the Midwest in their study of adopted children and adolescents. The study did not focus on transracial adoption, but rather on the experience of growing up adopted. Transracial families in this study responded to several quantitative measures, some of which were answered by parents, some by adoptees. Thirty-seven percent of adoptees reported that race made it difficult growing up, and 20% stated that they wished they were a different race. Frequent feelings of racial pride were endorsed by 41% of TRA youth.

In a quantitative dissertation study conducted by Bumpus (2015), 45 Black adoptees, ages 25-72, had higher levels of racial identity when adopted by two African American parents as opposed to two White parents. Bumpus used the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI) (Sellers et al., 1997) to assess (a) centrality, (b) ideology, and (c) regard related to racial
identity. Seven hypotheses were tested in order to attempt to identify the effect of positively correlated resilience and racial identity. Bumpus found that for transracial adoptees, resilience was positively correlated with two aspects of racial identity measured by the MIBI: Centrality and Private Regard. However, Resilience was negatively correlated with Public Regard, which relates to group identity. This reinforces the importance of exploring group identity development for transracial adoptees as a salient factor in racial identity development.

In a qualitative study by McRoy and Grape (1999), exploring the significance of skin color in transracial adoption, ten Black transracially adopted adults were interviewed (ages 21-32). In all interviews, participants told stories about their skin color and how it influenced their feelings about being Black, and about belonging (or not belonging) in the Black community as well as in society in general. Several participants described trying to find ways to lighten their skin, “wipe off” the black form their skin, or trying to straighten their hair. One adoptee expressed that she never dated in high school because she was sure the boys in her school (all White) would not find her attractive because of her Black identity. Another young woman discussed being seen as “almost White” because her skin was light. She shared that she believed boys found her attractive because she “looked White.” Another participant told a story of being selected for the drill team in her all-White school, and being told to wear white stockings so her legs would not be so different from the rest of the team. Most participants described not beginning to accept their Black identity until entering college. One participant stated that she wouldn’t even look in the mirror until she was in college, which was the first time she was around other Black people. One participant shared that he was called names and shunned throughout middle and high school, and suffered this silently because he was sure his parents would not understand what he was going through. It was not until adulthood that he began to
make Black friends, and started to feel more comfortable with his Black identity. These research participants’ accounts are also reflected in recent non-academic stories of transracial adoptees told in the media. For example, Chad Goller-Sojourner, a transracial family coach and performer who was transracially adopted by White parents in 1972, shares that it was not until college that he could make his “descent into blackness and out of whiteness.” Goller-Sojourner added Sojourner to his name in his early twenties, a time during which he says he finally fell in love with himself and with being Black (NPR, January 26, 2014).

More recent qualitative studies focused on young adults who were transracially adopted (Patel, 2007; Samuels, 2009) continue to explore commonly complex racial identity dynamics. Patel’s (2007) qualitative, life narrative study examined the stories of six participants transracially adopted and raised in Britain; two of which were domestically adopted and two of which were internationally adopted. Participants ranged in age from 21-43. Patel found several themes of difficulties reported by adults who were transracially adopted as children: (a) racial differences from the adoptive family, (b) parents ignoring or not talking about racial difference, (c) claiming a White cultural identity but not being labeled or treated like Whites as adults in the world, (d) fitting in to a certain extent and yet not quite fitting in with both birth and adoptive heritages, (e) experiences of discrimination and racism. Each of these themes points to the trickle-down presence of systemic racism in the lives of those who are transracially adopted, and the salience of race in the lives of transracial adoptees throughout life.

Samuels (2009) conducted another qualitative study pointing to the complexities related to race for transracial adoptees. This study focused on biracial transracial adoptees (n=25) in the US, and found three consistently present themes. First, the centrality yet absence of racial resemblance was mentioned. The second theme was navigating discordant parent-child racial
experiences. The third theme was managing societal perceptions of transracial adoption. The following quote from a participant in Samuels’ (2009) study is an example of the complex internal experience that can be had by transracial adoptees:

I’ve talked to other friends of mine who were adopted in White families. When we talk, there’s some anger there. You feel like you’re just set up. If I continued to live in [hometown] in what is…a bubble. But when you DO get out there, and realize just how much you missed out on, culturally and knowledge of ourselves, knowledge that it takes for survival in certain situations, it does make you angry. You know? A little bit. On the other side of that though, my parents have also given me things that are rare. And the perspective I have on race relations, how society looks at race is completely wide open (p. 88).

The research related to racial identity reviewed above shows a range of comfort with racial identity, as well as a range of emphasis on race for individuals and within families. The array of racial identity research shows the importance of continuing research in this area, particularly research that maintains a focus on the voices of adoptees, so that the complexities of experience are not confined to studies done in the past or with incomparable quantitative measures. Overall, research focused on racial identity and transracial adoption gives a complex and varied picture of how growing up with White parents might affect a Black child throughout life.

Methodological Caveats. Current TRA research offers some information on the complexities of race for adoptees, and suggests that race and TRA is a combined area of research in need of further exploration. While the extant research looking into self-esteem, adjustment, and racial identity is not without value, there are several methodological caveats to consider.
Lee (2003) explains that there is an underlying assumption in transracial adoption research that racial identity is directly related to psychological adjustment and the ability to negotiate transracial adoption. Unfortunately, according to Lee, this relationship is not explicitly explored in research. Another criticism of research on racial identity is there is a reliance on projective measures of racial preference (like the Clark The Doll test), ad hoc self-report items, open-ended questions, and parent reports of children’s interest and involvement with birth culture (Lee, 2003). Taylor and Thornton (1996) examined adoption studies focused on racial group identity, and pointed to the use of doll study methodology as flawed in that it does not look at one’s sense of belonging, racial and cultural involvement, language use, friendships, religion, clubs, organizations, politics, and area of residence.

It is unknown whether the variability found in racial identity among transracial adoptees is due to these limitations or actual variability in the experiences of adoptees. Baden and Steward (2007a) point to the tendency of TRA researchers focused on racial identity to measure racial group preferences and racial self-identification of TRA children, but not their actual racial identity development. Thus, missing in these studies are adoptees’ feelings about their racial identity, attitudes toward their racial group, how much they know about their racial group, how competent they feel when with their racial group, and their comfort level with their racial group. Baden and Steward posit that because of this, the racial identity conceptualizations used in TRA research may be born of societal norms [or the white racial frame] rather than the actual identities of the adoptees.

There are other varying factors related to TRA that could influence racial identity as well: (a) age at adoption (Bumpus, 2014), (b) geographic location (Shireman & Johnson, 1995), (c) racial composition of school, neighborhood and family friends (McRoy & Zurcher, 1983), (d)
White parent racial identity development, and (e) experiences of discrimination and racism (and how such experiences were handled by parents and children) (Smith et al., 2011). Similar to the variety of constructs and measures used to assess adjustment, there are many different measures used across TRA studies examining racial identity, which makes comparison difficult.

The following section of the critical review of literature shifts focus to racial socialization studies. Differing paradigms for racial socialization are explained, and then Black parent racial socialization, White parent racial socialization, and racial socialization in White transracial adoptive homes are each addressed. Racial socialization provided by parents has a direct impact on racial identity development for adoptees. Both implicit and explicit messages from parents related to race inform the ways in which adoptees conceptualize race, and the ways adoptees begin to think about themselves, their families, and society in terms of race.

**Racial Socialization**

Parental practice related to racial socialization is a major factor in the racial identity development process. As shown previously, racial identity is the transracial adoption outcome showing the most differences between TRA children and same-race or non-adopted children. Race is the factor making the overall socialization process for Black children different than for White children.

Racial socialization is a multifaceted, implicit and explicit process that, for Black families, has developed over generations (DeBerry et al., 1996). Black parents are intimately familiar with the position of Black people on the historical and ever-present racial hierarchy, which places Black people at the bottom (Feagin, 2010). Transracial adoption brings the history of racialization in the United States directly into the lives of families. The effect of this racialized history might complicate the parental socialization process in TRA families. One of
the main arguments against transracial adoption has been a concern that White parents will not have the ability to provide effective racial socialization for their transracially adopted Black children. This section provides literature-based descriptions of explicit and indirect racial socialization in Black, White, and TRA families; and a description of the unique position of White parents raising Black children.

This section on racial socialization begins with a subsection describing different paradigms related to race connected to respective racialized historical contexts. This is followed by a subsection titled Black Racial Socialization, which reviews literature providing a catalogued and categorized overview of many years of racial socialization research in families of color (Hughes et al., 2006), conceptual work focused on describing the nature of Black racial socialization as a necessity for survival (Brown & Lesane-Brown, 2006; Daniel & Daniel, 1999; Hughes & Chen, 1997; Lesane-Brown, 2006), and an article defining racial socialization and the planes on which it takes place for people of color (Bentley-Edwards & Stevenson, 2016). The White Racial Socialization subsection addresses the less-studied racial socialization practices of White parents to White children (Hagerman, 2014, 2017; Vittrup, 2016; Wilkerson, 2014). In addition, literature specifically focused on transracial adoption and the importance of racial socialization is referenced (Bumpus, 2014; DeBerry et al., 1996; Samuels, 2009).

While the topic of racial socialization by White parents in domestic, transracial adoptive homes is one not widely studied, several articles and one book on this topic are referenced for this final subsection. A TRA research article from which the author gleaned four basic approaches to race taken by White transracial adoptive parents is reviewed (Lee, 2003). Three approaches to providing a sense of racial belonging to TRA children by their White mothers are described, which were identified in a study of transracial adoptive parents (Barn, 2013). In
addition, common categories of approaches to communication about race in multiracial families are described, referenced from a book chapter (Orbe, 1999).

White parent behaviors in terms of racial socialization is explored, which is a topic studied even less widely. A unique contribution to TRA literature is reviewed in detail in this final subsection. The book, White Parents, Black Children (Smith et al., 2011) is the only publication that looks for themes in White parent race lessons, and analyzes those themes using a lens of the white racial frame in order to identify the ways in which racism shows up within the family dynamics in transracial adoption, even when parents are working to avoid it. Several conceptual articles and qualitative studies are referenced highlighting the ways in which racial socialization (or lack thereof) influences children of color growing up in White parent homes (Andujo, 1988; Berbery and O’Brien, 2011; Evan B. Donaldson Institute, 2008; Leslie, Smith & Hrapczynski, 2013; McRoy & Grape, 1999; McRoy & Zurcher, 1983). An effort was made to highlight articles and books that either included or emphasized domestic adoption Black/White dynamics, rather than international adoption issues, to keep content relevant to the current study.

**Differing Paradigms in Racial Socialization.** Most parents are likely to transmit racial socialization messages to their children, either implicitly, explicitly, or both. However, the meaning and importance of racial socialization differs for White families compared to Black families. The content of lessons learned about race in the homes of Blacks and Whites differs. Black children are exposed regularly to racial lessons, whereas most White children are not (Daniel & Daniel, 1999). This difference is directly related to the racialized history of the United States. The meaning of being White (the dominant racial group) in the United States is quite distinct from the meaning of being Black (an oppressed racial group) in the United States. Therefore, racial socialization practices delivered by White parents to same-race children would
look very different than racial socialization practices of Black parents with Black children. Because of differences in racial socialization (both from parents and from society), White parents raising Black children might be expected to use a variety of racial socialization approaches. Literature related to these three distinct parental racial socialization contexts are reviewed below.

**Black Racial Socialization.** DeBerry et al. (1996) describe Black racial socialization as a preparation for coping with oppression that begins as early as two years old. The racial socialization process teaches culturally relevant habits as well as values that will help children adapt in society and become competent in navigating life in a racialized society (DeBerry et al., 1996). This definition is expanded by Bentley-Edwards and Stevenson (2016) to include the transmission and acquisition of intellectual, affective, and behavioral skills with the goal of building racial efficacy. Racial efficacy allows for the reappraisal and negotiation of stressful racial/ethnic encounters. Such encounters occur within five psychosocial contexts: information and knowledge processing, relationship engagement, identity development, styles expression, and stereotype reproduction (Bentley-Edwards & Stevenson).

Racial Socialization for Black children growing up in a racialized society is seen as a necessity to form resilience, gain healthy coping responses to racial adversity, hold positive ingroup evaluations, and foster the development of racial identity (Bentley-Edwards, 2016; Hughes & Chen, 1997). In an extensive review of racial and ethnic socialization literature, Hughes et al. (2006) identified several categories of racial and ethnic socialization messages from parents: (a) cultural socialization, (b) preparation for bias, (c) promotion of mistrust, and (d) egalitarianism. Cultural socialization is seen as both deliberate and implicit parental practices that teach children about their racial or cultural heritage and history. Cultural socialization also includes the passing down of cultural customs and traditions, and the instillation of cultural and racial pride.
Preparation for bias is the parental practice of raising their children’s awareness of discrimination and racism. A finding relevant to the current study (with its focus on Black TRA children) is that preparation for bias is more common among Black parents in studies comparing them with parents from other ethnic and racial backgrounds. This finding is based on several studies comparing Black preparation for bias socialization practices to Japanese American, Mexican/Mexican American, Dominican, Puerto Rican, White, Haitian, and Caribbean parents (Hughes et al., 2006). Another aspect of racial socialization identified by Hughes et al. is promotion of mistrust, which are practices that focus on the need for caution and distrust in interracial interactions. Mistrust can be transmitted explicitly through verbal warnings, cautions, shared stories of racism and discrimination, and explanations of systemic barriers to success. Mistrust can also be transmitted implicitly as children observe their parents’ interracial interactions or hear conversations among adults about people of other races. Egalitarianism is a type of racial socialization that describes a valuing of individual characteristics (i.e., work ethic) over racial categorization or an avoidance of the topic of race with children. Egalitarianism is similar to the color-blind approach to the topic of race.

Studies focused on Black parents’ racial socialization began in the 1980s. This literature revealed that messages and modeling were meant to instill racial pride, high self-esteem, and resilience in the face of racial barriers and stereotyping (Hughes et al., 2006). Lesane-Brown (2006) further describes Black parents as a protective buffer between racism in the world and their children. Black parents serve as a buffer by transmitting messages that help prepare their children for the racism and discrimination they will face in society. According to Brown and Lesane-Brown (2006), Black parents are primary influences in terms of educating Black children about the implications of being Black in the United States. This focus on parents is echoed by
Hughes (2003), who stated that families are the first learning environment, and parents are the teachers in this environment. Brown and Lesane-Brown cite several studies that show that racial socialization predicts racial identity, which is an aspect of development directly related to the transracial adoption debate. This demonstrates the primacy of parental racial socialization in Black families.

As the research above illustrates, socialization focused on race is a necessary aspect of Black parenting. Black children living in a racialized society must be prepared for racial bias, and will have to practice caution in interracial interactions. The passing down of cultural knowledge and racial pride bolsters Black youth with internal leverage and group connection from which to draw strength in the face of racial discrimination. Because Black parents can draw from their own experiences of racial discrimination (sometimes in the presence of their children), they naturally serve as a buffer for Black children against racism in society, providing implicit and explicit messages and modeling that show Black children the meaning of being Black in the United States.

**White racial socialization.** White parents are rarely included in studies of socialization about ethnicity and race, although such socialization is quite likely to take place within White families, even if implicitly (Hughes et al., 2006). Because White people in the United States are part of the dominant racial group, they have the option to ignore racial identity development in themselves, and in their White children. In fact, studies have shown that many White parents do not talk openly about race, or even recognize that they have a race (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). White racial socialization differs from racial socialization in racial minority families in that White families are teaching children to navigate advantage, rather than the disadvantage inherent in the racial minority family experience (Hagerman, 2017). Societally, advantage is seen as a positive
rather than negative thing to possess, so it would follow that many White parents would not see the reason to teach their children how to navigate something that others may covet. Missing from this equation, though, is the interconnectedness of everyone in a society. When one group has advantage, that means there is a group with disadvantage. The playing field is not equal. Holding the advantage isn’t something regularly thought of as something for which one might need care and preparation, and yet, it would seem that those with more power in a society might need guidance so as not to repeat the mistakes of generations past, like the White masters who justified and rationalized enslaving an entire group of people for centuries. The unconscious and implicit “handing down” of dominance as a normal part of one’s group contributes, even if unknowingly, to the perpetuation of systems of oppression.

Because White parents tend to not speak explicitly about race with their children, it is important to understand the subtle and implicit ways White children’s perspectives on race are shaped. Implicit messages can be in the form of choices parents make: where to live, with whom to associate and form friendships, the racial demographics of the chosen schools, media consumption, political affiliations, etc. (Hagerman, 2017). All of these choices combine to form an overall racial context in which the child forms racial attitudes and racial common sense – both consciously and unconsciously. Hagerman (2014) found that parents intentionally living in racially diverse neighborhoods were more likely to socialize their White children to be aware of their own White privilege, as well as the presence of systemic racism. Conversely, parents who promoted color-blindness by not discussing race and believing that their children did not notice race delivered implicit messages to their children that were internalized. Children reared with the colorblind approach reported believing that racism is no longer a problem in the United States, and that they had no advantages as a White person in this country (Hagerman, 2014). The
danger of colorblind ideology is the idea that race no longer matters (Hagerman, 2017). This perspective effectively erases the discriminatory experiences of people of color in the United States, and brings the risk of victim-blaming people of color for their position in the racial hierarchy.

Socioeconomic status is a factor that influences White racial socialization. An important point was made by Hagerman (2017) as a result of a 2017 study focused on White racial socialization of middle-upper class fathers: the fathers interviewed who valued racial diversity had the privileged status to create the social contexts they wanted for their children. It was a choice to send their children to a racially diverse school, and they spoke of the importance of that factor in their process of choosing academic environments. Hagerman states that parents of color may want the same, racially or socioeconomically diverse environment for their children, but because of systemic racism, they might lack the social mobility to choose their children’s environments. The fathers in this study intentionally talked to their children about race and racism, and sought environments in which meaningful contact with a variety of racial groups would be the norm. They hoped their children would work against racism in the world, and be able to identify their own privilege. At the same time, these fathers also perpetuated the power dynamics of white supremacy in important ways. All of the fathers in the study traveled with their children to poorer countries, and spoke of wanting to expose their children to other people so they could learn about their own privilege and have empathy for those less fortunate. This is a reflection of the power dynamics in which “bodies of the marginalized are sites for the privileged to learn something about themselves” (Hagerman, 2017, p. 69). Even while unintentional, the perpetuation of the oppressive power dynamics and objectification these fathers were attempting to avoid were at play. Even the fathers having the choice whether or not to send their children to
schools with racially diverse student populations speaks to the socioeconomic differences present.

Some of the White racial socialization literature has used the contrasting terms *colorblind* and *color-conscious* (Hagerman, 2014, 2017; Vittrup, 2016). The colorblind approach is the idea that one does not see color, and that focusing on what is on the inside rather than external racial difference is the answer to solving racism. The color-conscious approach is described by Hagerman (2014) as the choice to construct diverse racial contexts, to be aware of and discuss privilege and oppression with their children, to intervene when confronted with issues of race, and to be socially active against racism. A qualitative study conducted by Wilkerson (2014) included focus groups with 17 White parents of children attending a racially and socioeconomically diverse school. These parents described race conversations as difficult but important. They discussed the tensions of race relations and the importance of preparing their children for a racialized context. However, every parent advocated for a colorblind philosophy, and wanting to teach their children to see *people* instead of race. This contradiction shows how even when there is an awareness of the tension related to race in the United States, colorblindness is still seen as a primary way of conceptualizing race for White people. The reason for choosing colorblind or “color mute” (not discussing race at all) were described by some mothers in a 2016 study conducted by Vittrup. In this study, 70 percent of 107 mothers of children ages 4-7 stated that they believed not talking about race would cause their children to not notice race, and therefore grow to be unbiased. The remainder or participants were categorized as color-conscious in their approach to racial socialization.

The socialization practices of White parents with their White children is a growing area of scholarship that needs expansion in order to understand more specifically the daily practices
employed by White parents to form their children’s racial contexts (Hagerman, 2017). White racial socialization still seems to be predominantly rooted in the color-blind approach. It would not be unusual, based on the above information on White racial socialization, for these same socialization themes to arise in transracially adoptive homes.

**Racial socialization in White transracial adoptive homes.** The level of competence of White adoptive parents in providing racial and cultural socialization for their children is a main concern in TRA (Vonk, 2001). White adoptive parents may not possess the necessary cultural knowledge and skills to parent non-White children (NABSW, 1972), and there may be several reasons for this deficit. One, White adoptive parents have no personal experience with surviving racism on a daily basis (Berbery, 2010; Samuels, 2009; Vonk, 2001). Two, White parents might not have awareness of the systems of racism that grant them, but not their Black children, unearned privilege (Vonk, 2001). Three, even with knowledge of racism and privilege, White parents might not be able to provide racial socialization in a way needed by Black children (Leslie et al., 2013). As Hughes and Chen (1997) assert, the racial socialization provided by parents is a reflection of parents’ racial heritage, the racial socialization they received, their own racial identity and their own experiences with discrimination and racism. Folaron and Hess (1993) report that adopted Biracial Black children describe experiencing racism within their adopted families, usually from an extended family member, but sometimes from one of the adoptive parents. One parent interviewed by Folaron and Hess reported that she encouraged her Biracial adopted children to show only their “White sides” at home. As this example illustrates, White parents are racially socialized within in a system that sees White as the “norm” against which everything else is measured. Smith et al. (2011) explain further:
As members of U.S. society’s dominant mainstream, White adoptive parents are positioned to transmit collective understandings, interpretations, knowledge, and memories about Whiteness, not Blackness. They are well positioned to teach lessons about race that reflect and give privilege to the interests, values, experiences, and perspectives of Whites. (p. 1198)

It could be that assumptions based on Whiteness influence choices made in TRA research as well. For example, in a 2013 study conducted by Leslie, Smith and Hrapczynski examining the relationship between TRA racial socialization and adoptee discrimination stress, researchers omitted the *Mistrust of Whites* subscale from the Racial Socialization Scale (RSS; Hughes & Chen, 1997). The justification offered for this omission was, “It was thought to be highly unlikely that White parents would engage in socialization aimed at teaching mistrust of Whites” (p. 75). It is interesting that Leslie et al. decided not to test their assumption by administering the scale as designed. It seems that a White TRA parents’ inability to consider that their Black child might have to, at times, mistrust White people could contribute to a TRA child’s handling of discrimination stress. Further, *Mistrust of Whites*, an aspect of racial socialization found in literature that has established the needs of Black children in the United States, cannot become irrelevant to a Black TRA child due to the child’s parent being White. The topic of TRA racial socialization is especially salient considering the tendency of White adoptive parents to raise their children in mostly White environments, and because it has been found that transracial adoptees placed in a home with White parents at a later age, identified more strongly with their ethnicities and races than did adoptees placed at a younger age (Lee, 2003; McRoy & Griffin, 2012). This latter finding suggests that White parents, when in charge of formative racial
socialization experiences, do not place as much emphasis on the topic as do parents of color who have lived through racial discrimination on a daily basis.

**Approaches and Perspectives Held by White TRA Parents.** In a review of transracial adoption literature, Lee (2003) identifies four different strategies or perspectives from which White TRA parents approach racial socialization. *Cultural assimilation* is one approach to racial socialization in TRA families, in which the adoptee is encouraged to orient toward White culture. Historically, assimilation has been most prevalent in TRA. Vroegh (1997) found that the majority of TRA parents had reportedly done nothing in particular to foster adoptees’ racial identity. One participant in McRoy and Grape’s (1999) qualitative study stated that there were never discussions about race in his home, even though he was one of three boys of color adopted by White parents. In Shireman and Johnson’s (1994) study, parents dismissed racial discrimination and the use of racial slurs by White children in the neighborhood as normal problems among children growing up. The prevalence of assimilation may have to do with the fact that cultural assimilation is the default strategy when no intentionally different effort is made by White parents. TRA children are immediately and constantly exposed to majority culture through their parents (Lee, 2003). Cultural assimilation is synonymous with “colorblind” parenting practices.

The second approach in TRA parenting related to racial socialization is *enculturation*. Enculturation is an active effort to expose adoptees to their birth race and culture through educational, social and cultural opportunities. Parents using this approach seek to instill racial awareness, pride, and knowledge. Their goal is to promote a positive racial identity. Simon and Alstein (1994) interviewed TRA parents who did things like celebrating Dr. Martin Luther King Jr’s birthday, seeking out Black playmates for their Black children, and buying books related to
Black history. It was found that these activities were more common while children were young, and that by the time the children reached adolescence, the children seemed less interested. One adolescent shared, “Not every dinner conversation has to be about Black history” (p. 17). As a result of their adolescents supposed loss of interest, White parents did less to focus on race as the children grew up.

The third approach, *Racial inculcation*, is the practice of actively preparing TRA children for dealing with discrimination and racism in everyday life. Parents who engage in inculcation speak openly with their children about race and racism and confront rather than ignore racial slurs or derogatory comments. There is little empirical research on the use of racial inculcation by transracial adoptive parents. One study focused on US adoptive parents of children born in Korea, and found that a belief in racial inculcation best predicted whether parents reported that they talked with their children about racism and discrimination in school (Lee, Yoo, Weintraub, and Su, 2002).

The fourth strategy of parenting in a TRA context is *child choice*. This refers to parents providing cultural and racial opportunities aligned with the child’s birth culture when the child is young, but then leaves the amount of racial socialization up to the child as the child grows. This approach has surfaced in TRA literature. For example, DeBerry et al. (1996) noted that parents were less active in racial socialization as TRA children entered adolescence. This could be because the child seemed less interested, or because the parents felt uncomfortable or reached the limit of their abilities. The criticism of this approach is that the responsibility for racial socialization is put on the child (Lee, 2003). In addition, children might interpret parental lack of focus on racial socialization as lack of willingness to provide those experiences for their children. Another possibility may be related to Orbe’s (1999) idea that parents might be
attempting to prepare their children for hoped-for versions of the future where racial categories are not emphasized.

In a 2013 study of White parents who adopted transracially from other countries, Barn identified three basic types of racial socialization approaches embodied by parents: (a) Humanitarianism, (b) Ambivalence, and (c) Transculturalism. Much like the colorblind approach described above, Humanitarianism deemphasizes race, and does not acknowledge the need for TRA kids to connect to their birth culture. Ambivalence is evidenced by adoptive parents’ confusion about how much of the birth culture to include in life, and the parents’ inability to bridge cultural gaps and join in with the birth culture of their children. In this category, the parents showed a clear preference for lighter skin in children. Transculturalism is an approach in which there is a commitment to understanding race and ethnicity, and incorporating race into family discussions intentionally. Parents embracing transculturalism demonstrate an awareness of the need to prepare their children of color for racism. Barn asserts that the approach to racial socialization enacted by White parents was directly related to their own understanding of race and racism.

As Barn (2013) and Lee (2003) describe, studies of White transracially adoptive parents document variation in racial socialization practices. The presence of the white racial frame can be found within many of the practices described in research. The white racial frame is the context reproducing the racial hierarchy within transracial adoptive families. In addition to these categories of racial socialization, Orbe (1999) identifies ways in which multiracial families communicate about race. Because communication is one important aspect of racial socialization, these types of communication are relevant in TRA families. They are: (a) embracing the Black experience, (b) assuming a commonsense approach, (c) advocating a color-blind society, and (d)
affirming the multiethnic experience. The first approach to communication within multiracial families, *embracing the Black experience*, describes families who immerse themselves in Black culture, and emphasize Black ancestry rather than White ancestry in their biracial children. Historically, this has been supported by the “one drop rule,” which stated that one drop of Black blood makes a person Black. Legally, this rule was once enforced, and it is still socially maintained (Orbe, 1999). The strength of this approach is that embracing the Black experience helps children who will be seen and treated as Black by society form supportive connections and identifications with the Black community. This approach seems to be rare among White parents who transracially adopt Black children or Biracial children. In fact, the majority of White parents who adopt transracially raise their children in predominantly White environments (Barn, 2013; Lee, 2003; Smith et al., 2011).

The second approach to communicating about race described by Orbe (1999) is *assuming a common-sense approach*. This paradigm favors addressing issues of race in the way that seems to make the most sense in each unique situation. For example, if a White woman is raising biracial or multiracial children in an all-White environment, and the children appear phenotypically White, people using this approach see no point in raising the children as anything other than White, because it coincides with how the children will be seen in the world.

The third way of communicating about race found in Orbe’s (1999) chapter about race communication in multiracial families is *advocating for a color-blind society*. This approach focuses on people as human beings who need not be categorized by race. A White parent of a Black child taking this approach, when asked about the race of her or his child, might respond, “Why, human, of course!” (Orbe, p. 120). This approach is found to be common among White parents who transracially adopt (Andujo, 1988; Barn, 2013). Transracial adoption advocates
often embrace the phrase, “Love has no color.” This notion of not seeing race is one that is quite idealistic, and ignores the social reality of race (and racism) with which Black children will have to contend. White parents with race privilege may advocate for this due to their religious beliefs, or due to their lack of willingness to acknowledge their racial privilege. Still others may assert that the refusal to categorize based on race is a step toward healing racism. In general, however, color-blind ideals are often seen as perpetuating systemic racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). For transracial adoptees, refusing to acknowledge racial difference creates a risk of erasure of the child’s connection to the birth family, disconnection from the Black community, and a lack of preparation for dealing with prejudice and discrimination. In addition, the lack of acknowledgment of a child’s blackness could be internalized as the White parents having negative views of blackness and Black people, especially if the family lives in a mostly white neighborhood and the child attends mostly White schools. This approach is similar to Lee’s (2003) colorblind approach, and Barn’s (2013) humanitarian approach.

The final approach to communication about race in multiracial families described by Orbe (1999) is affirming the multiethnic experience. With this approach, there is an embracing of diversity as something special, and each of the cultures represented in a person is acknowledged. This approach emphasizes knowing Black history, building social consciousness, and affirming culture, while not excluding any piece of a person’s heritage. This approach can include allowing the children to make their own choices about racial designation. This common feature of the affirming the multiethnic experience approach is similar to Lee’s (2003) child choice parental paradigm. However, in a transracial adoptive family, both parents or a single parent might be White, so that embracing a culture other than White cannot happen by
default, and requires work on the part of the child to find cultural events or friends/people with shared racial ancestry, as well as the support of parents to provide transportation and permission.

Another way in which TRA parents’ racial socialization approaches have been described is by racial orientation. McRoy and Zurcher (1983) found that racial orientation (Strong White Orientation, Moderate White Orientation, and Multi-Racial Orientation) of the parents affected the family, school, and community environments in terms of being predominantly White or Black, or racially diverse. Parents with a Strong White Orientation (60% of the sample) tended to refer to their child as mixed or part White, deemphasize Black heritage of their children, live in predominantly White neighborhoods, and send their children to predominantly White schools. Parents with a Moderate White Orientation (20% of the sample) referred to their children as mixed race or part White, but did not deemphasize Black heritage. They chose racially mixed school environments, but still lived in predominantly White communities. Parents demonstrating a Multi-Racial Orientation (20% of the sample) proudly acknowledged Black heritage in their children, chose either racially mixed or predominantly Black school environments, and lived in racially mixed or predominantly Black neighborhoods.

In transracially adoptive families, the embracing of a multiethnic experience would entail the family coming to identify as a multiracial family as a whole. Raible (2006) calls this process “transracializing.” Baden and Steward (2007a) write of this as the challenge for transracial adoptees to identify with both their birth culture and the culture of their White adoptive parents. Beyond the overall approaches or conceptualizations of racial socialization in TRA is the actual racial socialization behaviors enacted by White parents raising Black children, which will be covered in the next section.
White Transracial Adoptive Parent Racial Socialization Behaviors. A primary task for transracial adoptees is coming to terms with oneself within the context of the family and culture into which one is adopted, and also the birth culture, especially if racial identity differs from that of the adoptive family. Grotevant et al. (2000) name three aspects of identity that are salient for adoptees: (a) intrapsychic, (b) family relationships, and (c) the social world beyond the family. In the case of transracial adoption in the United States, the social world is racialized and carries a long history of racialized oppression. Because the family is steeped in that social world, it would follow that those same racialized dynamics are present in TRA families, even if in the unconscious.

Several studies have examined the frequency of racial socialization behaviors practiced by White TRA parents. Berbery and O’Brien (2011) found that White TRA parents engaged more in cultural socialization behaviors than racial socialization behaviors – but that they did not engage frequently in either type of socialization. Samuels (2009) conducted a qualitative study of multiracial transracial adoptees, most of whom reported that they did not receive racial socialization messages from their parents. Adoptees from this study shared that they felt unequipped to deal with racism and discrimination once leaving the protective environment of their White parents. Additional studies report that low levels of racial socialization are linked to TRA adolescents’ feelings about racial differences, feelings about themselves, and feelings about their ability to cope with racial discrimination (Andujo, 1988; Evan B. Donaldson Institute, 2008; McRoy & Grape, 1999; McRoy & Zurcher, 1983).

Smith et al. (2011) conducted in-depth interviews with 10 TRA parents of Black children and 13 TRA adolescents. They found that all parents agreed that transracial adoptive families should encourage pride in the racial backgrounds of adoptees. This theme was termed:
Celebrating diversity: be proud of who you are and where you come from. The difficulty in the idea of pride is that it often does not include being a part of the Black community, but rather is encouraged as an individual or family endeavor. Stories of Black achievement are presented by White parents within the context of meritocracy, rather than a shared history of oppression and survival. Books about Black people and Black history may be in the home, and there might be a celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s birthday. However, when adoptees grow into adulthood and become part of more racially diverse communities, they may find that their racial identity does not include a matching, Black cultural identity – and relating to the Black community is uncomfortable (Baden & Steward, 2007b; Grotevant, 1997).

Another theme that emerged in Smith, et al.’s (2011) study was that of caretaking Whites: we can choose to educate them. Adoptees and parents described modeling or instruction to teach or explain something to Whites, and third-party observers, after an incident of racial mistreatment. Within this instruction was a message that Black TRA children should suppress and manage their own feelings in order to serve the needs of Whites. For example, one parent described helping her adoptee attempt to discern in the moment if a White person’s racial mistreatment was intentionally harmful, or if the person was just uneducated. Another relayed an incident in which her daughter was upset that a White person touched her hair without permission. The parent’s response was to explain to her daughter that the White person was just curious, and they didn’t know, so it is best to just explain things to them. The dehumanization inherent in this theme is evident in placing the burden on the child to be an exhibit from which White people can learn (Smith et al., 2011). These examples highlight DiAngelo’s (2016) statement that White people tend to focus on intention rather than impact, so that if White people either didn’t know or didn’t mean it to be racist, the event should have no effect on the person
receiving the discrimination. Further, the White people discriminating, because of their lack of malicious intent, should have no unpleasant consequence for their actions. Smith et al. stress the white racial frame in this theme being connected to Audre Lorde’s 1984 quote, “This is an old and primary tool of all oppressors to keep the oppressed occupied with the master’s concerns” (p. 113, as cited by Smith et al., 2011).

Getting along with Whites: Have a peaceful heart was the third racial socialization theme that emerged in Smith et al.’s (2011) interviews. With this strategy of socialization, TRA parents teach their Black children to set aside their own needs and responses to racial discrimination in order to help White people learn about race and racism. One mother instructed her child, “Change won’t come unless you do it with a peaceful heart because people don’t want to listen; it’s scary for them when you’re really angry and militant” (p. 103). This statement is clearly from an egalitarian lens born from the White experience of this parent, and not from an understanding of what it might be like to grow up as a Black child in a racialized context. This theme also includes examples in which there is a lack of understanding of systemic racism and the white racial frame as a whole. One parent described her transracially adopted Black daughter as having been in a previous home that was “very racist against White people” (Smith et al., 2011, p. 104). This parent’s apparent “cure” was to hospitalize her daughter so that she could do “personal work on her dislike of Whites” (p. 104). The mother stated that her daughter had a new White friend, which, for her, was proof that the treatment for racism against White people had worked. This idea of “reverse racism” is one that is typical in the white racial frame of the United States, used to minimize and dismiss experiences of Black Americans. As Feagin (2011) points out in his foreword to Smith et al.’s study, these parents succeed in securing items like Black dolls and books featuring various races and cultures. “Yet, the parents rarely secure the
kind of materials and instruction that they need for themselves to learn about their own racism and that of this highly racist society” (p. viii).

A theme that has arisen in several studies is that of Black TRA children feeling that they must handle situations related to racism alone. One TRA parent relayed a story in which her eight-year-old daughter said, “I will be right back. I am going to go to the neighbor’s house.” She came back in a few minutes, and five minutes later, the neighbor child was on the porch in tears, apologizing to both the parent and the daughter. Apparently, the child had been calling this parent’s daughter “the n-word” at school. The daughter had gone to her house, knocked on the door, and said to the mother, “Your daughter has been calling me the n-word at school, and I think you should do something about that” (p. 101). This type of independence is seen by Smith et al. (2011) as the child feeling that she had to take responsibility for teaching the White family the proper etiquette around race. In Samuels’ (2009) study of TRA multiracial young adults, several participants discussed bringing an end to talking about issues of race and racism because they knew their White parents would not understand.

Some studies point to the desire of race-conscious White parents to accept the challenge of racial socialization. An important aspect of this desire is that it, by default, comes from a White racial frame. Therefore, the socialization that takes place continues a type of colonial control of the entire issue of transracial adoption (Willis, 1996); presenting the White parents as saviors with pure intentions, a characterization that commonly negates a necessary critique of the daily practices of racial socialization of Black children. While the desire to pursue adoption and the decision to take on a transracial adoptive situation may come from loving, altruistic intentions in some cases, that does not erase the need for moving from a focus on the “goodness” of the parents to a reconstructing of the family to be truly multiracial with a worldview that is not
limited to the white racial frame (Raible, 2006). In this way, learning about Black culture or
Black history as well as Whiteness and White history would be for the whole family, not just the
adopted child. There would be an understanding of the relevance for the parents to be steeped in
meaningful conversation about race, and a continuous learning about their own Whiteness as
well as their children’s experiences. Living in a racially diverse neighborhood would have a felt
benefit for the entire family, not just the child who is Black.

The solution offered by Smith et al. is to point to the context of White supremacy within
racial lessons from White parents, so that a new way of thinking about the lessons can emerge,
and new ideas can be found for appropriate interventions. Ideally, such a change in
conceptualizing racial socialization in TRA families to acknowledge the influence of white
supremacy as a system of oppression present at the systemic and familial level could lead to new
training strategies and requirements for TRA parents, with a specific focus on raising the
awareness of systemically informed patterns of thought, behavior, and socialization on the part
of parents.

**Population Focus: Black Emerging Adults**

This section offers a description of the population of focus in the current study: Black
emerging adults. Emerging adulthood has been described as a critical developmental period that
forms a bridge between adolescence and adulthood (Hope, Hoggard, & Thomas, 2015).
Emerging adulthood commonly refers to the age bracket from 18-25, and sometimes 18-28.
During this period, emerging adults engage in extensive identity exploration, and experience the
feeling of being in between two life phases - childhood and adulthood (Hope, Hoggard, &
Thomas, 2015; Munsey, 2006). Black emerging adults who were adopted and raised by White
parents will comprise the sample for the current study. The reason for focusing on the emerging
adult age group is that emerging adulthood is the time during which Black transracial adoptees will potentially leave the family home, and experience life in the world without an association to their parents’ whiteness as an influence in real-time or potential buffer in situations related to race. Also, because emerging adulthood is a time during which identity exploration is highlighted, it seems plausible that a Black emerging adult who was raised by White adoptive parents might enter new social environments in which race becomes salient in new ways. This experience might spur a new process of racial identity exploration, especially if the White parents had not discussed race, or fostered a colorblind approach to parenting their Black children.

While there is no research literature available that focuses specifically on transracially adopted Black emerging adults, there is research that examines the experiences of emerging adults in general, and of Black emerging adults. Researchers have explored topics of racial, ethnic, and cultural identity; partnership and sexuality; academic performance; mental health; systemic inequalities; and research methods related to the Black emerging adult population. I chose to review articles associated with the topics I felt were most related to the current study: (a) racial, ethnic and cultural identity and (b) systemic inequalities. The focus of the current study is on race, racial identity, racism and understanding of race experiences, which relates to the first category, and is situated within a theoretical framework of the white racial frame, which emphasizes systemic inequalities. Studies within these two categories will be reviewed in this section to provide a comparative context, and to explore what we know about Black emerging adults related to identity and inequality without the additional factors related to transracial adoption. Information related to Black emerging adult understandings of experiences may help inform an understanding of Black transracially adopted emerging adults.
Racial, Ethnic, and Cultural Identity Exploration. During emerging adulthood, individuals explore many aspects of identity: (a) work/career, (b) school, (c) love/relationships, (d) worldview, and (e) race, ethnicity and culture (Munsey, 2006; Reynolds, 2016). Reynolds et al. (2016) found that parental ethnic and racial socialization facilitates psychosocial adjustment and ethnic/racial identity for Black emerging adults. These researchers also found that ethnic/racial socialization was associated with greater ethnic racial exploration in Black emerging adults, as well as a stronger sense of affirmation and belonging to one’s racial/ethnic group. In addition, Reynolds et al. found that a positive, nurturing, and connected parent-child relationship affects ethnic/racial identity development. Considering Black emerging adults raised by Black parents, this all seems understandable. Yet, when considering Black emerging adults raised by White parents, there arises the question of whether closeness and nurturing from White parents would facilitate racial or cultural identity development. Same-race parents provide a model of Blackness, whereas White parents must be intentional about exposure to culture, so increased racial identity development is likely less a default result of a connected and nurturing relationship between Black children and White parents. That is not to say that it is not possible, if the White parents are in fact intentional, aware, and knowledgeable about the importance of race and culture for their children, and active in their pursuit of a continued understanding and supportive presence for their children’s identity exploration.

In a dissertation study conducted by Bumpus (2015) Black adoptees, ages 25-72, had higher levels of racial identity when adopted by two African American parents as opposed to two White parents. While most of these participants were older than participants in the current study, Bumpus considers factors that seem relevant. For example, transracial adoptees reported that their parents de-emphasized contact with upper and middle-class Black figures, making it more
likely for TRAs to accept a more stereotyped perception of Black identity. In addition, White TRA parents most often raise their Black children in mostly White environments (Barn, 2013). Because of this, Black TRAs are less likely to experience natural connections with the Black community and could miss out on learning the value of social bonds and interconnectedness with the Black community in building resilience (Bumpus, 2015).

In a study examining the racial identity stability of Black emerging adults, researchers found that racial identity fluctuates in response to experiences of individual and institutional discrimination, particularly among individuals who transition to adulthood without having examined their racial identity (Hurd, Sellers, Cogburn, Butler-Barnes, & Zimmerman, 2013). This finding suggests that for Black TRA emerging adults, who are less likely to have examined their racial identity in a similar way as Black emerging adults raised in Black families, racial identity will probably fluctuate with experiences of discrimination. For Black emerging adults entering college, there may be racial microaggressions, institutional discrimination, as well as individual discrimination from peers and teachers. White-Johnson (2015) found that Black parental messages about race were influential on academic performance for Black, emerging adult college students; particularly messages associated with preparation for bias. As discussed above, there is a propensity for White adoptive parents to adhere to a colorblind approach, which does not focus on preparation for bias.

The aspect of race, ethnicity, and culture potentially holds great salience for Black transracially adopted emerging adults because until emergence into independent adulthood, experiences related to race have been connected to the family identity, which includes whiteness. This factor may cause the experiences of Black transracially adopted emerging adults to be somewhat different than experiences of Black emerging adults raised by Black parents.
Depending on the racial composition of the neighborhood and school growing up, entering emerging adulthood could include moving into a more diverse public university, or moving to a different geographical area that offers more diversity (Grotevant et al., 2000). If this is the case, Black TRA emerging adults may enter environments in which their race becomes highlighted by peers and authority figures, and with greater awareness of one’s race comes the exploration of the significance and meaning of race (Hurd et al., 2013). If raised in a mostly White environment, the experience of associating regularly with peers of color may introduce a new internal conflict that could come with the suggestion of Black peers that one is not really Black, or not Black enough (Samuels, 2009).

Neighborhood racial composition has been shown to have no effect on racial identity salience and centrality for Black emerging adults raised by Black parents (Summers-Temple, 2012). This is likely due to the presence of family and friend relationships that support a Black racial identity. For Black TRA emerging adults, however, this might not be so. One transracially adopted participant in Simon and Alstein’s (1994) study stated that her White parents’ choice to raise her in an integrated neighborhood and send her to an integrated school was the factor that helped her develop her racial identity. Without Black people in the family, in addition to living in a mostly White neighborhood and going to a mostly White school, it would be difficult for Black youth to form reflective relationships that would encourage racial identity development. Therefore, for Black TRA emerging adults who come from such a situation, racial identity fluctuation will probably occur with experiences of racial discrimination.

**Systemic Inequalities.** Throughout the history of the United States, Black Americans have been placed at the bottom of the racial hierarchy that was created to justify the system of slavery (Feagin, 2010). Because of this, moving forward in history from that time, Black
Americans must contend with daily overt and subtle discrimination. While emerging adulthood is a time of self-exploration and decisions about school, work, and relationships, it is a transition period that can be disrupted for Black Americans due to discrimination in everyday settings like school, employment and housing (Hope et al., 2015). Discrimination has been linked to negative mental and physical health outcomes for racial minority populations (Bauermeister, Meanley, Hickok, Pingel, & VanHemert, 2014; Hope et al.). Robinson (2016) states that the career development of Black emerging adults is directly related to experiences with racial stressors, community hardships, and lack of resources. Related to career development and racial stress is a study focused on stereotype threat that shows Latino and Black students “leaking” from science programs over time at a greater rate than other racial groups (Woodcock, Hernandez, Estrada, & Schultz, 2012).

Black TRA emerging adults leaving the protective umbrella of White parents might experience some of these things more intensely and more often as they enter college or move out to live on their own. With less consistent racial socialization as a possibility, Black TRA emerging adults could face such stressors related to race without a prepared resilience to face racial discrimination. Current research on Black emerging adulthood demonstrates the salience of racial identity and systemic inequalities during this life phase (Hope et al., 2015; Robinson, 2016). This review has examined this literature and highlighted the potential differences in emerging adult experiences among Black emerging adults and Black TRA emerging adults raised by White parents, and potentially in White neighborhoods and schools.

Conclusion

The purpose of the present study is to qualitatively explore Black transracially adopted emerging adults’ understanding of experiences related to race. This addition to transracial
adoption literature will contribute to the transracial adoption research that has grown over many decades. There have been studies focused on adjustment (defined in a variety of ways and measured with a variety of instruments), and others focused on racial identity. A smaller number of studies have examined the ways in which parents perceive racial socialization in TRA families, and the racial socialization behaviors practiced by White TRA parents (Lee, 2003). Only one study has looked closely at the patterns of white supremacy that show up in the parenting practices and race messages given to transracially adopted children by their White parents (Smith, et al., 2011). Along with these lines of TRA research, a critique of TRA research has also grown, bringing ideas for improvement and refinement of scholarly TRA inquiry. Lee (2003) and Park and Green (2000) suggest improving methodology and conducting studies that appropriately treat international and domestic adoptees separately. Raible (2006) suggests that more specific studies be conducted that focus on transracial adoptees of specific age groups, racial identities, and geographical areas.

The current study is designed to integrate suggested methodological improvements by offering a contribution to transracial adoption research that focuses on a specific segment of the TRA population: Black, emerging adults who were adopted prior to the age of 5 and grew up in Michigan or Ohio. The primary research question for this study is: How do Black transracial adoptees raised by White parents describe their experiences related to race during the transition into adulthood? Secondary research questions include: (a) How prepared do Black transracially adopted emerging adults feel as a result of the racial socialization received by White parents? and (b) What are some of the lessons related to race that were given by parents during childhood? Hermeneutic phenomenology was chosen as the research method in order to capture
the nuances involved in racial and cultural identity for transracial adoptees, and to preserve their authentic voices in the research. Study methods are described in detail in the following chapter.
CHAPTER III

METHOD

The purpose of this study is to explore Black, transracially adopted emerging adults’ understanding of experiences related to race in a racialized society. The intention is to give voice to Black transracial adoptees at a developmental stage in life when their understanding of racial identity and race in society is maturing. This is vital considering that many TRA studies focus on child, middle school, and adolescent adoptees and/or TRA parent perspectives (Alexander & Curtis, 1996; Baden, 2002; Willis, 1996). The main research question for this study is: How do Black transracial adoptees raised by White parents describe and understand their experiences related to race during the transition into adulthood? Secondary research questions are: (a) How prepared do Black transracially adoptees feel as a result of the racial socialization received by White parents? and (b) What are some of the lessons related to race that were given by parents during childhood?

In the sections that follow, a rationale is given for use of the qualitative paradigm and phenomenological inquiry. The rationale is followed by a description of the key theoretical assumptions and research processes that characterize hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry. Consistent with qualitative research practices, there is also a description of the researcher’s role and bracketing of the researcher’s experiences. A description of participants and recruitment procedures is given, data sources are identified, and data collection procedures are outlined. In addition, phenomenological data analysis procedures, and the means used to ensure rigor are described. The chapter concludes with a discussion of ethical considerations.
The Qualitative Paradigm

Qualitative research intends to elucidate the particular and specific (Creswell, 2013). The goal is to provide a rich description of the phenomenon or group being studied. Qualitative research explores the meanings given to certain phenomena or problems and carefully considers the role of the researcher in the process. Data is collected in a natural setting, in a manner that is sensitive to the people under study. These characteristics of qualitative research are well-suited for this study in that participants are racial minorities in the United States, and are therefore vulnerable to inaccurate interpretations of their life experiences because of the pervasiveness of the white racial frame in social systems, including social science research (Feagin, 2010, 2013). (For a more thorough explanation of the white racial frame, see Chapter One).

Important aspects of the qualitative process, according to Creswell (2013), are: (a) the inclusion of the voices of participants throughout the project, (b) reflexivity of the researcher, and (c) a textured, rich description and interpretation of a problem. In this study, a focus on the authentic voices of participants was a primary objective. Rather than interpretation of implicit meanings, the goal was to describe the participants’ understanding of their experiences related to race, based on their own stories shared in interviews and journal entries. Reflexivity of the researcher was achieved through a conscious bracketing of personal experiences with the research topic, as well as a clear acknowledgement of position the researcher holds in the racial hierarchy. This study was implemented using hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry, for which the primary goal is to produce a rich, textured description of a phenomenon as it is experienced by the participant (Kafle, 2011).

In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument (Creswell, 2013). The researcher engages in the research process as a subjective person with thoughts, feelings, experiences, and
biases; rather than an objective, uninvolved party. The researcher poses open-ended questions and inquires organically to further the interview conversation. At times, qualitative researchers use multiple forms of data (i.e., interviews, documents, journals, observation) rather than relying on only one source of information. In this study, both in-depth interviews and journal entries were used for data collection. The qualitative process includes both inductive and deductive reasoning, in that researchers go back and forth between themes and their larger data set, sometimes working with participants interactively to identify themes (Creswell, 2013). In the current study, I repeatedly read chosen quotations and theme descriptions, discerning which quotations were the best representation of themes for each participant. I also went back to the original interviews and journal entries throughout the analysis process in order to be sure I did not lose the connection to the context in which content was shared. In addition, participants were consulted about themes, quotations, and theme structure through member checking interviews.

**Phenomenological Inquiry**

Phenomenological inquiry was used in this study with the intention of maintaining a focus on the voices of participants at every stage of the research project. Phenomenology seeks to study the lived experiences and understandings of those experiences of several individuals all living a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). An added distinction in phenomenology is the type of phenomenology used. This study used hermeneutic phenomenology, which seeks to describe the subjectively experienced phenomenon from the point of view of participants. Another distinguishing feature of hermeneutic phenomenology is the open acknowledgement of the researcher’s prejudices and perspective (van Manen, 2014).

The phenomenon of interest in the current study is the understanding of emerging adulthood experiences related to race for Black transracial adoptees raised by White parents.
The dominant white racial frame (Feagin, 2010, 2013) in the United States makes it especially important for voices of participants to be kept primary throughout a study focused on participants who are racial minorities. Because hermeneutic phenomenology seeks to understand the meaning of the phenomenon as the participants experience it (Finlay, 2008, 2011), it is particularly useful as a method of research meant to serve the interests of oppressed populations. Lee (2003) calls for researchers in transracial adoption to shift the focus away from adoptees being passive recipients of racial socialization, and toward thinking of adoptees as active change agents regarding their lives and their understanding of race and racial identity. The phenomenological qualitative paradigm is ideal for this type of focus. Hearing the stories of emerging adults, as they tell those stories, helps form an ever-growing understanding of how adoptees are understanding and traversing their experiences related to race. Orbe (2000) adds that phenomenological inquiry is well-designed for research related to issues of race/ethnicity by providing multidimensional descriptions. Transracial adoption, being raised by White parents, and the experience of emerging adulthood related to race are all conducive to such multidimensional descriptions. A deeper understanding of these aspects of the transracial adoptees’ experience are potentially beneficial to adoptees directly by giving accurate voice to this unique experience, and indirectly by providing descriptions through which social workers, psychologists, policy makers, and adoptive parents could gain knowledge to serve this population better. The following key assumptions from which hermeneutic phenomenology functions provide a more specific understanding of why phenomenology is an excellent choice for studying race/ethnicity issues (Orbe, 2000; van Manen, 2014).
Key Theoretical Assumptions

A tenet of qualitative research is that researchers function from theoretical assumptions (Creswell, 2013). Hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry works from several key theoretical assumptions (Orbe, 1993). Those key theoretical assumptions are described below.

Rejection of Objectivity. In hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry, there is a focus on managing subjectivity rather than attempting to obtain objectivity. Subjectivity is seen as a natural occurrence, one that if acknowledged and written, need not disrupt the research process. In fact, managed subjectivity could actually enhance the process. “When we adopt the phenomenological attitude, our habitual, taken-for-granted understandings are bracketed” (Finlay, 2014, p. 122). van Manen (2014) explains that researchers need to reflect on pre-understandings, frameworks, and biases. Further, van Manen (1990) stresses one needs to overcome one’s subjective or private feelings, references, inclinations, or expectations that may seduce or tempt one to come to premature, wishful, or one-sided understandings of an experience, and that would prevent one from coming to terms with a phenomenon as it is lived through (p.57).

Finlay (2014) explains that a common error in phenomenology occurs when novice researchers see reduction or bracketing as something to be engaged once, only at the beginning of research. Finlay stresses that “intrusions of preunderstandings” can show up throughout the research process (2014, p. 122). Orbe (2000) recommends that researchers exploring racial groups acknowledge their insider/outsider status in relation to the group being studied (p. 606).

In the current study, bracketing was revisited throughout the process. During analysis, there was a point at which I realized I had been naming themes from my lens about what participants were saying instead of what participants were actually saying. When I realized this,
I consulted with my dissertation chair, and began the process of thematization again from a different place. While this may seem like an error in research practice, it was a meaningful step in the process because that first act of making themes from my own lens ended up being an exercise in bracketing. Because I saw those assumptions I was making through my own identities and suppositions, I was able to set them aside and then start again from a stance honoring the voices of participants. The idea of acknowledging my subjectivity as a researcher helped me see my own assumptions when they showed up, and it became an important part of the research process.

**Deeper Understanding of Everyday Experiences.** Hermeneutic phenomenology encourages a greater awareness of the details of what might seem like trivial happenings of everyday life (Orbe, 1993, 2000). “Such a methodological approach is especially valuable for intercultural relations research given that the everyday conversations reflect the microcosms of the larger societal and political relationships of a specific place in history” (Orbe, 2000, p. 606). This is particularly poignant for Black emerging adults during this time in history. Black emerging adults are negotiating a world where a new rise in overt racism is creating new anxiety and tension for people of color in the United States. Since the 2012 shooting of Trayvon Martin in Florida, the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson at the hands of police, and a series of highly publicized incidents in which police shot and killed unarmed Black men, the Black Lives Matter movement began (Hall, Hall, Perry, & Kazak, 2016). The Black Lives Matter movement extends the work of previous civil rights movements, including the anti-lynching movement, that challenged forms of oppression that act on Black people (Nelson, 2016). Articles have arisen in peer-reviewed journals that attempt to understand police killings of Black people from a variety of perspectives, and to offer support for Black men and families dealing with the trauma related
to police violence against Black people (Aymar, 2016; Hall et al., 2016; Staggers-Hakim, 2016; Tolliver, Hadden, Snowden, Brown-Manning, 2016).

On the heels of this highly publicized violence against Black people, Donald Trump was elected President of the United States in 2016. Okeowo (2016) reports that since the election, there has been a dramatic increase in overt racist and xenophobic acts of aggression and violence. The Southern Poverty Law Center (2016) reports that 437 incidents of intimidation (targeting Black people, immigrants, Muslim-Americans, people in the LGBT community, Jewish community centers, and women) were reported to them between November eighth and fourteenth directly following the election. Expanding these findings, 1091 incidents were reported between November eighth and December 12th. In the community in which I live, a parent at my daughter’s school, who is a Black woman, came to school one morning visibly shaken and upset after she had been walking into a gas station that morning, and a White man in a big truck drove close to her and screamed, “It’s Trump’s America now, [N-word].”

While systemic racism has never been resolved in this country, the recent rise in overt incidents related to race, and the publicizing of those incidents, is something that will be part of emerging Black adults’ narratives. Not surprisingly, participants in the current study each mentioned the current racial climate in the U.S., and the racial politics that affect them on a daily basis. This place in history calls for hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry to help gain detailed descriptions of understandings of everyday experiences, no matter how seemingly inconsequential, to form a rich and textured picture of the phenomenon of emerging adulthood as a Black transracial adoptee who was raised by White parents.

**Discovery-Oriented.** Hermeneutic phenomenology urges researchers to not come to conclusions before or while engaging the research process. Van Manen (2014) states,
“Researchers strive to be as present as possible to the phenomenon (via the participants, transcript, or text) and to what is being described” (p. 123). Finlay (2014) refers to this discovery-oriented stance as a process through which the phenomenon is revealed. Finlay also advises phenomenological researchers to slow down and never assume the phenomenon is fully understood. Because each description of a phenomenon is subject to the perceptual frame of the reader, phenomenological descriptions are a part of an ever-growing, ever-changing series of descriptions. There is no final product that captures a phenomenon completely, but each phenomenological description adds to a wider and deeper understanding. The current study is one description adding to a wider and deeper understanding of experiences related to race for transracially adopted emerging adults.

**Open and Unconstricting.** Phenomenology requires researchers to approach participants without preconceived notions about results or outcomes. The experiences of participants are articulated in their own voices “without the prevalence of pre-existing structures to distort them” (Orbe, 2000, p. 607). Van Manen (2014) describes an intentional opening to possibilities, even if never before considered. Orbe (1993) explains that a phenomenological researcher’s role is to provide a space for “freedom of description” by participants, which helps researchers avoid imposing personal expectations for the outcome of the interview (p. 62). In the current study, there were times I was aware that, without bracketing, my personal expectations for the outcomes of interviews could have been distracting from the goal of being open and unconstricting. Having journal entries in addition to interviews was helpful, as well as having participants read their transcripts and engage in member-checking interviews as a system of checks and balances.
Person-Focused. Rather than using the terms *individual* or *subject*, which could be used to refer to objects, animals, plants, etc., hermeneutic phenomenology uses the terms *person*, *participant*, or *co-researcher* (Orbe, 2000). Language choice is important in phenomenology, because language reflects a researcher’s approach, and language is what we have for accessing participant experiences. Persons, participants, or co-researchers have the potential to be seen as complex and multidimensional rather than being limited to one aspect of the whole. Phenomenology, with its goal of a rich description of experience, encourages complexity and multi-layered understandings of experiences, and the hermeneutic sect of phenomenology encourages this complexity to emerge in the voices of participants themselves. In addition, when working with people who are part of a social or cultural group that is traditionally marginalized in both research and theory, allowing for complexity and authenticity is paramount in breaking through the tendency in research to treat racial minority groups as monoliths (Orbe, 2000). In the current study, the word “*participants*” was used most often to describe the people who were part of the study. “*Co-researchers*” was also used, specifically when discussing member checking interviews. Complexity and authenticity were invited during interviews and in journal prompts.

Conscious Experience. Researchers using hermeneutic phenomenological methods study conscious rather than hypothetical experience. Lived experience descriptions help to open the question of the meaning of a phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). Hermeneutic phenomenology invites the sharing of conscious experience from the lives of participants, and intentionally does not manipulate, alter or reshape that experience (Orbe, 2000). Rather, hermeneutic phenomenology seeks to describe its meaning. The current study focused on lived experience,
and encouraged participants to explore the meaning of experiences with race from childhood into emerging adulthood.

**Bracketing**

Hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry places great importance on the researcher’s role and on the bracketing of the researcher’s experiences. Hermeneutic phenomenology asserts that subjectivity is part of the research process, and that the more aware the researcher is of bias, the less that bias will interfere subversively with the research process. van Manen (2014) states that an extinguishing of one’s own perspective as researcher is not required. Rather, it is important to acknowledge the foreground of the researcher’s experience and prejudice so that the phenomenon itself can reveal its own truth, which may contrast with that foreground. Orbe (2000) considers researcher reflexivity to be a vital part of the first stage of phenomenological inquiry; phenomenological description. Phenomenological description also entails radical reflection. Radical reflection means that a person is reflecting through thinking and feeling, but is also conscious of that thinking and feeling process—observing it from a different position within. When engaged in radical reflection, a person is maintaining the awareness that the act of reflection takes place in the same temporal flow as that which the researcher is attempting to capture (Merleau-Ponty, 2012).

Radical reflection allows the researcher to not only reflect on the meaning of the lived experience of the participant, but also on the researcher’s experience of hearing it, and on the researcher’s own, complex inner lens. The participant’s experience and the researcher’s perspective are inextricably linked, and are also distinct. Just as the participant is expressing an experience through the lens of a multidimensional self, the researcher is listening and understanding through the lens of a multidimensional self. Hermeneutic phenomenology has a
respect for this mingling without having to attempt to over-control it. In this research project, my lens as researcher is filtered, at the very least, by whiteness and the experience of being a transracial adoptive parent. The more aware I was of internal perceptive filters, the more it was possible for me to interrogate that lens and see around it as well as through it. Biases and preconceived ideas come from my experience as a transracial foster and adoptive parent and my experiences as a White woman in a racialized culture.

**Transracial Fostering and Adopting**

When I was 34, I became a single foster parent, with a special certification to care for drug-affected newborns. I fostered two babies, the second of which became my forever daughter through adoption. I am White, and my daughter is multiracial, with Black, Native American, Mexican-American, and White ancestry. The experience of being the parent of a child who does not look like me brought my previous intellectual understanding of race, racism, and living in a racialized culture to a new and eye-opening place through experience. Suddenly I was asked almost daily intrusive questions: (a) What is she? (b) What is the father? (c) What is she mixed with? (d) Where is her real mom? (e) Where did you adopt her from? (f) What is her race? (g) What is her ethnicity? (h) Is she half Black? None of these questions had ever been asked of me when my older daughter was a baby. She and I were the same race, so people did not react to us with questions and curiosity. Rather, we were approached with comments and questions that did not feel invasive: (a) She is so cute! (b) Is she sleeping through the night? As my youngest daughter grew, questions were addressed to her about being with a White parent. Children in the library, upon hearing her call me “mom” would question her, “That’s your mom?” Sometimes, even after she answered affirmatively, the child would come to me and ask, “Are you really her mom?” School mates would stop my older daughter in the hall to ask if her sister was adopted.
Eventually, she came to the pat answer: “Does it matter?” The constant curiosity about my daughter and our family became a daily part of our lives – and it continues to be so. Only in a society where race and racialization are paramount would such questions be so commonplace and seemingly important. I have often wondered when such questioning occurs, if people ever consider what message they are sending to my youngest daughter by interrogating whether and how she belongs to her own family. Interestingly, the inquiries we receive are very different in emotional tone depending on the race of the person asking. When White adults ask, “What is she?” it feels almost as if they are looking for a receptacle for a set of assumptions at the ready, and would like to know which stereotypes to apply to the situation. People of color, Black people in particular, usually ask the question, “What is she mixed with?” This just feels different. My daughter and I have discussed that it feels more like Black people are extending a welcome or inquiring to know if she should be claimed as racial family. A closeness comes from the conversation, whereas with the previously described situation, separation is the result.

During this research project, it was important for me to utilize my story of adoption in a way that enhanced my empathy with participants and developed a point of identification that helped build rapport. However, it was vital that I recognized that each adoptive parent and each adoptee is a unique person with a unique perspective. Not every parent noticed or minded the questions that, to me, were extremely invasive and indicative of systemic racism. Not every adoptee felt “othered” by such inquiries. My story served as an inspiration for this project, but it was not used as a model by which my participants’ stories are shaped.

**White Racial Identity Development**

The journey related to my White identity began when I was 18 years old with experiences I had at Olivet College with my group of friends, who were Black. One afternoon, two
admissions administrators called me into their office, and informed me that I should be more careful when choosing friends, and that people were going to get the wrong idea about me if I stayed in “that circle of people.” I witnessed fist fights because of the n-word being used as a weapon by White football players. When several race-related fights broke out during athletic events, I saw all of the Black students on campus move into one wing of a dorm in solidarity and for safety in numbers, and I learned about a world from which I had been insulated. In the two decades plus that have followed those initial experiences, there has been generous culture sharing on the part of my friends, open conversations about race and how we were raised to think about it, and a bridging of two worlds that resulted in lifelong friendships.

Moving to Berea, KY brought an academic aspect to my journey, through conversations with a community of women who attended Berea College. It was the first time I was near and interacting with people who were well-versed in the language of privilege and oppression. Prior to these conversations, my learning had been experiential. My White identity became much more real to me with the experience of fostering and adopting transracially. My awareness of the racial privilege I carry became clearer. I saw firsthand how I did not have to explain my origins, I never had to worry about being questioned about my appearance, and the social world here in the United States was made for people who look like me.

Entering the doctoral program at Western Michigan University deepened and expanded my White racial identity journey by adding the anti-racist identity to the mix. I encountered professors and colleagues who were continuously pushing themselves and others to go further on the path, and to be a part of a movement to dismantle systems of privilege in education and in society. I began to not only be more aware of my racial privilege and how I unconsciously participate in this country’s system of racism, but ways to use the racial privilege I have to make
change. I was encouraged to study, read, write, and present on topics related to race, racism and privilege, and I was able to incorporate these topics into my teaching assistant position in the education department. In addition, living in a mostly Black neighborhood has been an important aspect of my racial identity development, as well as that of my entire family. Because my ever-growing lens has developed to the point of seeing racialized dynamics in all aspects of my life daily, I believe there is no person, situation, or place in this country that is not impacted by race and racism.

Because of the biases related to the experiences described above, it was important for me to remain open to the experiences and understandings of participants. I had to accept that some participants were just beginning to recognize their racial identity, and were at the beginning of being able to recognize racism in their lives. Some participants endorsed a colorblind perspective in certain aspects of their stories. I focused on hearing their stories without applying my story and my knowledge in a way that changed their stories. The phenomenological inquiry process assisted me in setting aside my own experiences and in being fully present to the participants’ experiences of the phenomenon. I gained assistance from my dissertation chair to be sure I was practicing reflexivity, and that when my biases entered the process, I could talk them out and set them aside to once again put the spotlight on participant narratives.

Participants

Nine people participated in this study (See Table 1). Each participant met the following inclusion criteria: Black/African American or Biracial with Black parentage racial identity, transracially adopted and raised by White parents, placed with adoptive parents prior to age five, raised in Michigan, Ohio, or Indiana, and age 18-28. While the criteria set for the study included participants from Michigan, Ohio, or Indiana, there were no participants recruited from Indiana,
despite recruitment efforts there. See Table 1 for information on age, racial identity, gender and sexual orientation. The reason for a narrow geographical focus is that racial socialization and experiences around race may differ across regions of the United States. Four participants identified as Black, three as African American, one as Biracial: Black and White, and one as Multiracial: African American and Caucasian.

Table 1

<table>
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<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
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<th>Sexual Orientation</th>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Queer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alyson</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Cis-Gender</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emilie</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Biracial (B&amp;W)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Straight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Biracial (B&amp;W)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austin</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Cis-Gender</td>
<td>Queer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryama</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaitlyn</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. All identifying terms in table are terms provided by participants

Three participants grew up in Michigan, and six were raised in Ohio. Gender identities were reported as follows: one cisgender male, one cisgender female, five female, one woman, and one
male. In terms of sexual orientation, two participants identified as queer, one as bisexual, and six as heterosexual. Ages of participants spanned the full 18-28 range. All participants were placed with their adoptive parents at age two or younger, with most being placed within the first months of life. The age of placement was considered important because there would be less clear, permanent memories of cultural influences associated with race for children under five than for older children. Socioeconomic background information was collected as well; one participant reported being from an upper-class background, five participants reported being from a middle/upper class background, one participant from a middle-class background, one from a lower/middle class background, and one from a low-income background.

**Recruitment Procedures**

Participants for this study were recruited using purposive and criterion sampling. Purposive sampling involves selecting individuals who can purposefully inform an understanding of the particular research question and the overall phenomenon that is being examined (Creswell). Criterion sampling is a type of purposive sampling that involves selecting people who have experienced the phenomenon in question (Creswell, 2013). In this case, the phenomenon was the understanding of experiences related to race for Black emerging adults after being raised by White adoptive parents. Each participant experienced being a Black transracial adoptee adopted and raised by White parent(s), and was between the ages of 18-28 (emerging adulthood). Unlike previous studies that include a wide variety of ages and geographical locations, sampling for this study sought participants from the same age group and from specific geographical areas, as suggested by Raible (2006). This choice resulted in a research contribution that is more specific and also more representative in that generalizations were not made about all transracially adopted people. Rather, a deeper understanding of this
group of transracially adopted Black emerging adults from a specific part of the country was
gained. Raible (2006) states that he hopes to see increasing numbers of studies on specific
groups of transracial adoptees – different ages of adulthood and different geographical regions –
in order to break the cycle of transracial adoptees being seen as perpetual children with a
monolithic experience. The narrower focus invited greater depth of understanding and
description.

The original recruitment plan was limited to Michigan cities, and took place first through
offices of institutional research at colleges and universities in Kalamazoo, Lansing, Detroit and
Grand Rapids, Michigan. Information about the research study and the need for participants was
sent via email to Detroit, Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids, and Lansing area colleges and universities,
via email lists obtained through offices of institutional research (See Appendix A). An
explanation of the study and contact information for the researcher was shared with potential
participants (see Appendix B), as well as a flier explaining the study (Appendix C). Because
only three participants were found with these efforts, recruitment continued at foster and
adoptive agencies and through transracial adoptive parent support groups in Michigan cities. An
eemail was sent to adoptive agencies and adoption support groups (see Appendix D and E) who
were asked to forward the information to potential participants. Fliers for the study were shared,
as well, (see Appendix C), as a way for workers to distribute information about the study to
White adoptive parents with children who fit the criteria, who could then relay the information to
potential participants. In response to inquiries, an email was sent (Appendix B) and a flier was
shared (Appendix C) explaining the study. A total of three participants were recruited in
Michigan, two from fliers and one from a university email.
After several months of recruitment effort, the decision was made to expand recruitment to include cities in Ohio and Indiana. A request was submitted to the Human Subjects Review Board to expand the recruitment plan to include the additional states, and the request was approved. The same plan detailed above was implemented in Ohio and Indiana, starting with offices of institutional research at colleges and universities. In addition, at the suggestion of a person from an office of institutional research, I added the process of contacting student organizations at colleges and universities to attempt further recruitment via email (see Appendix F). One of my dissertation committee members reached out to contacts in Ohio who he thought might be interested in participating, as well. While Indiana produced no participants, six were found in Ohio through colleges and universities. Snowball sampling was attempted by asking participants if they knew more participants who fit the criteria and might be willing to be involved in the study, but did not lead to more participants (Creswell, 2013). No recruitment to adoptive agencies or adoption support groups was necessary in Ohio and Indiana due to reaching saturation at nine participants. Target sample size was 8-12 participants.

When a potential participant made contact to express interest in participating in the study, they were contacted via phone for a recruitment conversation. The recruitment conversation was designed to meet the following objectives: (a) to describe the time commitment and activities involved in the research study; (b) to build rapport between researcher and participant; (c) to share the researcher’s interests and experiences related to the research topic, and to provide an explanation of her motivation to do the research project; (d) to give participants logistical information about digital journal entries and the in-depth interview; (e) to answer any questions participants may have about the study; (f) to explain the incentives for participation, (g) to provide a link to the informed consent document and the background information form (which
were posted on a secure, password protected webpage on Formsite.com.), and (h) to give each participant their identification code for use when making journal entries on the website. [See Appendix H for detailed recruitment conversation protocol]

An incentive of a $20 gift card was offered for their time (a total of approximately four hours over the course of the study), as well as a chance to win a drawing for a $100 gift card. These incentives were offered as a gesture of acknowledgement of the time and energy involved in sharing their stories and in filling out digital journal entries. It was explained that the $20 incentive would be given after the final journal entry was received, and the drawing for the $100 gift card would take place after the member checking interview was complete. Each participant received their $20 gift cards, and one participant won the drawing for the $100 gift card after the last member checking interview was complete.

Studies using interviews achieve saturation by asking the same questions to multiple participants, and comparing the themes that arise in the data across participants. Saturation is determined when no new information is obtained with continued interviews, and no new thematization is possible (Fusch & Lawrence, 2015). Saturation was reached with the nine participants, as evidenced by similarities in themes discussed during interviews and found in journal entries. While participants’ experiences were unique in many ways, there were marked similarities through which the description of the phenomenon of experiences and understandings related to race took shape. When data was collected from the final participants, no new themes emerged that changed the description of the phenomenon. As I collected journal entries and conducted interviews, I paid attention to the themes present in the stories of participants. While I noticed that there were differences among stories and within particular experiences of themes, no entirely new themes were showing up. For example, one participant had the unique experience
with living in a diverse area. While this differed from most other participants living in mostly White areas, the uniqueness of that participant’s experience still fit under the umbrella of the subtheme “Exposure and Representation.” The theme was able to accommodate a range of experiences. As data collection continued, the same themes within stories were showing up repeatedly, leading me to determine that saturation was reached.

**Informed Consent**

Initial recruitment conversations lasting 20-30 minutes (see Appendix H for recruitment conversation protocol) were scheduled with those considering participating in the study. During the recruitment conversation, potential participants were prompted to ask questions they had about the study, and I answered those questions thoroughly. The informed consent document (Appendix I) and a background information form (Appendix K) were posted on Formsite.com. The informed consent document included a detailed description of what the researcher was focusing on with this study, the time commitment involved with participation, potential risks and benefits associated with participation, what participants would be asked to do in the study, and the offered incentives for participation. It was also explained that interviews were to be recorded, and that participants were free to leave the study at any time. Participants were assured that their identities would be masked as much as possible through use of pseudonyms, removal of any identifying data, and secure encryption of data.

Potential participants were provided with a link to the specific site for the study, and a password, which granted them access to the site. Once participants made it to the site, they found the informed consent document (Appendix I). After reading the form, if they agreed, they clicked a box indicating that they agreed to participate. Participants then gained access to the next page on the site, which was the background information form (Appendix K). This form
obtained basic contact information of participants, demographic information (age, racial identity), as well as information related to participation criteria: (a) where the participant was raised, (b) where the participant attended school (elementary, middle, and high), (c) at what age they were placed permanently with their parents, and (d) what, if anything, participants know about the race of each of their birth parents. Some additional questions were included to give participants a chance to share more initial information. For example, participants were asked to describe their current living situation, their level of independence as an adult, what attracted them to being a part of the study, and what expectations they had related to participating in the study. One person engaged in the recruitment conversation, and expressed interest in participating, but did not follow through in filling out the informed consent and background information form. One person also engaged in the recruitment conversation, the content of which revealed that the inclusion criteria was not met.

**Data Collection**

Data was collected from four sources: (a) background information form, (b) in-depth interview, (c) journal entries, and (d) a member checking interview. There were seven digital journal entries and one in-depth individual interview (90 minutes). Participants were asked to write brief journal entries (meant to be completed in 10 minutes or less) six times within a three-week period between the recruitment conversation and the in-depth interview, and one time following the final in-depth interview. In-depth, 90-minute interviews provided a rich description of the participants’ understandings of their experiences related to race moving into independent adulthood as Black transracial adoptees (For interview topical protocol, see Appendix R). Following initial analysis of journals and interviews, participants were sent their transcript via email for their review, and were asked to engage in a phone conversation/member
checking interview to provide feedback on the transcript and the themes that were found in the data. Detailed procedures for data collection follow.

**Journals**

After the initial 20-30-minute recruitment conversation during which potential participants had the opportunity to ask any questions about participation in the study, participants were sent, via email or text (their choice), login procedures for a secure website (Formsite.com), which contained the informed consent document. Participants were given a password to access the form, which they were able to access from their phones or computers. Participants read the informed consent document (Appendix I), and clicked a box to indicate agreement to participate. Participants gained access to a webpage containing the background information form (Appendix K). After completion of the background information form, participants were granted access to a password protected digital journal entry form. Participants were asked to submit six digital journal entries over three weeks prior to a scheduled, in-depth interview. One additional digital journal entry was requested after the in-depth interview. Instructions for writing journal entries (to write about any experiences, no matter how small, related to race) (Appendix L) were posted on the online form through which participants submitted their entries. Six reminder prompts (see Appendix N) were sent to participants via text or email (their choice) over the three-week period of journal entry collection, and one final reminder prompt was sent after the in-depth interview for the final journal entry. With this final journal entry reminder prompt, participants were reminded that they would receive their $20 incentive after submitting the journal entry, and that they were going to be contacted in the future for the reviewing of their transcript and the member checking interview. Instructions for the final journal entry (Appendix O) were posted on the webpage through which participants submitted their digital journal entries. Results were
encrypted on the website and access was granted only to the researcher, with use of a two-level login procedure.

The experiences shared in the journal were either personal, or relational. This means an experience related to race could be a thought, a dream, an interpretation of an event in which one was not involved, an impression of someone’s reaction/response, or an observation of an environment, classroom, neighborhood, television program, etc. Relational race experiences involved others. These were conversations, events in class or at work, comments made by strangers, occurrences in public, etc. Participants were asked to write their thoughts and feelings about race experiences in order to invite their description of their understanding of these experiences, with encouragement to share openly and authentically. Prompts were kept open-ended to stay within the parameters of phenomenology, which focuses on gaining an immediate experience pre-reflectively (Orbe, 1993).

The final digital journal entry, submitted after the in-depth interview, was an opportunity for participants to share anything that came to mind after the whole process of the recruitment conversation, the six journal entries, and the in-depth interview. Participants had space to share what it was like for them to talk about race and racism in relation to their parents, and perhaps any further thoughts or feelings about the topic inspired by participating. Digital journal entries were piloted prior to data collection to ensure the data was received and stored as planned, and to test the clarity of the journal prompts and instructions.

**In-Depth Interviews**

In-depth interviews are the most common approach to data collection in phenomenological inquiry (Orbe, 2000). Interviews gave the opportunity to participants to tell their stories in their own words. One in-depth interviews lasting approximately 90 minutes was
conducted with participants after the three-week journal-keeping period. Interviews were audio-recorded for transcription and initial data review within 72 hours. Seven interviews were face-to-face, two were over Skype. Face-to-face interviews took place at mutually agreed upon locations (public and campus libraries) near participants’ homes. I drove to participants for interviews to simplify participation, and to decrease any possible cost for participants. For Skype interviews, I asked for participant Skype names via email, and then contacted them at an agreed upon time from a private location to protect confidentiality.

The purpose of the in-depth interview was to gain, from the perspective of participants, a better understanding of how they understand race, and what their experiences related to race have been as they emerge into adulthood and move away from the potentially protective influence of their White families. A topical protocol (Appendix S) with open-ended questions was used during the in-depth interviews. The goal was to create a space in which the participants could explore topical areas relevant and salient to them. The topical protocol included open-ended questions that were general, and a list of possible specific follow-up topics (Orbe, 2000). The opening question was: Please describe your experiences related to race as you become an independent adult, and what understanding of those experiences you have formed. From that point, there was an intentional effort to allow participants to lead the conversation. As the interviews unfolded, there was less focus on the topical protocol, and the researcher followed the participants’ lead (Orbe, 2000). To encourage participants to continue sharing, I used prompts such as, (a) what more specific details could you describe that would help me understand more fully, or (b) are there any specific stories you could share that would help me understand more fully? Several open-ended follow up questions were also be asked: (a) Describe experiences you have had related to race that may have surprised you, or for which you felt unprepared? (b) How
do you remember your parents talking with you about race, if at all? and, (c) What are some of the lessons or messages you remember receiving about race from your parents?

I strove to make the in-depth interview conversational and non-directed, with the intention of allowing the voice of the participant to be present in an authentic way. I completed a trial run of the interview process in which I conducted the interview with a colleague, and then another trial run during which I answered the interview questions as though I were a participant. During data collection, there were times I encouraged the participant to say more about a particular piece of the story by offering minimal encouragers. After each interview, I wrote in a research journal about the interview experience. This gave me something to consult that captured my initial thought process about interview content, and helped with bracketing.

**Member Checking**

After the final journal entry was received, the in-depth interview recordings were transcribed, and initial theme ideas were developed, I sent each participant’s transcript via email, and requested they read the transcript in order to assess whether they told their story as they wished to tell it. Participants were asked to engage in a 40-50-minute member checking phone interview during which the participants discussed the transcript and the potential themes that emerged from the data. It was important to obtain feedback from participants on emerging themes to validate the process and to position participants as co-researchers in the study (Orbe, 2000). Potential themes were shared with participants, and I asked participants if they felt those themes applied to their stories. We also discussed which themes, if any, did not apply to their stories. The seven participants who followed through with member checking interviews were quite invested in the conversation, and shared their opinions and thoughts on the names of certain themes and the organization of the themes and subthemes. Participants helped to sort out which
quotations felt most important to them, and which ones fit best in each theme. I also asked participants if they felt any themes were missing from my potential list. As a result of this question, the subtheme, Intersections, which had been combined with another theme, was brought back as a distinct subtheme.

Data Analysis

In this study, seven main themes related to the experience of being transracially adopted Black young adults raised by White parents emerged from the data. Within each main theme are subthemes expanding the description of the theme from the perspective of the nine participants. Hermeneutic phenomenology strives to see participants as co-researchers, so participant perspectives were carefully taken into consideration throughout the analysis process (Orbe, 2000). The intention was to preserve participants’ voices in the telling of their story through this research. Orbe’s (2000) recommended process for phenomenological data analysis was followed. Orbe is grounded in hermeneutic phenomenology, which focuses on the study of the lifeworld, or the pre-reflective experience of a phenomenon (Orbe, 1993), and also an intentional openness to and focus on the understanding of experiences of participants as told by participants (van Manen, 2014). The analysis portion of the phenomenological inquiry includes (a) phenomenological reduction and (b) phenomenological interpretation. An application of these two components of the analysis to the current study follows.

Phenomenological Reduction

The purpose of the phenomenological reduction process is to find essential characteristics of the phenomenon. Phenomenology seeks to describe the essence of a phenomenon, so this process of reduction to find essential characteristics is an imperative component. The reduction process includes initial data review, thematization, and imaginative free variation (Orbe, 2000).
**Initial Data Review.** Reduction began with the initial data review, which entailed listening to each interview on headphones while reading the transcript of the interview. While listening, I made notes of body language and emphasis, and also made corrections to errors in the transcript. For journal entries, I read each journal entry aloud to myself for the initial data review.

**Thematization.** During the reduction phase, researchers are reflecting on participants’ descriptions, within which are words, phrases, and pauses that reveal how participants structure their lived realities (Orbe, 2000; Finlay, 2014). In order to be able to see key words and phrases, the researcher reads the transcriptions and journal entries at least three times: (a) once to grasp the whole of the interview, (b) once to highlight and make note of potential themes, and (c) once to read the highlights and make note of themes. The first reading is vital to the holistic approach of phenomenology (Giorgi, 2012). The second reading, including highlighting and making note of potential themes, is described by Giorgi (2012) as noticing transitions in meaning in the data. As the researcher notices these transitions and makes note of them, the transcript becomes divided into *meaning units*, or general themes (Giorgi). These transitions in meaning might be signified by key words and phrases within participant stories. With the third reading, the researcher weeds out themes that are redundant or irrelevant to the phenomenon being studied. Through this process, it is the job of the researcher to refine, expand, develop, and discard themes, concepts and ideas that are most salient and relevant to the phenomenon (Orbe, 2000). As the researcher spends time reading and considering the content of each interview transcript through thinking and making notes, phrases and words are abstracted from the interviews that appear essential to the phenomenon (Orbe).
To begin the thematization process in the current study, I combined interview transcripts and journal entries and read each transcript and entry several times, first underlining important portions of the transcript that seemed essential to each participant’s story and making notes of possible themes in the margins. With the second and third readings, marking in a different color of ink, I reread underlined sections, made alterations, explored theme names, and discarded quotes or potential themes that did not seem essential. Throughout this process, I consulted with my dissertation chair and at some points with my dissertation committee members about my progress, and engaged in bracketing to be sure I was doing my best to remain true to the voices of participants.

I made a list of all potential themes, organized them, and reorganized them, deciding if some themes could be combined or deleted, and whether themes were missing. Once an initial structure to the themes was made, and I consulted with my dissertation chair about my process, I entered that theme structure into the NVIVO software program, as well as all interview transcripts and digital journal entries collected from participants. Once all data was uploaded to NVIVO, I began going through each transcript and journal entry while consulting hard copies with my highlights and notes, and highlighted the data, assigning specific quotes to themes. The NVIVO software was a very effective organizational tool. It provided the ability to visually see the organization of themes, as well as the quotes I chose for each theme. During this process, the theme structure changed some based on the quotes that were being assigned to themes, and on realizations about what made sense in terms of telling participant stories.

**Imaginative Free Variation.** Imaginative free variation helps the researcher glean psychological, structural components that comprise the foundation of a lived phenomenon. Imaginative free variation, a mostly mental exercise, is a method followed to seek the essence of
a phenomenon (Englander, 2016). The essence of the phenomenon is drawn from the themes, which have been identified as the recognizable meaning units or structure of the data. Imaginative free variation leads to a transformation of the data, wherein the researcher takes the expressions of the subject that reveal psychological value of what was said by participants (Giorgi, 2012). The researcher imagines these aspects as present and as absent, noticing if the phenomenon changes with their addition or deletion. This part of the analysis is a way of examining each theme, considering whether the researcher can “do the phenomenon justice” without including it (Orbe, personal communication, February 23, 2017). The researcher will think specifically about that theme, and consider whether the phenomenon would be altered if it were deleted. If it is impossible to imagine an example of a phenomenon without a particular characteristic, then that characteristic is regarded as “essential.”

I decided to include participants as co-researchers in the current study. Imaginative free variation became a shared activity within member checking interviews. After settling on a preliminary theme structure and choosing associated quotations from each participant, I conducted member checking interviews with seven of the nine participants who agreed to be interviewed. Two participants did not respond to emails requesting them to review transcripts and schedule the member checking interview.

The purpose of the member checking interviews was to obtain their feedback on: (a) the structure of the themes and subthemes, (b) the names of themes and subthemes, (c) the quotations chosen for each theme and subtheme, (d) whether each participant felt the chosen quotations and themes accurately represented them and their story, (e) if there was anything extra or unnecessary that could be left out of the description of their experience, and (f) if anything was missing from the description that they wanted to add. Each member checking interview was
transcribed, and participant changes and additions to quotes were incorporated. No participant suggested the removal of any themes or subthemes, but one additional theme was suggested, and the names of several themes were changed during the member checking process based on participant feedback.

During member checking interviews, it became clearer for participants and for me which themes and subthemes were essential. The subtheme related to friendships and dating received the expanded title, Feeling the Divide in Friendships and Dating. It was decided that the subtheme Divide in Family over Racial Politics would remain under the theme The Political is Personal, instead of under the theme Views of Family Related to Race. The subtheme, Intersections, which had been combined with another theme, was extracted and made into a distinct subtheme. A participant suggested the addition of the subtheme, Monolithic Expectations of Blackness, which was fully supported by the other participants consulted in subsequent member checking interviews.

**Phenomenological Interpretation**

Phenomenological interpretation is the process by which essential themes are reflected upon with the intention of finding meanings that weren’t clear in the earlier steps of the analysis. Also, a goal of this stage is to discover how themes are related to each other, and how they vary across participant stories. This is called syntagmatic thematization (Orbe, 2000). For this phase of interpretation, I considered themes and key quotations describing those themes for each participant. At this point, I sought input from my dissertation chair. We explored which themes were similar across participant stories, and how some themes across participants could be brought together under a broader theme. Through this process, some themes were combined and grouped in new ways that best described the phenomenon across participants. Seven themes
were settled upon. The seven themes vary in complexity and the number of subthemes generated. The smallest number of subthemes in a theme is two, and the largest number is three.

Another aspect of the interpretive process occurs through prolonged engagement in the reflective process, and the data sorting and thematization process. The researcher seeks to identify the essence of the phenomenon, which can be described as the core psychological aspect of participants’ understanding of their race experiences. This essence can emerge as a phrase or quote used by a participant. van Manen (1990) terms this the “overall thematic quality of the description” (p. 57). The interpretation phase brings bracketing, reflection, thematization and meaning making together into one, culminating stage that contains all of the previous stages. As I engaged the process of phenomenological reduction and interpretation, the essence that emerged became the title of this dissertation Between Two Worlds. This phrase was used by a participant during an interview. Throughout the process of reduction, this phrase was prominent. It became the name of a theme in addition to the title of the entire document. Between Two Worlds is a phrase that speaks to the experience described by participants related to race. Ultimately, their stories describe being between two worlds formed by the historical racialized context of the United States that trickles into their everyday lives as Black emerging adults who were raised by White parents.

Rigor

Rigor, or trustworthiness, in qualitative research, is demonstrated through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this section, these criteria are described, and steps taken to meet them are explained. Steps taken to meet the additional criteria of cultural sensitivity and multicultural validity are also described.
Credibility involves aspects of the research that increase the probability that trustworthy findings will come from the research project. Credibility is comparable to internal validity in quantitative research. The following techniques have been recommended to increase credibility: (a) member checking, (b) multiple sources of data, and (c) reflexivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Morrow, 2005). In the current study, participants were consulted as co-researchers, and were asked to review their transcripts to be sure they told their story as they meant to tell it. Participants engaged in the thematization process through a member-checking interview near the end of the study, during which they gave feedback on emergent themes found by the researchers. To further increase credibility, data was gathered from multiple sources through more than one method (interviews and journals). Participants told their stories verbally in interviews, and privately and conveniently through digital journal entries. I kept a research journal to jot down brief thoughts after interviews to further increase reflexivity and bracketing.

In qualitative research, transferability relies upon the researcher’s description of the time, context, and people involved in the research. When this description is rich and full, future researchers interested in making a transfer, referencing, or replicating the study will have to decide if transfer is feasible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability is supported by providing a “thick description,” which includes detailed information about the context, meaning, thoughts, and emotion in participant stories (Ponterotto, 2006). In the current study, quotes were used from interviews as well as journal entries. During the interview process, I maintained the use of open-ended questions and prompts to encourage participants to continue with their stories. I also obtained some background information prior to the journal entries and interview processes so that I knew some basic demographic context. The use of journal entries in addition to interview data increased transferability by producing descriptions that were both shared verbally with the
researcher and shared privately in a digital journal. This format provided an increased chance of participants sharing a pre-reflective experience, because one or the other ways of providing information might have felt more natural or comfortable for different participants.

Dependability in qualitative research can be likened to reliability in quantitative research. Dependability refers to how well the research process and data collection procedures can be understood based on the data. An external research auditor was used in this study to check the fit of the data with the themes found to be sure that the results of the study are reasonable, considering the data. The auditor also assessed the handling of the data. The auditor did this by examining the interview transcript data, the journal data, the initial list of emerging themes, and subsequent theme lists with corresponding quotations from participants. My external auditor was an advanced doctoral student in counseling psychology. She identifies as a Black, cis-gender woman, and was in her late twenties. Member checking also added dependability. Participants read the interview transcripts and had an opportunity to provide feedback or additions, and to discuss emerging themes with the researcher.

Confirmability can be described as objectivity. Objectivity is something strived for in qualitative research, even while it is understood that true objectivity is not possible (Morrow, 2005). In hermeneutic phenomenology, the foreground of a researcher’s bias is acknowledged and bracketed through researcher reflexivity (van Manen, 2014). While this does not guarantee objectivity, it adds the potential for it because the researcher’s assumptions are brought from the implicit to the explicit. In the current study, reflexivity was practiced with intentional written bracketing (see above) and keeping a research journal. Debriefing conversations with my dissertation chair following interviews was another practice that helped me intentionally see and bracket my own impressions after interviews so that I was more able to see the participants’
stories through the description given by the participants. My external auditor also added to confirmability, by helping assess whether the results found were grounded in the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I intentionally chose an auditor whose professional work has focused on race and racism, and whose racial identity mirrored participants’.

Cultural sensitivity has been defined within multicultural counseling as the use of an accurate and flexible cultural perceptual schema (Ridley, Mendoza, Kanitz, Angermeier, & Zenk, 1994). In other words, it is vital that counselors not remain tied to conditioned ideas of clients based on their group membership, and that racial and cultural differences are not assigned labels of value. In addition, it is important that wider systemic dynamics be considered, like societal power differentials. These considerations for multicultural counseling apply to research across culture as well. Cultural sensitivity was a primary focus during every aspect of the study in order to attempt to prevent the mirrored presence of systemic oppression within the study itself. I employed cyclical bracketing, or mindful consideration, of my own background experiences and biases to maintain an intentional focus on the understanding of experiences by participants. Cultural sensitivity was also employed in the interview style. After initial prompts, I followed the lead of participants in terms of the direction and focus of the conversation. I took special care to use the language used by participants in the description of the phenomenon to prevent, as much as possible, cultural erasure or whitewashing of participant experiences by my White lens.

Multicultural validity refers to the accuracy of descriptions of meaning across culture (Kirkhart, 2013). While the term “multicultural” can be vague, or an “umbrella term,” I specifically considered multicultural validity in terms of culture and race. The concept of multicultural validity was perhaps especially important for consideration in the current study
because of my dominant racial group status as researcher and the oppressed racial group status of participants in the United States. Multicultural validity was addressed in several ways throughout the study. First, as recommended by Kirkhart (2013), there was an effort to maintain congruence between theory and context. The white racial frame (Feagin, 2010, 2013) was used as the theoretical lens in this study as a way to acknowledge and intentionally keep in mind the social positions of the researcher and the participants, and to remind the researcher to watch for tendencies to automatically interpret data through a White lens. I held the intention to utilize the lens of the white racial frame in the discussion and interpretation of the data, without bending or distorting data to fit my preconceived notions of participant experiences. The voices of participants were preserved and given the “spotlight” throughout the study with the use of direct quotes from interviews and journals, and through member-checking. In addition, my background as researcher added to the multicultural validity of the study. Qualitative research positions the researcher as instrument in the study (Creswell, 2013). I have attended several training programs and doctoral courses focused on race, racism, and difficult dialogues. I have also served as an educator on issues of race, systemic racism and white privilege in my position as teaching assistant in the education department at a Western Michigan University. In addition, I am a transracial foster and adoptive parent. Because of this, there is a background familiarity with the context in which the study will take place, including the common issues arising within discussions focused on race, racism, and white privilege in classes and among peers and faculty. This by no means positions me as an expert on the lives of people of color. Rather, I have engaged in extensive study of systems of oppression and privilege and have an on-going commitment to listen and learn about racialized experiences.
Rigor was demonstrated in this study by enacting the research practices and activities described above. In a variety of ways, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were strived for. In addition, cultural sensitivity and multicultural validity were sought throughout the study. In the following section, ethical considerations will be discussed.

**Ethical Considerations**

While the issues of cultural sensitivity and multicultural validity, as described in the above section, are seen by the researcher as important ethical issues, there were additional ethical considerations related to this study. Of primary importance was the protection of participants’ confidentiality, which was maintained using pseudonyms, the removal of any identifying information from the data, and storing data in an encrypted drive. Participants were given a link to an informed consent document (Appendix I), which was on a webpage that is password protected. Informed consent also made clear that interviews were to be recorded and transcribed, and that participation was voluntary and could have ceased at any time if chosen by participant. The informed consent documented that participation entailed seven digital journal entries, one in-depth interview, and a member-checking interview. Potential risks and efforts to reduce risk were explained, as well as potential benefits associated with participation. Participants were given an opportunity to ask questions about the informed consent document and the research project process prior to participation.

**Summary**

The purpose of this study is to describe the understanding of experiences of transracially adopted emerging adults related to race. Past and current literature related to transracial adoption shows a lack of adoptee voices and lived experiences in research, and only a small amount of studies focused on domestic adoptees exclusively, specific racial groups, and certain cohorts.
This project addresses those gaps in the transracial adoption literature. Hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry was chosen as the method for this study in order to maintain a focus on participant voices and to gain a rich description of race-related experiences and the understanding of those experiences for Black, transracial adoptees during emerging adulthood. This study also addresses the potentially relevant context of the current, tense social climate related to race in the United States. Transracial adoptees during the developmental phase of emerging adulthood may be encountering unique experiences related to race during this time in history. The results of this study may help provide visibility for the Black transracially adopted emerging adult population, and affirm their understanding of their experiences by maintaining their voices and descriptions throughout the study. It might also inform better practices for social workers, counselors, policy makers, and psychologists in terms of race-focused training programs for foster and adoptive parents. In addition, this study can help adoptive parents to better understand the many complexities involved in being an adopted Black child raised by White parents in a racialized world; and, ideally, adjust parenting and family practices to be more supportive of their children.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of the current study is to describe experiences and understandings related to race for Black, transracially adopted young adults (age 18-28) from Michigan and Ohio. Using hermeneutic phenomenology, this study seeks to tell the stories of adoptees from their perspective, adding to transracial adoption literature by describing experiences from a specific population of adoptees in terms of age, geographic location, and racial identity. The primary research question is: How do Black transracial adoptees raised by White parents describe their experiences related to race during the transition into adulthood? Secondary research questions are: (a) How prepared do Black transracially adoptees feel as a result of the racial socialization received by White parents? and (b) What are some of the lessons related to race that were given by parents during childhood?

In this chapter, the results of qualitative phenomenological analysis of data are presented. The next section describes the seven main themes that emerged from the data: Memories and Reflections: The Uniqueness of Growing up Transracially Adopted, Race Mattered (Identity), Between Two Worlds, Growth in Black Identity, Views of Family Related to Race, The Political is Personal, and This is Me. Also described are the subthemes within each theme. Quotes from participants are provided as meaningful examples to describe each theme and subtheme.

Themes

The seven main themes that emerged from the data are: (a) Memories and Reflections: The Uniqueness of Growing Up Transracially Adopted, (b) Race Mattered (Identity), (c) Between Two Worlds, (d) Growth in Black Identity, (e) Views of Family Related to Race, (f) The Political is Personal, and (g) This is Me. Tables 2-9, placed within the following sections,
provide descriptions of themes and subthemes, as well as participant quotes showing the essence of each theme. The seven main themes vary in complexity and the number of subthemes generated. The smallest number of subthemes in a theme is two, and the largest number is three. Themes are organized to tell participant stories of racial awareness and understanding in a chronological and meaningful sequence beginning with childhood and adolescence, moving into young adulthood, and then onto political awakening related to personal identity and a description of how clients think and feel about themselves currently. Developmentally, the first two themes describe experiences in childhood and adolescence, and the next five focus on emerging adulthood. Including both childhood and adolescence as well as emerging adulthood was intentional, to explore the connections between childhood experiences and environment, and emerging adulthood experiences and perspectives related to race. The following section introduces each theme and associated subthemes in sequence. Descriptions of themes are strongly driven by participant quotations with the intention of keeping participant narratives at the center of the story being told.

Memories and Reflections: The Uniqueness of Growing up Transracially Adopted

This first main theme directly corresponds to the secondary research questions pertaining to childhood experiences related to race and parental racial socialization. This theme is comprised of quotations in which participants remember childhood and reflect on experiences specific to being transracially adopted. These memories and reflections are expanded upon with the subthemes titled: (a) Exposure and Representation, (b), Seeing Black and White and (c) Communication (or Lack of) about Race. These subthemes are meant to further illustrate the context of transracial adoption during childhood and adolescence for these nine participants.
### Table 2

**Theme One and Corresponding Subthemes with Example Quotations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example Participant Quote</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Memories and Reflections:</td>
<td>The Uniqueness of Growing up Transracially Adopted</td>
<td>This theme is comprised of quotations in which participants remember childhood and reflect on experiences specific to being transracially adopted.</td>
<td>“Growing up with White parents was culturally very difficult for me. Because we lived in a majority White area most of my life, I wasn’t really raised around many Black people, besides my brothers who were in the same boat, so I had very little exposure to or understanding of Black culture.” <em>Emilie (24-year-old Biracial straight female)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exposure and Representation</td>
<td>In this subtheme, participants describe the amount of racial diversity in their neighborhoods and schools. Some participants comment on the meaning of the lack of exposure and/or representation during childhood.</td>
<td>“Growing up I had no black representation. All my idols and obsessions looked nothing like me.” <em>Cherise (20-year-old Black queer woman)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seeing Black and White</td>
<td>This subtheme explains different ways participants came to see the meaning behind racialized identities during childhood. They describe wrestling with</td>
<td>“Whenever I would go downtown and see all of them walking around, getting on a bus, and that was my understanding of where the Black people were and what they were doing. That was like my context for so long.” <em>Alyson (27-year-old Black heterosexual cisgender female)</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
stereotypical ideas related to Black people, seeing and experiencing privilege and oppression, and noticing differences in how Black and White people were treated and characterized.

| Communication (or Lack of) About Race | Participants share about whether and how race was discussed with their families during childhood. Some participants offer examples of communication that was memorable and meaningful, including explicit race lessons offered by some parents. | “The only way that race is talked about in my family in present day is if I bring it up. The words, "race, racism, White, Black," were never spoken in my family growing up.” Alyson (27-year-old Black heterosexual cis-gender female) |

The uniqueness of the experience of being transracially adopted was discussed by each of the nine participants in this study as essential. An awareness of the importance of race began at a young age for many participants. Within this theme, participants tell stories of times they remember race becoming a part of their awareness, reflect on what it was like to be a different race than parents and other family members, and share thoughts and feelings related to looking back on the experience.

Maryama and Jacob shared specific stories about becoming aware of race during childhood. Maryama (21-year-old African American bisexual female) tells of a time when her belonging to her mother was questioned by a classmate:
I can remember the very first time where race became a factor in my life. I was very young, kindergarten actually, where I remember having show-and-tell. I was so excited because it was my day to show and my mom was bringing in our new puppy. When my mom had finally arrived, she walked through the door and at that very moment I was filled with joy and excitement, not only because my dog was there but because I got to see my mom in school. One of my really good friends at the time came up to me and asked, "that's your mom?" as if there was something wrong. I just remember looking at him like, "Why? Of course, that's my mom! What do you mean?" The kid had a blank look on his face, and he said, "but she's White and you're Black."

This example from Maryama’s journal entry illustrates the moment at which she was made aware that, while she might not have understood what it meant, there was something noticeable and socially important about her being Black and her mother being White. In a similar way, one of Jacob’s (18-year-old biracial heterosexual male) journal entries included a story of being a young child and realizing he was a different race than his family, but in this example, it was he who pointed out the difference rather than a peer:

I remember swimming in the lake and having an epiphany about myself in relation to my family. I got out of the lake, rushed over to my aunt who was talking with my dad. I pointed to my palm, and said something along the lines of, "Dad, Aunt [deidentified], look, look! I found my White, I found my White!" My aunt responded by pointing at my heart with something along the lines of, "Color doesn't matter, it's what is in here." I believe that I responded with something along the lines of, "Oh, I know, but I'm different than you. I'm Black and you're White."
This story illustrates the dawn of Jacob’s awareness of racial difference in his family, and, even when his family member responded with a philosophical explanation of color not mattering, he was insistent to again point to the fact that there was a difference, and he noticed it.

Several participants reflected on and shared memories of times when racial difference due to transracial adoption created a feeling of discomfort. Sadie (19-year-old African American heterosexual female) shares about her feelings related to going to her White grandparents’ cottage by a lake in a small rural town:

I used to be uncomfortable going to places around there especially because of what I looked like. I know a lot of the times people around there like my grandparents’ friends they always kind of looked a certain way or might have snickered to each other or something. It became noticeable. It used to make me self-conscious and I think that’s why I stopped going. I think that’s kind of when I started to push that side of me away. Because in high school I think it was to the point to where I almost wished I was White.

This vignette captures the discomfort Sadie felt due to race, and it was echoed by Cherise (20-year-old Black queer woman) as she described her feelings when she would encounter Black people while with her White family or friends. She stated:

Growing up, I was kind of uncomfortable around Black people, and I didn’t know how to act around them. I remember when I’d go to a salon it was mostly black women and I would be sweating sitting there. I would just feel super uncomfortable. I would think, ‘Oh, are they judging me? Are they thinking I talk a certain way? Are they judging me for being with a bunch of White people or my White friends?’

While fears related to an imaginary audience are common during adolescence, this discomfort is specifically related to racial difference and having been transracially adopted. Alyson (27-year-
old Black heterosexual cis-gender female) shares her experience of this discomfort at the age of seven:

> When I was with my family at home, I never felt abnormal or that our heterogeneous family was atypical. But the moment we stepped into public spaces it was palpable that we were different and from an early age I became paranoid of this fact. From even the age of 7 in 2nd grade, I remember feeling at ease that my mom worked in the school and everyone knew her, but they didn't know my dad. I remember that a girl a grade below me had a White mom, and a very Black dad and she was my color, so I thought, 'if they never meet my dad, maybe everyone will assume he is Black and thus not think I am weird or look confused or start to ask questions that I don't want to explain.'

Sadie, Cherise and Alyson all describe discomfort, and a feeling of being judged, looked at, or the feeling of discomfort from anticipating judgement or questions from others.

Being transracially adopted brings the unique experience of dealing with dynamics of race and racial difference interpersonally and societally, and also intrapersonally, while embodying a racial identity different from that of parents. Kaitlyn (18-year-old Black heterosexual female) shared, “I was confused when I was little because I knew I was adopted, but I would still wonder why my parents were a different skin color than me.” Another participant, Austin (28-year-old Black queer cis-gender male), commented on how being transracially adopted is different than same race adoption with the statement:

> Being transracially adopted, there was no hiding it, ever. There are those stories about kids who don't find out they’re adopted until they're in their twenties. There was no hiding it. And so always being aware of the effect of the fact that you're adopted, whether you wanted to be or not.
The above quotations provide a description of the uniqueness of transracial adoption from the perspective of transracial adoptees in emerging adulthood. They describe the experiences of race and racial difference being a noticeable factor during childhood and adolescence.

**Exposure and Representation.** In this subtheme, participants describe the amount of racial diversity in their neighborhoods and schools. Some participants comment on the meaning of the lack of exposure and/or representation during childhood. Each participant discussed exposure and representation as a part of their reflection about memories from childhood, expanding the description of that theme.

Seven out of nine participants shared that exposure and representation were an essential component of their experience related to race during childhood. When asked if he had much interaction with Black people, Jacob (18-year-old biracial heterosexual male) responded, “No. Little to none, actually. I’ve gone to private schools for most of my life, and I’ve really only been around Caucasian students.” Austin (28-year-old Black queer cis-gender male) also attended schools with few students of color. He stated, “I think there was five people that were Black that I graduated with, if that. And that was in my grade, but we were a class of 300.”

Reflecting on her environment growing up, Emilie shared, “I honestly can't, besides my family unit, I cannot think of any other Black people that lived in my entire neighborhood, like, just offhand.” Similarly, Simone (21-year-old African American straight female) shared, “Growing up, I didn’t have many friends who looked like me. There was no reason why, but my town didn’t have many African Americans in it.” Maryama (21-year-old African American bisexual female) shared a similar picture of racial diversity in her environment: “If I went to my dad's work, I would see some friends of color of his, but besides that, no. We went to an all-
White church. Actually, I'm thinking of it now. My mom didn't have any African-American friends.”

Cherise (20-year-old Black queer woman) noticed the lack of exposure to people of color in terms of representation. She stated, “Growing up I had no Black representation. All my idols and obsessions looked nothing like me.” On this same topic of representation, Alyson (27-year-old Black heterosexual cis-gender female) shared an experience in which her grandmother reminded her that when she was four or five years old, she told her grandmother, “I wish my skin was light like yours.” Alyson, hearing this story, described the following reaction:

When my grandma told me this, I viscerally felt so sick and sad for my past self. For a 5-year-old to recognize those differences and consciously say out loud that she wanted the White skin is so telling of the subconscious messages we receive about racial hierarchy from a young age. My 5-year-old self knew nothing about race, yet my environment engrained in me that it must be better or more desirable to be White. My entire family is White. Every teacher I had was White. Every doctor I had was a White, elderly man. Every person of authority in my life was White. The majority of children in my Catholic grade school were White, with the exception of a few Asian children, and around 10 Black children in grades K-8. My priest and every single human in the congregation was White. Every TV show at that age that I watched had White people or cartoon characters. Every book that was read to me had White people. One could venture to think, that as a 5-year-old, the subconscious feeling of not feeling like I belonged would resonate with me and have dire consequences all throughout my childhood and into my teens and young adulthood. And it did.
This story shows how even later in life as a young adult, Alyson saw the complexity of her experience related to race as a transracially adopted child and believed the lack of exposure to and representation of Black people in her life had a lasting impact.

Kaitlyn had a different experience than other participants, and grew up in a diverse town. She stated, “We had people from all races and all religions that went to school with us. So, it wasn’t that difficult.” Kaitlyn is the only participant who reported growing up in a racially diverse area and attending a racially diverse school. Even with L’s experience being at the opposite end of the spectrum in terms of amount of exposure and representation, it still was an essential component of her story. The added exposure to a diverse racial community produced opportunities for her to have casual and consistent contact with people of color on a daily basis, to be involved in conversations about race with peers, and to experience things like stereotype threat and unequal treatment at school in a way that was connected to her understanding of systemic inequalities based on race.

**Seeing Black and White.** This subtheme explains different ways participants came to see the meaning behind racialized identities during childhood. They describe wrestling with stereotypical ideas related to Black people and where their own identity fit into their understanding, seeing and experiencing privilege and oppression, and noticing differences in how Black and White people were treated and characterized. This subtheme helps to describe the theme, Memories and Reflections, by giving a more specific view into the reflections participants have about the ways they were perceiving race in the world at the times described in their memories, and the meaning behind their memories.

F described her ideas about Black people when she was growing up and related those ideas to the previous subtheme of exposure. She stated:
I wasn't exposed to Black culture before college, and to be honest, I kind of liked it that way. As bad as it might sound to say it, I always identified myself as mixed when someone asked my race. I was proud of my White side because the encounters I did have with Black people were not very good ones. I thought they were “ghetto” and in general had less manners and consideration for others, which is what I did not want to be. In a way you could say I had preconceptions about Black people.

Echoing this idea of having preconceived ideas about Black people, Cherise (20-year-old Black queer woman) shared, “Because I wasn’t around a lot of Black people, I think there were times when I did view Black people in a derogatory way, like in a stereotypical way. And it’s not something that I’m proud of. I don’t really talk about it.” Alyson shared her thoughts on how she thought about Black people when she was growing up:

Back then, the way that I thought about Black people globally was that those are the people that are downtown that mostly make up the people who are homeless or begging for money; that they live downtown in the hood and that's basically what they do. That was my context for so long.

In addition to ideas about Black people, ideas about White people and whiteness in the world were also essential to the experience of being transracially adopted. Several participants discussed or wrote about their views of and relation to whiteness during childhood. Cherise stated:

At a young age Eurocentric features are what I craved. I have realized that the lighter you are, the more beautiful you are, the lighter your skin is going to mean you are going to be treated better, with more respect, dignity.”
Similarly, Austin stated, “I didn’t ever want to be not Black. I just wanted to be White. Whiteness was the beauty standard. How I wanted straight hair. I just wanted straight hair so bad.”

Another aspect of seeing Black and White for some participants was making efforts to fit into whiteness. Emilie shared about this during her interview:

Being that I was raised by White parents in a predominantly White area, I spent most of my childhood from about fifth or sixth grade until college trying to assimilate into whitehood, like being White. If I decided that I didn't want to continue assimilating but wanted to continue trying to be accepted by my White peers, I felt like I would have no options as far as friends, as far as activities that I could participate in at my school.

Another piece of seeing Black and White during childhood was a feeling of discomfort specifically due to being with a White family. Alyson shared:

If my family went out to eat or I was with a parent at a store or entertainment place, if we interacted with a black person as waiter, cashier or worker it was hard to look them in the eye. I felt like a traitor of some sorts stuck between worlds, a word I now understand as shame.

Even as a child, she noticed a feeling in response to the racial dynamics of the transracial adoptive family and the racialized society in which she lived.

Communication (or Lack of) about Race. In this subtheme, participants share about whether and how race was discussed with their families during childhood. Variation in both the amount and content of communication is evident in stories shared by participants. Some offer examples of communication that was memorable and meaningful, including explicit race lessons
offered by some parents. Others tell of there being a need for more communication where there was none or their personal reasons for not bringing up topics related to race with their parents. Kaitlyn (18-year old Black heterosexual female) shared explicit instruction she remembers from her mother:

  My mom lectured me and my brother about how we were to behave if we ever got pulled over, or if we were walking in a store and getting followed. When we found that [de-identified] was shot or the guy at Walmart, but my mom would always like explain to us why that happened. So, I think we just always sort of knew better, like how to react. Like, in stores, we never put our hands in our pockets or anything.

Similarly, Jacob (18-year-old Biracial heterosexual male) explained the explicit lessons about race related to police and getting pulled over, saying, “My parents always harp on that. Like, always be respectful. Don’t ever make any sudden motions. Always make eye contact with the police officer and be as cordial as possible.”

An explicit race lesson for Emilie (24-year-old Biracial straight female) had to do with the n-word. She remembered her father instructing her not to say it. She reflected on the conversation, stating, “I don't know how Black kids and Black families are talking about the n-word, but my dad was basically like, ‘This is not a word that you use. If a White person says it’s grounds for a fight.’ She also shared that she believes her family did the best to try to help if there was any issue related to race, but that there was a level of discomfort with the topic. She stated, “I think, for our family, it almost felt like the sex talk in that it's a little bit awkward.”

There were also participants who did not receive the explicit race lessons they would have liked from parents. Cherise shared, “I wasn’t getting taught about race. It wasn’t a huge thing in the family. We didn’t get talks about the police or anything like that. I kind of had to
learn on my own and make those realizations and educate myself through the media or through social media.” Alyson remembered, “The words, ‘race, racism, White, Black,’ were never spoken in my family growing up.” Austin expressed, “They didn’t teach me how to handle discrimination and anti-blackness. Like they never, it was never brought up.”

Another aspect of communication about race was whether or not participants would go to their parents about things related to race. Maryama shared:

I never talked about it because I felt like I couldn't get help from my parents because of the things that I was missing in my life. I think it's just because, in my head, I knew that they couldn't give me what I was asking for. But, now, I'm thinking back on it. If I did ask them, I feel like my parents would have tried to find a way to give me what I need or even just listen, because maybe that's all I wanted. I don't think I knew what I wanted.

One participant, Simone, stated that her parents were comfortable talking about the history of racial tension in the United States, and that she appreciated this. She said, “My parents were like, “We want you to know what happened. As a race, we’re ashamed, of course.” But they’re like, “We don’t want you to grow up not thinking that things were bad, because they were.”

**Summary.** There was a large range of participant experiences related to the first theme, Memories and Reflections: The Uniqueness of Growing up Transracially Adopted. These racial socialization experiences presented themselves through experiences of Seeing Black and White, Exposure and Representation factors, and Communication (or Lack of) about Race. Stories shared by participants provided examples of the things that influenced their thinking and feeling about race during childhood, and how their environments and the people in those environments shaped their childhood understanding of issues related to race. Whether participants told stories
of how race was discussed in their homes, the racial composition of their neighborhoods and schools, or peers asking questions about their multiracial family, it is clear through the stories of racial socialization that race was something important, noticed by every participant as a part of the world in which they grew up. The next theme continues to explore impressions of race during childhood, with a subtle shift to perceptions of race in relation to self, identity, and participants’ place in the world.

**Race Mattered (Identity)**

This theme describes how race mattered during childhood and teenage years, and the experiences participants had that showed them that race mattered in terms of their personal identity. Race mattered in that it was directly related to how the world saw them, how they saw themselves, and the stereotypes with which they were associated during childhood and into young adulthood. This theme relates to the main research questions pertaining to understandings of experiences related to race during the transition to adulthood, because some influential experiences occurred prior to emerging adulthood that played a part in the formation of ideas about race during emerging adulthood. In addition, this theme explores some of the race lessons given by parents during childhood, even if unintentionally, as well as how prepared participants felt for racialized life as a Black person based on childhood experiences. Some of the topics covered related to this theme include personal style, friendships, managing image, experience of identity, and the assumptions of others. Following the description of this theme will be a description of three subthemes (a) Dealing with Monolithic Expectations of Blackness, (b) The Hair Journey, and (c) Experiencing Racism.

Sadie (19-year-old African American heterosexual female) discussed her personal style in relation to racial identity. She stated:
My style back then, I used to try to make it White, I guess. I was having such a hard time with my identity. I was trying to force myself to go in that direction just because the environment in high school.

Table 3

*Theme Two and Corresponding Subthemes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example Participant Quote</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Mattered (Identity)</td>
<td>This theme contains quotations that describe how much race mattered during childhood and teenage years, and the experiences participants had that showed them that race mattered in terms of their personal identity. Race mattered because it was directly related to how the world would see them, how they would see themselves, and stereotypes with which they would be associated.</td>
<td>“There’s a clear difference between White style and Black style. My style back then, I used to try to make it White I guess. I feel like I was having such a hard time with my identity and I didn’t really know what direction I was going.” <em>Sadie</em> (19-year-old African American heterosexual female)</td>
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<td>Dealing with Monolithic</td>
<td>In this subtheme, quotations shared by participants explain the monolithic expectations that they faced in the form of comments about not being “Black enough,”</td>
<td>“They’ll tell me things like, “Oh, you talk like such a White person. Because you were raised by all White people.” But, yeah. It’s mostly my White friends. Because they only know what stereotypical Black things are when they joke about it.” <em>Kaitlyn</em></td>
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<td>Expectations of Blackness</td>
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feedback on mannerisms and ways of speaking, or lack of familiarity with Black cultural standards.

The Hair Journey

This subtheme provides a description of a range of participant experiences related to caring for Black hair, the meaning of hair, and the journey of learning how to appreciate and care for their own hair.

“My hair was always an important part of who I was, but it wasn’t until I began to learn how I was supposed to care for it during my senior year. Learning about caring for my hair was something that took a lot of practice, and it helped me to find myself.”

Jacob (18-year-old Biracial heterosexual male)

Experiencing Racism

This subtheme provides examples shared by participants of experiencing racism during childhood and teen years.

“I remember the first time someone called me a nigger. I was 10 years old. It was in middle school. We were walking down the stairs to go to the buses. I knew that I was different and I knew there was anti-blackness, but it was the first time someone ever wielded it against me.”

Austin (28-year-old Black queer cis-gender male)

Similarly, Emilie (24-year-old Biracial straight female) reflected on her time from 6th grade to college, and her choice to assimilate more with her White peers. She said, “I knowingly or unknowingly leaned into, and on, my White side as a way to assimilate and survive both school and life.” In her interview, Cherise (20-year-old Black queer woman) shared that all of her friends were White. She said, “Honestly, I was okay with that. I didn't really think anything of it. It's all I knew and I didn't really want Black friends growing up.” She then acknowledged, “I
did get called Oreo: Black on the outside and White on the inside. At the time, it didn’t really bother me. I kind of laughed it off, because I think I did try to act White.” Cherise went on retrospectively, sharing, “I was a token Black girl, I guess, now that I can see it. But, now, it bothers me because I’m not White.”

For some, the idea of identity and race, in retrospect, brought realizations of feelings of insecurity or lack of clarity related to Black identity. Cherise stated, “Looking back on it and my childhood I was a little Black girl who didn't realize that I could be beautiful and shine and still rock my dark skin.”

Reflecting on how he understood race in relation to himself as a child and teenager, Austin talked about how he identified racially during childhood and teenage years:

When I was younger, I used to identify as 'mixed' or 'biracial' and would the part 'part Native American' thing that so many people include. I realize that a lot of those identities were attempts to distance myself from my Blackness. I wasn't secure in it, so I had to qualify it. And that was due in large part to my white family not accepting or even acknowledging my Blackness. Despite the fact that I had all this proximity to whiteness, other people still saw me as Black and treated me as such.

Part of the experience of race having mattered during childhood in terms of identity, was the management of the adoption story as it relates to race. Participants shared about the reactions of other people to the racial difference in their families, and the different ways they made sense of this as they were growing up. Alyson shared that for some time she did not tell her classmates that she was adopted, and that her father was White. She secretly hoped people would think her mother was married to a Black man, and she wouldn’t have to explain her family to anyone. She
then shared about what happened when people at school began to know her family and that her father was White:

    When people finally got wind of my White dad, they would ask me why I was adopted.
    And I didn't know what the feeling I felt back then was, but now I know that it was shame. The way they asked me made me feel like I wasn't normal or that I wasn't authentic in who I was. I used to lie about why I was adopted. I would just say that I was born in a bad neighborhood and that my mom wanted me to be safe but she couldn't afford to move (a subconscious story I told that I hoped would help people believe that I was indeed as Black as I looked because I knew saying 'bad neighborhood' would allude to the hood, and Black people live in the hood, right?). I literally had made this up as early as 2nd/3rd grade.

Alyson (27-year-old Black heterosexual cis-gender female) continued with her story, explaining the interesting racial image management that became a part of this experience for her:

    Contrastingly, around this same age, I was doing things to prove I wasn’t like the other Black kids at school and that I was more like White people; (i.e.: not standing next in line to a Black person, ignoring or not playing with a Black person as to not be associated with them, try to overachieve to separate myself and be more like the White kids, talk about certain Black kids to make myself appear superior).

Alyson could feel that race mattered, both internally and externally, and clearly struggled with knowing and managing her racial identity and its meaning in relation to societal ideas associated with race. Nuances of this theme, Race Mattered (Identity), are expanded through three subthemes: (a) Dealing with Monolithic Expectations of Blackness, (b) The Hair Journey, and (c) Experiencing Racism.
Dealing with Monolithic Expectations of Blackness. In this subtheme, quotations shared by participants explain the monolithic expectations of Blackness that they faced. These expectations showed up in the form of comments about not being “Black enough,” feedback on mannerisms and ways of speaking, or lack of familiarity with Black cultural standards or pop culture during childhood and adolescence.

Occurrences with friends was one way in which participants encountered monolithic expectations related to race. Participants described peers telling them they were White, or that they were not Black, or calling them names – all focused on race and identity. Austin remembered, “being called ‘Oreo’ and ‘Black on the outside and White on the inside.’ Telling me that like I'm not really Black or they don't see me as Black. Telling me I talk White.” This same type of thing happened to Maryama and Cherise, both of whom were called “Oreo.” Maryama recalled, “All I heard was ‘you're not Black, you're White. Why do you talk like a White person? How does it feel to live with White people?’ I HATED IT!”

In the following passage from a journal entry, Kaitlyn reflects on her experiences of comments made by friends, and how it caused her to believe things about herself:

My friends who were White would always say things like, “you don't know what racism is because you have White parents,” or they would say things like, “even I am blacker than you.” I know now that none of what they say matters because they will never understand what it means to have dark skin and be stereotyped. But when you are just starting a chapter of your life and every little thing that a person says matters to you, that can mold your mind and make you believe things that aren't true.
Austin (28-year-old Black queer cis-gender male) recalled a situation in his Spanish class during high school in which a Black student who had transferred to his school challenged him to a freestyle battle. He stated:

I literally said, ‘I can't. I don't know how to do that. I'm so sorry.’ And he said, ‘What do you mean, you don't know how to freestyle?’ I said, ‘Oh, God. Look around. What about this environment makes you think that I would know how to freestyle?’”

Austin described this as one of many moments when his Blackness was questioned.

Another school arena in which monolithic expectations arose was school dances. In a journal entry, Alyson (27-year-old Black heterosexual cis-gender female) reflected on her feeling of not fitting into the monolithic expectations of Blackness related to music and dances:

People would know hip hop/rap dances and old school R&B songs that their parents had grown up on. I would not know any, 1) because I was too busy with after school activities to ever hang out or be immersed in my Black friends’ or friends’ family culture and 2) my parents were White and I was not exposed to a lot of music or vernacular or culture that my Black friends were. I feared school dances because everyone expected me to know these songs and dances. I did not. I also was very self-conscious about my dancing because it would be described as "dancing like a White girl." I think that is why in high school, I always drank before school dances. It made me feel more comfortable in my own skin. I also took hip hop, jazz, and ballet class in junior high so I could truly learn these types of moves. However, choreographed hip hop class never really helped me improvise on the school dance floor.

Alyson was joined by Emilie (24-year-old Biracial straight female) in this experience of an attempt to know Black culture through dance classes. Emilie shared in her interview that her
mother made the effort to take her to an African dance class. While she appreciated this effort in retrospect, she talked about feeling out of place in the class because of the lack of cultural context in her own life.

Participants described this ever-present awareness of being outside of what was expected in terms of Blackness. Emilie shared that for her, there was a list of things she simply never felt well-versed in:

There are all types of things, from how to do your hair and what is a socially acceptable way to wear your hair, ways to care for your hair. Things like code switching- I didn't so much understand code switching and which code you used, and how well you transitioned was important. Food. I didn't understand, how important it was to know how to cook certain foods or, how you seasoned certain things added to how people saw you. Or, different movies that people would reference.

Pop culture was mentioned by many participants as something that seemed to have monolithic expectations related to Blackness. Maryama (21-year-old African American bisexual female) mentioned:

I found it hard to fit in with kids, especially during middle school. Kids at school would talk about movies and TV shows that all Black people watch. When they would ask me if I have seen it, I would respond with a ‘no’, and I would get laughed at.

Many participants also mentioned comments about the way they talked and being told they “talked White.” For example, Kaitlyn (18-year old Black heterosexual female) stated, “They told me things like, ‘Oh, you talk like such a White person because you were raised by all White people.’” She went on to explain that most comments came from her White friends, who would commonly reference stereotypical understandings of Blackness. “They would say something
stereotypical like, ‘You like fried chicken,’ or something. They only know the stereotypical way. They don’t really know like all the other stuff.”

Dealing with monolithic expectations related to being Black was an aspect of the theme Race Mattered (Identity) that was present for most participants and adds to an understanding of the internal aspects of racial identity as they related to external social comments and interactions. Because of the macrocosm of a racialized environment, participants were placed in situations where their ways of being based on their home environment and levels of cultural exposure, were questioned, labeled, criticized, and commented on. These experiences were a central part of how participants understood that race mattered and was central to identity personally and socially.

**The Hair Journey.** This subtheme provides a description of a range of participant experiences related to how families dealt with caring for Black hair, the meaning of hair, and the journey of learning how to appreciate and care for their own hair. Hair was mentioned in interviews and/or written about in journal entries by most participants as an important aspect of identity that made race matter while growing up.

For some participants, they remember wishing for hair that was a different color or texture, and then gradually coming to appreciate their hair as it is. For example, Simone (21-year-old African American straight female) shared the following passage in a journal entry:

Growing up, I always told my mom I wanted blonde hair, long blonde hair. I’m sure every girl has probably said that at one time. I did sports all throughout school. And it was always like, ‘man, I want straight hair like slicked back.’ I just thought it was low maintenance. And I found out that wasn’t true. But that’s how I always felt. So, I was just like, ‘I want to be normal, I want my hair to be straight.’ Because my hair is so kinky. And I just hated it growing up. But now I love it.
The same type of story was shared by Alyson (27-year-old Black heterosexual cis-gender female):

I straightened my hair for the first time in eighth grade because my Black friends showed me how and they had straighteners. And that became a thing, straightening my hair. And I also felt prettier when my hair was straight. I don't ever straighten my hair, really, anymore [laughs] because I like to just embrace what I was given in life.

Another aspect of the hair journey for participants was their parents not knowing how to care for their hair. Sadie (19-year-old African American heterosexual female) shared:

I think hair was something that I struggled with growing up because I never knew how to take care of it. When I was in the 5th grade, they cut it off. They cut my hair off when I was in the 5th grade so I looked like a boy. In high school, I would try my best on my own but I didn’t really know until I got to college how to start taking care of my hair because I had like my friends showing me.

Emilie (24-year-old Biracial straight female) shared in a journal entry some of her journey related to hair, which also included her parents not knowing how to care for her hair, and wanting to cut it off at one point:

One of the things I've struggled with most is having Black hair and White parents. When I was young my parents used to put my hair in twists every day. In first grade the other Black girls at school started making fun of me for still wearing my hair that way, so they stopped doing twists. The problem was they didn't know how to do my hair any other way. Sometimes they would get my hair braided, but it was expensive and didn't last long with my hair texture so that was not a frequent occurrence. So, they weren't doing my hair and I didn't know what to do with it, so I wasn't really taking care of my hair. In
third grade, my mom took me to a salon to get my head shaved because I wasn't caring for it and she didn't know what to do with it. The stylist suggested relaxing my hair instead, so we did. This ended up damaging my hair but I continued for several more years. Then in junior high I started straightening my hair every day to fit in. I stopped getting relaxers around 9th grade but resumed senior year of high school. I continued until I was about 20. By this point my hair was so damaged that I stopped getting relaxers.

There were also stories shared in which parents worked to learn how to care for participants’ hair, or to find people to help. Cherise (20-year-old Black queer woman) shared in a journal entry about her mom and hair:

I was always really proud of my mom because she always had my hair in some cute hairdo. It's not easy to do Black hair especially when your White and have no actually experience with it because your hair is nothing like it. So, I respect my mom for doing my hair, even though it usually ended and began in tears because she pulled too hard. She educated herself and took good care of my hair.

Interestingly, even with these efforts, Cherise continues to discuss the meaning of her hair, and how she didn’t want it to call attention to her:

Growing up I always had this irrational fear that my White peers would know that I had extensions so I never wanted my hair to be too long or too short in fear that they might know something; as if elementary and middle school White kids actually knew how Black hair worked and was maintained, as if they actually cared or worried about whether my hair was real or not. But nonetheless I would spend that night stressing about the
reaction of my teachers and peers. I had only felt real confidence when I had my hair straightened.

Maryama (21-year-old African American bisexual female) discussed her mom’s efforts to connect with Black women at salons or in stores. She shared that her mom would ask Black women where they got their hair done, and if they could recommend a stylist for her daughter. During these experiences, Maryama noticed the reactions of Black women. She stated, “But I did notice that the Black women would see my mom and be like, ‘What are you doing?’ I felt defensive for my mom. Like, chill, she's trying to help me.” Kaitlyn (18-year old Black heterosexual female) recalled that her dad learned from hairdressers how to do her hair. “Hairdressers taught my parents how to take care of my hair. They taught them different protective styles to do. They really made an effort to know how to take care of me and my brother’s hair.”

Hair has a strong significance for participants as a tangible symbol of race, and something that set them apart from their families and White peers. Some participants reflected on this connection explicitly in interviews and journal entries. Jacob (18-year-old Biracial heterosexual male) shared:

My hair was always an important part of who I was, but it wasn’t until I began to learn how to care for it during my senior year. Learning about caring for my hair was something that took a lot of practice, and it helped me to find myself.

Expanding on this idea of the meaning of hair, Austin (28-year-old Black queer cis-gender male) explicitly connected the lack of knowledge about hair care to race and identity in the following passage:
I don't have memories of being told that it's wonderful that I'm Black, that its beautiful that I'm Black, and, this is how you take care of your hair, because it is different. And it's okay that it's different. Instead, I spent years having my fucking mother relax my hair and, because she's not a cosmetologist, she had no idea what she was doing. So, she would just paint my whole head with no-lye relaxer. Not the regrowth, just my whole head. I have chemical burns on the back of my neck because she had no idea what she was doing and it ate through my skin. My hair has been thinning for the last three years. I used to have these beautiful curls, they were so nice when I was 19 years old, and I'm so fucking mad that they're gone.

Each participant described a journey related to race and hair. While there were a range of experiences presented in this subtheme, it was a core aspect of the theme, Race Mattered (Identity). Hair was present in the stories of participants as an unavoidable logistical issue that held strong symbolic significance related to racial identity and racial difference within family and school environments.

**Experiencing Racism.** This subtheme provides examples shared by participants of experiencing racism during childhood and teen years. These stories are shared to expand upon the description of how and why race mattered to participants as they were growing up and moving toward adulthood, and also how race and racism were factors which contributed to the shaping of their understanding of the world and themselves. Participants told stories of times they experienced stereotype threat, unfair treatment based on race, and explicit racism. Kaitlyn (18-year old Black heterosexual female) shared the following passage, which is a reflection of the treatment received by her and her brother during middle school, in a journal entry:
When I was going into middle school is when I started to realize how race affected me differently from my other friends. I started to realize this because me and my brother, who is also Black, would do the same exact thing as a person who was White. Yet when it came to either of us getting in trouble the white person would get let off with a warning while we would have to spend our lunch in a detention.

Another school-related experience was shared by Alyson (27-year-old Black heterosexual cis-gender female). This passage was part of a spoken word piece written by Alyson about her experiences related to race:

I remember when we first learned about slavery
7th grade, world history
Only Black kid in class and I was asked to read
How I was less than human, and sold for mere pennies
That day at recess they played the masters, and I was their slave
Play along, I told myself, fit in and be brave
Racist comments from peers was another way that racism occurred in the school environment for participants. During his interview, Austin (28-year-old Black queer cis-gender male) recalled:

I remember the first time someone called me a nigger. I was 10 years old. It was in middle school. We were walking down the stairs to go to the buses. I knew that I was different and I knew there was anti-blackness, but it was the first time someone ever wielded it against me. It was like someone specifically said, "You are Black and that's bad. This is the word that you use." Everything before that was implied, or microaggressions.
Being called a racial slur also happened for Jacob (18-year-old Biracial heterosexual male) during sixth grade. He stated that he did not know how to deal with it, and that he told his parents, and the administration at the school “handled it swiftly.”

Experiences of racism contributed to the understanding for participants that race mattered, it was a factor that meant something, even when that meaning wasn’t clear. Emilie (24-year-old Biracial straight female) recalled, “Growing up, one of my best friends, anytime she would even so much as say the word Black, she would say "no offense" as a preface to even the word Black.”

A story from Maryama (21-year-old African American bisexual female) focused on a mission trip she took to Kentucky when she was 11 or 12 years old. She traveled with a group of seven friends, and groups from other churches from different states joined together, and Maryama was the only Black person there. She shared about this as her first experience of overt racism:

That was the first time where it was like outright racism. These people who were from Kentucky had only a tiny percentage of African Americans in their population. Every single day it was like, "Oh so is it true that your people only eat, watermelon and grape drink and fried chicken?" It was just so blunt. I just was like, "No." They would make jokes, like, "Your lips are so big." I was just dumbfounded because they said that right to my face.

In addition to experiences with school and peers, participants also discussed experiences with family that showed them that race mattered, and how it influenced the perceptions of people around them. Sadie (19-year-old African American heterosexual female) shared about her grandparents:
They’re not racist. Some of their friends, however, might have been. I remember my grandma telling me about how when I was little, my grandpa’s friends used to always say something about them bringing me around. It used to make my grandma really mad. She told me about one time how this guy said, “I see you’re bringing the little [n-word] child around again.”

This story was one told to Sadie, and even though she doesn’t remember the event happening, the story still stood out to her as part of her experience being transracially adopted. Austin (28-year-old Black queer cis-gender male) shared some things he remembered about racism in his family:

I remember my sister suggested naming our dog ’niglet’ and when I said it, she told me I wasn't allowed to say that. And then there was the fact that my mom referred to rap as 'ooga booga music' and would mimic the women in videos.

These memories were potent enough to remain a part of Austin’s story into adulthood, and show the ways in which experiencing racism, even within his own family, was a part of realizing that race mattered, to him, and to others.

Some participants discussed the feeling of race mattering, and being able to intuitively know when it mattered, but not being able to, at the time, see it as racism. Cherise (20-year-old Black queer woman) shared:

Racism didn't really affect me growing up. But what it meant to be a Brown girl to me when I was younger was that my White peers were prettier than me, better than me, and more worthy. And that's what separated me from them.

This example shows how the meaning behind race and knowing how it mattered was transmitted to this participant as a child even before she knew the word “racism.” Alyson (27-year-old
Black heterosexual cis-gender female) reflects on this with the following statement from a journal entry:

I never knew what racism was as a child and certainly did not interpret my experiences during childhood as racism, although now it is clear to me that it was. I have words for what I observed, felt, and experienced: bias, institutional racism, personally-mediated racism, vicarious racism, and internalized racism.

During childhood and adolescence, a feeling was present that was yet to be named, yet clearly held weight in the lives of participants. Reflecting on the presence of racism in their lives was an important aspect of the theme Race Mattered (Identity), showing experiences that were personally relevant for participants, even when participants did not completely understand what was happening at the time.

Summary. All nine participant stories included the main theme, Race Mattered (Identity), expressing the ways in which they learned and knew that race mattered and related to their own identities during childhood and adolescence. Three subthemes expanded the description of this main theme, describing how participants encountered monolithic expectations related to Blackness, experiences related to hair, and the ways that racism showed itself in their lives. The following section shifts away from childhood reflections, to describing experiences and understandings of race during emerging adulthood.

Between Two Worlds

The third theme begins to describe the study results that focus on experiences in emerging adulthood rather than childhood/adolescence. Between Two Worlds describes the experience of being in between two racial and cultural “worlds” of Black and White, interactions with others that reinforce that experience, and the feelings and thoughts related to that
experience. Between Two Worlds directly relates to the central research question by exploring how transracially adopted emerging adults are experiencing and understanding race as they become adults. This theme is expanded with subthemes: (a) They Don’t Get It, (b) Feeling the Divide in Friendships and Dating, and (c) Feeling Disconnected from Black Culture. This section will begin with describing the theme, and then provide a description of each subtheme.

Most participants shared that there were times they felt either too White or not Black enough in Black spaces or that they would be told they talked White, acted White, or were White. Participants also described feeling discomfort related to this feeling of being in between two racial worlds, and the social experiences that reinforced that discomfort. Emilie (24-year-old Biracial straight female) shared, “I think that because my complexion is lighter, people often say I act White, because I was raised by White people and I don't have a lot of experience with Black culture because I wasn't raised with Black culture.” Simone (21-year-old African American straight female) shared that the issue of being between two worlds shows up

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<td>This theme describes the experience of being in between two racial and cultural “worlds” of Black and White, interactions with others that reinforce that experience, and the feelings and thoughts.</td>
<td>“It still is hard for me in college because I still strive to &quot;fit in&quot; with my African American peers. People &quot;joke&quot; around and tease me but that really hurts my feelings because they don't understand how much I desire to actually know what I don't know about my &quot;culture&quot;; the culture of struggling, and being below the poverty line and going to</td>
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related to that experience. family reunions with chicken and soul food while listening to hip hop and R&B. I never got to experience that unless I was with a friend. Sometimes I wonder what my life would be like if I was ever adopted by a Black family. Would I be more accepted?”

Maryama (21-year-old African American bisexual female)

They Don’t Get It

In this subtheme, participants share experiences of being misunderstood by family, peers, and loved ones in relation to racial identity.

“I remember him telling me, saying, ‘I should have just taken you to a Black college because you hate White people,’ and all this other stuff. Just because I started to be more comfortable in my identify as a Black woman, and he didn’t like that and just kind of dismissed that for me being prejudiced towards White people.”

Cherise (20-year-old Black queer woman)

Feeling the Divide in Friendships and Dating

Quotations in this subtheme describe participants’ experiences with a racial divide among friend groups or in attraction and dating experiences.

“There was a time when I first cut my hair, I had been seeing this guy who was White for, like, a couple weeks, and as soon as I cut my hair, I had sent him a picture of it. And, he was like, "Oh, okay." And then, we hung out again, and it was, like, very weird. And, at the time, I didn't really see it, but I think it was that now I looked too Black for him to be interested in.”

Emilie (24-year-old Biracial straight female)
Feeling Disconnected from Black Culture

This subtheme describes the experience of transracial adoptees in young adulthood feeling disconnected from Black culture, and therefore dealing with comments and judgments from others about their racial identity. Participants express the feelings associated with this experience of being disconnected from various Black cultural markers.

“I was still very nervous to go into typically masculine Black spaces like barber shops. I would make my husband go, my then boyfriend go with me, he had to set up the appointment. He had to tell me what—because I didn’t know—I’d never had my hair cut by a Black person before. And I didn’t know any of the language. I would say, "What do I want him to do, you know?" And so, he had to teach me the language and I still struggle with the language sometimes.”

Austin (28-year-old Black queer cis-gender male)

in certain conversations with her boyfriend. “So, sometimes he makes comments like, “Wow, that was a really White thing of you to say.” I’m like, “What do you mean? That’s just how I was raised.”

A similar reflection came from Sadie (19-year-old African American heterosexual female) in a journal entry:

Even to this day, it genuinely bothers me to be called ‘White.’ Today I still hear that certain things I do are because I was raised by White people. Just because I was raised different than typical Black people from Detroit, it started to make me feel a little out of place with the Black community. Which in a way brings this whole thing full-circle. I am always too White for Black people, and I am too Black physically for White people.

Alyson (27-year-old Black heterosexual cis-gender female) continues with this idea of being “Black enough” with this passage from a journal entry that shows the crux of feeling in between two racial worlds:
Why I still feel I have to prove that I am Black enough….I don't know. It is clear to others, but not to my inner child. It is an oxymoron and hypocritical, because I often find myself shaming myself or hiding or stifling my true self as to not appear as Black in White spaces, yet I do the exact opposite around Black people to try to prove I AM Black enough.

The effect of being between two worlds was described by Maryama (21-year-old African American bisexual female) as insecurity with the following statement from her interview:

I get very insecure about myself before even meeting people, and, because I fear that rejection, and I know I shouldn't. But, based on past experiences and how I have been rejected by other people just because of my background, that's why I become more of a homebody.”

This feeling of insecurity was echoed by Cherise (20-year-old Black queer woman) as she reflected:

I just feel like I need to be surrounded by more Black people. But sometimes, I do feel held back. I feel self-conscious because I feel like I might be judged by my Black peers, and they'll think, ‘Oh, she’s not down. She’s not Black enough.’

Sadie (19-year-old African American heterosexual female) explains this as a feeling of pressure, stating, “Now I feel like there is this constant pressure like I have to live up to what a Black person acts like and kind of lives their life, which I don’t.”

When discussing his experiences related to race, Jacob (18-year-old Biracial heterosexual male) shared, “I’m more comfortable around people I have more shared experiences with. But taking it out of context that would imply that I’m racist towards Black people. But I don’t think
that’s the case.” He went on to explain that the comfort of shared experiences is related to race and ethnicity for him:

Racially I feel African American. Ethnically I would say I’m more along the lines of Caucasian. I identify with some of the struggles. I come from an upper-middle-class family. I’m a very privileged child. In that way, I haven’t experienced the same struggles as a lot of my racial peers.

Another way that being between two worlds was present for some participants was with being categorized by other people. The following passage from Austin’s (28-year-old Black queer cis-gender male) interview describes this aspect:

The thing that I’ve always thought was interesting was White people's obsession with figuring out ‘what I am’ and trying to make me not Black. Black people, and everyone really, has that same curiosity when they see people and they say, "You don't look like you’re just Black." Black people's curiosity is usually, "What are you mixed with?" They are saying, "I see your blackness, but there's something else there." Whereas, for White people, it's, "What are you?" Because I talk the way that I talk and I am the way that I am, but I have this skin color. But it's not the same skin color that they're used to. And I'm also very gay and very out as gay. It doesn’t make sense to them. And so, there's this obsession with figuring out what I am and why I am the way that I am.

Each participant shared the feeling of being between two racial worlds. In the following three sections, subthemes (a) They Don’t Get It, (b) Feeling the Divide in Friendships and Dating, and (c) Feeling Disconnected from Black Culture are described with quotations from participant interviews and journal entries.
They Don’t Get It. In this subtheme, participants share experiences of being misunderstood by family, peers, and others in relation to racial identity. Being between two worlds is described by participants to include the feeling that other people do not understand the unique experience of being Black and having been raised by White people, and the frustration that sometimes accompanies the experience.

Sadie (19-year-old African American heterosexual female) spoke about this in general during her interview when she shared, “I feel like I experience some sort of racism from both White and Black people. It gets on my nerves when people say that I try to ’act Black’. I AM Black. I act the way I act, and my race shouldn't determine how I am supposed to act.”

An experience of her father “not getting it” was recalled by Cherise (20-year-old Black queer woman) during her interview:

We would never just have a normal conversation. There were times when we were yelling at each other. I remember him saying, “I should have just taken you to a Black college because you hate White people,” and all this other stuff. Just because I started to be more comfortable in my identity as a Black woman, and he didn’t like that and just kind of dismissed that for me being prejudiced towards White people. And I said, “But most of my friends are, unfortunately, White. I’ve been surrounded by White people and it hasn’t been a problem, but I’m just starting to realize my role and how important it is. And me loving myself and being comfortable in my own skin shouldn’t be such a huge problem to you.” And I was telling him, “If I had Black parents, I wouldn’t be having a lot of these issues and a lot of these problems.” So, it was just frustrating.
Another arena in which participants sometimes experienced others who didn’t get it is at work with peers. Emilie (24-year-old Biracial straight female) wrote about an experience she had with a coworker in which she felt misunderstood and offended. She stated:

DB and I had a hard time working together for other reasons, but I believe one of them was that I didn't fit his idea of what either a White girl or a Black girl should be. I cut my hair and went natural about a month into the school year, so I wore my hair in a fro, or other natural styles, for about 6-7 months. By around February or March my hair was finally long enough to flat iron. I did so and wore it down to school. He approached me and said "I see what you've been trying to go for, but I think this (my straight hair) is more you." I was so mad because first, my hair is no one else's business but mine. But more importantly, him saying straighter, whiter hair was more me felt like an attack on my blackness that I had worked so hard to love and be proud of.

Another description of a work situation that resulted in the feeling of “they don’t get it” was shared in a journal entry by Alyson (27-year-old Black heterosexual cis-gender female). She explains her role as an advanced medical student, and how her unique history and background brings with it a specific skill set, but that it often leaves her feeling perpetually drained and misunderstood:

In the academic setting, I work on a weekly basis to explain bias and racism in healthcare and society to tenured professors, medical students, and experienced physicians. I am used as a liaison between worlds because it is a skill set I have acquired by being raised by White people but knowing firsthand what it’s like to operate in a White society as a Black person. My Black friends tell me I am their spokesperson because the White people relate better to me and are more willing to listen and not interpret my passion as
anger or threatening. My White friends tell me I am brave for bringing up these very important matters because they don’t have the vocabulary or examples to explain these realities, experiences, and history themselves. No matter how hard I try and how hard I prepare and how well I articulate over and over again to translate how racism works to the people in my PWI [predominantly White Institution], I always feel left drained and unaccomplished. I am exhausted from this and too often I end up just internalizing in silence because I’m too tired to constantly feel the burden of being the self-nominated and publicly-expected one to explain all the time.

Maryama (21-year-old African American bisexual female) experienced her family “not getting it” when she attempted to explain her choice to join a sorority, and why her sorority is exclusive to African American women. She shared the following in her interview:

I just joined this sorority last semester, and it's from, a NPHD sorority, so it's part of the Divine Nine and it's all African-Americans. And so, I told them about that, but it goes way over their heads. I was trying to explain to them how excited I was—you know, to find some sisters, and they were just like, "Okay." I just want them to understand, like, the basis of it. I told my family, and they just don't get it at all. I have an older sister. She was like, "Well, why can't I join?" And, I'm like, "Oh, my gosh! Let me just have this thing to myself." And, she's saying it jokingly, but she's genuinely like, "Well, why can't I do it?" I say, "Okay. Let me explain this to you. It's the history. We were founded in 1922. There was segregation and all this stuff happening in Indiana. That was the melting pot of the KKK, and these women formed this group so that they could get an education for other Black women. And so, it's continued that way." So, then, my
sisters and my family see it as, "Well, that's not being diverse." I'm like, "Oh, my gosh. That's not the point." But, it's always an argument about race with my family.

As a Black woman, Maryama was excited to be a part of one of the Divine Nine sororities, and the meaning was rich. Her frustration came in when that meaning was not understood and was dismissed by White family members.

Kaitlyn (18-year old Black heterosexual female) shared an experience in which she felt her unique situation as a transracial adoptee was not being understood by her friends who were also adopted. She stated:

I don’t really think they get where I’m coming from in terms of race because they’ve never had to experience it the way I have. My whole family’s White, but all my other friends - they’re White and their families are all White—they’re all the same. I love my family, but like it can be kind of awkward sometimes, like when I’m trying to tell my friends things. So, I think they just don’t get what I am going through, so we just don’t talk about that stuff much.

In a somewhat similar way, Austin (28-year-old Black queer cis-gender male) describes an interaction with an acquaintance in which the racism Austin experienced from his family was invalidated. He stated, “We were talking about our families. I mentioned how racist my family was and the guy interjected that he 'doesn't think my family is racist.' To which I replied 'which one of us do you think knows better?’ He instantly got quiet.” Austin continues, explaining how this interaction reminded him about how easily people assume that White people with Black family members can’t participate in racism. He shared:

I know that his follow up would have been ‘they adopted you, how can they be racist?’ The idea that a white person or white people can't be racist simply because they have
loved ones that are Black, whether they be friends or family, is truly reprehensible. It all sort of adds credence to the idea that there is only 'one type' of racism, and that's the scary overt kind. But the more insidious version, the one where Black people are constantly invalidated and victimized is the one that comes from White people that are supposed to be people that care for us.

The above stories shared by participants provide examples of how people “not getting it” is directly related, for these participants, to being transracially adopted. There is the idea that people don’t grasp the process of fighting to claim a racial identity different from the racial identity of family, don’t understand that having pride in that identity and engaging in exclusive activities or groups that nurture it is important, and don’t see how being transracially adopted and experiencing racial difference within one’s family is an experience all its own. This subtheme was an important aspect of the experience of feeling between two worlds.

**Feeling the Divide in Friendships and Dating.** This subtheme consists of descriptions of participants’ experiences with a racial divide among friend groups or in attraction and dating experiences. Interactions with friends and dating relationships showed up for participants as arenas of life that intensified the feeling of being in between two racial worlds.

Some participants shared about noticing or anticipating the reactions of other people in terms of race. Simone (21-year-old African American straight female) described:

I feel like sometimes when I’ve dated White men, I’ve just—like I almost try and not be Black, if that makes sense. Or I try and tone it down. But I think that’s just because I’m more scared maybe about what people will say.”
This idea of being “too Black” for White men and dating came up for Emilie (24-year-old Biracial straight female) as well. She told a story in her interview about a time when she was dating a White man, and she first cut her hair and started wearing it natural. She stated:

As soon as I cut my hair, I sent him a picture of it. He was like, "Oh, okay." And then we hung out again, and it was very weird. At the time, I didn't really see it, but I think it was that I looked too Black for him.

While he expressed some uncertainty about coming to any conclusions, Jacob shared that he wondered about whether or not his race, and associated stereotypes about Black people may have affected dating for him in high school. He discussed the fact that he attended an all-White private school, and he shared, “I think race might have been the cause for me not dating anyone in high school or middle school. But I’m not entirely sure if certain expectations or certain stereotypes played into why I didn’t really have a dating life or not.”

Another aspect of experiencing a racial divide in dating and attraction was described by Sadie (19-year-old African American heterosexual female). Her experience was related to her own interests changing rather than anticipating the reactions of other people. She wrote in a journal entry:

Before I even came to college, I only liked White guys. I used to not even be attracted to Black guys. Then I came here and then I was just around Black people all the time and I just kind of felt my taste in guys just shift completely.

She continued, explaining how part of the attraction had to do with shared understandings. “It is a race thing but it’s also just kind of more than race. Because if I were to be with a Black guy there would be a lot more understandings that would already just be known.”
A racial divide in friendships was very memorable for participants Alyson (27-year-old Black heterosexual cis-gender female) and Maryama (21-year-old African American bisexual female). They shared their experiences of having two entirely separate friend groups based on race. Participant E’s experience took place during college:

I had two distinct different friend groups in college. The ones that I lived with and spent most of my time with were White. Whenever I wanted to spend time with my Black friends, or go to a Black Student Union event, it became a thing. I just remember feeling very nervous to tell them, "I'm going to hang out with so-and-so," and they knew that I was going to hang out with the Black people tonight. They didn't want to have any part of it, and they got annoyed. I remember their faces, their nonverbal cues, and their reactions to that. Even when I invited them, they did not want to be a part of that, and it felt like they felt I was betraying them.

Maryama also described having two distinct friend groups divided by race. She shared, “I wouldn't get invited to parties or people would be like, ‘You can come, but don't invite your White friends.’ And, I'm like, "But, I hang around them all the time. They're my best friends, you know." She continued with describing what it was like to tell her White friends she was going to a party with mostly Black friends in attendance: “They would ask, ‘Well, why can't we come?’ And, I'm just like, "You guys would be the only White people." And then, that would stray them away, and they're like, ‘Oh, okay.’” Maryama explained that she liked each of the two environments and wanted to experience both. She said:

I wanted to go to both, but then, I would get criticized, ‘Oh, [Maryama] was at that White party, drinking beer and, you know, sitting around listening to music.’ I guess that wasn't like what the Black kids would do. I didn't see any wrong to either of them.”
Participants’ experiences of a racial divide in dating and friendships was a central component of the feeling of being in between two worlds. Friendships and dating relationships were arenas in which the racial divide rooted in the racialization of the society in which participants live was especially potent and meaningful. The next section describes an additional subtheme that contributed to participants experience of being between two worlds: Feeling Disconnected from Black Culture.

**Feeling Disconnected from Black Culture.** This subtheme describes the experience of transracial adoptees in young adulthood feeling disconnected from Black culture, and dealing with comments and judgements from others about their racial identity. Participants expressed how being disconnected from various Black cultural markers increased their feeling of being between two worlds, and sometimes not knowing where they fit due to their unique combination of adoptive and racial identities.

A reflective story shared by Jacob (18-year-old Biracial heterosexual male) about attending a fall welcome event for Black students at his university offers a glimpse into his experience of disconnection and being between two worlds:

I often find it hard to relate to those around me of color. I wasn't raised in the same homes or nor have I been exposed to many of the landmarks of Black heritage during my lifetime. I know that racially I am Black, but I'm starting to understand the primary differences between ethnicity and race, it's a matter of culture, language, and other vital experiences that bind the two together to make a person who they are, ethnically. For instance, during my first week on University of Cincinnati's campus, the African American Cultural Resource Center had a barbecue and it invited all African American students to attend. I wanted to go and so I did, but during my time there I felt out of
place, like I wasn't supposed to be there. Obviously, that's not true, but for whatever reason I felt that way. I felt alone and isolated in this crowd of people that were just like me even though I'm typically an outwardly extroverted person. I felt like we hadn't shared the experiences that would help me to develop those connections that I so desperately wanted to develop with my fellow African American peers.

Maryama echoes the feeling described by Jacob, wanting to know more about Black culture and make connections, yet feeling out of touch:

It still is hard for me in college because I still strive to "fit in" with my African American peers. People "joke" around and tease me but that really hurts my feelings because they don't understand how much I desire to actually know what I don't know about my "culture"; the culture of struggling, and being below the poverty line and going to family reunions with chicken and soul food while listening to hip hop and R&B. I never got to experience that unless I was with a friend. Sometimes I wonder what my life would be like if I was ever adopted by a Black family. Would I be more accepted?

Most participants shared that there were aspects of Black culture from which they felt disconnected, and described the situations in which those aspects would come up. Sadie discussed not knowing certain things that most of her Black friends grow up knowing. She stated, “I didn’t know about sew-ins when I came to college. I would ask questions, they would say something and I’d be like, ‘I don’t know what that is.’ They’d be like, ‘That’s because you’re White.’ I’m like, ‘I’m not White.’” She went on to explain her feelings in response to such situations: “It makes me feel like singled out, awkward or kind of dumb for not knowing. It depends on the situation, but it makes me feel like I’m not being respected enough for what my actual race is.” This feeling was echoed by Cherise (20-year-old Black queer woman), who
described constantly feeling, “as though I am not Black enough, and have to prove myself every day. But I am Black, and you don't have to ‘act Black’ to be Black. Those stereotypes and microaggressions can be really damaging and alienating.”

Emilie (24-year-old Biracial straight female) described an experience common in her life related to feeling disconnected from Black culture:

Just today I was at lunch with 3 Black co-workers and they were asking me if I've seen School Daze, which I now know is a Spike Lee movie, then proceeded to list off ~20 classic Black movies they would have thought I'd have seen. Although I like these coworkers and they would never make me feel less than or not Black enough for not having seen these movies, I still did and that is a hard feeling to swallow.

For Austin (28-year-old Black queer cis-gender male), there were times the feeling of disconnection from Black culture arose in specific social arenas. He shared:

I was still very nervous to go into typically masculine Black spaces like barber shops. I would make my husband, then boyfriend, go with me, and he had to set up the appointment. I'd never had my hair cut by a Black person before. And I didn’t know any of the language. I would say, "What do I want him to do, you know?" And so, he had to teach me the language and I still struggle with the language sometimes.

The following passage from Alyson (27-year-old Black heterosexual cis-gender female) shows how this feeling of disconnection relates to the experience of being between two worlds. She stated:

In my White family, of course I am the most knowledgeable of Black pop culture, and they often look to me for answers as if to speak for the entire Black community. But with my Black friends, I am probably considered the "least cultured."
Some participants shared that part of the experience of feeling disconnected from Black culture, and people noticing, was having to explain. Emilie (24-year-old Biracial straight female) stated:

It can be awkward because you don't want to admit that you don't know something. So, it depends on how close I am to the people who have made this reference that I don't understand. If it's people who I'm close with, I'll often ask, or, if it's not, I'll kind of just fumble my way through and pretend I understand. Or, sometimes, like more recently, I've become a lot more comfortable with kind of making a joke out of it, “I have no idea what you're talking about. I was raised by White people.” And most people understand then.

For Maryama (21-year-old African American bisexual female), she described sometimes wishing that Black friends would teach her instead of confront her about not knowing certain things, because being reminded of things she hasn’t learned brings up feelings of embarrassment and longing. She explained:

Somebody will be like, "Well, who is this person?" I'm like, "I don't know. I've never heard of them in my life." And, they're just like, "Are you serious?" I'm like, “Well, teach me,” you know? You don't know what you don't know, and I can't blame my parents for that. Even today, people assume that about me in college who don't know anything about my background, and I say, "No. I still don't identify with what you're saying." So, it gets annoying after a while. I don't want to always have to explain myself. I say, "I was raised by White people."

Most participants explained ways in which they felt disconnected from Black culture, and how this added to the experience of feeling in between two racial worlds.
**Summary.** The above theme, *Between Two Worlds* emerged from the stories of all nine participants in some way, describing how participants felt they existed between two racial worlds of Black and White. Three subthemes helped to specify the ways in which the feeling of being in between two worlds occurred. Through the subtheme, *They Don’t Get It*, participants described how people don’t seem to grasp the uniqueness of being transracially adopted, and the meaning of race and racial identity for participants. The way the racial divide of two worlds showed itself in friendships and close relationships was explored with the subtheme, *Feeling the Divide in Friendships and Dating*. *Feeling Disconnected from Black Culture* provided examples of how feeling separated from certain aspects of Black culture added to the feeling of being between two worlds. The following section explores the fourth theme, *Growth in Black Identity*, and three associated subthemes.

**Growth in Black Identity**

In this theme, participant stories reflect times as emerging adults during which their Black identity became more prominent, embodied, and understood. Participants describe processes of change during which their perspectives were transformed, and their Blackness took on a different meaning. This theme is associated with the main research question focused on how Black transracially adopted emerging adults are experiencing and understanding race as they become adults. *Growth in Black identity* was a central aspect of participant narratives, and seemed to accelerate specifically during emerging adulthood due to exposure to new environments, people, organizations, and media sources. The theme of *Growth in Black Identity* will be described in this section, followed by an expanded description of three subthemes: (a) *Embracing Blackness*, (b) *Intersections*, and (c) *Pathways, Influences, and Support*. 
Table 5

*Theme Four and Corresponding Subthemes with Example Quotations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example Participant Quote</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Growth in Black Identity</td>
<td>In this theme, quotations from participants express times as emerging adults during which their Black identity became more prominent, embodied, understood, and real in the world.</td>
<td>“Just because I had a White family didn't mean that I didn't have a place in the Black community. The color of your skin can mean whether you're going to die at the hands of people who are supposed to be protecting and serving you. My eyes were suddenly opened. And it was a gradual thing, but my mindset had shifted. Black issues and topics were finally becoming important to me. My blackness was a gift, that was another thing that I had slowly began to learn. That definitely changed my core self.” Cherise (20-year-old Black queer woman)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Embracing Blackness</td>
<td>This subtheme provides descriptions of times during emerging adulthood when participants began to embrace their blackness as an important and defining aspect of self.</td>
<td>“When I was in high school, I didn’t really identify as Black because I was just so used to being around White culture. Not that it’s anyone’s fault, my opinions were my opinions. But I think in high school I started to kind of formulate my own opinions about race. Then coming here, I definitely came to a lot of conclusions about race. I feel like I’m a lot more open-minded about it now. Because I used to really not embrace my Black side but now I do so that’s a big change so, that</td>
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**Intersections**

This subtheme describes intersecting factors and identities that affected racial identity development or coincided and cannot be untangled from racial identity development. Intersecting identities and factors include sexual orientation, religion/spirituality, age of parents, and gender identity.

Sadie (19-year-old African American heterosexual female)

“It does because I feel like, since I've become more comfortable with my sexuality, I can be more comfortable with my race and as well as my background. So, I have come a long way since my freshman year in college when it comes to self-identity and me being confident in who I am. I'm still working on it, but I've made a big jump in progress, and I hope to keep continuing this progress.”

Maryama (21-year-old African American bisexual female)

**Influences, Pathways, and Support**

In this subtheme, participants describe people, organizations, experiences, media, and social media that were helpful in the journey of developing Black identity and learning about Black culture and history as a Black person raised by White parents.

Austin (28-year-old Black queer cis-gender male)

“And so, this woman very much so ended up being this incredible mother figure that I never had, that was very pro-Black. She taught me all about activism, and feminism, and community organizing, and radical politics. And she changed my entire life. Changed my life. Saved my life, honestly.”

Some participants described becoming more aware of certain social issues related to Blackness. For Cherise (20-year-old Black queer woman), growth in Black identity began when she became more aware of issues of police brutality and began exploring more Black topics through social media. In her interview, she shared:
I began to realize that just because I had a White family, that didn't mean I didn't have a place in the Black community. The color of your skin can mean whether you're going to die at the hands of people who are supposed to be protecting and serving you. My eyes were suddenly opened. And it was a gradual thing, but my mindset had shifted. Black issues and topics were finally becoming important to me. My blackness was a gift, that was another thing that I had slowly began to learn. That definitely changed my core self.

Simone (21-year-old African American straight female) discussed in her interview that she connects her awareness of racism with comfort with her Black identity: “I notice, at least now, over these last five years, as I’ve gotten more comfortable with, I guess, my blackness, racism is still alive. And it’s still a big issue.”

Learning some Black history and watching certain Black-centered television shows was relevant for Jacob (18-year-old Biracial heterosexual male) during the summer before starting college. He stated:

Over the summer I saw a Netflix TV show, *Dear White People*. I think I was trying to make myself more aware of African American culture and that kind of stuff. I watched a lot of documentaries and ingested a lot of information about, I guess, my race in America.

For Alyson (27-year-old Black heterosexual cis-gender female), her larger process of self-exploration included the solidification of her Black identity, and an interest in Black history and culture. She stated:

I think five years ago is when I started solidifying my identity in my own way. I was able to kind of delve more into understanding who I was. I journaled a lot. I started meditating, started training for a half marathon and running in silence and thinking without outside noise. And then also, I had traveled to Ghana twice right before that. I
think I was just alone in my thoughts and was able to be, like, "Who am I?" And with that, I feel like I came into my own identity. And then, things that mattered in the world started mattering more to me. And so, I began my journey of really understanding Black history and culture. And once I started understanding things more, that's when I started bringing these topics up to my parents.

Sadie (19-year-old African American heterosexual female) unexpectedly delved into the Black community when she came to college. Because most of her friends in high school had been White, she said she assumed she would continue that trend, and find mostly White friends in college. She was surprised when the following event occurred:

It all kind of changed when a friend of mine in my scholarship group brought me to a frat party. When he said frat party, I was definitely not thinking of a Black frat party. I didn't even know Black frats existed. That was really the night everything changed for me. I can easily admit that at the party I was very confused and kind of shook at the things that were happening. The way people were dancing, the types of songs that were being played, the way people were dressed. I felt awkward and out of place, but something about the atmosphere is what I liked. I remember walking back to my dorm that night, I was really happy and excited. I started to associate myself more with the Black community on campus, which is not what I was expecting. I had never been around this amount of Black people in my life before, and it was definitely apparent how they had their own culture. There are certain unspoken understandings, but I enjoyed being around them. For the first time in my life, I found myself only attracted to Black guys. I didn't look twice at White guys anymore. I started to feel myself being more comfortable
with my Black side, and for the first time, I started to feel like I was beginning to find my
identity. From there on out I just identified myself as Black.

While the Black frat party was new and unfamiliar, there was something about it that Sadie
appreciated and was drawn to. It ended up being a catalyst for a spring forward in her Black
identity development.

For some participants, there was a gradual realization that they were doubting themselves
or feeling negatively about themselves in an irrational way that was related to internalized
racism. Alyson (27-year-old Black heterosexual cis-gender female) shared that she began to see
how systems had influenced her perspective on race and on herself. She wrote in a journal entry:

The system of bias and institutional racism cultivated the way I see Black folk. I was
subconsciously trained to have racist ideals and I was Black myself!! I internalized this as
well and also didn't have pride in my own Black skin. It affected my confidence. And to
this day I still don't believe I am as naturally smart as the "smart and fast
reading/comprehending" White men and women in my medical school. I have achieved
some of the highest achievements one can in academics. I am part of the 1% who have
made it all the way to become a physician. Yet, I still have imposter syndrome.

While this realization was unpleasant, it seemed important to Alyson in that it caused her
to connect her own identity with the identities of other Black people surviving the same systemic
issues related to race. Austin (28-year-old Black queer cis-gender male)
also shared about how growing into his Black identity meant facing the negative feelings he had
about himself, which he connected to having been raised in a mostly White environment. He
stated:
It's been a big journey for me to understand my Blackness and how the life that I was raised in caused me to devalue myself as a Black person. Having been deeply submerged in whiteness with my family and the environment I was raised in, I truly didn't love myself.

As evidenced by these stories, growth in Black identity for transracial adoptees in emerging adulthood can include realizing and grappling with internalized racism. Emilie (24-year-old Biracial straight female) shared in her interview that growth in her Black identity caused her to have a new rift between her and White people in her life. She reflected that this was a time in her life when her friend group moved from being majority White to being majority people of color. She stated:

At that point I felt like the crack between myself and all the White people I knew widening even further because, now that I was educating myself, I was like, ‘Wow. Things used to be terrible, but things are still pretty crappy.’

Emilie continued to describe this transition in her identity, and the discomfort and struggle that came along with the things she was learning about race and the White people to whom she was close. She said:

That was really hard for me, especially being that my parents are White. Everyone that I grew up with that I was still friends with was White. My early college friends were White. Like, there were so many people that I cared about who are White, but it was hard to, sort of, separate my feelings for White people in general and the terrible things that had happened in the past and were still happening today from those people. So, I ended up, sort of, pushing a lot of those people away, whether they deserved it or not, and some of them did deserve to be pushed away out of my life. But that was probably one of
the hardest transitions I've ever made. That's sort of how I moved into adult life was—my transition with how I saw myself and how I interacted with the world due to race wouldn't really have started until around then. Now I've gotten to a much healthier place where the people I love are the people I love, and I love them for a reason.

Another piece of this transition articulated by Emilie had to do with experiencing a time when she felt that she had to prove that she wasn’t White, and engaged in behavior about which, in retrospect, she feels some regret. She became involved in a racial awareness organization on her college campus, and became close to a group of friends who were all people of color. She shared, “When I look back on the way we treated my roommates and my other group of White friends, it was wrong. We were unkind. We would talk about them behind their backs, mostly based on the fact that they were White.”

In recollecting these experiences, Emilie shared her understanding of why those things happened:

I think it happened because I felt like I needed to prove myself almost. I had been, basically acting like, and almost wishing, that I was just White for all these years, and then, I finally was okay with the fact that I was not White. I was proud of the fact that I was Biracial and Black and White. I felt like I needed to prove to other people that I was proud of this. And, I obviously took it way too far, which I think had a lot to do with the group of people that I had become friends with and, like, the way they interacted on their own, but it was because I felt this need to, like, prove that I was Black enough and prove that I was not White.
Each participant expressed times in their lives during which they came to understand their Black identities in new ways, whether through learning new information, having new interactions, noticing new feelings and thoughts, or engaging in new communities.

**Embracing Blackness.** This subtheme provides descriptions of times during emerging adulthood when participants began to embrace their blackness as an important and defining aspect of self. For some, this was related to new interactions that helped them feel their Black identity more thoroughly, for others this had to do with accepting and loving their physical characteristics associated with being Black, and for some participants it came in a new perspective or a new claiming of the identifier of “Black.” Embracing blackness was shared by most participants as central to growth in their Black identities.

Austin (28-year-old Black queer cis-gender male) described, during his interview, a casual interaction with his husband’s grandmother that helped him sink deeper into his Black identity. He shared:

One of the first times that I felt a Black person see my blackness in a very different way was my husband's grandmother. I was making coffee and, for the very first time—I had never heard anyone do this—I asked her, "How do you take your coffee?" And she said, "A little bit darker than you." And I thought, "Okay. I get that." You know, and no one had ever talked to me like that before, just like a Black person to a Black person in the way that she expected I would understand. And I did because, you know, it was easy, but, that's a very distinct memory for me. I felt I was being welcomed into a community because we were using common language and a common understanding.
For Simone (21-year-old African American straight female) and Maryama (21-year-old African American bisexual female), part of embracing blackness was acceptance of their physical characteristics as Black women. Simone recalled:

When I was growing up, I was made fun of because I was dark, too, because I wasn’t Biracial or anything. But it’s nice now because like social media loves it so much. Which, I mean, it’s kind of sad that it took it so long to get to that point where people accept women of color. But now you see people, all the actresses, I love looking at their Instagram because it’s like—the top comments are like other Black women saying, “Oh, you’re so beautiful.” That’s what I like to see.

Maryama remembered:

I started loving my hair and my skin when I got to college. When I joined [de-identified Black women organization], they stressed that. That's why I went natural. I cut my hair freshman year of college, and I've loved it ever since.”

Kaitlyn (18-year old Black heterosexual female) was attracted to joining an all-Black sorority as an experience related to her racial identity. She said, “Since it’s all Black—I never really grew up with that, so I thought that it would just be nice to see what that would be like.”

College provided Sadie (19-year-old African American heterosexual female) with the opportunity to be immersed in a community of Black peers. When asked how the change of environment influenced her, she stated:

I think my opinions about race have changed a lot. In high school, I didn’t really identify as Black because I was just so used to being around White culture. I feel like I’m a lot more open-minded about it now. I used to really not embrace my Black side but now I do, so that’s a big change.
Emerging adulthood brought a similar process of embracing blackness for Cherise (20-year-old Black queer woman). She described a process of realizing her pride in being Black and in being a part of the Black racial group:

> It has taken me a long time to be comfortable with my Blackness but it's a mindset that I have to have every day. And then when I did start to realize, “Okay, I should love myself. Black people have so much to offer, and they are amazing.” And there’s a lot of great stuff that they can do and continue to do, and they invented certain types of music, and do so many things. It took me awhile to realize, though, we are awesome.

Embracing blackness, the pride and knowledge that comes with that process, can also include realizations about experiencing oppression, and finding empowerment in group identity. Alyson (27-year-old Black heterosexual cis-gender female) shared her experience of realizing that she had been trying to please others by going along with external expectations, and how letting that go was a part of embracing her blackness and finding that empowerment. She stated:

> I have acquiesced to their domineering culture, yet am resented for being the very person they wanted me to be. I could have been myself all along and they would have still hated me. Was it worth the mask all these years to change myself to assimilate and be accepted but hated regardless? Naw. I’m tired. Been time to start living as the person I’ve always been inside. I am consciously trying to be more unapologetic for my blackness. When I see Black leaders being unapologetic in their ranks in congress or physician leaders or athletes, etc., I am more empowered to do the same in my community when I speak up or speak out.

The growth of Black identity intersects with other salient identities for several participants. Those identity intersections are described in the following section.
Intersections. This subtheme describes intersecting factors and identities that affected racial identity development or coincided with and cannot be untangled from racial identity development for participants. Intersecting identities and factors include sexual orientation, religion/spirituality, age of parents, and gender identity. Intersections is presented as a subtheme to Growth in Black Identity because, for these participants, Growth in Black Identity occurred simultaneously and in connection to these other relevant identities, and would have developed differently without those aspects of self.

For three out of nine participants, a journey related to sexual orientation intersected their racial identity development. Maryama (21-year-old African American bisexual female) shared:

Since I've become more comfortable with my sexuality, I can be more comfortable with my race and my background. I have come a long way since my freshman year in college when it comes to self-identity and me being confident in who I am.”

Austin (28-year-old Black queer cis-gender male) expressed a similar idea, stating:

For me, a lot of my identity and like the development of my racial identity was coupled with being gay. Being Black, and being feminine, and, and not being masculine meant that I wasn’t often accepted into most Black spaces, especially by Black men. The homophobia within hypermasculine Black spaces, like that will always be there. But my husband goes through that too. But my husband also knows how to codeswitch a little bit better because he was raised by Black people.

He continued to explain the intersection of sexual orientation, gender and race and how during emerging adulthood in college, things began to come together more for him in terms of a community that reflected his own identities:
When I was in high school and growing up because of the way I expressed my gender and my sexual orientation, even if I wanted to find other close Black friends, we didn't fit into each other's lives, solely because I didn't necessarily subscribe to the same beliefs, especially around gender and gender expectations. I didn't like sports. I did theater, all that stuff. Then I went to college and I met queer Black people and it was more closely aligned with what I was experiencing and what I was looking for because these people also shared this other identity. Being young and Black and queer, that queerness is what really, a lot of times, kept my other young Black counterparts from me. Then I went to college, and when I started finding other Black friends, they were all queer and Black, or they were all Black and allies, and comfortable with people who are not straight or who were gender variant.

Cherise (20-year-old Black queer woman), in her interview, discussed the intersecting ways she experiences her identities in relation to society. She shared:

The way that society does view Black women and men is in a stereotypical, too loud, or like they have an attitude, and a lot of times women are super disrespected. I’m a woman, I’m Black, and I’m gay. That’s a lot stacked up against me sometimes, so that’s hard.

She also discussed another layer of intersection, which was salient for her and other participants; religion. Cherise told her story of sexual orientation, and how she experienced rejection from her dad that was rooted in his Christian religious beliefs. She remembered her dad saying, “All right. You can either be gay and live that lifestyle or follow the Lord and marry a man but suppress your gay urges.” She continued, sharing how this rejection affected her:
I think just that it’s deep rooted shame, like, internalized homophobia that I think a lot of kids deal with because it’s hard, especially when you do grow up in a Christian home or a really religious home. And when you’re not accepted by your parents, it just kind of destroys you, and it sucks because they’re supposed to have your back.

Cherise also shared her own struggle, as someone who identifies as Christian herself, trying to reconcile oppression happening in the world with the ideals she was trying to live as a Christian. She stated:

As Christians, you need to have that mindset, be openminded and love everybody. But I couldn’t, because I was so full of anger to the injustices that were happening. And I’m like, “If that makes me a bad Christian, I don’t know what to tell you.” Because a lot of stuff, continually is happening to Black people and that’s really hard to cope with and be loving towards.

When Maryama (21-year-old African American bisexual female) discussed religion, she expressed that she experienced a divide due to her sexuality and also her preferences in terms of style of worship. She talked about how she attended a church on campus that is non-denominational and includes some of the Black Christian tradition, and how this felt better to her than the style of church in which she was raised. As she experienced growth in her racial and sexual identities, she noticed that her values differed from that of her parents. She shared:

I feel like, as I grew up, my views and values differ from them, and especially when it comes to my sexuality. And, that’s a major divide. Religion, my parents were very conservative, and we went to church every Sunday. My mom is so concerned about me losing my faith, and that’s not true. I definitely believe in God, and I definitely, like, will go to church. I just don't like the old school sitting in pews, you know. I want to go out
and be able to praise, and not necessarily force my religion down people's throats, but be able to, you know, praise with other people in a different way.

Some participants spoke about seeing racism first hand within their churches, and the struggle that caused them with their church and with religion in general. Simone (21-year-old African American straight female) stated:

Being a Christian is not an easy thing, especially while Black. It's even worse on weeks where hot button issues are preached about. Like police brutality. My pastor preached on that one week, and it became very clear who was a closet racist. One man literally stood up and said "if you look like a criminal, you deserve to be killed." I then promptly stood up, turned to him and said, "Jesus was crucified, and I think we all know he wasn't White like you all want to believe, so where does that leave us?" The older White gentleman then stood there stuttering and trying to justify what he had said. The point I'm trying to make is that, of all the places, there is so much racism and prejudice in the church. You really have to stay grounded to your faith to get you through these encounters.

Cherise (20-year-old Black queer woman) also talked about a time when issues related to race were discussed in church:

I did go to a mostly White church. It was uncomfortable, honestly. Because they would talk about how there’s still a lot of racism in the world. And, you know, my pastor, at the time, he’d be like, “We, as a church, we don’t talk about these things, and there is a lot of racism within the church,” and we would talk a little bit about police brutality. I did enjoy some of the stuff he would talk about because he would be on the side of like how Black people are treated poorly, and there’s a lot of injustices. I guess afterwards, he made an apology because I guess there was a police officer in one of the services and he felt kind
of attacked by that sermon. Yeah, there really hasn’t been too much talk whenever I’m in church about those certain things.

An additional arena in which an intersecting issue arose had to do with the age of parents. Sadie (19-year-old African American heterosexual female) was raised solely by her grandparents, who are White. She shared:

The whole identity thing was kind of hard for a while. A lot of the standards that I grew up with were typical White household standards, especially with my grandparents being a whole generation older. It was way different than everyone else my age is raised.

Several participants shared experiences related to growth in Black identity that were inextricable from the presence of other salient identities. Those intersections included sexual orientation, gender, religion, and age of parents. The following section describes the subtheme, Influences, Pathways, and Support.

**Influences, Pathways, and Support.** In this subtheme, participants describe people, organizations, experiences, media, and social media that were helpful in the journey of developing Black identity and learning about Black culture and history as a Black person raised by White parents. Growth in Black Identity was strongly influenced by these sources of support. For Kaitlyn (18-year old Black heterosexual female), a refreshing influence was a teacher in middle school. She describes this teacher’s intentional focus on race in the following passage:

She was one of the only Black teachers I ever had. And in February, when it's Black History Month, none of our teachers really talked about that, but she was our English teacher, and she had us do a museum project where we had partners and we researched different aspects of Black culture and did a big museum thing. Like, my parents didn't really teach me a lot about Black culture, but she took the time to teach everyone about it
because she felt like it was important for us to be educated on Black culture, because most of the time, we're really only educated on White culture in the United States. A lot of the White students didn't really like the project because they thought that there was no reason to do it, but I think for the Black students, it had a different impact because we never really get to learn about the Black culture in schools. It's always White culture.

Other pathways and influences came through community involvement, which sometimes happened in the form of organizations. Sadie (19-year-old African American heterosexual female) discussed in her interview that being at college and just having proximity to Black people and getting involved in community was helpful in growing her Black identity. She shared, “Coming here, just being introduced to these many Black people I just kind of started involving myself in the Black community. I think I started becoming a lot happier especially with my identity after that.” Another influence for Sadie was her involvement in her Black Greek organization. Prior to going to college, she didn’t know that these organizations existed, but they came to be an important part of her racial identity journey. She stated:

I’m in the process of joining a Black sorority. For some people, this is their whole life. Its very tradition-based, like culture-based, and I think that’s what I like about it. It’s a very good networking opportunity. Like since I started joining, I’ve met a lot of different people from other schools that happen to be Black too. It’s a very connecting type of thing to do. I never would have expected myself to do it. I’m happy with my decision though. The more I was around events and stuff like that, and the more I saw how their bond was, I was like ‘that’s something I want to be part of.’

Maryama (21-year-old African American bisexual female) also named influences and support for her in growing her Black identity. She said, “I have my girlfriend, my sorority
sisters, and that's all I need. If I ever need anything or if I'm feeling questionable about my identity, I'll have a discussion with them.”

In addition to Black Greek life, there are programs on college campuses focused on race, racial history, and race-based support. Both Maryama and Emilie talked about the influence of these programs on their racial identity development. Emilie (24-year-old Biracial straight female) shared, “I went to a program at [college] for minorities in political science after my third year of college, and that, for me, was really the time when I spent the most time with people who looked like me and people with origins that were similar to mine.” A combination of popular culture and campus events helped Jacob (18-year-old Biracial heterosexual male) with his growth in Black identity. He shared:

‘Dear White People’ was really good about explaining African American culture and college life. I would say that it helped me to understand a little bit more about my situation, and also helped me to understand how I can better identify with my own race as well. I am trying to be more emerged in the community that I try to identify more with. I have attempted to do so a variety of ways, I suppose. I went to a panel about being Black at [college] this past Wednesday. I networked there. And I extended my hand out a lot more than I had previously at the prior event.

Social media was another pathway to growth in Black identity mentioned by several participants. Simone (21-year-old African American straight female) shared the affirming influence of social media, stating:

Social media promotes it so well. I’m really into Twitter I think every first or second of the month, a lot of people I follow do the Celebrate Women of Color, which is nice because I see people on there who are like 10 times darker than me.
Cherise (20-year-old Black queer woman) shared her experience of social media providing much needed Black representation. She shared:

Thank goodness there's so much positive Black representation. "Black Panther" is the perfect example because here you have a movie that has a mostly Black cast. I am seeing these strong Black women fight bad guys and I am seeing these Black men not portrayed as thugs and criminals. And I think that is so amazing and empowering.

Personal connections, friendships, and spending time in the homes of Black friends is another way that some participants felt they were influenced and supported in growth in Black identity. Alyson and Maryama talked about friendships they had that gave them the opportunity to be included in the experience of a Black family. Alyson (27-year-old Black heterosexual cis-gender female) shared:

So then in high school I still had my best White friends from grade school in the neighborhood, but most of my friends and my best friend was Black. I think that's when things changed for me. We became very close. And through being included in her Black family I got context. They were like my family, and different from my family. Different in some of the values, conversations, interactions, but same as in families love, provide, exist, operate as unique and wholesome units. Some key differences included going to Black church and how religion was expressed, expressions of affection, strict rules, what movies we watched and music we listened to, how one’s value as a person was communicated, and the depth of conversations about God, boys, love, reality, safety.

Spending time with this family affirmed to me that Black families weren’t some aberration that was poor, unfit, unintelligent, poor mannered, reckless household. It's not what I thought that it was based on what I saw downtown or the very limited
understanding of what I may have seen on TV or in movies. I connected with her family so much. Her mom was like my second mom.

Similarly, Maryama (21-year-old African American bisexual female) discussed time she spent with the families of close friends who are Black:

I'm able to be in their families and listen to stories from uncles, grandparents, and I can hear from their side of the story, because I've only heard from my White family and their side. So, it was really eye-opening. Now, I do feel more connected or interconnected with them.

Additionally, close connections with strong, positive mentors was mentioned as a pathway toward growth in Black identity. Austin (28-year-old Black queer cis-gender male) shared in his interview about a woman for whom he worked after graduating from college. He stated:

This woman very much so ended up being this incredible mother figure that I never had, that was very pro-Black. She taught me all about activism, and feminism, and community organizing, and radical politics. She changed my entire life. Changed my life. Saved my life, honestly. Like, I get emotional talking about her. She's, she's the mom that I needed. She was the one teaching me language to be able to respond to antiblackness. Like she's the one that taught me the, the word microaggression. She taught me about systems of power. She taught me about, disenfranchisement, and marginalization, and how that stuff worked. And I was able to take that and practice it with my husband because he understood that language. There was like this paired belonging with progressive movement forward into the like specifics.
Another important influence for some participants was connecting to racial history of the birth family. Alyson (27-year-old Black heterosexual cis-gender female) experienced a unique self-mentorship that began with solo travels to two different African countries. She explained in a journal entry the monumental value of these trips:

During my junior year of college, I traveled alone to Ghana to find myself. The next year I went back. Two years later, I went to South Africa. During these trips I do believe that I "found Myself". These trips contributed to the shaping of my identity as a biological daughter of an African Immigrant, descendent of slaves, and who I am as a Black woman in America. These trips gave me spiritual awareness, context, and purpose. It was like I stepped off the plane onto the red soil of my ancestors, and was instantly enlightened. That sounds pretty dramatic, but it truly was the culmination of these trips that in a stepwise fashion, I gained the identity and voice that had always been within me, but myself and the world was so blind to for all the years of my life. These trips helped me invite light and love into my life thereafter and it gave me the insight to choose my friends and companions wisely and offered the wisdom of how to pursue my purpose on this earth.

A variety of influences, pathways, and supports were discussed by each participant as they told their stories of experiences related to race as transracial adoptees. Participants articulated the importance of those influences, and how they were especially needed due to the lack of that particular support from their White adoptive families.

**Summary.** In this section, the theme, Growth in Black Identity, was explored through descriptions given by all nine participants. The nuances of this theme were described through three subthemes. In the subtheme, Embracing Blackness, participants described times during
which they more fully embodied, felt, or understood their Black identities. Intersections with other salient identities as part of growth in Black identity were shared through the second subtheme. In the third subtheme, Influences, Pathways and Supports named by participants described ways in which developmental “blanks” in their racial identity development process were filled in. In the following section, the fifth theme, Views of Family Related to Race, and two associated subthemes will be described.

**Views of Family Related to Race**

This theme includes a range of thoughts and reflections on family related to race, providing a vignette of the various and sometimes conflicting feelings about family that can be present for young Black adults who have been raised by White parents, and how the experience of being Black creates a unique perspective on family values, ideas, and behaviors. This theme relates directly to the primary research question focused on how participants are experiencing and understanding race in emerging adulthood. In this section, the theme Views of Family Related to Race will be described first. Following will be descriptions of two related subthemes: (a) Having to Teach Family, and (b) Allegiance, Loyalty, and Gratitude.

Table 6

*Theme Five and Corresponding Subthemes with Example Quotations*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example Participant Quote</th>
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<tr>
<td>Views of Family Related to Race</td>
<td></td>
<td>This theme includes a range of thoughts and reflections on family related to race, providing a vignette of the various and sometimes conflicting feelings about family that can be present for young Black adults who have missed out on and how, despite my parents' best efforts, there are a lot of experiences and knowledge that my parents just could not provide for me. It's hard not to be resentful of that, but I know my parents did the best</td>
<td>“I think the most difficult part was realizing how much I do feel I missed out on and how, despite my parents' best efforts, there are a lot of experiences and knowledge that my parents just could not provide for me. It's hard not to be resentful of that, but I know my parents did the best</td>
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been raised by White parents, and how the experience of being Black creates a unique perspective on family values, ideas, and behaviors. 

Emlie (24-year-old Biracial straight female)

Having to Teach Family

This subtheme provides participant stories of finding themselves in situations where they have to teach their White families about things related to race, racism, and racial history. Some participants express their feelings and thoughts about being in that position, as well as their family’s responses.

“Ahaving to teach my family about the complexities of race and history and culture is like trying to teach a fiscally irresponsible adolescent who hasn’t learned adding and subtracting yet, financial literacy in order to run a business. Access to the learning environment with a teacher and textbooks and encouragement, but no context, no skills, no capacity for understanding, no willingness to invest in that learning, distracted, no background knowledge, no incentive toward meaningful action.”

Alyson (27-year-old Black heterosexual cis-gender female)

Allegiance, Loyalty, and Gratitude

This subtheme offers reflections of gratitude by participants about their parents’ efforts to support them in specific ways related to race. Also included are some conceptualizations of their family members and how they deal with race or express ideas about race from the stance of loyalty.

“My stepmom is super socially aware and always had my back in the heated arguments that I had with dad. And I will always deeply appreciate her for that.”

Cherise (20-year-old Black queer woman)
In her interview, Sadie (19-year-old African American heterosexual female) described her parents’ opinions related to race, and how her relationship to their views shifted over time. She stated:

They’re just really set in their ways. They have their opinions about it and they don’t really change. That’s why I think it took so long for me to be able to form my own opinions on race. I started feeling in different type of way about them, disagreeing maybe.”

For Emilie (24-year-old Biracial straight female), views of family included seeing efforts made by her parents and also acknowledging that, in retrospect, it was sometimes not enough:

I think the most difficult part was realizing how much I do feel I missed out on and how, despite my parents' best efforts, there are a lot of experiences and knowledge that my parents just could not provide for me. It's hard not to be resentful of that, but I know my parents did the best they could to provide us with the best life they were able.

Sometimes, family relationships brought a mixture of elements related to race. For Kaitlyn (18-year old Black heterosexual female), there are things about race and her family that are difficult, but she also felt that her family was supportive and understanding about issues of race. She stated:

One thing that has bothered me now that I'm older is how my dad will sometimes say that he is a Black parent because he has raised Black kids. I think what he means to say is that he understands more of what Black people go through in terms of racism, but he will never truly understand the struggles that Black people as a race face. Even though he
will say that from time to time I still love him very much and my mom too. I am blessed to live with a very strong and supportive family and one that is diverse in many ways. Me and my brother can understand the things that we go through in terms of racism and my parents are always there to help us with our problems and the differences that we face in the world.

Cherise (20-year-old Black queer woman) discussed the common struggle she had attempting to talk to her dad about race, and how she then experienced support from another family member—making her home a source of frustration, but also connection. She said:

A lot of times my dad would make me feel dumb during arguments about race. Sometimes I had this idea of what I wanted to say to him and then actually voicing those opinions and thoughts wouldn't come out right. And then he would get the wrong idea or just not understand. So, sometimes, my stepmom would be like, “Oh, she probably means this.” That was always super nice. There’s definitely a connection, and we definitely bonded over that. That was really awesome because it’s nice to have somebody who has your back in those things especially when it’s really important to you.

Having a multicultural family of siblings that were all adopted brought a unique view of family related to race for Simone (21-year-old African American straight female). She reflected:

In my family, we have a lot of different cultures. My adopted family is very Dutch. My oldest brother is Caucasian and Puerto Rican. I have a Biracial brother, and I have another brother who’s mostly Polish. And we’re all adopted. Growing up we always like welcomed everybody’s cultures.

Reflecting on their current relationships with parents, several participants described feeling a sense of distance from family members when topics of race came up with family
members. Jacob (18-year-old Biracial heterosexual male) stated, “I love my dad. And I love his personality and all. But like, it can be really hard to interact with him sometimes because of that. Because of his views and all that. And it can be awkward.”

This feeling of distance was described in other ways, as well. While her parents were open to hearing Alyson (27-year-old Black heterosexual cis-gender female) talk about race, in her interview, she expressed a longing for a deeper level of engagement and more mutual understanding on the topic. She shared:

I wish that I could talk to my parents fully authentically about all things that I have experienced and how I feel and for them to truly understand. I think that as a child you always want to connect with your parents in various different types of ways. And I feel like this is one of them where there is a disconnect. And maybe from naivete on their part or just never really trying to understand, like reading about it. And, like, If I prompt them to read an article about race, they’ll read it. But I don't know the context in which they're reading it and then our discussions are just mostly me talking.

Alyson also reflected on how her parents were lifelong learners, and how she felt their selectivity in terms of what they educated themselves about avoided topics relevant to race and her experience of race. She said, “They read all the time. My dad reads magazines about money, business, politics. I'm, like, "Could you have read about Black history and taught me about that? Could you have taught me about things about Africa or anything like that?"

Similarly, Austin noted that being educated on topics of Whiteness and race was not a priority for his family members. He stated, “No one in my family has done any type of work to understand their privilege to like understand what it means for them to be a White family and have a Black child.” Austin (28-year-old Black queer cis-gender male) shared a story in which
he called his mother to discuss issues of race and racism in the family. He stated that the first things his mother said in the conversation was, “We raised you to be a White boy from the suburbs.” He continued, discussing how this lack of awareness displayed by his family, as well as racism he witnessed from them, has affected him. He said:

About a week ago, in therapy, I really sort of lost my mind about my relationship with my family, specifically my mom. I have internalized the damage done from witnessing my family express racist views. My intention is that I will be writing her a letter detailing the many things that I am struggling with compartmentalizing. I can no longer pretend like hearing my family express racist views has not had a lasting impact on me.

Participants described a range of views of family related to race. The description of this main theme is expanded in the following sections through two subthemes: (a) Having to Teach Family and (b) Allegiance, Loyalty, and Gratitude.

**Having to Teach Family.** This subtheme reflects participant stories of finding themselves in situations where they have to teach their White families about things related to race, racism, and racial history. Some participants express their feelings and thoughts about being in that position, as well as their family’s responses. This aspect of the theme Views of Family Related to Race shows a piece of the TRA family dynamic that participants have to continually decide how to approach.

Cherise (20-year-old Black queer woman) told the story of being with her extended family, and finding herself trying to teach them about cultural appropriation. She stated:

I was with my grandparents and I have aunts and uncles there and we had a huge conversation about cultural appropriation, and we talked about hair and what I thought White people were appropriating from Black culture and it was just, it was kind of a
mess. But nobody really saw eye-to-eye. My cousin was literally just like, “yeah I just feel like she's just trying to say that there are a lot of people, a lot of women, a lot of kids, a lot children and men, Black men, a lot of people who are all the time being told that certain hairstyles aren't okay and how, when a White person wears it, it is celebrated or is trendy.” So yeah, that was a huge conversation I had with my family and it just kind of ended in a mess.

A similar story was shared by Maryama (21-year-old African American bisexual female).

She stated:

My sister and I were talking about dreadlocks and why it's unacceptable for her to do that. But, she's like, ‘But, it's acceptable for the Black girls to get White girl hair.’ And, she's talking about weave, and I'm just, like, I don't know how to answer that.”

She expressed her feeling of being in a place in her own development in which she didn’t feel ready to be the expert, yet felt frustrated that her sister continued to question what she was saying. She said:

I don't know the history of it or the background of it. I just know that if she were to show up with a weave or dreadlocks or cornrows, it would be offensive. But, I kind of explained that to her, and she was getting mad. And, it made me feel uncomfortable because she wants these answers from me like I know. I’m like, "I'm learning too, you know. You have to understand that." But I don't think they understand the struggle that I've been going through. They ask questions about things they're genuinely confused about, but they already have their own preconceived ideas, and then it's kind of hard to change their mind because they just come back with a rebuttal.
Austin (28-year-old Black queer cis-gender male) also shared a time when he was in a position of teaching his sister. In this instance, the topic was “colorblindness.” He shared, “I was like, ‘You can't say that you don't see color. That’s such an invalidating thing to say and also wrong, because you do.’ And so, I was talking to her and she's coming around to it more.”

As Jacob (18-year-old Biracial heterosexual male) delved into learning more about Black history over the summer before he started college, he began to learn things that caused him to challenge his dad’s understanding of certain topics related to race. He shared that one of the first things he watched as a documentary about the Black Panthers. He recalled this exchange:

I think what my dad said was that they were a pseudo-terrorist group. I was quick to correct him and say that that was not the actions of the Black Panthers but the actions of like, one of the syndicates that spun out of the Nation of Islam. My dad was like, “I was alive during that time. You don’t know what you’re talking about.” But it was like, he’s talking about the 1980’s. So, the Black Panther Movement had like, really died by then. It was replaced by other more extremist like, African American groups…like the Nation of Islam.

Jacob thought quietly for a moment, and then said, “I think… Like with anything that has to do with politics, my parents and I often disagree.”

Some participants described a sense of resignation, realizing that certain family members were not open to learning new ideas about race. Kaitlyn (18-year old Black heterosexual female) shared:

I think my dad's mom doesn't understand a lot of the stuff that comes with being Black in a White family, but I don't really try to explain it to her, because she's just set in her ways. It doesn't really do any good to try to talk to her about it.
Being in a position of teaching family about race – or not being able to do so - was described as part of the experience of being a transracially adopted emerging adult in today’s world. Alyson (27-year-old Black heterosexual cis-gender female) uses an analogy in the following passage to attempt to explain this unique situation:

Having to teach my family about the complexities of race and history and culture is like trying to teach a fiscally irresponsible adolescent, who hasn’t learned adding and subtracting yet, financial literacy in order to run a business. Access to the learning environment with a teacher and textbooks and encouragement, but no context, no skills, no capacity for understanding, no willingness to invest in that learning, distracted, no background knowledge, no incentive toward meaningful action.

She continued, expressing a feeling of futility related to the conversations she has with her parents in an attempt to teach them about race topics and inform them about her personal experiences related to race. She stated:

In present day I feel like I over-talk about race to my parents. Every time I’m home, I start some type of dialogue about race, usually with my mom, then I end up talking her to death for like 3 hours and I’m starting to feel like I am bombarding them with things they don’t want to talk about and that they may feel that I’m that girl who always obsesses about race topics. They understand the diversity work I do in my school but I don’t think they realize how race is something I’ve dealt with, still deal with and think about on a DAILY basis and how much a part of my life it is.

It seems that because some family members have not made it a priority on their own to be a student of racial topics, the weight of convincing family members of the importance of race is
left to adoptees, and this can feel like an overwhelming and frustrating task at times. The following section explores the next subtheme, Allegiance, Loyalty, and Gratitude.

**Allegiance, Loyalty, and Gratitude.** This subtheme offers reflections of situations in which conceptualizations of family members through a lens of allegiance and loyalty to the family were expressed by participants, sometimes in confusing circumstances. Also, participant stories describing gratitude about parents’ efforts to support them in specific ways related to race are included here. Transracial adoption family dynamics are unique in that there are sometimes coexisting, yet seemingly incompatible components of relationships present. Some participants describe an awareness of discomfort, lack of support or feelings of frustration due to racial identity, but this does not cancel out the feelings of love, connection, and gratitude present in those same relationships. This subtheme shows some of the complexity within views of family for participants.

One way that allegiance and loyalty to family showed itself in participant stories was the tendency for some participants to not confide in parents about things related to race in order to protect them. Simone (21-year-old African American straight female) said:

I tell my parents some stuff. Some stuff I keep from my parents because I know they get upset. There has been some stuff I just don’t want to tell them because it does nothing but hurt them. If I’m okay with it, then that’s all that really matters.

In a similar way, Emilie (24-year-old Biracial straight female) shared that her parents probably don’t know that she feels like she missed something in terms of exposure to diversity and Black culture. She shared, “I don't 100% know that I would ever tell them because they have done so much and I love my parents deeply and I know that hearing that would hurt them, especially because they always did their best.” This awareness of parents doing the best they
could was mentioned by several participants, and usually accompanied a sense of gratitude and loyalty. Maryama (21-year-old African American bisexual female) discussed her parents’ efforts to expose her to African American culture in an academic way through trips to museums and similar educational pursuits. She said she didn’t start to appreciate this until she got to high school. She shared:

I saw that my parents were actually trying to make me more knowledgeable about my culture. I always make sure I thank my parents for that because I'm like, "You guys didn't have to do that. You could have just raised me as, you know, just normal and not teach me about my background and just had me learn it in school." I’m very thankful for that and I feel like they tried their best.

Maryama also addressed in her interview how bonded she feels to her parents, regardless of their differences. She said, “I feel like my bond is so strong with my parents right now. Just because I have differences with them and my beliefs, I'm not going to not feel that bond anymore. I still go to them.” Even though Cherise experienced struggle with her father, she found solace in the level of interest and awareness shown by her step mom. She expressed her gratitude, stating, “My step mom is super socially aware and always had my back in the heated arguments that I had with dad. I will always deeply appreciate her for that.”

For Jacob (18-year-old Biracial heterosexual male), there is a gratitude for transracial adoption in general in his life. He expressed that he felt it was a good option to help expand opportunities in some ways. He shared about what he thought transracial adoption provided for him:
I think I felt that in my upbringing. I think it allowed me to focus more on schooling and who I am. It gave me an opportunity to stay away from some of the more disruptive cultural elements of the African American community like gangs and that sort of thing.”

An insight shared by Alyson (27-year-old Black heterosexual cis-gender female) had to do with realizing what her parents didn’t give, but also what they did give. It felt important for her to acknowledge the following:

My parents didn't talk about race and racism or tell me that I belonged even though my skin was different or tell me that I am loved even if people treat me different because of my skin...but what they did do is treat me like I mattered, they always made me feel like I belonged in their family through their equitable treatment of me and my sister, they stood proud when they introduced their family to strangers, they had pictures of us at their work, they supported me in anything I ever wanted to do or tried to do. I think this was their way of telling me that my skin did not make any difference whatsoever in their level of love for me.

Continuing with the idea that family was a mixture of disappointment and fulfillment, Austin (28-year-old Black queer cis-gender male) acknowledged that while needs related to race were left unmet, there were other components of his family’s influence that were supportive. He stated:

It was a lot easier for me to unlearn sexism and be supportive of women than it was for me to unlearn racism and be supportive of Black folks because I was raised by my mom. All negative things aside, she's an incredibly powerful woman. My feminism was encouraged.
Some participants shared stories that included some confusion about where White family members stood on issues of race and racism. An example is a story reflected upon by Simone (21-year-old African American straight female). Her brother was friends with people who used the n-word, and she had to address this with him. This inspired the following thought process:

I know my brother obviously doesn’t think that. He doesn’t share the same point of views. He has a Black sister. So, I know he doesn’t think that. But like hanging out with his friends sometimes I feel like so awkward, because I want to speak up and say something. But—there’s only been a couple times where I’ve like heard it. And they’ve never directed it at me, which I guess it’s—I mean, it’s bad either way. But it’s like, what do you really do in that situation, because that’s your brother’s friends? So, it’s like, does he secretly think that? Like sometimes I get kind of confused. I mean, I know he doesn’t, because he loves me. But it’s still kind of, I don't know, awkward or uncomfortable, just the whole situation.

For Sadie (19-year-old African American heterosexual female), who was raised by her grandmother, who is White, there was an awareness of bias, but also of other facets of her parent that caused Sadie to conclude that, “She’s not racist, but she does sometimes say biased things.” She added part of her parent’s personal history to support her assertion: “Because I know in high school, she used to get in trouble for hanging out with Black people. So, I know she’s never been a super biased type of person. It happens sometimes. I feel like that happens to everybody.” In the end, Sadie accepts that they have different views, stating, “Sometimes she just has that kind of opinion, though I can’t really think that or say that, but it’s all you.”
This acceptance of some family members who hold onto archaic ideas related to race was also shared by Kaitlyn (18-year old Black heterosexual female) in reference to a grandparent. She wrote the following passage in a journal entry:

My great grandma is 83 and she grew up back when Black people were called colored people. That doesn't really bother me because she's old and is just saying what she is used to. She also said to me that she is tired of hearing how much harder the Black man has it than the White man because each person has the same amount of problems. I don't argue with her when she says these kinds of things because she doesn't get out much and she doesn't watch the news or anything to see what’s going on in the media. She may say things like this sometimes because she really doesn't know what is going on, so I don't even get mad.

Another way that gratitude related to family showed itself in participant stories was the experience of a parent advocating for and protecting participants. In one story, shared by Alyson (27-year-old Black heterosexual cis-gender female) in a journal entry, she had been stopped by a White man while walking in her own neighborhood. Her presence in the community was questioned, and the man told her it was private property and she was trespassing. She wrote:

He continued to badger me with questions until I answered his specific questions like what my exact address was and making me point to exactly where I live before he left me alone. There were other people walking around the neighborhood at that time, there always were. The difference...they were White. A week later, the same thing happened to me while I was walking in my neighborhood with my partner Logan, but by a different man who was walking his dog. We immediately went home and this time, my dad was home and I told him what had occurred. What would happen next, truly changed my
adult life in how I came to realize how much my dad actually does care about me. I don't know if his understanding of race and racism culminated at this point but it sure seemed like real life racism hit him all at once. He grabbed his jacket and his shoes and marched out the door and found the man I described to him standing in his driveway some houses down the street. My dad confronted him and told him to stop harassing his family and to leave his family alone and that it is not a crime to walk around the neighborhood. He told the man that if he ever bothered his family again, that he would report him to the authorities. I...will....never...forget...this. This is the first time my dad EVER confronted anyone. The first time I have ever seen my dad stand up for me, or anyone, really. And it made so much sense....he dealt with this the same way he has dealt with everything else in our life, not by dialoguing with me or talking about it or sharing emotions but rather taking direct action as a result of his love for me.

This event was clearly meaningful for Alyson, and caused her to not only feel a deeper understanding of her father, but also a closer feeling of loyalty and allegiance between her and her dad. For the first time, she could feel that they were on the same side, with a shared understanding of what occurred as an injustice. Kaitlyn (18-year old Black heterosexual female) made a statement during her interview that relates to this idea of going through things together being something that bonds people together as a family. She said, “I think sometimes you have to go through rough times to realize that the family you were put in is the family that loves you the most.”

**Summary.** The complexities of Views of Family Related to Race for transracial adoptees are apparent in the above interview and journal entry content, which covered a range of experiences and understandings for participants. Two subthemes, Having to Teach Family and
Allegiance, Loyalty, and Gratitude, offered a view into some of the difficulty present in family when it comes to race, and also some of the deeper positive components of family expressed by participants. The following section begins the description of the sixth theme, The Political is Personal.

The Political is Personal

The following segment of a spoken word piece authored by Alyson (27-year-old Black heterosexual cis-gender female) introduces the sixth theme that emerged from participant narratives: The Political is Personal.

She told me affirmative action is the only reason I got in
Not knowing that my application was stronger than hers to begin [with]
Not knowing that without affirmation of our black and brown skin
That the racist policies and people still wouldn’t let us in
Constantly questioned about my own intelligence
Does not help the bias, you are convinced doesn’t exist
Deflection of my feelings and lived realities
Does not properly reflect your so-called empathy
I want to understand you, I promise - I do
But I just wish you would try to take a walk in my shoes
I was told my gorilla nose don’t belong here
I was told I need to tame my wild and curly hair
Oh and your minority scholarships are just so unfair
But what they failed to see, is we breathe the same air…
This theme provides descriptions of the personal relevance of racial politics in the lives of participants. In today’s world and for the generation coming into emerging adulthood at this time in history, racial politics are more visible than ever before with social media and hand-held phones recording and spreading news quickly. Participants share a range of insights, stories, and viewpoints in this theme, which relates to the primary research question of this study focused on how participants are experiencing and understanding race as they move through emerging adulthood. First, the theme the Political is Personal will be described, and then the two subthemes: (a) My Eyes Were Opened and (b) Divide in Family over Racial Politics.

Many participants discussed events related to the 2016 United Stated presidential election in their interviews and journal entries. The election had clear relevance for participants as people of color in the US. Emilie (24-year-old Biracial straight female) shared, “I got to a point after the election where every White person was the enemy, and it's taken me some time to sort of get place to a place where I believe that maybe we'll be okay.” Simone (21-year-old African

Table 7

*Theme Six and Corresponding Subthemes with Example Quotations*

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<th>Theme</th>
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<th>Example Participant Quote</th>
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| The Political is Personal | My Eyes Were Opened                 | This theme provides descriptions of the personal relevance of racial politics in the lives of participants. | “When we were planning our wedding, we wanted to have voter registration cards. And my mom said, ‘No, you can't have those things.’ And I asked, ‘What do you mean?’ And she said, ‘You don't mix the personal with the political.’ And I said, ‘Mom, I'm marrying another man. And the only reason that's legally recognized is because of politics and field organizing. So, my
<p>|                      | Divide in Family over Racial Politics |                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |</p>
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<th>Subtheme</th>
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<tr>
<td>My Eyes Were Opened</td>
<td>In this subtheme, participants share stories and thoughts related to personally experiencing having an oppressed identity in a racialized society.</td>
<td>“Oh, basically, the sororities just start a big festival thing that you can go to and see which ones there were. So, I went to one. Then, and like when I went, like, they had all the Black sororities on one side of the curtain, and then all the other sororities on the other side. And, like, so I went to the other side first to see what it was like, and they just sort of were being fake because they felt like I should just be on the other side of the curtain, but I just wanted to see what it was like. So, after that conversation, I went to the other side, and I thought that it would just be better to join one of those because no one would look at me weird or anything.”</td>
<td>Kaitlyn (18-year-old Black heterosexual female)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Divide in Family over Racial Politics</td>
<td>Quotations in this subtheme tell of instances of division between participants and their families due to racial politics and disagreement about race.</td>
<td>“I think… Like with anything that has to do with politics, my parents and I often disagree. They’re more conservative than I am. And I’m on the opposite side. But I’m way more liberal than they are. But when it comes to race, typically we don’t always see eye to eye. And my dad thinks of like, police shootings as more-so like, officers attempting to do their job as best as they can verses what they really are, oftentimes.”</td>
<td>Jacob (18-year-old Biracial heterosexual male)</td>
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American straight female) discussed what it was like to see campaign logos on friends’ social media accounts. She talked about how this caused her to think about friendships in a different light. She stated:

But I’m like, are all my friends racist? Because they’re supporting him. And he talks bad about minorities, women, people with disabilities. So, I have a tough time getting behind someone like that. And it definitely opened my eyes, because if they support him, they share the same views. To some extent, they do. So, I just kind of like distanced myself from a lot of the people on Facebook or a lot of my friends because I don’t support him at all. But I’m like, “now I don’t really know if I’m your friend.”

In a journal entry, Cherise (20-year-old Black queer woman) discussed her experience at the time of the election and what it was like to attend class that day as a college student. She wrote:

I remember when Trump first became “president.” I was on the phone with my friend waiting in anticipation. I remember her crying because her mom was an undocumented immigrant and Trump’s viewpoint of them was incorrect and unforgiving. I think at that point I knew that was a clear indication as to where we were as a country. The election was made up of votes of mostly White women. I remember having to go to class in defeat that day and how it was especially difficult because I was at a predominately White Christian college. Many of these people were republicans and I tried to not feel a slight disdain for my peers. When Trump became president for many of my peers it was just another day. But I knew my rights as a queer Black woman would be threatened and things would certainly be different.
Sadie (19-year-old African American heterosexual female) shared her point of view related to racial progress. She wrote in a journal entry, “It seems as though we've made progress with race and acceptance and equality, but if you ask me, we are at the point where we are at a standstill and are kind of going backwards.” She continued, writing about how there are certain ways that she feels limited in terms of traveling or where to live.

It is kind of a scary thought though. The fact that there are people out there so passionately racist, and active about it. It is so bad in the world that there are certain places I don't ever want to go. I used to want to move to Alabama, but that is a scary thought now. You couldn't pay me enough to go to Mississippi, and I am planning on moving to Atlanta after college, and now that is even a scary. I just think it is sad that people have to still live in some type of fear just because of the way that they look.

While Kaitlyn (18-year old Black heterosexual female) did not discuss traveling to other places, she did mention her feelings about the place she grew up, and her family’s experiences with the local police:

I think they were targeting our family more than the other houses. Because, like, some of the houses would deal drugs, but they would never go in there. But if we got too loud or like—my dad and my brother were arguing. They’d always be knocking at our door. The police didn’t really like our family, and I think part of the reason was because of our diversities. So, I think we were kind of watched a little more than the other families. My parents have Black children, so they don’t like it.

Kaitlyn explained that she and her family members were visibly in support of Black causes. She shared that her dad used to kneel at her soccer games in support of peaceful protest against police brutality against Black people. She shared:
My dad used to kneel at my soccer games, but I asked him not to because no one else was, and I was kind of embarrassed. But he supports that. And me and my brother support that too. We all support “Black Lives Matter.”

Maryama (21-year-old African American bisexual female) shared in her interview how her awareness of Black culture and history was related to her awareness of racial politics. She said, “I feel more defensive or supportive for my Black community. Back then, I really didn't care. But now, I understand the struggle, the culture and the background.” Jacob also mentioned that studying Black history was influential in seeing how racial politics could affect him personally. He said, “It helped me to better contextualize racism in the United States. And I think that brought me into a feeling of, wow, I really need to learn a lot more about like, what’s going on and how it affects me as an African American male.”

Austin (28-year-old Black queer cis-gender male) talked about his process of becoming an activist starting in college, and how this influenced his feelings about the personal relevance of racial politics. He stated:

I was very apolitical for most of my life. But I went to college. I went to a liberal arts college and began to sort of grow my understanding and, the seeds of my activism were planted. Gradually, I became so militant in many ways that I lost a lot of friends. I became very vocal. And, it was very much so, "You either give a shit or you don't. And, if you don't give a shit, you don't give a shit about me, then. And I don't want you in my life." I lost friends. I would get into fights with friends over things, screaming matches over the world. And I don't regret a single moment of it, to be very clear.

He continued, discussing how his personal relationship life was related to racial politics. He said:
I met the man who would eventually become my husband. He's a very political man. If I thought that I was becoming political in college because I went to some rallies, that was nothing compared to dating a man who had been a field organizer for President Obama. When Austin and his now husband were planning their wedding, they planned to have voter registration cards for guests, and his mom was not in support of this idea. The following exchange occurred:

My mom said, "No, you can't have those things." And I asked, "What do you mean?" And she said, "You don't mix the personal with the political." And I said, "Mom, I'm marrying another man. And the only reason that's legally recognized is because of politics and field organizing. So, my life is political. I'm a gay Black man. My life is political.

Participants expressed the presence of racial politics in most arenas of their lives during interviews and in journal entries. Alyson (27-year-old Black heterosexual cis-gender female) added the life arena of medical school by writing the following:

Based on my experiences as one of the few people of color in medical school, I have a lot of built up anger and things I'd like to explain to my White classmates. It deeply saddens me that many of them display a huge capacity of intelligence to learn the biomedical sciences, but lack common empathy and understanding of the experiences and/or history of Black people in America. It pains me to know they will be doctors next year who will have patients that look like me. Based on many people in my classes' comments, how they view the world, their lack of desire to engage in cultural competency experiences, and their disdain that they project upon anything that threatens their privilege, I would venture to regretfully say that they will project some serious bias in their future practice
and further contribute to the ethnic and racial health disparities we have today. When social injustice occurs right in front of their eyes, their silence is deafening. I just wish they would take the time to listen to the experiences of people different from them and just believe us, instead of questioning everything and getting so defensive.

The personal relevance of racial politics is further explored through two subthemes: (a) My Eyes Were Opened: Experiencing My Racial Identity as Oppressed and (b) Divide in Family over Racial Politics in the following sections.

My Eyes Were Opened. In this subtheme, participants shared stories and thoughts related to personally experiencing feeling “othered” or “less than” because of having an oppressed racial identity in a racialized society. Participants shared about experiencing stereotype threat, microaggressions, incidents of racism, and coming to a greater understanding of systemic dynamics related to race, all of which had a part in participants seeing the political as personal. For transracially adopted emerging adults, the realization of oppressed identity based on experience is a unique aspect of the Political is Personal. Without the influence of Black family members and the absence of experiences like watching one’s parents, siblings and extended family and neighbors coping with oppressive circumstances, some participants came to the realization and understanding of oppressed racial identity during emerging adulthood rather than during childhood or as an inherited culturally socialized fact of existence. For some participants, the realization was in retrospect, when knowledge and language related to race and racism gained in emerging adulthood provided a lens through which participants could interpret their earlier experiences with greater understanding.
In a story told by Cherise (20-year-old Black queer woman) in a journal entry, she shared about the first time, at 19 years old, that she experienced being treated as if she were a threat because of the color of her skin. She wrote:

I was waiting for my Uber to pick me up and I was sitting in front of 7/11 when a lady working there comes out. She tells me that I'm not allowed to sit in front of the store because I was making one of the customers inside uncomfortable by standing in front of her car. The lady was apologetic but said to me "You know how it is." And I just remember thinking, “No, I really don’t.” Me being very unconfrontational, I agreed to move to the side of the store. I was doing nothing wrong and strongest emotion I felt at that time was anger. Anger because she didn't even know me, anger because I was so docile about the whole situation. I wish I would have stood up for myself and told them I was doing nothing wrong. That was the first time that I’d ever really experienced somebody seeing my skin and thinking that I was a threat.

In a journal entry, Alyson (27-year-old Black heterosexual cis-gender female) explored this idea of stereotype threat. She wrote a list of examples from her life:

Do you know how many times I have...

……stayed silent in my life in fear of being the Black girl who always brings up issues?

……tipped too generously despite horrible service in fear of being the Black people who don’t leave good tips?

……been overly pleasant and apologetic even when I have been disrespected and walked on just to avoid being labeled as the angry Black girl?

……dimmed my light or decreased my self-worth so others can feel better about themselves so they don’t get jealous of me?
ran slower in a track race or sprint at basketball practice just so they wouldn’t think I’m just fast cuz I’m Black, despite me working 10 times harder on a daily basis?

not raised my hand in class when I knew the answer as to not outshine the white people and have them resent or fear me?

withheld the fact that my parents are white so that they don’t say, “oh that makes sense, we knew the only reason a proper Black like you made it was cuz them white folks raised ya”

How many times you ask? TOO MANY

Maryama (21-year-old African American bisexual female) shared her reaction to experiencing a racial microaggression, stating “I would always have White people say, ‘Can I touch your hair?’ Oh, I hate that. I still hate it today. People put their hand on top of my head, and I'm like, ‘Please stop. Like, please don't do that.’” Microaggressions were a part of Sadie’s (19-year-old African American heterosexual female) story as well. She shared the following story in a journal entry:

One time this older White guy told one of the other black cashiers that he didn't know 'colored' people worked here. I actually really hate the word ‘colored’ as a way to describe skin color, because every time I think of like the segregated 1960's, and it makes my skin crawl. I feel awkward and out of place working there. I feel like I am always looked down at like I don't know what I am doing. Even at the school of music, there are not a lot of music majors that are Black, so I feel like when I walk down the halls, I have to prove myself more than everyone else. I really hate sometimes that skin color is something that makes you automatically look weak and inferior. I wanna prove myself but based on my skills not my appearance.
Several participants wrote and spoke about being in mostly White spaces, and how emerging adulthood is a time in which they begin to have a different perspective in those spaces. In a journal entry, Emilie (24-year-old Biracial straight female) shared a story that caused her to realize her unique position in White spaces. She wrote:

When I was a senior in college we were beginning to grow apart, but the final straw was at a Friendsgiving dinner where we were all drinking and having a fine time, until one of the guy, [deidentified], who is White, said "Let's listen to some nigger music." I had never heard him say anything like that before and I'm honestly not sure where it came from or where he found the audacity to say nigger in my presence and expect nothing would come of it. I admittedly caused a whole scene, but to this day I feel justified because not only would he not admit he was wrong, but none of my "friends" would stand up to him with me. It was in that moment that I realized that in my life, as a person with my background, privilege, and complexion, I have a very simple choice around white people. I can either sit back and let things happen to fit in and not cause waves, or I can stand up for what I believe is right. Unfortunately, I also realized that day that many people will expect me to sit back and shut up in the face of oppression and racism because of my complexion, and that when they realize I am unwilling to do so I find their surprise often turns to anger and resentment.

Austin (28-year-old Black queer cis-gender male) shared what he noticed in terms of his intersected identities, and how he experiences race as more of a taboo topic than sexual orientation. He stated:

If I said my family's homophobic or if I was telling people that I was distancing myself because my family doesn't support me being gay, or doesn't accept me for being gay, or
doesn't, you know, affirm me for being gay, I would be a fucking hero. I would be the bravest person in the world. But, because it's race and race is the most taboo topic, people don't want to believe that this pleasant White family that raised this well-spoken, well-educated, seemingly well-adapted Black person could possibly be racist.

This aspect of the transracial adoptive experience mentioned by Austin is inherent in many participant stories; the uniqueness of being in a family where both oppressed and privileged statuses related to race are present. In thinking back about her journey of racial awareness, Cherise (20-year-old Black queer woman) talked about how she began to feel strong emotions in response to police violence against Black people, and how this internal struggle impacted conversations with her father and increased her understanding of systemic and personal dynamics related to race. She shared:

I do remember that Black male being fatally shot and it being all over the news. I remember feeling this anger, this sadness. I remember talking to my dad about it. He tried to justify this police's actions, as if this Black man deserved to die. I think from there that's when me and my dad started having real conversations about politics, well, more like arguments. That's when I started realizing how race determines everything. I did start to realize that my skin color does matter, you know, the way I'm perceived, the way I am treated, and just actually how important it is to me, being a Black woman.

Kaitlyn (18-year old Black heterosexual female) had been raised in a racially diverse area. She shared experiences related to race, experiencing racism, and understanding that she and her brother were treated differently at school, and that her family was targeted by police due to race. When she reached emerging adulthood, she encountered a new aspect of race and society: segregated Greek life on her college campus. She shared:
Basically, the sororities just start a big festival that you can go to and see which ones there were. So, I went to one. When I went, they had all the Black sororities on one side of the curtain, and then all the other sororities on the other side. So, I went to the other side first to see what it was like, and they just sort of were being fake because they felt like I should just be on the other side of the curtain, but I just wanted to see what it was like. So, after that conversation, I went to the other side, and I thought that it would just be better to join one of those because no one would look at me weird or anything.

When asked what it was like for her to experience this, she shared her way of coping with racism and stereotype threat, saying, “You just sort of have to let it go. You can’t just dwell on that stuff. You just have to let that stuff go because they’re the ignorant ones.”

Only one participant, Jacob (18-year-old Biracial heterosexual male), expressed that he did not notice being treated differently due to race. He said, “I don’t really often like, notice any, I suppose, microaggressions or indicators of racism in my direction. I can’t think of any scenario where that’s happened to me before.” He also shared a self-reflection, wondering if he didn’t pick up on things other people of color might. He stated:

I don’t typically analyze my interactions with people that much for hints of like, racism or something along those lines. But I know people that do. I think either I’m not informed enough to look for it, or I just ignore it and assume that it’s just an idiosyncrasy of the way the person is trying to act.

For most participants, experiences of microaggressions, stereotype threat, and racism were important aspects of seeing the political as personal. The next subtheme explores the aspect of this main theme by looking at division in the family related to racial politics.
**Divide in Family Over Racial Politics.** Quotations in this subtheme tell of instances of division between participants and their families due to racial politics and disagreement about race. This aspect of the Political is Personal is a unique piece of TRA. The personal relevance of racial politics coupled with the family tension and divide regarding racial politics adds a dimension to racial identity that is most likely not usually present for Black emerging adults raised in Black families. In general, there seemed to be a feeling for participants that some parents and family members simply did not understand the significance of race for participants, and for some, there was the presence of anti-Black political views within the family.

Present in this subtheme are conversations or experiences with family related to elections, leaving participants with realizations about their family’s views. Cherise succinctly stated, “Being pro black in the eyes of my father meant that I hated all white people. But really, it had set me free.” Simone (21-year-old African American straight female) told the following story in her interview:

Aunts, aunts, yep, aunts, cousins, my uncles didn’t talk to me for six months. And I didn’t understand because I wasn’t like, yelling or anything. I just said, “I don’t really support him.” And then they were like, “Well, that’s racism because you”— And I was like, “How is it racism? Reverse racism doesn’t really work.” And that made them even angrier. It was just crazy, because I’m like, you guys didn’t want a black President. Because like when people run for President, they always drag up old issues and stuff. Like they couldn’t find Obama’s birth certificate. And that’s how my aunts and uncles—I remember that actually, them saying all that stuff. And I was like, is it because of that or is it because he’s Black? And then like this past election, I’m like, oh, it really was because he was Black.
Maryama (21-year-old African American bisexual female) also shared about her family supporting the Republican party during the election when President Obama was running, and going through the process of figuring out her own beliefs and opinions:

So, my parents are Republican, and I remember when Obama was running. My parents formed this thing in my head, like, he's a bad guy. So, I was thinking like, "Okay. Anybody who supports Obama is bad." But then, in school, people were like, "Yes! First Black President." You know, all this stuff, and he stood for Obamacare. And, I'm like okay. I didn't understand the whole political aspect of it because I wasn't knowledgeable on those topics, but I was like, yeah, why not have a first Black President, you know. And then, I started wondering about why wouldn't my parents want that? But then, I understand that they had different views because of their background as well, but I didn't understand that. But I never really talked to my parents about it. I'm like, okay, I support Obama as the first Black President.

Racial politics and racial identity development seemed intertwined for Emilie (24-year-old Biracial straight female). In her interview she talked about how growth in her Black identity fueled a change in her political stance, making it feel like more was at stake for her personally, but she never explained that to her mom. She stated:

I don't know that she knew exactly why, like, I was changing the way that I was interacting with her and other people, but I think that that was one of the ways that it most manifested in our relationship was that our political differences became, sort of, sort of, like, a breaking point of our relationship. Like, we had gotten to a point where we couldn't even talk about politics in even the most remote of ways without it becoming an argument. So, we just said we're not going to talk about this anymore.
Another aspect of a divide in family over racial politics mentioned by participants was police brutality. Jacob (18-year-old Biracial heterosexual male) explained that he and his parents are on opposite sides when looking at a police shooting:

They’re more conservative than I am. And I’m on the opposite side. I’m way more liberal than they are. But when it comes to race, typically we don’t always see eye to eye. And my dad thinks of like, police shootings as more-so like, officers attempting to do their job as best as they can verses what they really are, oftentimes.

For Austin (28-year-old Black queer cis-gender male), the issue of police violence against Black people is an area of conflict with family. He told the following story during his interview:

And, you know, my mom, being an asshole, is like talking about how hard it is to be a police officer. Yeah. This is my life. She's talking about how hard it is to be a police officer. And then, we were talking about Tamir Rice, and I said, "You know, that man murdered a 12-year-old." So, my mom's like, "they didn’t murder him." At that point, I looked at [husband] and said, "We have to go. We're done now."

Another point of view was shared by Simone (21-year-old African American straight female), who expressed that she copes with issues of racial politics by trying to see both sides.

She stated:

When I discuss situations like this with my family, they often side with law enforcement. But my friends and other people my age question the polices true intentions. I like to see both sides of the situation, make a smart and fair decision or opinion.
Kaitlyn (18-year old Black heterosexual female) shared during her interview that she doesn’t have as close of a relationship with family members who don’t understand issues of race or express racist views. She shared:

My grandma, like my dad’s mom, she posted on Facebook one time, it was a joke about Black people picking cotton in the fields. My brother, he wouldn’t go to her house for Thanksgiving or Christmas for like three years. I still went because I liked seeing my cousin, but like I was pretty mad at her for a while, and we still don’t have that tight of a relationship because of that. Because I just think that she’s ignorant and oblivious to all that stuff. Like, when my dad addressed her about it, she was like, “Oh, I thought it was funny, and I didn’t know that it was wrong.” That just made me mad at her. And instead of calling me and apologizing to me, she just—like posted something on Facebook about it to where everyone could see it. Because I don’t—I don’t think she realized that that was ever wrong. I think that because like she grew up in the country with all White people, who were also kind of racist.

Sadie (19-year-old African American heterosexual female) noticed that her White grandmother, who adopted and raised her, held on to some biased views related to race. She shared, “She always watches Family Feud with Steve Harvey hosting and she always thinks that they give it to the Black family to win. She always thinks that and I’m like, you can’t just think that, you can’t just say that.” When asked if she ever said anything to her grandmother about these things, Sadie stated, “Sometimes I do but it’s always going to end up the same way and I leave. It doesn’t really bother me I’m just like, you can’t really do that.”

There were some descriptions of family dynamics shared by participants that included a contradiction in which the family members were saying they were open to a discussion, yet
openness wasn’t what participants experienced during interactions. For example, Maryama (21-year-old African American bisexual female) said:

They say they’re open, but they’re ready to come back with any type of argument to defend their side. They always ask me, “Well, explain this to me.” And, when I explain it, they fight back, and I'm like, “Whoa. I'm learning too. I'm trying to teach you. But you can't come at me like that.”

Alyson (27-year-old Black heterosexual cis-gender female) shared, too, that she often feels that she is in a position of having to defend her views with her father, and feels she must prepare for conversations ahead of time so that she is ready with evidence to support what she is saying. She wrote the following passage in a journal entry:

It is hard to change my dad’s opinion of something. He prides himself in being logical and having a fixed view of how the world operates because he is well read. If he is so well read then he would understand real history and perspective, but he doesn’t. He takes things matter-of-factly when I need him to empathize with the real-life experiences behind it because it’s part of his daughter. When I made him watch my lecture on social inequity in healthcare he said “yeah all that makes sense” as if he already knew all of it and was unimpressed …but the next words out of his mouth are questioning a certain study or saying “I think the only way to know if this is true is if they studied [this] and controlled for [that].” These types of responses make me want to cry because I try to send my dad articles or talk to him about a controversial topic that I identify with and try to present the best evidence and logic for my truth but he always finds some way to question it, not fully accept it, or deny it with something I just don’t have a comeback for. When he does this, he challenges my existence and my truth and invalidates me. It’s like
I’m playing this endless game of “hey I exist, see me, see us, see what you have been ignoring for decades…”

Participants described experiences related to race that demonstrated a divide among family due to racial politics. For them, this divide was a piece of the political being personal.

**Summary.** In this section, the theme, The Political is Personal, was described by participants as a core aspect of their experiences and understandings related to race as Black emerging adult transracial adoptees. The theme described the ways in which participants came to see the political as personal, related to their own racial identities. The description of The Political is Personal was expanded through two subthemes. The first, My Eyes Were Opened: Experiencing My Racial Identity as Oppressed, included descriptions in the words of participants of times during life when stereotype threat, microaggressions, and overt racism occurred, and how that impacted them. The second subtheme, Divide in the Family over Racial Politics, described family dynamics related to racial politics in which family members and participants differed in their views, causing stress and frustration for participants. The following section describes the last theme, This Is Me, as well as three corresponding subthemes.

**This Is Me**

This theme provides a description of how the experiences related to being transracially adopted, including both challenging and positive, have formed participants into the people they are today. The choice to study a specific age range means that these interviews and journal entries catch participants at a particular moment in their development, and this theme provides vignettes into participants’ present moment. Each one, in their own way, acknowledged the unique struggle related to race for transracial adoptees in emerging adulthood, and also the gifts in the experience. This theme relates directly to the primary research question of this study,
Table 8

*Theme Seven and Corresponding Subthemes with Example Quotations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example Participant Quote</th>
<th>Example Participant</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This Is Me</td>
<td>This theme provides a description of how the experiences related to being transracially adopted, while challenging, have formed them into who they are today.</td>
<td>“I have just always loved the ending of the poem [Two kinds of love, a poem about adoption] because it always reminded that my birth mom did what she had to do for a reason and that she is part of the reason I am living the life I have with supportive and loving parents. She is also part of the reason I have such high goals and aspirations because if I ever do get a chance to meet her and she sees the things that I have accomplished she will know that she made the right decision and my life is good because of the choice she made to give me up for a better life.”</td>
<td>Kaitlyn (18-year old Black heterosexual female)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seeing What I Needed and Didn’t Get</td>
<td>In this subtheme, participants describe things they missed out on as Black people having been raised by a White family. For some this was cultural experiences, for others representation or affirmation of Blackness, and for others, messages about how to deal with being Black in</td>
<td>“I was ill-prepared to know who I am in the world. We have to teach children to associate names to emotions and explore reactions to experiences. That is the language I wish my parents taught me about race, racism, and complexities of an interracial racialized society. I wouldn’t have been so lost for so long. To this day I struggle to express myself and match words and feelings together about things I experience with race.”</td>
<td>Alyson (27-year-old Black heterosexual cisgender female)</td>
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the world or how to care for Black hair and skin.

Worldview and Perspectives Related to Race

Quotations in this subtheme show participants’ worldviews and perspectives on race and racism. The quotations show the range of beliefs and opinions on race and racism existent among participants.

“I think people should be able to act how they want to act, regardless of their race, or anyone else's race, and without being accused of trying to be something else. I think this is what starts lots of problems, because people are so worried about what everyone else is doing, and always end up bringing race into it somehow.”
Sadie (19-year-old African American heterosexual female)

What My Blackness Means to Me Now

Participants share the meaning of being Black from their unique perspective as transracial adoptees and emerging adults.

“It [my Black identity] almost feels a little artificial, if I'm being totally honest, because it's, it's something that I found only recently. I wish that it was something that I felt had deeper roots. I think that, unfortunately, being raised by White parents did take that away from me because, as much as they tried, like, there's only so much you can give a child that, that isn't from a place where you come from—and isn't in their daily interactions. So, I would say, unfortunately, it does feel artificial. Like, their roots have been planted where they were always supposed to be, but are not deep enough as they should be.”
Emilie (24-year-old Biracial straight female)

focused on how participants are experiencing and understanding race during emerging adulthood. First, the theme, This is Me, will be described. This description will then be expanded through descriptions of three subthemes (a) Seeing What I Needed and Didn’t Get, (b) Worldview and Perspective Related to Race, and (c) What My Blackness Means to Me Now.
Alyson (27-year-old Black heterosexual cis-gender female) wrote in a journal entry that her experiences related to race as a transracial adoptee have helped her in specific ways. She related this back to memories during childhood when her birth mother would tell stories of her birth family’s history. She explained how as she came into her own identity in emerging adulthood, her relationship to these stories changed. She wrote:

These moments when I learned more about my origin and history are some of the most vivid and emotionally satisfying moments and pieces of information that I have ever received. I cling to these moments because it is feels like my truth, even though now in adulthood I am learning that I write my truth, not the people who birthed me. Growing up, this was all I had to quench my thirst to know where I came from and feed my identity and I hung on to it for dear life. Now, as I grow into the identity I have created for myself after years of being in one long term identity crisis, I am slowly giving back those pieces of my story she gave me, because I don't need it like I thought I did. I now take responsibility for my identity of my late 20's rather than yearning for someone else to give me one.

Sadie (19-year-old African American heterosexual female) shared, too, that her experiences have not been in vain. She stated:

I think that the experiences that I have had that pertain to race have helped me become the person that I am today, just for the simple fact that now I have an identity, and now I walk around with more confidence in my skin, despite that bad experiences I've had.

For Alyson (27-year-old Black heterosexual cis-gender female), her unique experiences as a transracial adoptee, moving in different “worlds,” have played a role in her professional
development as a future doctor with a focus on health disparities based on systemic inequalities.

She stated:

Even though I identify as Black, I feel like I can connect with everyone. And that is my purpose to do that. It's my purpose to bring all types of understanding and perspectives and experiences together to advocate for Black people and other oppressed people and people on poverty. Anyone who's, like, the underdog, I just feel like I'm standing on the shoulders of giants who are my distant and close ancestors and everything that they have overcome to just carry that torch forward.

In considering how transracial adoption has been a part of her life, Kaitlyn (18-year old Black heterosexual female) reflected on a poem that has held meaning for her along the way. It is titled, Two Kinds of Love, and expressed how the adopted child has two different mothers that give two different kinds of love. She wrote about how this poem directly applies to her own life and her feelings about her birth mother and her adoptive family. She wrote:

I have just always loved the ending of the poem because it always reminded me that my birth mom did what she had to do for a reason and that she is part of the reason I am living the life I have with supportive and loving parents. She is also part of the reason I have such high goals and aspirations because if I ever do get a chance to meet her and she sees the things that I have accomplished she will know that she made the right decision and my life is good because of the choice she made to give me up for a better life.

Moving through life with intersecting identities and learning more history about those identities has become a source of strength and solidarity for some participants. Cherise (20-year-old Black queer woman) shared about the relationship between her personal expression of her identities in emerging adulthood and historical activist movements, stating:
Learning my history, like queer history ...... and how it wouldn't be the way that it is now if it wasn't for women of color and trans Black women and trans women of color. So, I have been educating myself about and realizing that queer women of color, we're the backbone of the way that things are today. And then, also coming into being comfortable in my skin, and also being a gay woman. I think the two intersect a lot. Because if somebody were to ask me to identify, yeah, I’m a queer Black woman. I’m super proud of both of those things now.

Maryama (21-year-old African American bisexual female) also expressed the relationship between her intersecting identities as an important piece of her feeling of self in emerging adulthood. She stated:

I feel like, since I've become more comfortable with my sexuality, I can be more comfortable with my race and as well as my background. I have come a long way since my freshman year in college when it comes to self-identity and me being confident in who I am. I'm still working on it, but I've made a big jump in progress, and I hope to keep continuing this progress.

For some participants, there is a daily continuing feeling of uncertainty related to racial identity rooted in the unique experience of having been transracially adopted and raised in a mostly White environment. The following passage, shared by Emilie (24-year-old Biracial straight female), speaks to this:

These days I still struggle with knowing where I fit in. As a light skinned Biracial woman who is often viewed as White passing or racially ambiguous, I understand my privilege in society and everyday interactions and systems, but that privilege makes it no less difficult to sort out my own identity. I do believe if I had continued to go to diverse
schools and live in diverse communities, I might have a better handle on who I am, but I will never know for sure.

Simone (21-year-old African American straight female) expressed that part of what she learned from her experiences related to race is that it is okay to not be okay, and to get needed support. She stated:

There have been times when I’ve been stereotyped or had something rude said to me and just needed to lay down and cry. There’s absolutely nothing wrong with admitting you need help or seeking therapy or just venting to someone. Keeping things inside is not good for you, or your health. I have battled depression; I have had suicidal thoughts but I am here today. Every day I think about how I made it to that day and am grateful.

Jacob (18-year-old Biracial heterosexual male), in his first year of college, said he is just beginning his journey related to racial awareness and understanding his racial identity. He wrote in his final journal entry about participating in this research study, stating, “Participating in this research study has impacted me in an extremely positive way as it has pushed me to reach further out of my personal bubble and further develop connections with people of color on my campus. It has also spurred me to continue developing my cultural awareness.”

An important part of Austin’s (28-year-old Black queer cis-gender male) journey has been gathering his community and family of choice so that he can relax into the support he needs in daily life. He stated, “I'm very glad that I got to the point where I found the people that I need to teach me how to love myself and love my blackness.”

A diverse range of present understandings of self related to racial experiences as transracial adoptees was shared by participants in this main theme. This Is Me is described further in the following sections through the subthemes (a) Seeing What I Needed and Didn’t
Seeing What I Needed and Didn’t Get. This subtheme includes quotations in which participants articulated what they needed as racial beings and didn’t get from families or environments. The awareness of what was missing and how it impacted participants helps to describe the theme, This is Me.

For Emilie (24-year-old Biracial straight female), the realization that something had been missing didn’t come to her until emerging adulthood. She stated in her interview:

Only in my later years have I really felt like I missed out on something, and maybe it's because I didn't have that diverse experience from sixth grade onward. Maybe if I had, I wouldn't feel as disconnected from Black culture as I do and that part of my identity and my blackness.

She went on to discuss how through Black people in her life recently, she has come to know more of what other Black people had for their entire lives that was just not available to her. She shared the following example:

Throughout recent years I’ve also come to realize I’ve missed out on the larger family ties that many Black families have. My parents are older and I have mainly been limited to my immediate family, while many Black families I know are much larger and closer than ours is. That has definitely caused some sadness for me, especially over the past few months I’ve gone to many family gatherings with my boyfriend, who is Black, and there are tons of extended family, with aunts and uncles and cousins and great aunts and grandparents, etc., but when he comes to visit my family it’s just my immediate family. This has especially caused me to think about the stark contrast in our family dynamics.
During her interview, Sadie (19-year-old African American heterosexual female) talked about not having been around Black people before college. When asked if she wished she that had been around more Black people growing up, she responded, “I feel like yes and no only so I wouldn’t feel kind of on the outside about a lot of things. I feel like it would have helped me come to the conclusion of my culture a little more.” Maryama (21-year-old African American bisexual female) discussed in her interview that Black people who are raised in Black families just grow up with certain things that she felt she really didn’t know to ask for or about. She said:

They grow up with it, so I couldn't get that just by asking my parents, like, just going to a Black church. But, my family, they took me to African-American museums. They really tried to teach me my culture, but that's the extent that they could give me. And, I appreciate them for that. I just still feel like I missed out.

Some participants shared that they did ask for certain things related to Black culture.

Jacob (18-year-old Biracial heterosexual male) reflected:

I can poignantly remember learning about Kwanzaa and asking my mom why we don’t celebrate it. And that kind of like, culture is one of the things that I feel like I missed out on. Understanding those aspects. And being more in touch with like, who I am racially.”

Representation was something mentioned by participants that was missing, as well.

Cherise (20-year-old Black queer woman) explained:

I wish that I had been around more proud, confident Black girls. Because it took me a long time to realize how beautiful my dark skin is. Black girls have been living their lives unapologetically Black for a long, long time but it took me a lot of learning, growing, and educating myself to realize my self-worth.
This idea was also expressed by Simone (21-year-old African American straight female). She talked about an actress she loves to watch on a popular show, and said:

She’s just like a brilliant mind. It’s not even because she’s an actress and she’s good.
She’s a good person all around. Those are the Black women I wish I’d had when I was younger because there wasn’t really anybody to look up to.

Language and a deeper understanding of race and racism is another thing that was missing for some participants. Alyson (27-year-old Black heterosexual cis-gender female) shared:

I was ill prepared to know who I am in the world. We have to teach children to associate names to emotions and explore reactions to experiences. That is the language I wish my parents taught me about race, racism, and complexities of an interracial racialized society. I wouldn’t have been so lost for so long. To this day I struggle to express myself and match words and feelings together about things I experience with race.

In addition to language, learning to deal with racism was mentioned by participants. Kaitlyn (18-year old Black heterosexual female) shared that she would have liked to learn more, and she also came to accept that she would just have to learn as she lived life. She stated:

Definitely learning to deal with racism better, but I think that's just something that you have to learn as you go through life, because your White parents are never going to fully understand what racism feels like. That's just something you have to learn how to deal with it on your own.

While Austin (28-year-old Black queer cis-gender male) discussed not being taught how to deal with racism, he also shared that there was a deeper experience he missed that was more important to him. He shared:
But the thing that I'm probably the most upset about is not necessarily the lack of skills being given to me to handle discrimination. It was the support that comes from being raised by Black people specifically, for me, to love yourself for your blackness and not value and center whiteness.

Two of nine participants discussed the fact that they felt they missed out on stricter discipline from parents, and they compared the style of discipline of their parents, or the amount of rules, to their Black peers, and felt they had gotten away with too much during their teen years. Maryama (21-year-old African American bisexual female) reflected:

I feel like, growing up, I got away with a lot of stuff, a lot of stuff. I was able to sweet talk my way out of things or just get away with a lot of things that a majority of African-American kids could not, who got whoopins or had, what's it called, curfews. Like, there would be times in high school that I wouldn't come home until the next day, but my parents were like, "Well, as long as you call." And, I remember telling my friends that. They were like, "No, I would have got beat." But, I'm like, Well, maybe it would have taught me more, what's it called, not humility, but discipline? But, at the same time, I wasn't making stupid decisions.

Alyson (27-year-old Black heterosexual cis-gender female) shared a similar idea, discussing how many things she got away with, and things she did that her parents did not ever question. In retrospect, she wonders if her parents being stricter would have reduced the amount of trial and error she had to go through during teen years. She stated:

I got away with a lot of, like, alcohol stuff in high school that they kind of just, like, pretended not to see. And so those habits persisted through college. And I feel like I'm not good at saying no because they didn't say no to me.
The above examples show some specific things that participants felt were missing in their upbringing that, for participants, relate to race and being raised by White parents. The main theme, This Is Me, includes the awareness that things that were missing then are related to experiences and understandings of race in emerging adulthood. The next section provides a description of the subtheme, Worldview and Perspective Related to Race.

**Worldview and Perspective Related to Race.** Quotations in this subtheme describe participants’ worldviews and perspectives on race and racism. The quotations show the range of beliefs and opinions on race and racism existent among participants. These worldviews and perspectives are a part of the main theme This Is Me, offering a vignette of how the unique experience of being transracially adopted and having experiences related to race might influence emerging adulthood viewpoints about race in society.

Alyson (27-year-old Black heterosexual cis-gender female) shared her worldview on race in the form of a spoken word piece, an excerpt of which follows:

My dream is for us to foster human connection
Meet each other half way with love and affection
But the reality is you are familiar with complacency
It makes sense, because you are not the one facing Inequality
I wish you would just say something, anything at all
So we could stand together and break down these walls
I wish your silence on the racism would end
So we could all begin to heal and mend
I wish we could march hand in hand
With common purpose in our common land
Freedom should be the rhythm of everyone’s song

But the country is off beat and the lyrics are wrong

The silence is deafening, and nothing gets done

That's why I’ll be singing Black Lives Matter, until our fight is won.

This creative work presents a worldview steeped in activism, knowledge of systemic dynamics, and being a part of a movement working for a change related to racism. It is echoed by Austin (28-year-old Black queer cis-gender male), who said:

Race will forever remain a taboo topic within a white supremacist society. Even in the most 'progressive' of spaces, it's still considered radical to address those power dynamics. It's still difficult to get people to understand how to de-center whiteness and center Blackness and POC identities, voices and bodies.

Cherise (20-year-old Black queer woman) discussed the need to be around people who were at a similar level of understanding in terms of issues of race and social justice issues, because she has observed White people depending on people of color for education about issues of race. She shared:

I just want to surround myself with people who are on the same level as me in terms of having the same views on Black issues and gay issues and human rights and all of that stuff. We [my partner and I] have the same exact views and morals. I like to obviously educate people, but I don’t also think that Black people really owe White people an explanation, because that can be super exhausting. I try to have conversations with my family about it and they don't understand, I feel I have to pick and choose my battles. I feel like there's just so many more ways to educate oneself than always going to a person of color for certain things, you know? If they really wanted to educate themselves, there
are books about it. I don’t mind talking—But a lot of times we aren’t being heard, so it gets frustrating.

In the above quote, Cherise’s connection to a group identity with other Black people can be seen. She relates what happens to her on a personal level to what happens to Black people in general in the United States.

For Maryama (21-year-old African American bisexual female), there is a definite connection between her personal development and the worldview she now holds. She shared in her interview:

Since coming to college and being in tune with my culture and just loving myself for who I am, my hair, my figure, my background. My worldview and perspective related to race is that yes, there's problems with race today unfortunately, and I know that as an African American female I will continue to have to struggle with these differences, but I don't want people to think that it's a setback for me. Though I'm aware, that's not gonna stop me from achieving what I want.

On a different place in the spectrum in terms of worldview regarding race, Sadie (19-year-old African American heterosexual female) shared that she disagrees with the idea that cultural appropriation should be highlighted as a transgression. She stated:

Another thing that gets me is when people say that another group of people is 'stealing' a culture. When White people like to do stuff that typically Black people do, they are accused of "stealing a culture", and that’s when people try to accuse others of trying to act like a race that they aren't. I think people should be able to act how they want to act, regardless of their race, or anyone else's race, and without being accused of trying to be
something else. I think this is what starts lots of problems, because people are so worried about what everyone else is doing, and always end up bringing race into it somehow.

This perspective seems congruent for Sadie based on her personal experiences of being told she “acts White” or being told by White people that she is “trying to act Black,” and not appreciating that when it happens.

Simone (21-year-old African American straight female) reflected on her experiences in a journal entry, and said that she would give her younger self a piece of advice if she could. That advice is:

Everyone is always watching. No matter the situation or where you are, someone is watching you and how you present yourself. There have been many times when I have been profiled and had the chance to be irate or upset. I have to remind myself every time that how you react to these situations also contributes to people’s stereotypes of minorities. At the same time, you can stand up for yourself without being the stereotypical angry Black woman people expect you to be.

Simone shared at several points in her interview, times when customers at her job accused her of losing control or yelling, and she took pride in the fact that she was always able to confidently tell her boss to view the store security footage to verify that she had not raised her voice or lost her temper. She said that her parents often comment to her that she doesn’t show emotion or get visibly upset. For her, this coping mechanism has been useful in avoiding association with certain stereotypes about Black people, and has contributed to her perspective.

There is a variety of worldviews and perspectives about race from participants in this study, all of which appear to be informed by their personal experiences as adoptees and people of
color. The following section explores one additional subtheme as a part of the main theme, This Is Me. It is titled, What My Blackness Means to Me Now.

**What My Blackness Means to Me Now.** Participants share the meaning of being Black from their unique perspective as transracial adoptees and emerging adults. This subtheme brings the current meaning of racial identity into the description of This is Me. It includes a range of developmental places among participants, which helps us further understand that complexities of the individuation process directly related to race for transracial adoptees. Because of various factors, a wide range of experiences are represented in this subtheme. One participant expressed that his process of learning about race and his racial identity is fairly new, and when he was asked what his Blackness means to him, he responded, “I don’t know if it means anything really like, explicit. I think it’s just like, a case label. Something that just identifies me as an individual. I don’t know if it plays into any of like, my interactions as much.” Sadie (19-year-old African American heterosexual female) discussed how her Black identity is fairly new as well, but that it has played an important part in her development during her first year of college. She said:

> It makes me want to be able to just share my experiences and my knowledge. Because I think I’ve definitely learned a lot in the past year. I’m not the same person I was coming into college at all. A lot of that has to do with finding my identity with my race. It’s a great part for me. It’s a little uncomfortable thinking about being in the world looking like this and kind of having the upbringing that I did, but at the end of the day I have the power to decide how I feel and how I react.
Several participants talked during interviews about how the degree to which they feel solid in their identity is directly related to their journey of transracial adoption. Emilie (24-year-old Biracial straight female) described the current meaning of her Blackness:

It [my Black identity] almost feels a little artificial, if I'm being totally honest, because it's, it's something that I found only recently. I wish that it was something that I felt had deeper roots. I think that, unfortunately, being raised by White parents did take that away from me because, as much as they tried, like, there's only so much you can give a child that isn't from a place where you come from—and isn't in their daily interactions.

Expressing something similar, Alyson (27-year-old Black heterosexual cis-gender female) shared:

I think now it's [my Blackness] probably overexaggerated because it's like I was White my whole life, and then just got reborn Black. So, it might be heavily exaggerated rather than someone who encompassed their blackness since birth and growing up.

Relating to the idea of Blackness and its meaning not being felt as entirely solid, Maryama (21-year-old African American bisexual female) shared the following:

I don't feel that Black power I'm supposed to feel, you know, as I'm supposed to love my identity as a Black woman. According to society, I'm supposed to identify with these other things, and I'm, like, if I don't identify with them, how am I supposed to feel that Black power as being a woman. So, I'm torn. It's an everyday battle with me sometimes.

Cherise (20-year-old Black queer woman) also related to the idea of an everyday battle to maintain a certain mindset. She said in her interview:

It’s a mindset that I have to have every day that I’m, like, “Okay. I am worthy. I’m awesome.” I must have that mentality about, you know, that I am as good as my peers
and I am intelligent, and I am valid. I have to work on and not letting certain anxieties of how I'm perceived by others and not let other people dictate what it means to be Black. Showing a different place in the spectrum of the meaning of Blackness, Austin (28-year-old Black queer cis-gender male) shared that he has noticed a recent shift that has come with his choice to create distance between him and his parents/family. He explains in his final journal entry:

> Truthfully, the righteous rage that I experienced when I began to wake up has subsided. There are still flares of anger any time there is something unjust, but I don't feel it overtaking my every waking thought. There is more of a sense of peace with my identity, and I think that is largely because of the fact that I have created a family and a community that embraces and celebrates my Blackness and my queerness and all of my identities. Those people have fostered a sense of hope, a sense of resiliency, a sense of pride in my Blackness. Something that I never had growing up. Something that my family of origin didn't give me. So, moving away from them has been a radical act of self-care and a way of continuing to develop and strengthen my Black identity and the pride I feel from it.

Alyson (27-year-old Black heterosexual cis-gender female) has found a strong connection to her Blackness through history, and through her birth father’s African immigrant identity, and through her work as a physician. She shares the positive meaning her Blackness has for her that includes her ancestry and a feeling of group identity:

> My blackness connects me to Africa and my ancestors’ spirits. It connects me to wisdom, truth, and power. My blackness alone is a reason to move forward and to keep grinding and leave this world a better place. It is an anthem to inspire me to be my best self so that
I can raise children that are empowered and healthy and conscious in order to continue the legacy of paving the way for equity and ownership. My blackness is an invitation to see every other Black person as my brother and sister and uplift them in a society that oppresses them. My blackness opens doors for me to open doors for others.

As somewhat of an outlier, Kaitlyn (18-year old Black heterosexual female) reported *not* struggling with her Black identity. She always lived in a diverse area and had Black people in her life, which may have contributed to this unique experience of security in her Blackness. She said:

Well, I think it [my Blackness] means a lot, especially since I want to find my birth mom. I think it’s one of the things that defines me right now. I love everything about being Black. I think it’s one of the things that makes me unique and beautiful, and I’m not really ashamed of it.

The above range of descriptions of participants’ understanding of the meaning of Blackness in their current lives provides a view into different ways the story of transracial adoption can influence the life journey.

**Summary.** The above description of the theme, This Is Me, offered a descriptive vignette of participants in the present, as emerging adults who are Black and were raised by White parents. Certain aspects of the experience of being transracially adopted, Black, and an emerging adult seem unavoidable, but variations in experiences might change how certain aspects of the journey are experienced and understood. Participants expressed both challenging and positive associations to being transracially adopted as the young adults they are today. Three subthemes provided rich descriptions of several aspects of their life experiences. Seeing What I Needed and Didn’t Get gave a view into the things participants can see, as emerging adults, that
would have been helpful on their journeys. Worldview and Perspective Related to Race described the various ways participants have come to see the world in terms of race, and how they see themselves fitting into that milieu. In the last subtheme, What My Blackness Means to Me Now, participants shared how their unique stories have shaped a relationship with their own racial identity.

**Conclusion**

This chapter describes the results of a qualitative phenomenological analysis of in-depth interviews and digital journal entries from nine Black/African American or Biracial transracially adopted emerging adults (age 18-28) raised by White parents in Michigan and Ohio. Of nine participants, two identified as Queer, one as Bisexual, and five identified as heterosexual or straight. Hermeneutic phenomenology considers participants “co-researchers.” Thus, participants were consulted in the process of analysis, and played an important part in the formulation of results to assure that the above chapter told their story accurately.

The themes that emerged from participant data included (a) Memories and Reflections: The Uniqueness of Growing up Transracially Adopted, (b) Race Mattered (Identity), (c) Between Two Worlds, (d) Growth in Black Identity, (e) Views of Family Related to Race, (f) The Political is Personal, and (g) This Is Me. The first two themes, Memories and Reflections: The Uniqueness of Growing up Transracially Adopted and Race Mattered (Identity) pertained to childhood and adolescent memories of experiences related to race and related most to the two research questions focused on racial socialization and feelings of preparedness to live in a racialized society. The next five main themes were focused on emerging adulthood experiences and understandings, which directly relates to the primary research question for this study. Both childhood/adolescent and emerging adulthood were included in order to provide data to address
all research questions in this study. Each main theme contained important subthemes that helped expand each theme description. Variations in individual experiences resulted in a range of experiences pertaining to main themes.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

This chapter provides a discussion of study results in relation to the research questions and current transracial adoption literature. The seven main themes that emerged from the data will be briefly summarized. Second, each research question will be addressed, incorporating results. Third, a section applying the theoretical lens of the white racial frame to the current study is offered. Fourth, an explanation of how the current study results reflect and extend previous TRA research focused on racial identity development, adjustment and self-esteem, and racial socialization/parental paradigms related to race is provided. Implications for adoptive parents, adoptive training and policy, and counseling psychologists based on findings of this study follow. A discussion of limitations of the current study and suggestions for future research are also included. A brief chapter summary concludes the chapter.

As a review, the primary research question for this study is: How do Black transracial adoptees raised by White parents in Michigan and Ohio describe their experiences related to race during the transition into adulthood? Secondary research questions include: (a) How prepared do Black transracially adopted emerging adults feel as a result of the racial socialization received by White parents? and (b) What are some of the lessons related to race that were given by parents during childhood?

Summary of Results

This study examined how nine Black emerging adults who were transracially adopted by White parents in Michigan and Ohio understand their experiences related to race. Also explored was the felt level of preparedness of these Black transracially adopted emerging adults for life as Black people in a racialized society. Results came from data collected through digital journal
entries and in-depth interviews, as well as member checking interviews. Because of the complex nature of transracial adoption and the centering of participant voices in hermeneutic phenomenology, the description of this phenomenon was multifaceted and varied. Seven themes emerged, which combined to provide a textured and rich description of experiences and understandings related to race for participants. All participants included all of these main themes in their descriptions of the phenomenon, with individual variations within each theme. The themes are: (a) Memories and Reflections: The Uniqueness of Growing up Transracially Adopted, (b) Race Mattered (Identity), (c) Between Two Worlds, (d) Growth in Black Identity, (e) Views of Family Related to Race, (f) The Political is Personal, and (g) This Is Me. The first two themes focus on reflective sharing about childhood and adolescent experiences related to race, and the remaining themes describe experiences and understandings related to race during emerging adulthood.

The first main theme is Memories and Reflections: The Uniqueness of Growing up Transracially Adopted, which includes elements of Seeing Black and White, Exposure and Representation, and Communication (or Lack of) about Race. Memories and Reflections is comprised of participant reflections on childhood racial socialization experiences specific to being transracially adopted. Seeing Black and White describes different ways participants came to see the meaning behind racialized identities during childhood. They described wrestling with stereotypical ideas related to Black people, seeing and experiencing privilege and oppression, and noticing differences in how Black and White people were treated and characterized. Exposure and Representation described the amount of racial diversity in participants’ neighborhoods and schools. Some participants commented on the meaning of the lack of exposure and/or representation during childhood. Communication (or Lack of) about Race
describes whether and how race was discussed in participant families during childhood. Some participants offer examples of communication that was memorable and meaningful, including explicit race lessons offered by some parents.

The second main theme is titled Race Mattered (Identity), and includes subthemes Dealing with Monolithic Expectations of Blackness, The Hair Journey, and Experiencing Racism. Race Mattered (Identity) describes how race mattered during childhood and teenage years, and the experiences participants had that showed them that race mattered in terms of their personal identities. Race mattered because it was directly related to how the world would see them, how they would see themselves, and the stereotypes with which they would be associated. Dealing with Monolithic Expectations of Blackness explains the monolithic expectations that participants faced during childhood and teenage years in the form of comments about not being “Black enough,” feedback on mannerisms and ways of speaking, or lack of familiarity with Black cultural standards. The Hair Journey provides a description of a range of participant experiences related to how families dealt with caring for participants’ hair, the meaning of hair, and the journey of learning how to appreciate and care for their own hair. Experiencing Racism provides examples shared by participants of experiencing racism during childhood and teen years. These stories are shared to expand upon the description of how and why race mattered to participants as they were growing up and moving toward adulthood, and also how race was a factor which contributed to the shaping of their understanding of the world.

The third main theme, Between Two Worlds, is the first theme focused on experiences and understandings during emerging adulthood, and includes subthemes They Don’t Get it, Feeling the Divide in Friendships and Dating, and Feeling Disconnected from Black Culture. Between Two Worlds describes the experience of being in between two racial and cultural
“worlds” of Black and White, interactions with others that reinforce that experience, and the feelings and thoughts related to that experience. They Don’t Get it describes participants’ experiences of being misunderstood by family, peers, and loved ones in relation to racial identity. Feeling the Divide in Friendships and Dating describes participant experiences with a racial divide among friend groups or in attraction and dating experiences that increased the feeling of being between two worlds. Feeling Disconnected from Black Culture describes the experience of transracial adoptees in young adulthood feeling disconnected from Black culture, and therefore dealing with comments and judgements from others about their racial identity. Participants express the feelings associated with this experience of being disconnected from various Black cultural markers.

The fourth main theme is Growth in Black Identity, including elements of Embracing Blackness, Intersections, and Influences, Pathways and Support. Growth in Black Identity describes times as emerging adults during which participants’ Black identity became more prominent, embodied, understood, and real in the world. Embracing Blackness provides descriptions of times during emerging adulthood when participants began to embrace their blackness as an important and defining aspect of self. Intersections describes intersecting factors and identities that affected racial identity development or coincided and cannot be untangled from racial identity development. Intersecting identities and factors include sexual orientation, religion/spirituality, age of parents, gender performance, and gender identity. Influences, Pathways, and Support describes people, organizations, experiences, media, and social media that were helpful in the journey of developing Black identity and learning about Black culture and history as a Black person raised by White parents.
The fifth main theme is Views of Family Related to Race, and includes elements of Having to Teach Family and Allegiance, Loyalty, and Gratitude. Views of Family Related to Race includes a range of thoughts and reflections on family related to race, providing a vignette of the various and sometimes conflicting feelings about family that can be present for young Black adults who have been raised by White parents, and how the experience of being Black creates a unique perspective on family values, ideas, and behaviors. Having to Teach Family provides participant stories of finding themselves in situations where they have to teach their White families about things related to race, racism, and racial history. Some participants express their feelings and thoughts about being in that position, as well as their family’s responses. Allegiance, Loyalty, and Gratitude describes participants’ gratitude about their parents’ efforts to support them in specific ways related to race. Also included are some conceptualizations of their family members and how they deal with race or express ideas about race from the stance of loyalty and allegiance to their families.

The sixth main theme is The Political is Personal, and includes elements of My Eyes Were Opened and Divide in Family over Racial Politics. The Political is Personal describes the personal relevance of racial politics in the lives of participants. My Eyes Were Opened provides a description of how participants experienced feeling “othered” or “less than” because of having an oppressed racial identity in a racialized society. Participant descriptions include a range of reactions to and experiences of racism, microaggressions, and stereotype threat, or the perceived absence of such experiences. Divide in Family over Racial Politics describes instances of division between participants and their family members due to racial politics and disagreement about race.
The last main theme that emerged from participant stories is This is Me, including elements of Seeing What I Needed and Didn’t Get, Worldview and Perspective Related to Race, and What my Blackness Means to Me Now. This Is Me provides a description of how the experiences related to race and being transracially adopted, while challenging, have formed participants into who they are today. Seeing What I Needed and Didn’t Get describes things participants are aware they missed out on as Black people having been raised by a White family. For some this was cultural experiences, for others representation or affirmation of Blackness, and for others, messages about how to deal with being Black in the world or how to care for Black hair and skin. Worldview and Perspective Related to Race show participants’ current worldviews and perspectives on race and racism, which are informed by their experiences related to race as transracial adoptees. In the subtheme, What My Blackness Means to Me Now, participants describe the meaning of being Black from their unique perspective as transracial adoptees and emerging adults. The following section addresses each research question driving the current study.

Results in Relation to Research Questions

This section is a response to the research questions driving the current study. The primary research question is: How do Black transracial adoptees raised by White parents in Michigan and Ohio describe their experiences related to race during the transition into adulthood? Secondary research questions include: (a) How prepared do Black transracially adopted emerging adults feel as a result of the racial socialization received by White parents? and (b) What are some of the lessons related to race that were given by parents during childhood?
Describing the Phenomenon: Research Question One

Current study results provide a rich and textured description of experiences and understandings related to race for a narrowly designated racial group (Black/African American, Biracial with Black parentage), a specific age group (18-28) raised in a specific geographic location (Michigan and Ohio), at a certain time in history. The first research question includes this specificity, asking: How do Black transracial adoptees raised by White parents in Michigan and Ohio describe their experiences related to race during the transition into adulthood? This specificity was called for by TRA scholars as a way to begin a new direction of TRA research that does not aggregate international with domestic adoptees, is not designed to provide proof either for or against TRA, does not combine adoptees from different generations and locations within the US, and does not include adoptees from many different racial groups within the same study (Lee, 2003; Raible, 2006). Findings suggest the importance of looking into a specific sample of transracial adoptees, as suggested by Raible (2006). Seeing how emerging TRA adults are experiencing and understanding race during this particular time in history proved to be a unique contribution to TRA literature.

Emerging adulthood was the developmental stage focused on in this study. Because certain developmental milestones are associated with each developmental stage of life, experiences and understandings of transracial adoptees in emerging adulthood would be unique compared to older adults from different generations or children. It is possible that the emergent themes related to racial politics, such as *The Political is Personal* and *Divide in Family over Racial Politics* might take a different form from participant stories of different generations. For example, TRA adults raised during the Civil Rights Movement may have a different understanding of current political issues, and may be differently engaged in social media than
current participants. While it seems likely that the political context would emerge across generations, the nuances of experiences and impact would likely differ.

Revisiting the importance of emerging adulthood in relation to identity development, recent research on emerging adulthood focused on race and ethnicity asserts that there is a relationship between racial socialization given by parents and the exploration of racial identity by emerging adults. Also, positive, nurturing and connected parent/child relationships affects racial identity development for Black emerging adults raised by Black parents. Participant stories shared in the current study showed how different the experience of racial socialization and racial identity exploration is for Black emerging adults who were raised by White parents. While there were definitely descriptions shared of close bonds between some participants and their parents, only one participant described the parental relationship as positively influential on racial identity exploration and development. Interestingly, this was the only participant who was raised in a racially diverse community, attended racially diverse schools, and had Black people close to her throughout her life. Bumpus (2015) conducted a qualitative study focused on Black adoptees, some transracially adopted, some adopted by same race parents. Bumpus noted that when transracial adoptees were raised in mostly White environments, and were not exposed to Black people, adoptees were more likely to accept a stereotypical perception of Black people, and miss out on natural connections with Black people that would help adoptees gain interconnectedness with the Black community. While some participants in Bumpus’ study were of older generations, it is clear that this dynamic was reflected in the current study, with the main theme, Between Two Worlds, and the subthemes Feeling Disconnected from Black Culture and Seeing What I Needed and Didn’t Get.
Another interesting way that the current study reflected existing Black emerging adult research relates to a study looking into racial identity stability. This study described racial identity fluctuating in response to experiences of individual and institutional discrimination, particularly among individuals who transition to adulthood without having examined their racial identity (Hurd, Sellers, Cogburn, Butler-Barnes, & Zimmerman, 2013). Most participants in the current study described having little to no racial identity examination during childhood and teen years. Also, most participants described dramatic flux in racial identity, the realization of their own oppressed identities, and the personal relevance of racial politics during the dawn of emerging adulthood. In many cases, these points of growth were instigated by experiences of racism and exposure to a more racially diverse community. Support needed from people who understood participants racially, who could help them to learn about their cultural historical story, and who stood with them in racial struggle were most often found outside of the family.

The subtheme titled, *Influences, Pathways, and Support*, showed how emerging adulthood brought opportunities for this support to be found in race-focused peer organizations, social media sites, friends, intimate partners, co-workers, bosses, or sorority sisters. The reason for focusing on the emerging adult age group in the current study was to examine how the racial socialization process in TRA families may bring a unique experience of emerging adulthood in terms of race. It does seem that for participants in this study, emerging adulthood was indeed a time of great exploration related to race, racial, and racial identity. This is partly because of a newfound distance from White families and new environments with greater racial diversity and new educational racial experiences, both professionally and in peer groups.

Geographical location may have an influence on parental paradigms related to race, racial socialization practices, and experiences of racism by adoptees. Two participants in the current
study mentioned feeling that racism, while experienced in Michigan, would be more extreme and overt in southern states. One participant even said she would never visit certain southern states due to fear of racial violence.

Another way that the focus of this study was narrow is with racial identity of participants. Experiences and understandings related to race might vary considerably depending on racial identity due to the distinct United States histories connected to various racial groups. The current study intentionally focuses on Black/White racial dynamics within transracial adoption. Due to the history of the enslavement of African people by White settlers in the United States, and the resulting history of Black/White racial relations in the United States, there are particular stereotypes, power dynamics, and disparities present between these two racial groups. Even if on an unconscious level, these dynamics are bound to be present in some way in a transracial adoptive family with White parents and Black children. In the themes focused on childhood in the current study, there were indeed stories of the ways in which participants became aware of these particular dynamics, which led to the subtheme named Seeing Black and White. Participants described events from childhood that informed them of the stereotypes, power dynamics, and disparities associated with their racial identity and with the mostly White environments where most of them were situated. Participants also reflected on occurrences of racism in their lives, the difference in needed skin and hair care being a memorable and sometimes problematic aspect of growing up in a White family, and whether and how race was communicated about in childhood. Beyond childhood in the themes related specifically to emerging adulthood, prominent themes related to racial politics, experiences of racism, and racial worldview often included descriptions of experiences and understandings rooted in the playing out of Black/White racial dynamics rooted in the racialized history of the United States.
For example, many participants referenced the Black Lives Matter movement and the issue of police violence against Black people as significant and important in their experiences of race and racial identity development. All participants discussed the desire to connect specifically to the Black community.

While the current study is not enough information to provide comparisons between experiences of Black transracial adoptees and transracial adoptees of other racial identities, it is a start toward a line of research specific enough to lay the foundation for such comparisons to become possible. This is a valuable direction to be able to discern whether or not it is appropriate research practice to aggregate TRA samples to include adoptees of different racial identities, as has commonly been the practice in existing TRA research. This is also an important consideration for research informed practice and training of foster and adoptive families. If adoptees of different racial identities have unique experiences based on the racial histories to which they are connected, it would be important for such information to be considered in the designing or trainings for prospective foster and adoptive parents. This way, efforts can be made to meet specific cultural needs, such as exposure and community connection, as well as to precipitate preparation efforts for children as they move toward adulthood in a racialized society. The more that is known by adoptive parents about the history to which their children are connected, the more possible it will be for children to learn about that history. In addition, the more that is known about the contemporary societal dynamics related to specific racial groups, the more that White parents can help their children understand and be prepared for those dynamics.
Preparation and Parental Influence: Questions Two and Three

The two secondary research questions related to parents will be addressed in this section. First: How prepared do Black transracially adopted emerging adults feel as a result of the racial socialization received by White parents?

Participants described a range of preparedness, with a skew toward a greater lack of preparedness being experienced by most participants. Through subthemes such as Communication (or Lack of) about Race, Exposure and Representation, the Hair Journey, and Race Mattered (Identity), and Seeing What I Needed and Didn’t Get, participants described experiences of disconnection, confusion, anxiety, and silence related to race. There was a feeling of void in their stories – a retrospective understanding of the emptiness they were experiencing living without any guidance or dynamic openness related to race, and also what that lack cost them in emerging adulthood in terms of feeling connected to other Black people, understanding their own identities, and feeling seen by their families. While there were exceptions to this, as one participant described feeling very solid in her Black identity throughout life, there were still stories told by this participant of times when extended family members or peers lacked a connection to or understanding of her experience as a transracial adoptee. This led to some feelings of isolation for her. Positively, she felt very aware of systemic and societal racial dynamics, and felt she had developed coping skills for dealing with racism throughout her life. This confidence was not shared by other participants. Perhaps most striking in the phenomenon as it is described by participants is the emptiness that existed related to racial identity development and racial socialization; the habitual default of White parents to ignoring race entirely, remaining in mostly or all-White environments, with only an occasional out of context learning experience related to Dr. King or a museum of racial history for some participants. In a
later section, a discussion will explore more fully the connection of current results to racial socialization and racial identity literature.

An interesting inadvertent effect of White parents’ racial socialization (either implicit or explicit) was the presence of negative or stereotypical views or judgments about Black people within the minds of participants. This left participants unprepared in that they were “late” to the process of accepting their own racial identity, and having positive group racial orientation. Several participants mentioned seeing Black people in negative ways based on stereotypes, media, or limited exposure to Black people. The default unfamiliarity with the Black community that was a part of most participants’ experiences made encounters with Black people in teenage or emerging adulthood years very informational, and in some cases inspired self-directed study of Black history and Black social issues. Participants also described then being in a position of having knowledge and understanding coupled with their growing racial identity, and finding themselves opposed to their parents’ views of Black people, racial dynamics, and racial politics. Exposure to more racially diverse environments and involvement in racially diverse communities and relationships helped participants challenge the negative views they had picked up, and begin the process of embracing their blackness.

In general, participants described this aspect of the phenomenon as the racial socialization received by White parents being sometimes well-intentioned, but usually coming up short in terms of actually providing what was needed to feel prepared to live as a Black person in the United States. Many stories were shared about not knowing cultural information, having little to no familiarity with Black people, and having to learn later than most Black people how to recognize, address, and cope with racism.
The other secondary research question asked: What are some of the lessons related to race that were given by parents during childhood? Participants all told stories about race lessons from parents, some implicit, some explicit. Examples of implicit race lessons include: (a) participants being taken to a salon to have their hair cut off due to lack of knowledge, effort, familiarity with caring for Black hair, (b) parents and other family members having no Black friends and never having any Black people over to their house or choosing to live in an all-White environment, (c) a participant hearing a race-based threat against him on the answering machine and no one addressing it with him, and (d) a parent supporting Black Lives Matter or kneeling at a sports event in support of ending police violence against Black people. Examples of explicit race lessons include: (a) parents teaching participants how to behave with police or to be sure not to put their hands in pockets in a store, (b) parents explaining that the n-word is not acceptable language, (c) a relative explaining colorblind ideals of “what’s inside is what matters,” or similar sentiments, and (d) parents explaining the racial history of the United States and expressing shame related to their race’s history.

The first two main themes were filled with impressions taken in by participants during childhood and teen years. Some of these were verbal, memorable exchanges, but more often it was described as having experiences that participants knew meant something related to race, but they didn’t yet have the language or conceptual base to interpret the situation. This was the idea behind the main theme Race Mattered (Identity). Participants knew very early that race was a factor, that it mattered, and that there were different races in their families. It seemed that most participants were currently still in the process of digesting and forming clear understandings of their experiences related to race due to the complexity of transracial adoption, the daily relevance of race in their current lives, and continued relationships with family members. The following
section applies the chosen theoretical lens for the current study, providing a historical and conceptual context within which the results can be understood at a systemic level.

**Theoretical Lens Applied: The White Racial Frame**

The theoretical lens of the white racial frame is a useful tool in understanding consistent and central themes related to race for participant stories. This section offers a review of the white racial frame and how emergent themes reflect that paradigm. With the inclusion of the white racial frame as a theoretical lens, this study extends literature by scholars such as Baden and Steward (2007); Smith, Juarez, and Jacobson (2012); and Willis (1996), who include historically rooted contemporary theory related to systemic racism, whiteness and white supremacy related to transracial adoption. The inclusion of the white racial frame also acknowledges the troubled history of transracial adoption in relation to systemic racism, and the struggle of groups such as the National Association of Black Social Workers to find institutional, equitable, and culturally respectful solutions to the systemically created problem of the disproportionate number of Black children in foster care.

The theoretical lens of the white racial frame provides a way to examine transracial adoption within the historically rooted social context in the United States. For review, the white racial frame (Feagin, 2010; 2013) is a model explaining and describing systemic racism that outlines the historical building blocks and lasting systemic constructs that maintain and perpetuate White supremacy and racism in United States culture. The white racial frame is a conditioned conceptual map that influences cognition, and filters out ideas and experiences that do not fit (Smith, Juárez, & Jacobson, 2011). For a more extensive description of the white racial frame, see Chapter One of this document. When applying the white racial frame model to something like transracial adoption, the acknowledgement of unique racial histories that inform
current relationships is vital. The white racial frame produces a social context in which White people are not encouraged to examine their whiteness, have an incomplete understanding of racialized United Stated history, don’t have regular exposure to or accurate understanding of contemporary experiences of people of color, and enjoy an explicitly and implicitly maintained insulation by default. Because this cognitive and emotional frame is inherited, it happens automatically for most White people in the U.S. That means, without an intentional intervention designed to expose this frame, it will be seen as “the way things are,” and, more directly, “the way I am.” Perhaps the clearest example from participant stories of the pervasiveness of the white racial frame was the story told by Austin in which he attempted to discuss how his family’s racism has affected him, and his mother’s first statement in the conversation was, “We raised you to be a White boy from the suburbs.” This statement may seem preposterous coming from a White mother to a Black young adult – but it is probably quite honest. Without an intervention designed to expose and dismantle the influence of the white racial frame, this mother would have nothing but the white racial frame to use as a paradigm related to race. And in the white racial frame, only whiteness matters because whiteness is the standard against which every other racialized group is measured and assessed. So even though this woman’s son was Black, she could only give him what she had – whiteness. This is not to excuse this parent from the responsibility of adjusting her paradigm to acknowledge and appropriately value her son’s blackness. Rather, it is to expose the idea that without an understanding of the pervasiveness of the white racial frame and race-focused required trainings that encourage White families to examine their racial paradigms, transracial adoption will simply be another cog in the wheel of white supremacy, perpetuating systemic racism. This story from the current study reflects the Shireman and Johnson (1987) study in which researchers asked White parents how they wished
their adopted African American children to identify racially. Only 11 parents stated they wished their child to identify with the Black race. The remaining parents wished their children to identify as White, human, or no race.

The white racial frame is designed to make whiteness continually unnamed and unexamined. It is the invisible default, deciding thoughts, feelings, and beliefs related to race. Therefore, unless White transracial adoptive families somehow independently work to learn about the racialized history of the United States, become invested in gaining a deep and humble understanding of how they are a product of and a perpetuator of the white racial frame, seek a community of racially diverse relationships, and intentionally form a family-wide anti-racist identity, the white racial frame will continue to run much like the operating system on a computer. The operating system will determine the racial interface, choosing what is seen and how it is seen, and what will and won’t be done.

Several themes and subthemes from the results of the current study offer examples of white insulation, which is a common feature of the white racial frame. *Exposure and Representation, They Don’t Get It, Communication (or Lack of) About Race, Having to Teach Family, Between Two Worlds, and Seeing What I needed and Didn’t Get* all illustrate parents and other family members being insulated in whiteness, preventing them from interrogating issues of race, seeking education related to race, or having an interest in race/racism, even as it relates to their children. White insulation creates a paradigm in which White family members do not address race, reiterating the fact that as the dominant racial group, White people have the option to ignore racial identity development in themselves. While family members might not realize they are insulated, and that the white racial frame is at play, it is a phenomenon that adds to the burden related to race for transracial adoptees, causing them to, even at a young age, learn
through trial and error about their own identities, and then be placed in the position of informant and motivator about issues of race for the family.

Part of the white racial frame is the perpetuation of white standards of beauty, and white characteristics being seen as “normal.” The emergent theme titled, *The Hair Journey*, was a salient and symbolically rich portion of participant stories that highlighted the presence of the white racial frame. There was a range of effort related to hair care made by transracial adoptive parents described by participants. Some participants shared expressions of gratitude and appreciation for the extra effort made by their parents to either learn how to care for their hair, or to find salons or stylists trained in caring for and styling Black or biracial hair. On the other hand, there were also stories shared of parents cutting off their children’s hair because they didn’t know how to care for it, and didn’t take the time to learn. There were also stories shared of hair being wrongly cared for and therefore a source of teasing or even lasting chemical burns. While the specific stories shared by participants in this theme vary, they all show how the importance of hair care for transracial adoptees.

Symbolically, hair can be seen as a tangible extension of racial identity. When an exasperated White parent enters a salon with her Black child and asks for all of his or her hair to be cut off because she “doesn’t know what to do with it,” that parent is symbolically (and probably unintentionally) sending the message: I don’t know what to do with your blackness, so I am going to erase it. Add to this the mostly White environments in which adoptees were raised, immersing them in the message: “You are not normal.” Many participants discussed wanting straight hair or blonde hair. Some talked about feeling self-conscious on a daily basis, wondering how White peers would think about their hair styles. Some mothers were described as criticizing daughters for flat ironing or chemically straightening their hair due to the damage
caused by these procedures. At the same time, with no empowering, positive representation of beautiful and proud Black people, a school full of White peers with straight hair, and no close family or friends who were Black and well-versed in daily hair care and diversity of styles – it seems understandable that adoptees felt a need to fit in with peers at any cost, and didn’t proudly embrace their hair during adolescence. Through the lens of the white racial frame, one could say that the denial of their hair was the denial of their own racial identity. This denial was supported in important ways by family and by environment, complicating the journey of racial identity development and racial socialization.

This leads to another aspect of the white racial frame shown in participant stories – the ownership of the problem of racism. All participants described either parents or extended family members who refused to consider perspectives of participants regarding racism. The white racial frame ensures that White people not see racism as a White person’s problem, and will usually only engage the topic when it is brought up by a person of color. And when it is brought up, the default response is usually defensiveness, attempts to prove any claims of racism to be a misunderstanding or misperception by the person of color, proposals of exceptions to what is being pointed out by the person of color, avoidance through bringing up other factors besides race that could be involved in any given incident, silence, or an emotionally fragile response that puts the focus on caring for the white person’s upset about what is being discussed rather than being compassionately present to the person of color’s experience (DiAngelo, 2016). Something that consistently showed itself in the stories of participants was the default necessity for participants to gain the ability to ‘hold the tension of opposites.’ Many participants consistently felt that their parents and/or families were not understanding their struggles with race, did not work to educate themselves about their whiteness or racism, and sometimes invalidated or
directly opposed participant viewpoints about race as Black people. Family unwillingness to oppose the white racial frame (within them and between them and participants) placed participants in the position of having to accept being frustrated and disappointed with lack of support, having to be a teacher to family members about issues of race, and living with and loving people who perpetuate the very real racial issues they deal with on a daily basis. Participants were made to find ways to maintain a sense of belonging in their families, and sometimes an extremely close bond with parents. With their family members, especially after having experienced loss of birth parents, finding a way to hold these opposing experiences was a necessity. This is a unique situation for transracial adoptees. For Black emerging adults in Black families, racial discord would most likely be experienced outside of the family and home – and family and home would be a source of default support and understanding when incidents related to race were discussed. Instead, adoptees have to either explore or deny their racial reality in some way, while knowing that their family members are not aware of these issues.

bell hooks (2012) writes about the difference between blame and responsibility. While White parents are not to blame for the white racial frame, there is a responsibility for becoming educated about race, racism, and how those things are impacting them and their children in the world and in the family system. People commonly view transracial adoption as “at least the kids have a home and a family that loves them.” No one would argue that permanence is not important for children being adopted. At the same time, pretending that race is not a factor in transracial adoption is negligent, and causes added suffering for transracial adoptees. The following section offers an explanation of how the current study reflects and extends previous TRA research through a discussion of previous TRA research topics.
Reflections and Extensions of Previous Transracial Adoption Research Topics

There were specific topics covered in the literature review of this study that are considered foundational to transracial adoption research. Some of those topics are revisited in this section, showing how results of the current study reflect or extend previous research focused on transracial adoption. Those topics are (a) Adoptive and racial identity development, (b) Racial socialization and Transracial adoptive parent paradigms related to race, and (c) Adjustment and self-esteem. Some considerations and implications for research, training, and for counseling psychologists are presented in each section as well.

Adoptive and Racial Identity Development

Coming to terms with oneself in the context of both family and culture are tasks primary in the adoptive identity development process (Grotevant et al., 2000), and these tasks are complicated for transracial adoptees by the social contexts of the white racial frame and systemic racism. Added to the task of developing an identity as an adopted person is the task of adapting to one’s status within the context of an oppressive dominant culture (Grotevant, 1997). The current study results reflected these tasks and social contexts as salient. Similar to some more recent qualitative TRA literature, participant stories suggested that being transracially adopted complicated the development of racial identity and feelings of belonging, within family and within social contexts (Baden & Steward, 2007a; Hollingsworth, 1997, Samuels, 2009). This section will link results of the current study with transracial adoptive racial identity development literature reviewed in Chapter One.

In the current study, Kaitlyn shared that growing up in a diverse community and attending a diverse school system, plus having people close to her throughout life who were Black, made her feel proud of being Black. She described having no difficulty embracing her
Black identity. She said she loves everything about being Black and that it is part of what makes her unique and beautiful. All other participants described various degrees of struggle related to their Black identities and endorsed living in mostly if not all-White communities. Kaitlyn’s experience related to a specific result from a longitudinal, four-phase study conducted by Simon and Alstein (1994). One participant expressed during young adulthood how important it was that her parents made the choice to raise her in an integrated neighborhood, and that it made a difference in her racial identity, with which she described being fully comfortable.

Other studies by Feigelman (2000) and McRoy and Grape (1999) suggested that diversity of neighborhood and schools influenced comfort with appearance related to race. Most participants in the current study discussed their all-White environments, and within emerging adulthood, could retrospectively see the impact on their identities. Themes and subthemes such as Exposure and Representation, Dealing with Monolithic Expectations of Blackness, Seeing Black and White, Race Mattered (Identity), Feeling the Divide in Friendships and Dating, and Between Two Worlds, described many experiences of the struggle that came with the juxtaposition of their Blackness against the canvas of Whiteness. This is quite consistent with Benson et al.’s, 1994 survey study in which thirty-seven percent of adoptees reported that race made it difficult growing up. In addition, the current study extends more recent qualitative studies (Patel, 2007; Samuels, 2009). While these other studies are less specific in their racial identity and age focus, they do report that the following issues showed up consistently for transracially adopted adults: (a) parents ignoring or not talking about racial difference, (b) racial differences from adoptive family, (c) claiming a White cultural identity but not being labeled or treated like Whites as adults in the world, (d) inclusion and exclusion issues with birth and
adoptive heritages, and (e) experiencing racism. Each of these issues can be found in the stories of participants in the current study woven through several different themes.

An important expansion of TRA literature in the current study is the inclusion of group racial identity development as a factor. The absence of consideration for the importance of group racial identity development has been a criticism of TRA literature in the past, addressed by several scholars, such as, McRoy and Grape (1999), Park and Green (2000), Samuels (2009), and Taylor and Thornton (1996). In the current study, each participant in some way struggled to understand the factor of race in their relationship with self, with family, and the social world around them, similar to predicted adoptive identity tasks identified by Grotevant (2012). In addition to these relational tasks of identity, participants also encountered racial group identity as a salient feature of their stories. In Between Two Worlds, Dealing with Monolithic Expectations of Blackness, and Feeling Disconnected from Black Culture, participants discussed times when their confidence in relating to other Black people was precarious, and their insecurities about being “Black enough” were pronounced.

Only one out of nine participants described being around Black people consistently throughout childhood and teenage years. Casual contact, school friends and teachers, close friendships, or having friends of family that were Black was just not a part of life. It makes sense that feeling a part of a group identity would be strained if one’s experience of life was not connected in any of these ways to the group in question. This leads to a disparity between racial identity and cultural identity, which was specifically discussed by most participants, and expressed through the themes: Feeling Disconnected from Black Culture, Between Two Worlds, Dealing with Monolithic Expectations of Blackness, and My Eyes Were Opened. This suggests the importance of not only exposure and representation, but also the personal lives of TRA
parents. A diverse group of friends and neighborhood and schools is something that, if prioritized by White adoptive parents, could make a difference for adoptees’ group identity development, in the White identity development process for parents, and the multiracial family identity as a whole recommended by scholars such as Raible (2007). In addition, an emphasis on multiracial family identity could be encouraged by foster and adoptive trainings. This paradigm would create a family story that by design had room for the inclusion of the unique identities of each child to be celebrated and engaged. Counseling psychologists or social workers doing counseling with TRA families could also work to encourage a multiracial family identity development process, helping specifically with education about the white racial frame, and racial identity being important for all family members rather than only family members of color.

The topic of group racial identity relates closely to racial socialization. Reynolds et al. (2016) found that parental ethnic and racial socialization facilitates psychosocial adjustment and ethnic/racial identity for Black emerging adults. These researchers also found that ethnic/racial socialization was associated with greater ethnic racial exploration in Black emerging adults, as well as a stronger sense of affirmation and belonging to one’s racial/ethnic group. Considering that participants missed out on racial socialization from a Black parent, the development of group identity would be a unique trajectory for transracial adoptees, especially when raised in a mostly White environment. The following section discusses racial socialization and parent paradigms related to race for adoptive parents.

**Transracial Adoptive Parent Racial Socialization and Race Paradigms**

Part of the focus of this study is to begin to understand the relationship between racial socialization provided by parents and how Black adoptees are understanding and experiencing race during emerging adulthood. The current study reflects many aspects of past research on
racial socialization, parental paradigms regarding race, and communication styles in multiracial families.

Looking at the purpose and method of racial socialization in Black homes (for full description see chapter one) helps us see the complexity of transracial adoption related to racial socialization. Black parents pass down cultural knowledge and racial pride that bolsters Black youth with internal leverage and group connection to know how to navigate life in a racialized society with an oppressed racial identity (Bentley-Edwards & Stevenson, 2016; DeBerry et al., 1996; Hughes et al., 2006; Lesane-Brown, 2006). This, more often than not, just happens as a part of living life as a Black family. Black children with Black parents see their parents deal with race and racism on a daily basis, and receive implicit and explicit messages rooted in the Black experience. This is simply something White families cannot provide, because they are living the White American experience. It is vital to distinguish here that this does not mean that White transracial adoptive parents cannot offer anything to their Black children. It does mean that without intentional effort, the White racial paradigm will remain primary, and will be the place from which White parents give implicit and explicit messages about race. This default of the white racial frame as the paradigm for understanding and dealing with race was described by all participants in the current study in various ways.

Several past studies conceptualized the ways in which White parents approach or think about race and racism. A qualitative study by McRoy and Zurcher focused on TRA families and explored parental racial orientations and how that influenced racial identity for transracial adoptees. The racial orientations identified included Strong White Orientation, Moderate White Orientation, and Multi-Racial Orientation. Researchers found that children with parents with a Strong White Orientation associated less with Black people, held common stereotypical beliefs
about Black people, emphasized human identity over racial identity, had mostly White friends, and dated White people. Moderate White Orientation led to parents referring to their children as mixed or part White, but they did not deemphasize Black heritage, and some chose racially diverse schools while still living in mostly White communities. Those with Multi-Racial Orientations acknowledged Black heritage in their children, chose racially diverse environments and lived in racially diverse neighborhoods. In the current study, based on the stories of participants, it seemed that many parents had a Strong White Orientation. One participant described parents who would fit into the Multi-Racial Orientation. Participants with parents demonstrating a Strong White Orientation described adopting a Strong White Orientation or a Moderate White Orientation as a result of their socialization by parents and environments. In emerging adulthood, however, participants describe a shift in their racial orientation due to greater diversity in their friend groups and environments in college, and because of increasing experiences of racism in their own lives as Black people. The participant who described her parents as having a Multi-Racial Orientation claimed a Multi-Racial Orientation, and felt pleased with the amount of diversity in her life as well as her own racial identity.

There are four different strategies or perspectives from which White TRA parents approach racial socialization, according to a review of TRA literature by Lee (2003): (a) cultural assimilation, (b) enculturation, (c) racial inculcation, and (d) child choice. Cultural assimilation encourages adoptees to orient toward White culture. This approach can be seen in some participant stories in the current study in both active and passive ways. Some active examples are Cherise being told by her father that growing a pro-Black identity meant she hated White people, and Austin’s mother told him that she “raised him to be a White boy from the suburbs.” A passive example is Sadie describing being in all White environments until she arrived at
college, and by default, picking up stereotypical, negative appraisals of Black people in general. Cultural assimilation is essentially the erasure of a transracial adoptee’s race-based cultural identity.

*Enculturation* includes an active effort to expose adoptees to their birth race and culture through educational and cultural opportunities. Examples from the current study are Emilie’s mother taking her to an African dance class once during childhood and Maryama’s parents taking her to museums of Black history. White parents who engage in enculturation usually focus less on race as children grow up. Importantly, both participants who described the above-mentioned efforts made by parents expressed that while these efforts were made, the overall context of the home was not one of active racial awareness. Emilie, in particular shared that she had no cultural context for the dance class, and did not want to continue going because she didn’t understand what they were doing there.

*Racial inculcation* describes parents proactively preparing TRA children for dealing with discrimination and racism in everyday life. Examples of this approach can be seen in the current study in explicit conversations about two topics described by several participants: (a) being taught how to behave in the presence of police, and (b) the n-word being a word that should not be said. In general, though, participants mostly described parental paradigms that did not engage consistently in racial inculcation. Most participants learned about racism and discrimination by experiencing it, and figuring out how to respond on the spot.

*Child choice* is the final strategy described by Lee (2003). It refers to parents providing cultural and racial opportunities aligned with the child’s birth culture during childhood, but then leaving any further exploration up to the child as adolescence and young adulthood approach. This might be the most accurate choice to describe parent strategies illustrated by participants in
the current study. Most participants felt that they needed to rely on sources of support, information, community, and mentorship from sources other than their White families in order to get what they needed for the development of their racial identities. This is particularly true in relation to group racial identity, which, for most participants, did not begin to develop until emerging adulthood when environments became more racially diverse.

Overall, the current study suggests that it was rare for parents to use only one strategy consistently. Some parents used bits and pieces of different racial paradigms, and sometimes two different strategies would be at play in the same home from two different parents. It is important to acknowledge that because of the white racial frame, cultural assimilation ends up being the default strategy in the absence of an intentional effort to enact another strategy. Even parents who attempted to come from a place of racial inculcation or enculturation still came from a place of cultural assimilation in other ways. This is not meant as a criticism of individual parents or a dismissal of efforts that were made. Rather, it is a reminder of the pervasiveness of the white racial frame. Because of the white racial frame, even when efforts are made, the absence of a focus on an understanding of whiteness, the White identities of parents, and the systemic dynamics related to race that are a constant undercurrent can leave transracial adoptees without what is needed in terms of racial socialization as a whole. For example, one participant described her parents speaking openly about race and racial history and making efforts to know how to find Black hair stylists to care for her hair. She also said her mother acknowledged that she would not experience certain things that this participant would because she is White. However, racial struggle was presented by her parents as something that happened in the past, and she expressed that she usually dealt with experiences of discrimination alone because she wanted to save her parents from the pain of knowing her struggle as a Black person. In addition,
this participant’s extended family would not speak to her for six months because of her choice to not support Donald Trump in the 2016 US presidential election. This example shows how even when there are specific efforts toward enculturation or racial inculcation, the gravity of the white racial frame is still a factor.

Another important piece of racial socialization is that different strategies regarding race are likely to be present among immediate and extended family members. This is another unique aspect of transracial adoption. Adoptees may have parents making efforts at racial inculcation or enculturation, but grandparents and other extended family members may subscribe to cultural assimilation, colorblindness, or overt racism. Also, two parents might have different levels of awareness regarding race, leaving the adoptee wedged between one parent who might be supportive in terms of racial identity and another who is wedded to racist ideology. This is another reason why intentional racial socialization and personal efforts on the parts of parents to address their own racial conditioning is a vital protective factor needed in TRA families.

Another aspect of racial socialization is communication about race. Orbe (1999) identifies four main ways in which multiracial families communicate about race. *Embracing the Black Experience* describes families who immerse themselves in Black culture and emphasize Black ancestry in Biracial children rather than White ancestry. Only one participant described a parent enacting this type of communication. Kaitlyn’s parents intentionally lived in a racially diverse area, sent their children to racially diverse schools, had consistent close relationships with Black people, and acted in ways consistent with anti-racist activism. The benefit of this approach is that embracing the Black experience helps children who will be seen and treated as Black by society form supportive connections and identifications with the Black community. Interestingly, the only negative expressed by Kaitlyn about her parents was that her father once
said that he understood what it was like to be Black because he has Black children. So, in TRA families, it is important that the embracing of the Black experience for Black children is kept distinct from appropriation of the Black experience.

*Assuming a common-sense approach* to communicating about race favors addressing issues of race in a way that seems to make sense depending upon each situation. This approach was described by Emilie when she talked about her parents spending more time having discussions about race and preparation for bias with her brothers, who are Black rather than Biracial. Emilie described herself as coming across as racially ambiguous due to her Biracial identity, and felt that this was why her parents hardly emphasized race with her. It is important to note, though, that this participant felt she had missed out in terms of racial socialization and cultural community.

Another way of communicating is *advocating for a color-blind society*. This could be seen as conducive to the cultural assimilation approach to racial socialization. This approach is rooted in an idealistic belief that ignoring the social reality of race and racism is a step toward healing racism and that “Love had no color.” Unfortunately, it has the effect of erasure of the narratives and experiences of people of color in a racialized society. An example from the current study of this approach being used was when Jacob’s aunt, upon his realization that his skin was darker than hers, expressed that it “isn’t about what’s on the outside, it’s about what’s on the inside.”

The final way of communicating about race identified by Orbe (1999) is *affirming the multiethnic experience*. In this approach, parents embrace diversity as something special, and all cultures in the family are represented and acknowledged. In the current study, some participants described efforts made by family members to enact this approach. For example, Cherise
remembers her mother helping her find comfort in identifying as Black, and also made efforts to learn how to care for her hair. The bigger picture is important to consider, though. This participant also grew up in an entirely White environment, attended an all-White church, and felt great anxiety about how her White peers were perceiving her hair. While some efforts were made by this participant’s mother, it is clear, again, how important it is to acknowledge the wider, over-arching paradigm of the white racial frame and how that influences the results of efforts, and sometimes dissolves them.

A unique study conducted by Smith et al. (2011) analyzed interviews from both parents and children in TRA families, looking for racial socialization messages given by parents to children. The white racial frame was a guiding theoretical lens for this study. One theme identified, Celebrating diversity: Be proud of who you are and where you come from, was reflected in the current study. Celebrating diversity emphasizes individual racial identity, but usually includes isolated, intermittent exposure to culture-related historical figures or events, without an immersion in or consistent connection to a racially-based cultural community. This theme was reflected by several participants in the current study. Almost all participants described feeling a lack of group racial identity through themes of Feeling Disconnected from Black Community, Dealing with Monolithic Expectations of Blackness, Seeing What I Needed and Didn’t Get, and Between Two Worlds. Even in instances when parents made efforts of exposing participants to historical information or cultural experiences, it was intermittent and individually focused, and not connected to a wider context of a diverse community.

To conclude this section on racial socialization, even when there is intentional effort to see and challenge the white racial frame, White parents are still White, and cannot offer the same type of socialization given by Black parents. Again, this does not mean transracial adoption is
“all bad.” It points to the importance of White parents making race awareness, racial
socialization, diverse communities and friend circles, and an understanding of racism and racial
dynamics a priority in life as a multiracial family. Racial socialization plays a role in how
transracial adoptees adjust in life and form self-esteem. The following section addresses how the
current study reflects and extends literature related to adjustment and self-esteem in TRA.

**Adjustment and Self-Esteem**

Studies such as Feigelman (2000), Shireman and Johnson (1986), and Vroegh (1997)
interpret data to suggest that transracial adoptees have no worse adjustment or self-esteem than
same-race adoptees. Qualitative studies make room for the complexities in participant
narratives. In other words, it is possible to see the resilience of participants, their ability to
function and succeed in the world, and their compensatory adjustment to their unique situations.
Alongside these factors, it is possible to acknowledge the pain involved in having to fight for
family members to understand the personal relevance of racial politics, the hurt accompanying
experiences of racial discrimination inside the family and in society, and the awkwardness of
feeling out of place culturally while with people of the same race. Participant stories show that
adjustment can and does happen even while such difficulties related to race are experienced. At
the same time, having to adjust to such factors on top of the usual adjustments needed on the
journey to young adulthood exacerbates the necessity for TRA adoptees to be always and
everywhere paying for the white racial frame set up. TRA adoptees are charged with coping
with, digesting, and making sense of the layers of their experience that their White family
members are free to ignore, dismiss, or even argue against, as was illustrated by some participant
stories.
Looking at studies like Vroegh causes me to pause and consider Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s idea of adjustment and maladjustment. In Dr. King’s speech to Social Scientists in 1967 at the American Psychological Association’s annual conference, he addressed the ideas of adjustment and maladjustment. Of the word *maladjustment*, he said, “In dealing with what the word implies you are declaring that destructive maladjustment should be destroyed. You are saying that all must seek the well-adjusted life in order to avoid neurotic and schizophrenic personalities.” He continued, pointing out that there are circumstances that call for maladjustment:

But on the other hand, I am sure that we will recognize that there are some things in our society, some things in our world, to which we should never be adjusted. There are some things concerning which we must always be maladjusted if we are to be people of good will. We must never adjust ourselves to racial discrimination and racial segregation. We must never adjust ourselves to religious bigotry. We must never adjust ourselves to economic conditions that take necessities from the many to give luxuries to the few. We must never adjust ourselves to the madness of militarism, and the self-defeating effects of physical violence.

If we know that race is a primary piece of the equation in life for transracially adopted people, should adoptees have to adjust to a life that does not acknowledge, enrich, and include their racial existence? When looking at adjustment outside of the definitions and priorities established by the white racial frame, it seems the factors we interrogate should be rooted in ideas developed by people of color who have dealt with issues of race in the United States. We must dissect the idea that if transracially adopted people don’t complain or voice difficulty related to race to the White people around them, it means they have adjusted well. This
adjustment could also be a sign of resignation; a feeling that efforts to share what is happening related to race are futile or will cause more harm for the adoptee. It could also be a result of having little to no exposure to issues of race and people of color.

We must consider that adjustment is survival for transracial adoptees. Coming from the loss of the biological parents, the idea of loss of or abandonment by the adoptive family is a common fear for adoptees, even if unconsciously (Eldridge, 1999; Verrier, 1993). Several studies reviewed in the literature review of this study that assess adjustment of adoptees look at parent-report of problems with school, behavior, dysfunction, and perceived self-esteem (Juffer & Van Ijzendoorn, 2007; Shireman & Johnson, 1986; Simon & Alstein, 1994). Others look at global assessment or overall well-being (Feigelman, 2000). In one study, adjustment was categorized as “excellent,” “good,” or “with difficulty” (Shireman and Johnson, 1986). Most studies aggregate samples of international, same-race, and domestic adoptees of different races. When considering that most studies were interpreted to be proof that transracial adoptees’ adjustment is similar to non-adoptees and same-race adoptees, it is interesting that race was not a topic of inquiry in most studies. This is especially interesting considering that when Hollingsworth (1997) conducted a meta-analysis of four data sets from the Shireman and Johnson longitudinal study, it was concluded that transracial adoptees had lower combined racial identity and self-esteem than non-adoptees. Effect sizes were larger when racial identity was examined separately from self-esteem.

Race produces an entirely additional arena in which adjustment must happen for transracial adoptees. The current study’s results show that regardless of the variations in how participants approach and process adjustment related to race, race is a continuously present, salient, and influential factor for participants. It is adoptees themselves who choose how to deal
with the issue of race within their families. However, even among stories that are very different in terms of how participants adjust, dealing with and adjusting to factors related to race is a dominant factor in the lives of all participants in the current study.

For the participant in the current study, Austin, who had the most anger toward and separation from his adoptive family, his sense of security in the world was gradually built during emerging adulthood through his family of choice and his life partner. This security outside the adoptive family allowed him the space to deeply consider how issues of race had impacted him negatively throughout his life, and make the choice to have more distance from his adoptive family in order to cope. Looking at this story through the lens of Dr. King’s idea of adjustment would suggest that this participant was “creatively maladjusted;” refused to adjust to input from an environment that did not acknowledge or appropriately value his blackness. His story of adjustment is more complex than looking at factors of adjustment found on measures used in other studies.

Looking at what could be considered the opposite end of the spectrum in terms of how racial adjustment is being processed, another participant, Jacob, had just recently begun intentional exploration of racial identity, and was just learning language to understand more about racial dynamics in the United States. Even though he reported feeling that transracial adoption was a good option that saved him from some of the struggles that many of his racial peers have experienced, he still reported feelings of awkwardness and difficulty with his parents’ denial of social issues of race. He also discussed an overwhelming desire to fit in with his racial peers paired with extreme discomfort when in Black spaces because he was intensely aware of the lack of shared racially-informed culture. He remembers many instances during childhood and teen years that highlighted the racial difference between him and his parents, and the
questions that arose from experiences in public and with family. How might we look accurately at the complexity present in terms of adjustment for this participant? Measures such as those used in the studies referenced above would more than likely show that this participant possessed high levels of self-esteem, no behavioral problems, and good overall well-being. Yet, when we intentionally include his experiences and understandings of race, we see a normally invisible struggle just beneath the surface; one that will be with him throughout life.

Bringing in the idea from research focused on Black emerging adults, we must consider the effect of this young man being without a Black parent to discuss or show reactions to racial incidents rooted in life experience. Instead, he has a White father who argues with him about who is to blame in police shootings of unarmed Black people. Similarly, for this and several other participants, instead of growing up hearing relatives discuss issues related to race and racism from the perspective of how to cope, survive, gain resilience in the face of oppression, there is often a general dismissal of the perspective of Black people, discomfort related to seeing the role of White people in racial tension and violence, and a lack of empathic realization of the personal significance of these events for participants. These factors are all “adjusted to” by participants. They find ways to cope, they work to see the positives of their experience, they fight for their racial identities, continue bringing their voice and perspective, or perhaps they practice the understandable psychological defense of denial. However, can the additional arena of race be left out of measures of adjustment in transracial adoption and yield an accurate picture? The necessary adjustments are happening, and the help along the way found by participants are described in the subtheme, *Pathways, Influences, and Support*. Student organizations, mentors, peers, significant others; all of these help with the ongoing adjustment required of transracially adopted emerging adults on a daily basis.
Participants in the current study described tension, awkwardness, discomfort, and fundamental disagreements related to issues of race with at least some of their family members. When family members are not taking it upon themselves to learn about race, their whiteness, and how racism affects people of color, the onus for adjusting rests solely on the shoulders of adoptees. They must decide if and how to approach the subject of race, anticipate how the family member will react and how much energy the interaction will cost them, and deal internally with their own feelings about what is happening. Perhaps a better way to assess and measure adjustment within transracial adoptive families is to look at the extent to which families and adoptees adjust to being a multiracial family, what efforts are made by parents to interrogate their own dominant racial identities in order to be able to have genuine interest in and compassion for the racial realities of their children, and attendance to adoptees’ racial and adoptive identity development within the family. Even the level of support and comfort around communication related to race felt by adoptees within the family would be a better way to look at adjustment. This way, the responsibility for multiracial family adjustment would belong to the entire family system, rather than resting on the shoulders of adoptees alone. Understanding and assessing adjustment is more complicated than looking at measures of self-esteem, behavioral problems, and overall well-being. Within participant stories, we can see adjustment as a lifelong process intricately tied to issues of adoption, family, belonging, identity, and a collective social reality that makes issues of race a primary factor in adjustment.

**Recommendations and Implications**

The stories shared by participants in the current study clearly illustrate the salience of race in the lives of transracial adoptees throughout childhood and into emerging adulthood, and the influential role played by White parents in outcomes for participants. There were effects on
individual and group racial identity development, social development, self-acceptance, feelings of connection and belonging, and perspective on the world in which we live regarding race. We can see a resilience in the stories of participants, and an understandable bond to their families, and we know from previous foster and adoption research that permanence for children is a primary need. Therefore, we can see that TRA, like most things, is not all bad and not all good.

In our present societal situation related to foster care and adoption, which is informed by systems of power and privilege and the white racial frame, there is less recruitment of adoptive parents of color, a disproportionate number of Black children awaiting permanence through adoption, and a systemic race-based disparity in resources to be able to expand a family through adoption. Because of these situations, which do need to be addressed and hopefully will be addressed, but will not be solved effectively for some time, transracial adoption will continue to occur. Knowing that TRA will likely continue for the time being, and knowing that race is an incredibly influential and important factor in the lives of transracial adoptees does cause us to have an ethical duty to change how it happens.

Multicultural considerations can be framed as an ethics issue. Considering adoptees as whole beings, including their racial identity in deciding how to approach adoption practice is vital if we are to put an end to the dehumanization of Black adoptees. This section explores some possible future changes informed by the current research that are in line with acting in a multiculturally ethical manner for the sake of transracially adopted Black children and young adults. Recommendations are provided for adoptive parents, adoption training and policy, research professionals, and counseling psychology professionals.
Recommendations for Adoptive Parents

The results of the current study are especially informative for transracial adoptive parents. Because of differences in individuals and families in terms of communication and verbalization of inner processes, the results of this study may be helpful in providing insight to parents about the potential thoughts and feelings of their children/teens/emerging adults related to race. Participant narratives make the clear point that there are some needed components of racial socialization that White parents do not generally provide for their Black adopted children. Participant narratives also show that parental lack of intentional racial socialization and absence of personal investment in building racial literacy has consequences for emerging adult adoptees. The following sections suggest specific changes for White TRA parents: (a) Diversify your lives, (b) Find a transracial adoption support group, (c) Communicate about race regularly, (d) Examine adoption paradigm, (e) See color, including your own, and (f) Find your personal investment in anti-racism.

Diversify your Lives. It is important for White TRA parents to recognize that some racial socialization components cannot be provided by White parents directly. For example, White parents will not experience racism personally, so they will not be able to model handling those things, or working through a thought and feeling process in their child’s midst after a racist experience. They will not be able to use their own experience of facing racism on a daily basis as a wealth of experiential knowledge to inform how they prepare their children for racism in the world. It is important for White adoptive parents of Black children to be aware that they cannot provide these things, and change their lives in specific and intentional ways so that the needs of the child can be met. We can see in the experience of Kaitlyn that greater exposure to people of color had an important influence on her development. Most participants reported growing up in
a mostly White neighborhood and attending schools with a mostly White population. However, Kaitlyn, reported growing up in a racially diverse community, and attending schools with racial diversity among the student body. Even still, this participant stated that she only had one Black teacher during her K-12 experience. Kaitlyn shared that her Godmother is Black, and that her parents were in support of Black Lives Matter, and were aware of and talked about issues related to race in society for Black people. These variations in Kaitlyn’s story set her apart from other participants in that she did not experience specific things discussed by all other participants. For example, she described having a secure and positive Black identity, loving her Blackness, and not being able remember a time when she didn’t. These variations for Kaitlyn, though, did not cause her to never have any struggles related to race, and she, too, experienced racism within her extended family. In general, though, her experience was different due to the racial composition of her neighborhood, school, and people close to her – as well as having White parents who were aware of race and racism in society, and worked to support anti-racist causes.

Kaitlyn’s varied experience with more diversity in her life, anti-racist White parents, and common conversations about race in the home growing up suggest that there are some things that White parents can give, and should give in order to truly meet the racial socialization needs of Black children to the best of their ability. Parents should consider the diversity of their neighborhoods, their own friend groups, and the schools their children attend. Also, parents should consider the television shows and movies they watch. Including Black representation in parents’ own lives is good for them and for their children, simply to get used to seeing more people of color as “normal people,” familiarizing themselves with cultural norms, and humanizing Black people. It is important that parents do not appropriate Black culture, but expose themselves and their children to Black culture, allowing their children to choose their
own ways to express their racial identities, even if it does not mirror the ways White parents express themselves.

**Find a Transracial Adoption Support Group.** Parents should investigate transracial adoption support groups with the intention of both parents and children gaining long-term friendships with other multiracial families so that adoptees and parents can feel a normalization of their experiences, friendships rooted in shared experience, and ongoing support through challenges. Each one of the participants in this study inquired about the other participants, and expressed a desire to meet them and talk with them about what they experienced. Finding a group and committing to attending would be a great way to provide much needed connections for adoptees and their parents. Such groups can be found through foster and adoption agencies, and also online.

**Communicate about Race Regularly.** Many participants in this study discussed a lack of communication about race as well as an awkwardness when race was discussed. Some participants shared that race was never discussed unless they brought it up, and for many participants, conflict was inherent in race discussions with parents. Part of being a multiracial family is making race a part of everyday life, and a part of normal, everyday conversation. Regular discussions about race as a part of life makes the subject less taboo, and creates an openness for children and teens to discuss their experiences related to race with their parents. Some participants chose not to share their experiences with parents in order to protect their parents, or because they knew their parents would not be open in their listening. It is important for parents to educate themselves and engage their own investigations around racial identity so that their listening and interacting comes from an informed and genuine place, rather than from the white racial frame.
Examine Adoption Paradigm. Adoption is often romanticized in our society. White adoptive parents are often seen as “saviors” of kids of color, and often the focus is placed on how “lucky” the kids are to have their parents adopt them. Because of the history of racialized power dynamics in the United States, and the history of transracial adoption, the white racial frame makes it a default to see placement with a White family as a “better” place for children. This paradigm ignores the fact that adopted children will forever deal with the monumental loss of their birth families, and for transracially adopted children, that loss is compounded by the loss of racially informed culture, belonging, and community. It is important that adoptive parents instead come from a place that centers their children and their children’s identities as primary, and acknowledges the loss of birth family and culture as important. That means that parents must adjust themselves, continue learning, and change their parenting strategies based on the needs of their children.

See Color, Including Your Own. Alyson in the current study shared that when she asked her mother why she and her father adopted Black children, her mother responded that “it didn’t matter” to them. They just wanted children. Interestingly, this participant struggled mightily with race being something that actually didn’t matter to her parents. They were avid readers and lifelong learners, yet Alyson wondered aloud in her interview about why her parents never bothered to learn anything or read anything related to race, racism, and racial politics. Alyson deals with race, her racial identity, and systemic and institutional racism as a medical student every single day, and is passionate about solving the disparities in health care based on race. For her race to “not matter” when it is such an essential and integral part of who she is creates difficulty for her. She needs race to matter to her parents, and she needs them to see her race and their own race, and to understand more about what that means.
Colorblindness is a paradigm that is often chosen by White people to avoid the topic of race, and to avoid facing conditioned racism within. It is more comfortable for people to say they don’t see color than to face the realities of racism on a personally relevant level. TRA parents must see color, including: the history of race in our society; contemporary realities faced by their children based on color; their own whiteness and the beliefs, responses, and emotions that come with whiteness in US culture; and the development of their own and their children’s racial identities. In addition, White parents must see, acknowledge, appreciate, and truly love their children’s color. If parents attempt to not see color, they are missing a very big part of their children.

**Find Your Personal Investment in Anti-racism.** I chose to situate this study within the theoretical context of the white racial frame to inspire a change that would be rooted in changing how White parents see themselves regarding race, and, secondarily, influencing how they see their children, and how they help their children see themselves. TRA parents must start with a sobering look at whiteness on a personal and societal level, the perspectives that have grown from that whiteness, the fears that arise when it is challenged. The more parents understand whiteness, the more they will be able to help transracially adopted Black children feel supported when they encounter racism, stereotype threat, and microaggressions. TRA children will be faced with White teachers who have not faced their own unconscious conditioned racism, White friends who microaggress and stereotype them, peers who chide them for not quite fitting into racial and cultural categories, and people who are generally resistant to being aware of how race impacts them on a daily basis in our racialized society. Transracially adopted emerging adults would prefer to not have to face such issues at home. As I read the words of participants over and over during the two years I worked on this dissertation, I heard young people desperately
wanting those closest to them to see these dynamics from a place of personal investment. I heard them longing to not have to defend their position, explain why something was hurtful, give a history lesson, or once again work to make their racial identity visible and important.

The white racial frame makes the work of dismantling racism something for people of color to worry about and take action toward. But this is a trick allowing White people to shirk responsibility, and to continue to see growth in racial identity as an optional interest rather than a vital and personally meaningful act. Dismantling racism begins with White people becoming humble, open, and invested enough to do the daily work of looking inside of themselves and interrogating their own response or lack of response to a certain situation involving race. It takes effort and time, seeking information, watching documentaries, going to workshops, diversifying their lives, listening to the narratives of people of color and also of White anti-racist activists. It takes acknowledging that all people born into a racialized society have racialized identities.

Perhaps TRA White parents begin their journey related to race with their Black children as their reason for wanting to learn. As the journey continues, though, it is important for parents to find a personal investment in the work of developing an anti-racist identity. Unaddressed, denied patterns of racism impede our own humanness, and that influences our lives in all ways, including how we parent. Eventually, with work, White TRA parents can change their lives by breaking free from inherited, archaic forms of racial understanding, and thus, make a connection with their children that is humble, genuine, and inclusive of all identities.

**Conclusion.** The above recommendations for parents are inspired by the voices of participants in this study. Considering their range of experiences related to race and the effect those experiences have had on their development, my hope is that parents will be inspired to diversify their lives, find community through a transracial adoption support group, communicate
about race regularly, examine their adoption paradigm, see color consciously, and find their personal investment in anti-racism. These efforts would help provide transracially adopted children with what they need as whole, developing people.

**Implications for Research Professionals**

The current study is intended as a new direction in TRA research; one that uses specific samples based on race, type of adoption, age, and geographic location. Aggregation of international and domestic adoptees, different generations of adoptees, varying racial identities, and vastly different geographic locations has caused TRA research to be less specific than is useful to guide interventions in training and policy. The current study utilized a hermeneutic phenomenological method in order to center voices of participants in the study and let the stories told by adoptees comprise results of the study. Qualitative research is a great platform through which to help adoptee voices be heard without distortion. Even in this effort, as a researcher, the process of bracketing was essential throughout the process. I noticed points at which I could see a tendency in myself to interpret participant stories instead of reporting participant stories. I had to stop and consult and start again more than once so that I could challenge the tendency to see predetermined results in the data instead of seeing the story told by the data. As a White researcher, it was vital to apply knowledge of the white racial frame to the research process, acknowledging that there would be times I might unconsciously be guided by my whiteness. This was one reason I sought an external auditor who is Black identified. Her input was invaluable in that she could identify important pieces of participant stories that I may have missed, undervalued, or misplaced in the results. A component that may have added more to the current study that could be incorporated into future studies is a follow up interview to learn more about how participation in the study may have influenced participants. The study itself may have
been one of the first or even only times that participants were asked to intentionally reflect on experiences related to race. It could be that such a reflective experience may have contributed to growth for participants in interesting ways.

It would be a positive direction for TRA research to continue gathering qualitative data that privileges voices of adoptees from specific racial, age and geographic categories so that a more customized understanding of the TRA experience can be gained and then applied to changes in adoptive policy, training, and parenting. Focus groups would be an informative addition to qualitative research as well, providing an interesting dynamic in data collection that would include connections between adoptees who have had somewhat similar experiences with transracial adoption. In addition, focus groups would allow for conversations among adoptees without a researcher present. This would remove the component of participant reactions to interviewer identity, and may lead the conversation to places only adoptees themselves would intuitively go.

Once qualitative data is amassed, a positive direction would be to develop quantitative research in which variables such as adoptee racial identity development and parental white racial identity development could be explored. Also, measuring levels of preparedness for dealing with racism among adoptees might be helpful as well. Studies focused on racial literacy in foster and adoptive TRA parents prior to and following a race-focused training would be helpful in gathering information about what interventions were successful in beginning the work of dismantling the white racial frame in the minds of TRA parents. Implicit bias in adoptive and foster parents would be another variable that would be illuminating in terms of the bigger picture of the factor of race in adoption and foster care. Experiences of birth parents who lost their children to foster care and adoption also needs research attention. Looking into circumstances of
separation, what services were offered and not offered, as well as what barriers prevented the reunification plan might help guide future investments into family preservation. Racial literacy and implicit bias testing among social workers might be helpful to see how the white racial frame may be showing up institutionally and personally among those who are instrumental in placement decisions.

Such research would potentially help guide training efforts for foster and adoptive parents, as well as bring attention to salient issues regarding racial identity for professionals involved with adoptive families; teachers, counselors, social workers, physicians, etc. Perhaps most importantly, being clear about difficulties faced by adoptees provides support for greater investment in family preservation to decrease the disproportionate number of kids of color in foster care awaiting permanence. Ideally, future research would have two broad goals: (a) Raise awareness of race as a salient factor in foster care and adoption that needs to be addressed through improved training for TRA parents, and (b) Inspire improved systemic dynamics and investment in family preservation. In other words, help the TRA that needs to happen better meet the needs of children of color and work systemically to decrease the number of children removed from their birth families permanently.

**Implications for Adoptive Training and Policy**

Current adoption policy requires that race not be considered in foster and adoptive placements. Because of this policy, many adoptive and foster agencies do not include mandatory multicultural trainings, and if they do voluntarily provide any training, there are no guidelines or standards for such trainings. Because of the practical link between policy and practice regarding training, it is important to consider how the current study can inspire changes in training and also a move toward change in policy.
There is a need for support of permanence for children/teens in care and also for including race as an important aspect of identity for both children/teens and adoptive parents. This goal could be met by requiring all foster and adoptive parents to complete a mandatory training and follow up trainings that include race specifically, and cover the topic of white privilege, whiteness, the racial history of transracial adoption, and research such as the current study. Such a training being required would at least expose parents to the idea that race is important, and that continuing to hold a strong white orientation is not conducive to ethically raising a child of a different race. The training should also focus on the formation of a truly multiracial family identity (Raible, 2006). This focus would call for training activities designed to present a multiracial family identity as beneficial for the entire family, not only the adopted child or children.

Advocacy for policy change by social workers, foster and adoptive parents, and all other professionals working with adoption is an important piece of this puzzle as well. Current policy that makes it possible for multicultural trainings to be optional and not standardized does not serve transracial adoptees. There are several options of companies in the United States that specialize in race-based trainings that teach the racial history of the country, the impact of racialization on people of color and on White people, and ways to move toward anti-racism as an active identity development process. These companies could be consulted and contracted to provide comprehensive race-based training, and to help set up follow up activities for continued learning on the subject. A change to policy should be proposed, with the new policy stating that all foster and adoptive parents open to transracial placements must complete professionally facilitated race-based training as a part of the process.
Implications for Counseling Psychologists

The results of this study provide some guidance for counseling psychology professionals, who may at some point work with adoptees of color from TRA families, TRA parents, or non-adopted siblings in counseling. The salience of race described by participants from childhood into emerging adulthood helps counseling professionals know to bring race and identity into the counseling conversation, providing an invitation for transracially adopted clients to discuss experiences related to race in an affirming environment. It would be helpful for counseling psychology professionals to be ready to help adoptees explore their unique racial identity development process, to discuss wonderings about birth family, and to perhaps discuss ways to approach the topic of race with White parents. The results of this study suggest that advocacy, compassionate listening, and working to be aware of issues related to race and identity are things adoptees wish for from family members, and often find from peers and mentors. Counseling professionals can also provide some of this to clients who are transracially adopted.

When counseling families or White parents of TRA adoptees, this study suggests that helping the family system move toward a multiracial identity would be beneficial for each family member. This might include providing reading materials for parents and other family members and describing the importance of race and racial identity for everyone in the family. Pointing to the dynamics of race in the counseling room can add to the psychoeducation around race and racism. This can be done in an interpersonal process manner with compassion and guidance toward change and growth for White family members, with clear explanations of the inherited white racial frame and resulting systemic dynamics of privilege and oppression. Being aware of community resources for TRA families, such as anti-racism training or transracial adoption support groups, is another way that counseling psychologists can be of help. Counselors can
help TRA parents and White adoptive siblings grow in the understanding that race is an important topic in the family, and that growing in racial awareness and white racial identity is vital in order to approach TRA effectively and ethically.

**Limitations**

There are some limitations present in the current study that will be described in this section. They include the interviewer’s racial identity as a White woman, the absence of the parent perspective, and intersecting identities of participants.

Because this study focuses on experiences related to race, it would follow that the experience of participating in the study would in itself be an experience related to race. Participants were asked to reflect deeply on memories and experiences in journal entries and interviews. Included in the content of the interviews were reflections upon difficulties with White family members. Interviews were conducted by me, a White woman, which may have added a layer of context for the stories being told. It may have been beneficial to ask participants if they were aware of their reaction to my racial identity in the interview, and what that reaction was. In future research focused on transracial adoptees, it might be prudent to have a research team that would include people of color, so that interviews could be conducted in same-race dyads. The paradoxical nature of transracial adoption, however, complicates this limitation. My identity as a White woman might have provided participants with a sense of familiarity, since they have been raised by White families and were raised in mostly White environments. Having a person of color as an interviewer may bring its own reactions from participants, especially considering the content shared in interviews about feeling disconnected from Black culture, feeling stuck in between two racial worlds. In future studies, regardless of the race of the interviewer, it would be a useful addition to ask participants about how, if at all, the race of the
interviewer may have influenced their experience in the study. Additionally, as mentioned above, a focus group following the individual interview that allows for adoptees to interact and discuss their experiences without the presence of a researcher might help mitigate this influence.

A second potential limitation in the current study is that participant stories are solely from the perspective of adoptees. While a core purpose of this study was to centralize the voices of participants, a deeper understanding of some of the experiences they discussed may have been gained by including data from other family members. More could be learned about transracial adoption by studying both adoptee perspectives and parent perspectives. It would be an interesting addition to hear from parents of transracial adoptees about how they feel they responded to the racial identities of their children, and how they see their experiences with racial socialization, multicultural knowledge, awareness and skills. This inclusion might give insight into the environment in which adoptees were raised, the perspective of parents, and whether or not parents engaged in growth over time regarding racial identity development and awareness of the racial realities in which their children have grown into adulthood. This additional information could be beneficial in developing training experiences related to race, racial identity and racial socialization for White parents. Providing training that incorporates information about common strategies used by TRA parents while also acknowledging the limits of those strategies and building on them based on the experiences of TRA emerging adults could be particularly effective.

Within the experiences and identities of participants, there was variation in intersecting identities. This could be seen as limitation in that the sample consisted of an uneven distribution related to these factors, and that one or more of these factors were an influential ingredient that altered the phenomenon. For example, gender identity was mentioned as salient in addition to
race by some participants. There was an awareness on the part of some Black woman- or female-identified participants that their gender and racial identities combined resulted in the “double jeopardy” phenomenon, with combined oppressed identities bringing greater vulnerability to discrimination in different social arenas. In addition, sexual orientation identity development was expressed by three participants as an intersecting, salient, and influential aspect of their stories. Participants found that their sexual orientation development intertwined with their racial identity development process. The two were not compartmentalized in life experiences. Gendered expression using the term *femme*, was mentioned by one participant as well, as an additional intersecting identity. Socioeconomic status was another varying factor among participants. Most participants reported being from middle to upper class socioeconomic situations, but others reported being from low income backgrounds. This factor was not discussed at length by participants as an intersecting identity, but was present as a piece of their lives and showed variation among participants.

Intersecting identities were not predictable during recruitment based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the study, but proved to be present as the study proceeded. When participants discussed their intersecting identities, these topics were included in the results, because of the primary intention to have results driven by participant voices. While intersecting identities may bring some variation in the experiences of participants, it is also an expected piece of the phenomenon due to the natural presence of different identities when a holistic approach is embraced. Even when intersectionality was present, there did not seem to be any difficulty for participants to discuss race and how experiences related to race influenced them. Because of the focus on the emerging adult population, which is a developmental stage during which primary tasks are identity formation and exploring intimate relationships, there could have been an
emphasis on intersecting identities that might not be as prominent if another age group were to be interviewed. With so many identity pieces in motion for emerging adults, there may be greater difficulty untangling one piece from another. In future studies, it might be interesting to include a longitudinal component, with follow-up interviews to see how identity intersections continue to influence experiences of race for participants.

**Chapter Conclusion**

The goal of qualitative hermeneutic phenomenology is to provide a rich and textured description of a particular phenomenon. In this study, the phenomenon described was experiences and understandings related to race for Black transracially adopted emerging adults. Through the stories told by participants in both interviews and journal entries, a description of the phenomenon was achieved in the form of seven themes and several corresponding subthemes. These themes, summarized at the beginning of this chapter, make clear the importance of race for participants from early in childhood to emerging adulthood. Participant environments, childhood experiences, and lessons from parents related to racial socialization (both active and passive) all sent a message to participants that race mattered in their lives, even when they didn’t have language for what they were experiencing and feeling. In emerging adulthood, participants described feeling between two racial worlds, with their own identities and the racial dynamics in social, family, and institutional arenas colliding to produce a leap forward in the salience of race. Themes were named and organized with the help of participants through member checking interviews, and I was struck by the investment on the part of participants in the process. I could feel their intention to have their stories told in the hopes of influencing a system that had affected them so deeply for their entire lives. This, too, speaks to the importance of this study and future studies that prioritize the voices of the people central to transracial adoption.
The complexity of race for Black people raised by White parents is clear throughout the results of this study, with the unique combination of permanence being achieved through family formation, and racial difference bringing unique interpersonal and identity challenges. Emerging adulthood is a time when identity becomes more salient, and this was definitely true for participants related to race. They described finding new perspectives, diverse influences, and realizations about their racial identities during this uniquely active time of development, each in their own unique way.

The chosen theoretical lens, the white racial frame, was applied to results, providing a systemic context through which the choices of TRA parents and the experiences of transracial adoptees could be understood. The white racial frame also helped guide recommendations for adoptive parents, adoption professionals, research professionals, and counseling psychologists, which were also given within this chapter. Results of the current study were discussed in relation to relevant transracial adoption research – including adjustment and self-esteem; racial identity development; and racial socialization and transracial adoptive parent paradigms related to race. These discussions helped to show the importance of continuing to adjust the type of research being done on the topic of transracial adoption, specifically to highlight rather than erase the complexities of the phenomenon of experiencing and understanding race for adoptees. Finally, limitations of the current study were discussed.

The intention of this research project was to give Black transracially adopted emerging adults a forum through which to contemplate and share their stories of experiencing and understanding race, their memories of racial socialization, and their feelings of preparedness for living in a racialized society as Black people after being raised by White parents. The importance of this study is evidenced by the authenticity, genuineness, and vulnerability with
which these nine participants shared their experiences through interviews and journal entries. My hope is that this research effort, comprised of their narratives, will inspire a much-needed change in racial literacy on the part of all professionals who work with people touched by transracial adoption. With greater awareness and training based on the needs of adoptees, systems can gradually change to encourage truly multiracial families with parents aware of race and adopted children who grow into adults who don’t feel stuck between two worlds, but instead feel at home in their own skin, steeped in the familial, cultural, and social support they need.
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APPENDIX A: Email Recruitment Request Educational Institutions

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Dear Colleague or Associate,

My name is Kyrai (key-rye) Antares. I am a doctoral student in the counseling psychology program at Western Michigan University. I am conducting a qualitative study exploring experiences related to race for US born, Black (African American, Black, Biracial with Black parentage) domestically transracially adopted emerging adults (age 18-28) who were raised by White parents. You must have been raised in Michigan, Ohio, or Indiana. My hope is that this study will provide accurate, representative stories that can inform adoptees living through similar situations, and that these stories will inform better foster and adoptive training practices, which will improve circumstances for transracially adopted youth.

Participation in this study entails one in-depth interview (60-90-minute), seven digital journal entries within a 3-week period, and one 30-40-minute member checking interview during which participants will have the chance to provide feedback after reviewing their interview transcript, as well as discuss the themes emerging in the data. Participants will be compensated for their time with a $20 gift card and a chance (1 in 15) to win a drawing for a $100 gift card.

Please direct potential participants to me through my email address: kyrai.e.antares@wmich.edu or through phone: 859-200-8013. Upon their inquiry, I will provide information about the study, compensation, and potential risks and benefits associated with participation. Potential participants will then have the opportunity to participate or decline participation in the study.

Please forward this call for participants to anyone you think may be in contact with potential participants. I appreciate your help finding participants and your support of my dissertation process.

Sincerely,

Kyrai Antares
APPENDIX B: Recruitment Email to Students

Kyrai Antares
Western Michigan University
Doctoral Student in Counseling Psychology
Kyrai.e.antares@wmich.edu
859-200-8013

Dear Potential Participant,

I am conducting a research study with the intention of exploring the experiences of Black (Black, African American, Biracial with Black parentage) young adults, age 18-28, who were adopted and raised by White parents. To participate, you must have been born in the United States, and lived with your White parent(s) by age five or younger. You also must have a racial identity of Black, African American, or Biracial with one Black birth parent, and you must have raised in Michigan, Ohio, or Indiana. This study serves as the subject of my doctoral dissertation. My inspiration for doing this research study comes from my own experience as a White foster and adoptive parent. It also relates to my commitment to anti-racist education and action.

If you consent to participate, you will be asked to take part in two interviews (one, 90-minute, and one 30-40 minute). You will also be asked to write seven digital journal entries. Journal entries would be made online (on your phone or computer) through a secure website. Participants will be compensated for their time with a $20 gift card and a chance (1 in 15) to win a drawing for a $100 gift card. The $20 incentive will be given after the final journal entry is complete. The drawing for the $100 gift card will take place after the final member checking interviews are complete.

If you meet the above criteria, and might like to take part in this study, please contact me at 859-200-8013 (text or call) or kyrai.e.antares@wmich.edu to learn more. In a short phone conversation, I will give you more information about the study, and answer any questions you might have. If after this conversation you decide to participate, you will be provided with a link to an informed consent document, and specific instructions for participation.

Thank you for considering becoming a participant in my research study. My hope is that this project will be a way for your story to reach others in the adoptive community, and that it will lead to more positive outcomes for children living through similar situations.

Sincerely,

Kyrai Antares
APPENDIX C: Study Flier

**Transracial Adoption Research Study:**
Would you like to share your story as an adoptee and **earn $20?**

---

**Seeking Research Participants for Transracial Adoption Study!**

If you meet the following criteria, and would like to share your story, you could be a participant in a new research study:

- Identify as Black, African American, or Biracial with Black/African American Parentage
- Adopted and raised by White parents (placed prior to age 5)
- Current age 18-28
- Raised in Michigan, Ohio, or Indiana

This research study will explore understandings related to race for Black (Black, African American, Biracial with Black parentage) young adults, age 18-28, who were adopted and raised by White parents.

In a short phone conversation, you will have a chance to ask questions and learn more about the study prior to deciding whether to participate.

**More information about the study:**

**What would you be asked to do if you participate?**

- Complete a demographic information form
- Share your experiences verbally (One recorded interview – 90-min.)
- Complete seven digital journal entries (from your phone or computer)
- Review your interview transcript
- Discuss themes over the phone (50 min)

**What would you gain from participating?**

- A $20 Amazon gift card
- A chance to win a $100 Amazon gift card (drawing at the end of study)
- The chance to share your unique experiences

**Does it cost anything to participate?**

- The only cost involved is the time you will spend (4-4.5 hours)

---

**If you are interested in participating, or have questions about participation, please call or email Kyrai (Key-rye).**

859-200-8013
kyrai.e.antes@wmich.edu

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My name is Kyrai (key-rye) Antres. I am a doctoral student at Western Michigan University. This study serves as the subject of my doctoral dissertation. My inspiration for doing this research study comes from my own experience as a White foster and adoptive parent. It also relates to my commitment to anti-racist education and action.
APPENDIX D: Recruitment Request Email to Adoption/Foster Agencies

Kyrai (key-rye) Antares
Western Michigan University
Doctoral Student in Counseling Psychology
Kyrai.e.antares@wmich.edu
859-200-8013

Dear Colleague or Associate,

My name is Kyrai (key-rye) Antares. I am a doctoral student in the counseling psychology program at Western Michigan University. I am conducting a qualitative study exploring experiences related to race for US born, Black (African American, Black, Biracial with Black parentage) domestically transracially adopted emerging adults (age 18-28) who were raised by White parents. In addition, potential participants must have been raised in Michigan, Ohio, or Indiana. This research project will serve as my doctoral dissertation. My hope is that this study will provide accurate, representative stories that can inform adoptees living through similar situations, and that these stories will inform better foster and adoptive training practices, which will improve circumstances for transracially adopted youth.

I am seeking help finding potential participants for this study. Would you be willing to forward the attached call for participants or the attached recruitment flier to families or colleagues who may be in touch with people who may fit the criteria for participation?

Participation in this study entails one in-depth interview (60-90-minute), seven digital journal entries within a 3-week period, and one 30-40 minute member checking interview during which participants will have the chance to provide feedback after reviewing their interview transcript, as well as discuss the themes emerging in the data. Participants will be compensated for their time with a $20 gift card and a chance (1 in 15) to win a drawing for a $100 gift card.

Please direct potential participants to me through my email address: kyrai.e.antares@wmich.edu or through phone: 859-200-8013. Upon their inquiry, I will provide information about the study, incentives, and potential risks and benefits associated with participation. Potential participants will then have the opportunity to ask questions, and to participate or decline participation in the study.

Please forward the attached call for participants to anyone you think may be in contact with potential participants. I appreciate your help finding participants and your support of my dissertation process.

Sincerely,

Kyrai Antares
APPENDIX E: Recruitment Request Email to Adoption Support Groups

Kyrai (key-rye) Antares
Western Michigan University
Doctoral Student in Counseling Psychology
Kyrai.e.antares@wmich.edu
859-200-8013

Dear Adoptive Parent Support Group Members,

My name is Kyrai (key-rye) Antares. I am a doctoral student in the counseling psychology program at Western Michigan University. I am conducting a qualitative study exploring experiences related to race for US born, Black (African American, Black, Biracial with Black parentage) domestically transracially adopted emerging adults (age 18-28) who were raised by White parents. In addition, potential participants must have been raised in Michigan, Ohio, or Indiana.

This research project will serve as my doctoral dissertation. My hope is that this study will provide accurate, representative stories that can inform adoptees living through similar situations, and that these stories will inform better foster and adoptive training practices, which will improve circumstances for transracially adopted youth.

I am seeking help finding potential participants for this study. Would you be willing to share the attached flier explaining the study with people who may fit the criteria for participation?

Participation in this study entails one in-depth interview (60-90-minute), seven digital journal entries within a 3-week period, and one 30-40 minute member checking interview during which participants will have the chance to provide feedback after reviewing their interview transcript, as well as discuss the themes emerging in the data. Participants will be compensated for their time with a $20 gift card and a chance (1 in 15) to win a drawing for a $100 gift card.

Please direct potential participants to me through my email address: kyrai.e.antares@wmich.edu or through phone: 859-200-8013. Upon their inquiry, I will provide information about the study, incentives, and potential risks and benefits associated with participation. Potential participants will then have the opportunity to ask questions, and to participate or decline participation in the study.

Please forward the attached flier to anyone you think may be interested in participating.
I appreciate your help finding participants and your support of my dissertation process.

Sincerely,

Kyrai Antares
APPENDIX F: Email to Student Organizations

Dear [Name of student organization],

I have received approval from the University of Michigan-Dearborn IRB office to contact your student organization to request that you share a flyer about my research study, and announce my study to members of your organization. Any help you can give in spreading the word about my study would be greatly appreciated.

My name is Kyrai (key-rye) Antares. I am a doctoral student in the counseling psychology program at Western Michigan University. I am conducting a qualitative study exploring experiences related to race for US born, Black (African American, Black, Biracial with Black parentage) domestically transracially adopted emerging adults (age 18-28) who were raised by White parents. In addition, potential participants must have been raised in Michigan, Ohio, or Indiana. This research project will serve as my doctoral dissertation. My hope is that this study will provide accurate, representative stories that can inform adoptees living through similar situations, and that these stories will inform better foster and adoptive training practices, which will improve circumstances for transracially adopted youth.

I am writing to request your office’s help with recruitment of participants. Would it be possible to send the attached flier explaining the study to students in your organization? Participation in this study entails one in-depth interview (60-90-minute), 7 digital journal entries within a 3-week period, and one 30-40-minute member checking interview during which participants will have the chance to provide feedback after reviewing their interview transcript, as well as discuss the themes emerging in the data. Participants will be compensated for their time with a $20 gift card and a chance (1 in 15) to win a drawing for a $100 gift card.

In response to inquiries by potential participants, I will provide information about the study, incentives, and potential risks and benefits associated with participation. Potential participants will then have the opportunity to ask questions, and to participate or decline participation in the study.

I appreciate your help finding participants and your support of my dissertation process. Please reply to this email to let me know if you are able to help by forwarding my flyer to the members of your organization or by announcing my study at a meeting. Please copy me on any emails you send out to your organization, so that I can track the distribution of my flyer. Thank you again!

Sincerely,

Kyrai Antares

kyrai.e.antaress@wmich.edu
859-200-8013
Hello,

This is Kyrai Antares contacting you regarding participation in my research study on transracial adoption. I hope to have a short conversation with you to provide more information about the study, and to answer any questions you might have. I can be reached at area code 859-200-8013. Thank you for your interest! I hope to talk with you soon.
APPENDIX H: Recruitment Conversation Protocol

During the recruitment conversation, which will last 10-15 minutes, the researcher will:

- Engage the participant in a casual conversation in which the researcher will express her reasons for being motivated and inspired to conduct this specific study. This may include the researcher sharing her experiences as a transracial adoptive parent, and as anti-racist advocate and educator. The goal of this sharing will be to build rapport, and to help the participant feel more comfortable in the research context. The conversation is meant to send the message that the purpose of qualitative research is telling the story of their experience, and that the researcher’s goal is to give them a voice to tell that story. Ideally, the conversation will unfold naturally.

- Restate the criteria necessary for participation, and ask if they are still interested in becoming a participant.

- Share logistical information with the participant about the research study. Specifically, the researcher will explain how the digital journal entries work, and will reiterate that she is requesting nine journal entries within the three weeks between the recruitment conversation and the in-depth interview, and one final journal entry after the final interview.

- Explain the incentive for participation: a $20 gift card after the final journal entry is complete, and a chance to win a $100 gift card at the completion of the study following the final member checking interview.

- Ask if there are any questions about the study.

- Provide link to the informed consent document, and explain that the background information form link will be at the end of the informed consent document.
APPENDIX I: Informed Consent Document

Western Michigan University

Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology Department

Principal Investigator: Mary Z. Anderson, Ph. D.
Student Investigator: Kyrai Antares, MA

Title of Study: Exploring Transracial Adoptees’ Experiences Related to Race

You have been invited to participate in a research project related to race experiences for US born and domestically adopted, Black (Black, African American, Biracial with Black parentage) people (ages 18-28) who were adopted and raised by White (of European descent) parents.

This project will serve as my dissertation for the requirements of a doctoral degree in counseling psychology. This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please ask questions if you need more clarification.

What are we trying to find out in this study?
This study is meant to document the experiences of Black, transracially adopted young adults related to race. My hope is that this study will provide accurate, representative stories that can inform adoptees in similar situations, and that these stories will inform better foster and adoptive training practices, which will improve circumstances for transracially adopted youth. Specifically, this study would like to explore participants’ thoughts and feelings about experiences related to race during the time between ages 18 and 28. In addition, the study will explore the things you were taught about race by your parents, and how well you feel you were prepared for independent adulthood in terms of race.

Who can participate in this study?
Participants must have a racial identity of Black, African American or Biracial with Black parentage, must be age 18-28, and must have permanently resided with White parents prior to the age of five. Participants must have been raised in Michigan, Ohio, or Indiana.

Where will this study take place?
This study includes two types of data collection; interviews and journals. Interviews will take place at a mutually agreeable location (your home/dorm, library study room, or other private space). Journal entries will be submitted online, through your phone or computer on a secure, password protected website.

What is the time commitment for participating in this study?
The total time commitment involved in this study is approximately four hours, which will be distributed across the following activities:
• Seven digital journal entries, which will vary in length depending upon content being shared. These journal entries are meant to take approximately 10 minutes each.
• One in-depth interview (approximately 90 minutes)
• 20-30-minute review of the in-depth interview transcript
• 30-40-minute phone conversation to obtain feedback on your interview transcript and to discuss themes emerging in the data.

What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?
If you consent to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a demographic information sheet, share your experiences verbally (one in-depth interview) and through writing (seven digital journal entries). You will also be asked to review your interview transcript, to provide clarification to make sure you have told your story the way you want to tell it. During a phone conversation, we will discuss the main themes I see in your story to be sure I have an accurate understanding of your experiences.

What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?
The primary risk for participating in this study is an increase in awareness of experiences related to race. This may include the surfacing of memories, feelings, thoughts, as well as new perspectives on past, current, and future experiences related to race. If after the interview you feel you would like to continue processing your experiences with a counselor, referrals will be provided. Your identity will be protected by the use of a pseudonym, and all identifying information about you will be deleted from the research data. All members of the research team, including the person transcribing your interview, will be trained in confidentiality. All identifying information will be removed from your transcript and journal entries.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?
This study provides you with the opportunity to share your lived experiences with others. While a greater awareness about self and race can be a risk, it can also be a benefit. This study may influence you in positive ways in terms of racial identity development and self-understanding. In addition, you may find a form of satisfaction to know that you are part of a unique group of people, and that the experiences of your group are important to research and future practice in psychology and social work. You will also gain the unique experience of being a part of a research study.

Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?
The only cost to participating is the time you will spend during interviews, journal entries, reviewing your transcript, and the phone conversation during which you will give feedback on your transcript and themes.

Is there any compensation for participating in this study?
Following the in-depth interview, you will receive a $20 Amazon gift card for your participation. After the final journal entry is received, you will be entered in a drawing with a chance to win a $100 Amazon gift card. You will have a 1 in 15 chance to win. The drawing will take place after the final member checking interview is complete.

Who will have access to the information collected during this study?
Only members of the research team will have access to the data for this study. All research team members are trained in confidentiality. Kyrai Antares and a professional transcriber will have access to interview data. The transcriber is professionally trained in confidentiality and will omit identifying information such as personal names or names of places from the transcript. Kyrai Antares will remove identifying information from journal entries prior to sharing these data with other members of the research team. Kyrai’s doctoral chair, as well as a research analysis consultant, and research assistant will have access to de-identified journal entries and transcripts. All data will be saved on an encrypted drive.

What if you want to stop participating in this study?
You can choose to stop participating in the study at any time for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. You will experience NO consequences either academically or personally if you choose to withdraw from this study. The investigator can also decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent. Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the primary investigator, Kyrai (key-rye) Antares at 859-200-8013 or kyrai.e.antares@wmich.edu. You may also contact the principle investigator, Dr. Mary Z. Anderson, at 269-387-5113 or mary.anderson@wmich.edu. You can contact the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This study was approved by the Western Michigan University Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) on (DATE). Please do not participate in this study after (date of one year after approval). Participating in this study online indicates your consent for use of the answers you supply.

-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

AFTER READING THE ABOVE DOCUMENT PLEASE INDICATE WHETHER OR NOT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.
APPENDIX J: Email to Potential Participants Who Completed the Recruitment Conversation

The following email will be sent to participants who have completed the recruitment conversation, verbally agreed to participate, if they have not completed the informed consent or background information form to begin the study, and one week has passed since the recruitment conversation. The purpose of this email is a gentle reminder prompt to begin the study.

Dear ____________.

I am glad we had the chance to speak on the phone about my research study related to transracial adoption. If you have not received the link to the informed consent document and the background information form, I have included it below. Simply follow the link and you will find instructions on the page.


If any more questions have come up for you about the study and what participation might entail, I am more than happy to help. Just call or email me – 859-200-8013 or kyrai.e.antares@wmich.edu.

Thank you for your time!

Kyrai (key-rye) Antares
APPENDIX K: Background Information Form

Thank you for providing the following information to give me a better idea of your demographic characteristics, your personal background, and some information about your family. *Please do not include your name on this form so that your identity can remain protected and anonymous.*

Email address:

Cell phone number:

Would you like to receive journal reminder prompts via email or text?

Age:

Race:

At what age were you placed permanently with your parents?

What do you know, if anything, about your birth mother’s race?

What do you know, if anything, about your birth father’s race?

Where did you grow up?

What place (city/state) feels like “home” to you?

Where did you go to school?
   Elementary:
   Middle:
   High:

In what city do you currently live?

Describe your current living situation:

How would you describe your level of independence as an adult?

What attracted you to being a part of this study?

What are your expectations related to participating in this study?
APPENDIX L: Digital Journal Entry Instructions

The following instructions will be discussed with participants during the recruitment conversation, and will also be posted on the website through which participants will submit journal entries:

**Instructions for Five Journal Entries:**

Please write about present-day experiences you have that are related to race, as well as your feelings and thoughts about those experiences. *No experience is insignificant,* so please feel free to share whatever comes to mind, regardless of how small or big it might feel to you. There are no rules. I encourage you to share openly and authentically. Your opinions and interpretations of events and experiences are welcome.

Your experiences related to race might be *personal,* or *relational.*

*Personal* experiences related to race could be:
- a thought;
- how you felt in a certain place, at an event, or in a conversation;
- a dream;
- your interpretation of an event you observed but were not involved in directly;
- an impression of another person’s reaction/response to you; or
- an observation of an environment, classroom, neighborhood, media, family gathering, television program, etc.

*Relational* experiences related to race would be experiences involving others. These might be:
- conversations,
- things that happened in class or at work,
- comments made by strangers, or
- occurrences in public, etc.
APPENDIX M: Email for Scheduling In-Depth Interview

Dear (insert participant name),

Thank you for participating in my research study on transracial adoption!

I am writing to schedule our in-depth interview, which will take place after the three-week journal entry period. The interview will last approximately 90 minutes. I will travel to a private location near you for this interview, which will be recorded and then transcribed. Please follow this link to a doodle poll asking about your availability on several dates/times. If none of the dates/times work for you, please reply and let me know. We will work together to find a date and time that works for both of us.

I look forward to hearing from you, and to our interview!

Sincerely,

Kyrai Antares
APPENDIX N: Journal Entry Reminder Prompts

The following prompts will be sent out at regular intervals during the three-week period between the initial interview, and the in-depth interview. Added to the end of each reminder will be the participant’s password for their convenience.

**Friendly Research Reminder #1:** I will be sending two reminders per week about journal entries. This is the first reminder of six.

Please remember to submit a digital journal entry about an experience you had related to race! Your thoughts and observations will be a big help in this project. Don’t hesitate to email or text if you have any questions. Thank you!


**Friendly Research Reminder #2:** It’s a great day to submit a digital journal entry about an experience related to race! Your thoughts, feelings, occurrences, memories – even dreams – related to race qualify as experiences about which you can write. Thank you for participating!


**Friendly Research Reminder #3:** Did you have an experience related to race today? Write about it in your digital journal today! Remember, experiences related to race can be about your own experiences, your reactions to events seen in the media, things that have happened with other people, your friendships, etc. Feel free to share whatever comes to mind!


**Friendly Research Reminder #4:** I appreciate you sticking with this research project. If you have missed one or two entries, don’t worry about it. Just proceed from this point. Your experiences count! Please submit a digital journal entry about an experience related to race
today. Digital journal entries can be about race-related experiences you have, that you observe others have, or even in media. They can be your own thoughts, feelings, and observations about race. Write one today! Thank you for your participation!


**Friendly Research Reminder #5:** Did you see something in the news or on facebook related to race? You can write about that in a digital journal entry! Please share an experience related to race today in your digital journal; no experience is too big or too small. Only five more to go! Thank you for your participation! You are coming close to being done with your journal entries!


**Friendly Research Reminder #6:** Has participating in this research project brought up any memories related to race? If so, write about that today in your digital journal entry! If not, tell me about something that happened today! This will be your last entry before your in-depth interview, which is coming up [insert time and date of interview].


**Final Reminder Prompt:**

**Friendly Research Reminder #7:** Thank you for participating in my research project! Only one more journal entry to go! Please take a moment to make one final digital journal entry. This is a chance for you to write about anything you may have thought about since our interview, and any thoughts or feelings you have about your experience during this project.

*Upon receipt of this journal entry, you will receive your $20 gift card incentive!*

As soon as I have processed the data from our interview and your journal entries, you will receive an email from me about reviewing your transcript and
having a 20-30-minute conversation with me during which you can give me feedback on your transcript, and about the themes I have identified in your story. Thank you for participating!
APPENDIX O: Final Journal Entry Instructions

Thank you for completing this final journal entry. This is an opportunity for you to share any thoughts, feelings, memories, or experiences you have had during or since participating in the other components of this research study. You may also share your thoughts and feelings about participating in the project; you could share what it was like for you to participate, if participating impacted you in any way, and/or whether participating spurred further thinking or ignited memories. Once this final journal entry is received, you will receive your $20 gift card incentive!

There will be one more step in the completion of this study. I will contact you as soon as I am ready for you to review your transcript, so that I can be sure you have told me everything you wanted to tell me. We will then set up a time for a phone discussion so I can explain the themes I am seeing in your story, and get some feedback from you regarding that. After that phone interview, you will be entered into a drawing for a $100 gift card! Again, many thanks for your time and energy, which made this project possible!
APPENDIX P: Email to Participants Who Began Participation and then Ceased

The following email will be sent to participants who signed the informed consent document and submitted a background information form, and submitted at least one digital journal entry, but have not been heard from in over one week, even with the sending of reminder prompts.

Dear Participant,

Thank you for starting your participation in my research project!

Your participation so far has been very helpful. Feel free to jump back in and continue submitting journal entries. If you start again at this point, and continue participation, you will still be eligible for your incentives.

Here is the link to the digital journal entry form for your convenience:

I look forward to meeting you at our in-depth interview.

Please let me know if you have any questions. I am here to help!

Thanks again,

Kyrai Antares
APPENDIX Q:

Email to Participants Who Submitted a Background Form but No Journal Entries

The following email will be sent to participants who signed the informed consent document and submitted a background information form, but never submitted a digital journal entry, even after receiving reminder prompts. It is written to be a more formal, but still gentle reminder to start submitting journal entries.

Dear Participant,

Thank you for starting your participation in my research project by agreeing to participate and filling out a background form! You can go ahead and start submitting digital journal entries. You have three weeks to submit six entries.

Here is the link to the digital journal entry form for your convenience:

After those three weeks, we will complete our in-depth interview.

Please let me know if you have any questions. I am here to help!

Thanks again,

Kyrai Antares
APPENDIX R: Automatic Response to Journal Entry Submission

The following message is programmed to send automatically after a participant submits a journal entry through the secure website:

Thank you for your recent submission to my research project. Your help is greatly appreciated!
Sincerely,
Kyrai
APPENDIX S: In-Depth Interview Topical Protocol

Possible Topics:

- Context of emerging adulthood for the participant (Is the participant working, in college, financially independent, living on her/his own or with friends, etc.)
- Experiences related to race during emerging adulthood involving parents
- Experiences related to race during emerging adulthood involving friends
- Experiences related to race during emerging adulthood in college (classrooms, on campus, in dorms, at events, on sports teams, in social settings, etc.)
- Experiences related to race during emerging adulthood at work, in public, in social settings with peers or co-workers
- Race lessons from parents during childhood
- Experiences related to race during childhood involving parents
- Participants’ thoughts and feelings about how prepared they were by their parents for living in a racialized society

Initial Question:

Please describe your experiences related to race as you become an independent adult. Feel free to share any specific stories that come to mind.

Sample Follow-up Responses and Questions:

- That is interesting. Please tell me more about that.
- Is there a specific example you can share?
- What details can you add to be sure that I understand?
- Please describe your transition into adulthood socially, financially, etc.
• How prepared do you feel you were for dealing with issues related to race? Can you share any specific examples that make you say that?

• Can you tell me about any experiences related to race that surprised you, or for which you felt unprepared?

• Would you mind talking about what it is like to live in the United States today, having the racial identity that you do?

• What has it been like for you having White parents?

• How do you remember your parents talking with you about race, if at all?

• What are some of the lessons you remember receiving about race from your parents?
Dear (Participant’s name),

Thank you again for participating in my research study about transracial adoption. I am contacting you because the transcript of your in-depth interview is ready for your review. Please take some time to read the transcript, making notes of anything you would like to explain further, or that you feel is inaccurate. We will speak on the phone in a couple weeks to discuss your transcript, and I will ask for your feedback at that time. During that phone call, I will also share with you the themes I have identified in the interview transcripts, and will ask for your feedback on those themes, as well.

Please respond to this email to let me know a couple of dates/times you might be available to have our phone conversation in two weeks.

Let me know if you have any questions about this part of the process. This will be the final step in your participation! After this phone call, you will be entered into a drawing to win a $100 gift card! Thank you for your time and effort.

Sincerely,

Kyra Antares
APPENDIX U: Email Follow-up If No Response to Transcript Review Request

Dear (Participant’s name),

Thank you again for participating in my research study about transracial adoption. This is my second attempt to contact you about proceeding with the research process. I have pasted the original email below, in case you missed it. Thank you for sticking with this project! You are almost done!

I am contacting you because the transcript of your in-depth interview is ready for your review. Please take some time to read the transcript, making notes of anything you would like to explain further. We will speak on the phone in one week to discuss your transcript, and I will ask for your feedback at that time. During that phone call, I will also share with you the themes I have identified in the interview transcripts, and will ask for your feedback on those themes, as well.

Please respond to this email to let me know a couple of dates/times you might be available to have our phone conversation in the coming week.

Let me know if you have any questions about this part of the process. This will be the final step in your participation! After our phone conversation, you will be entered into a drawing to win a $100 gift card! Thank you for your time and effort.

Sincerely,

Kyrai Antares
APPENDIX V: Member Checking Interview Protocol

Topics for Discussion:

- Participant feedback on previously reviewed transcript
- Emerging themes identified by researcher
- Possible quotes from transcript that could help explain a theme

Questions to ask Participant:

- Is there anything you would change about your transcript? Anything you would add or delete?
- Do the themes I have mentioned seem accurate to you? Are there themes you would add? Are there themes you think don’t apply to you?
- Is there anything in your transcript you would like me to not quote in my final dissertation or article?

At the end of the interview, I will express my gratitude for their participation in the study.
APPENDIX W: Phone Script for Contacting Foster and Adoptive Agencies

My name is Kyrai (key-rye) Antares. I am a doctoral student in the counseling psychology program at Western Michigan University. I am conducting a qualitative study exploring experiences related to race for US born, Black (African American, Black, Biracial with Black parentage) domestically transracially adopted emerging adults (age 18-28) who were raised by White parents in Michigan, Ohio or Indiana.

My hope is that this study will provide accurate, representative stories that can inform adoptees in similar situations, and that these stories will inform better foster and adoptive training practices.

I am seeking help finding potential participants for this study. Would you be willing to forward a call for participants or recruitment flyer to families or colleagues who may be in touch with people who may fit the criteria for participation? I can email you my recruitment flyer, which contains more information about the study, as well as my contact information.

You could also direct potential participants to me through my email address: kyrai.e.antares@wmich.edu or through phone: 859-200-8013.

When I am contacted by potential participants, I will provide information about the study, incentives, and potential risks and benefits associated with participation. They will then have the opportunity to ask questions before deciding whether to participate.

**If the following information is requested, it will be shared:**

Participation in this study entails one in-depth interview (60-90-minute), seven digital journal entries, and one 30-40-minute member checking interview during which participants will have the chance to provide feedback after reviewing their interview transcript, as well as discuss the themes emerging in the data. Participants will be compensated for their time with a $20 gift card and a chance (1 in 15) to win a drawing for a $100 gift card.

Thank you!
APPENDIX X: Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

Date: November 22, 2017

To: Mary Anderson, Principal Investigator
   Kyra Antares, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 17-10-03

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled “Experiences Related to Race for Black Transracially Adopted Emerging Adults” has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may only be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project (e.g., you must request a post approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your application under “Number of subjects you want to complete the study.”) Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date stated below.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: November 21, 2018