

## **Transracialization: Redirecting Traffic on Integration's One-Way Street**

by Dr. John W. Raible

My work as a multicultural educator drives my interest in integration and the creation of interracial families and friendships, schools and communities. As a teacher educator, my goal is to help teachers learn to care deeply for—and connect with—diverse students, their families, and their communities. In my work with adoptive families, my aim is to help parents and others to recognize the complexities of adoption and race, and how both impact different members of families touched by transracial adoption.

*Transracialization* is the term I use to describe what happens to certain individuals after they take part in long-term relationships that transcend racial boundaries. I came to this term while conducting research with white adults who grew up in transracial adoptive families, in other words, the non-adopted white siblings of transracial adoptees.

All of the adults in my study grew up with adopted Korean or African American brothers and sisters, yet only a few of them could be described as having transracialized their white identities. It is important to note that the few individuals I characterized as transracialized used their family experience as a springboard to forming close friendships with others *outside* their families.

Transracialization didn't just happen simply because they had a sibling of another race. Rather, it emerged when individuals developed a deep and sophisticated understanding of the dynamics of race and racism. This process was helped by key experiences that broke with the typical process of *racialization* (which I define as the socialization most of us go through whereby we learn the rules of race, which are in effect, the codes that serve to maintain race separation and the dominance of one race over all others).

I found that these white siblings came to their enhanced awareness by their immersion in situations where they experienced being in the minority themselves. They lived in predominantly African American or Latino neighborhoods, and attended worship services where they were in the minority as white people. Sometimes they were married to, partnered with, or had dated individuals of another race. Transracialized siblings also had other long-standing ties of friendship and chosen kinship with peers of color. Their long-term relationships enabled these siblings to transform their identities and enact new and creative ways of “doing” whiteness, in ways that I describe as “post-white.” Not that they stopped being white, but in post-modern fashion, they transformed their performance of whiteness in fluid and atypical ways.

I believe that the siblings in my study who were able to transracialize their identities provide a model for all of us. They offer a new way to think about integration, which is no longer viewed as a one-way street. In effect, transracialized siblings said, "If race-mixing is a good thing inside our family, then it should be a good thing out in the real world, too."

The challenge to those who care about racial harmony and social justice is this: How are we transracializing our own lives? It is no easy task to break out of the comfort zones within which racialization encourages us to remain. To transcend the limits imposed by racialization requires a huge commitment, as the siblings in my study have shown. But transracialization offers an answer to the unsolved riddle of how to effectively integrate our still highly segregated society. Whether we are identified as white or as people of color, each of us can commit to breaking the rules of racialization by transforming our families and communities, and in the process, our very identities.

---

*For more information and free resources about transracial adoption and international adoption, please visit John Raible Online at:*

<http://johnraible.wordpress.com/>

---

*Dr. John Raible's email address is [jraible3@unl.edu](mailto:jraible3@unl.edu). Please contact him for permission to reprint this article and to arrange a speaking engagement for your group or conference.*