



**NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER
FOR FOSTER CARE
& PERMANENCY PLANNING**

at the Hunter College
School of Social Work

INFORMATION PACKET: *Domestic Transracial Adoption*

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Domestic Transracial Adoption

Transracial adoption means joining parents and children of different racial backgrounds together in adoptive families. The child welfare system debates over whether race should take precedence over permanency. The National Black Association of Social Workers opposes children of color being placed in homes different from their cultural background. Research evaluates the successes and failures of adoptees in inracial and transracial adoption (Hayes, 1993; Pertman, 2000; Vonk, 2001). In general, results indicate that 75%-85% of the adoptees develop positive self-esteem. However, adoptees in transracial adoptions experience a lack of racial and cultural identity as compared to adoptees in inracial adoptions. Since racism exists in society, their lack of identity does not prepare them how to survive racism. Thus, it is uncertain whether transracial adoption will be beneficial to the child.

The majority of the children in the foster care system are children of color (Courtney, 1997). The wait for children to be adopted is much longer for children of color than Caucasian children. Thus, there is not enough supply of color adoptive families to match the demand of color adoptable children. In addition, there is a negative correlation between age and adoption. Policy affects practice. Laws overlook the child welfare system and have their impact on adoption issues. This packet will also outline some laws.

“Race-consciousness pervades American society...and adoptive placements should recognize and accommodate this truth” (Hall & Steinberg, n.d.) There are advocates who believe that transracial families need help. Adoption is a difficult process. Adoptees of inracial families frequently experience identity crisis in their teens and late twenties (Pertman, 2000). Pertman writes that many adoptees seek their biological history and hope to find a sense of self when they enter adulthood. Adoptees in transracial adoptions face a greater crisis as compared to adoptees in inracial adoptions. This is because transracially adopted individuals experience double rejection, the rejection from their birth mother, and the rejection of their race and culture (Steinberg & Hall, 2000). This packet will list some suggestions on ways to foster cultural competency.

Fact Sheet

- ◆ In the 1990s, there were approximately 120,000 adoptions each year. In 1992, there were 127,441 adoptions. *Adoption: Numbers and trends*. Retrieved April 11, 2002, from the World Wide Web: http://www.calib.com/naic/pubs/s_number.htm.
- ◆ In 1997, the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute in New York conducted a survey and found that 6 of every 10 Americans have a “personal experience” with adoption; either they, a family member, or a close friend were adopted, adopted a child or placed a child for adoption. *Pertman, A. (2000). Adoption nation: How the adoption revolution in transforming America. New York: Basic Books.*
- ◆ Around 130,000- 150,000 adoptions are approved in court yearly. *Pertman, A. (2000). Adoption nation: How the adoption revolution in transforming America. New York: Basic Books.*
- ◆ One-half of the children are adopted by step parents and other relatives. *Pertman, A. (2000). Adoption nation: How the adoption revolution in transforming America. New York: Basic Books.*
- ◆ Around 14% of all adoptions are transracial adoptions, the majority of the adoptions are international. *Vonk, E. (2001). Cultural competence for transracial adoptive parents. *Social Work*, 46, 246-256.*
- ◆ In 1987, the National Health Interview Survey found 1% of white women adopt black children; 5% of white women adopt children of other races; 2% of women of other races adopt white children. *From National Adoption Information Clearinghouse*. Retrieved April 10, 2002 from the World Wide Web, http://www.calib.com/naic/pubs/s_trans.htm

- ◆ African American children generally stay in out-of-home care longer than Caucasian children, and the majority of these children have very low chance of adoption. Courtney, M. (1997). *The politics and realities of transracial adoption*. Child Welfare, 76, 749-760.
- ◆ In 1992, 15.5% of adoptions were public agency adoptions and 37.5% adoptions are private agency adoptions. *Adoption: Numbers and trends*. Retrieved April 11, 2002, from the World Wide Web: http://www.calib.com/naic/pubs/s_number.htm.
- ◆ A national survey of 87 adoption agencies in 25 states conducted in 1990 and 1991 found that 9% of African American children were placed transracially by public agencies and 37% of African American children were placed by private agencies. 94% of private agency African American children were placed in same race homes. Courtney, M. (1997). *The politics and realities of transracial adoption*. Child Welfare, 76, 749-760.

Adoption Laws:

- ◆ Massachusetts, 1851, enacted the first United States Adoption Law. It set strict procedures for giving children new parents, and defined needs of children as paramount. It marked the beginning of state court interventions where it was mandatory courts made approvals for adoptions. Pertman, A. (2000). Adoption nation: How the adoption revolution in transforming America. New York: Basic Books.
- ◆ Loving v. State of Virginia (1967) removed the last legal barriers to interracial marriages. Patten, S. (2000). Birth marks. New York: New York University Press.
- ◆ Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 declares Congress to establish minimum Federal standards for the removal of Indian children from their families and

- extended families. The Indian Child and Family Programs led grants to Indian tribes to provide family services to prevent family breakups. *From National Information Clearinghouse. Retrieved April 11, 2002. URL <http://www.calib.com/naic/pubs/index.cfm#federal>.*
- ◆ Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 discouraged foster care and encouraged adoption. It believed that adoptive placement is the preferred outcome for children who are in out-of-home care and it is clear that they will not be returning home. This law emphasized the importance of permanency planning. *Courtney, M. (1997). The politics and realities of transracial adoption. Child Welfare, 76, 749-760.*
 - ◆ Family Preservation and Family Support Services Program of 1993. The Federal government funds programs for preventive and crisis services. This policy also created the Court Improvement Program which the court needs to conduct assessments on family functions. *From the Administration for Children and Families. Retrieved April 15, 2002 from World Wide Web <http://www.acf.dhhs.gov>.*
 - ◆ In 1984, *Palmore v. Sidoti*, 466 U.S. 429, the U.S. Supreme Court held that it was unconstitutional to transfer custody of a white child from her mother to her father solely because the mother was living with a Black man. *Perry, T. (n.d.). Thinking and teaching about transracial adoption. URL <http://racerelations.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm>.*
 - ◆ The Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 prohibits agencies that receive Federal fundings from delaying or denying the placement of a child on the basis of race, color, or national origin of the adoptive or foster parent or the child involved. *From Adoption.com. Retrieved March 7, 2002 from the World Wide Web http://www.adoptionstatistics.com/transracial_adoption.asp*

- ◆ Personality Responsibility Act of 1994. This was introduced by Republicans and an attempt to dismantle the welfare system and revoking federal entitlements by giving block grants to states. In addition, it addressed adoption issues. Adoption was part of the welfare reform under section of “Reducing Illegitimacy”, Title I, 3/22/95 version. What it meant was to relocate illegitimate children into legitimate families, which meant heterosexual, two parents families. The politicians believe(d) this illegitimacy contributed to poverty and welfare in this nation. *Pattan, S. (2000). Birth marks. New York: New York University Press.*

- ◆ Interethnic Placement Provisions of 1996 was an amendment of the MEPA. The IEP changed some of the MEPA language. In addition, it also emphasized on decreasing the length of time that children wait to be adopted, promote foster and adoptive parents recruitment and eliminating discrimination on the basis of race, color or national origin. *From Adoption.com. Retrieved March 7, 2002 from the World Wide Web http://www.adoptionstatistics.com/transracial_adoption.asp. It sanctions states and agencies that do not comply with MEPA. It dictates penalties and corrective actions to noncompliant states and agencies. *From Administration for Children and Families. Retrieved April 15, 20021 from World Wide Web <http://www.acf.dhhs.gov>.**

- ◆ President Clinton signed the Welfare Reform in 1996, which included the five-year limit, MEPA, Personality Responsibility Act and Job Protection Act. *Pattan, S. (2000). Birth marks. New York: New York University Press.*

- ◆ The Job Protection Act commenced a \$5,000-\$6,000 tax credits to adopting families. *Pattan, S. (2000). Birth marks. New York: New York University Press.*

- ◆ There was also another form of tax relief that allows an employer to reimburse an employee up to \$5,000 for qualified expenses per adopted child. This reimbursement is not to be treated as income. *From Adoption Services. Retrieved*

April 14, 2002 from the

http://www.adoptionservices.org/goto/adoting_families_adoption_cost.htm

- ◆ In summary, the 1996 Welfare Reform that President Clinton signed reduced social safety net for low-income mothers; it removed racial restrictions on adoption; it provided financial incentives for adoption; it made difficult for poor mothers to keep families together; and it made adoption easier for middle class. *Pattan, S. (2000). Birth marks. New York: New York University Press.*

- ◆ What about the fathers? Only presumed fathers have rights and would require his consent for adoption. Under the law, presumed fathers are either married to the mother within 300 days before the baby's birth; or by marrying the mother, bringing in the child and declaring the baby to be his biological child; or his marriage was legally terminated within 300 days before the child's birth. *From PACT. Retrieved April 14, 2002 from the World Wide Web*
<http://pact.best.vwh.net/adoptive/laws-other.html>

- ◆ Adoptees are the only U.S. Citizens who do not have automatic rights to have records on their birth parents. *Pertman, A. (2000). Adoption nation: How the adoption revolution in transforming America. New York: Basic Books.*

- ◆ Helen Hill Vs Supreme Court. Helen Hill, an adoptee fought a court decision on May 30, 2000. She won and the decision allowed Oregon adoptees to receive their birth certificates. This set precedence in allowing adoptees to receive their birth certificates. *Pertman, A. (2000). Adoption nation: How the adoption revolution in transforming America. New York: Basic Books.*

- ◆ Laws sealed adoption records from adoptees once the adoption is finalized. There are two kinds of information, identifying and non-identifying information. Non-identifying information includes descriptive social and medical history but omits details that can positively identify parties involved. Identifying information

includes names, addresses, birth dates and place. Adoption records are only accessible with a court approval. *From Transracial Adoption.Com. Retrieved April 14, 2002 from <http://www.adoptionlaws.org/access.asp>*

- ◆ If there is mutual consent (adoptee and birth parents), information can be obtained through Adoption Registry. *From Adoption Registry in New York. Retrieved April 14, 2002 from the World Wide Web <http://www.adoptionlaws.org/newyork.asp>*

Open Adoption

Adam Pertman (2000) believes that open adoption fosters healthy relationship establishment between adoptees and adoptive families. In addition, it would also diminish anxiety.

- It is a system that allows birth parents stay in touch with and remain involve in the lives of their children after placement in adoption.
- It promotes honesty and respect.
- It offers ongoing information about family medical issues to fulfill adoptees' innate desire to know about their genetic histories.
- For birth mothers, giving away a child create life long emotional psychic injury. They yearn for knowledge and contact about their children. Thus, being able to be involve fosters mental well-being.
- However, open adoption can create problems for the adoptive families and the adoptees. Problems such as emotional uncertainty and emmeshed boundaries. However, it has been shown that openness correlate with gains.

Cultural Competency

“Positive racial identity depends on our ability to identify fully with our ethnic roots, yet remain confident that race or ethnicity does not limit our opportunities in life” (Steinberg & Hall, 2000)

The following are suggestions by the authors:

- Parent(s) need to keep in mind that they cannot prevent the child from experiencing racism. However, they can help the child deal with racism. Parent(s) can help by identifying bias on television, in books and other sources. Parent(s) should name the bias and help the child recognize when it appears again.
- Parent(s) should be proactive in antiracist activities.
- Parent(s) should encourage open communications on racial issues at home.
- Parent(s) should listen to the child’s response to television shows, books and events. After listening to the child, parent(s) and child should discuss the issues together.
- Parent(s) need to learn to talk less and listen more. This can be done by asking open-ended questions; questions that do not elicit single word answers to encourage the child to self-express.
- Parent(s) should not assume their own experiences as the same as the child’s experiences.

In her article, Vonk (2001) writes, parents need to acquire the attitudes, skills and knowledge in order to help their child develop positive racial identities and survival skills for life in this racist society. Knowledge is the information that is necessary for accurate understanding; attitude is the self-awareness of assumptions and values about the parent’s

culture and the understanding of the child's culture; skills are the developed skills that can best help the child.

- Awareness is the starting point for transracial adoptive parent(s). White parent(s) need to increase their awareness of “white benefits.” It will be difficult to understand the disadvantages the children of color face without being able to identify the “white benefits” that the dominant culture take for granted.
- Parent(s) need to be aware of their motivation to adopt a child. If the motivation to adopt was to fight racism, the parents need to re-evaluate. Instead, a child-centered motivation is encouraged where the focus is on the match between a child's needs and the parent's ability and desire to meet the needs.
- Parent(s) need to be aware of the roles race, ethnicity and culture play in the lives of others. Parent(s) need to understand the importance these are on the child's culture of birth.
- Parent(s) need to have respect for the child's race.
- Parent(s) need to have knowledge of the history and the culture of which the child belongs. In addition, parents should have knowledge of culture on the country of origin and in the United States.
- Parent(s) need to be aware of the child's needs in order to help their child develop pride in their racial identities as well as coping skills to deal with racism.
- Parent(s) need to examine their own attitudes and beliefs about their child's race and culture.
- Parent(s) need to imagine their child as adolescents and adults to consider feelings about issues such as interracial dating and marriage.

- Transracial adoption exposes the parents in public. Parent(s) need to become aware of how they can deal with this attention. More importantly, how racism might affect their children and their own family.
- Parent(s) need to learn to recognize positive and negative stereotypes.
- Steinberg, Hall and Vonk suggest that parent(s) should be actively engaging.
- Parent(s) and children should participate in cultural recreation to allow the child to learn about their culture of birth.

Conclusion

The intentions of MEPA is a positive one since it attempted to promote permanency and attempted to decrease the number of years children wait for homes. However, it is naïve to believe that children of color are placed sooner because of the law because the reality is, there are greater number of children (of color) waiting to be adopted than there are available adoptive families. The supply and demand is not balanced. In addition, the haste to place children may have a reverse effect. Transracial adoption is beneficial to children, only when the adoptive parents are competent enough. Love is colorblind. However, in raising a child, love is not enough. As an African proverb says, “It takes a village to raise a child.”

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Web Sites

Adoption.Com. <http://www.adoption.com>

Articles and adoption services.

Adoption Forum, Inc. <http://www.adoptionforum.org>

Provides emotional support for all adoption.

P.O. Box 462

South Eastern, P.A. 19399

215-238-1116 (phone)

610-917-2456 (fax)

Adopted Me Too. <http://www.communities.mns.com/Adoptedmetoo>>

For adoptees to come together.

Adoption Services. <http://www.adoptionservices.org>

1800-943-0400

Adoption Registry in New York. <http://www.adoptionregistry.net>

Adoption in Medical Information Registry

Department of Health

Public Health Representative

Corning Tower Room 208

Albany, NY 12237

518- 474-9600

African American Child. <http://www.aachild.com>

Has news articles, tips for parents and links related to African American interests.

African American Publication. <http://www.aawc.com>

Guides and links to sites of publications by African Americans.

Bastard Nation. <http://www.bastards.org>

Advocate for civil and human rights for adoptees prohibited from accessing

Personal records.

P.O. Box 271672

Houston, TX 77277-1672

Child Welfare League of America. <http://www.cwla.org>

An Advocacy and Services resource

Children's and Young Adult Books with Interracial Family Themes.

<http://www.cynthialeitichsmith.com>

Lists books and bibliographies on adoption and transracial issues.

Inter-racial Families in Fellowship. <http://www.insouciant.com>

A support community and connection. Provides links, and articles on transcultural issues.

Interracial Voice. <http://www.webcom.com>

It's a web journal and has articles on the topic.

Mavin Foundation. <http://www.mavinfoundation.org>

It's the Mavin magazine. It has essays, projects and other articles by multicultural Individuals.

Multiracial Activist. <http://www.multiracial.com>

It's mission is to abolish racial classification. It has links and articles on multicultural issues.

Multiracial Family Circle. <http://www.cdiversity.com>

Its mission is to educate people about transracial and multiracial people and families. It holds meetings and conferences.

P.O. Box 32414

Kansas City, MO 64111

National Adoption Information Clearinghouse. <http://www.calib.com/naic>

Major source of adoption, publishes and distributes fact sheets, directories, etc.

National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency Planning

<http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfepp>

Supports agencies to provide services for children in foster care to achieve permanency.

New Roots. <http://www.insouciant.com>

It is a support group for newly adopted or considering adoption individuals.

P.O. Box 14953

Columbus, OH 43214

614-470-0846

New York State Citizens' Coalition for Children, Inc. <http://www.nysccc.org>

Provides articles on adoption issues.

306 East State Street Suite 220

Ithaca, NY 14850

607-272-0034 (phone)

607-272-0035 (fax)

North American Council on Adoptable Children. <http://www.nacac.org>

Advocates for permanency of any "denied" children.

970 Raymond Avenue Suite 106

St. Paul, MN 55114

651-644-3036 (phone)

651-644-9848 (fax)

Pact, An Adoption Alliance. <http://www.pactadopt.org>

An adoption agency that emphasizes on placing children of color.

3450 Sacramento Street Suite 239

San Francisco, CA 94118

415-221-6957 (phone)

510-482-2089 (fax)

Transracial Adoptive Parent Support : 888-448-8277

Raising Adopted Children. <http://www.raisingadoptedchildren.com/race.asp>

It has articles on transracial adoption.

Transracial Adoption Consulting. <http://www.msu.edu>

A Site by Dr. Amanda Baden with research articles and links on transracial adoption.

Voices of Adoption. <http://www.ibar.com>

Mission is to educate public and policy makers. Provide pre and post-adoption services.

2006 22nd Avenue

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415-759-9575