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ABSTRACT

SHARING THE SPOTLIGHT: THE NON-ADOPTED SIBLINGS OF TRANSRACIAL ADOPTEES

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In the community of adoption and throughout its related literature, the needs and experiences of “invisible” or non-adopted children in transracial families have been largely overlooked. This study attempts to address that void by documenting the meaning and influences of transracial adoption in the lives of twelve non-adopted white adults who grew up with a transracially adopted brother or sister. The research used discourse analysis to document the narrative identities of the non-adopted siblings as they were enacted during interviews about transracial adoption. Five composite narrative identities are discussed, with distinctions made between those that were characterized as transracialized or un-transracialized. Transracialization is presented as a participant’s active engagement with discourses of race and adoption in ways that may result in “post-white” identities in non-adopted siblings. Transracialization is discussed in terms of its benefit to members of adoptive families and the professionals who serve them, including social workers, psychotherapists, and educators. Implications for the community of adoption and the field of education are offered, along with recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

My younger brother and I were both toddlers when his biological parents decided to adopt me in 1962. Like many small children, David had little if any say in the decision to add another child to the family. Yet having his family disrupted by the arrival of a biracial African American boy would undoubtedly impact his life in numerous ways.

Our mother likes to tell the story of how, when they first brought me home, David took me by the hand and gave me a child's eye tour of the house. When bedtime came we were tucked into our beds in the room we would share for the next decade, one brown boy and one white, side by side, wearing our matching pajamas. On our first night together as roommates and brothers, only a few minutes passed after the light had been turned out when David climbed out of bed and padded softly down the hall to my parents' room. David wondered if I were going to stay, and if so, for how long. My mother cuddled him on her lap reassuringly and quietly answered his questions. Then she remembered the medicine the pediatrician had prescribed for me in case I needed help falling asleep during the transition from foster care to life in my new family. Since I was already slumbering, she gave David a spoonful instead.

I share this family story for several reasons. To begin with, it illustrates the love and attention I received as a child newly adopted into a welcoming home. From this anecdote it is clear that the needs of the adopted child were anticipated by the adults; my parents and the family doctor had plans in place to ease a potentially bumpy transition. It
goes without saying that much thought had gone into the adoption in other ways before I ever entered my new home.

In addition, the story captures the excitement of all family members over the arrival of a child. Moreover, it represents the immediate and lasting bond of brotherhood that, through the act of adoption, became possible between siblings unrelated by blood and transcending even race. Most significantly for the purposes of this dissertation, I begin with this family story as a way to reframe the usual discourse on transracial adoption among academics and in the popular culture.

Statement of the Problem

In the literature and throughout "communities of adoption" (Raible, 2002), discussion of transracial adoption traditionally centers primarily on adopted children. To date, few studies have addressed the impact of adoption on the other children in transracial families, either as youngsters or as adults. The qualitative study described in this dissertation expands the parameters of transracial adoption discourse by refocusing the researcher's gaze on the typically overlooked white siblings of transracial adoptees. It intends to highlight the experiences of non-adopted siblings, thereby bringing into the spotlight their previously undocumented perspectives on the meaning of transracial adoption in their lives.

Approaches to Transracial Adoption Research

An ethnographic pilot study I conducted in 2001-2002 (Raible, 2002) clarified how transracial adoption is enacted at the nexus of two powerful constitutive discourses, namely, race and of adoption. Informed by the insights from my pilot study, the current study deliberately views transracial families from a new perspective: it "zooms out" for a
wider angle on transracial adoption taking into consideration the needs and experiences of children like my brother David.

Given the salience of adoption and race to the members of the community of adoption (Raible, 2002), it made sense to investigate whether and to what extent those discourses influence non-adopted siblings. In our particular case, certainly, my parents talked with my brother ahead of time, the same way they prepared the two of us a few years later while we awaited the arrival of our sister. Notwithstanding the pre-adoption preparation of children already in the family, my study focused particularly on how prepared families were for the post-adoption effects of transracial adoption.

Of course, the story of our family's journey through transracial adoption did not end with my arrival; rather, that is where our collective journey began. After our mother bore another child, the three of us-- David, my sister Ann, and I-- constituted a mixed sibling group, somewhat out of the ordinary because it was comprised of adopted and non-adopted children growing up in the same household. Our family was all the more extraordinary given the visibility of siblings of different races.

**Into the Spotlight**

In adoption discourse, the common positioning of transracial adoptees as children in need of rescue (Briggs, 2003) allows social workers and researchers to overlook the impact of adoption on non-adopted children. As a result, adoptees alone have been pushed to center stage to withstand the spotlight of public scrutiny. In contrast, non-adopted children are relegated largely to the shadows in the literature on adoption. That is, the experience of the siblings of adoptees has been ignored and even taken for granted, leaving their voices largely unheard in the research literature.
While their brothers' and sisters' lives have been rendered extraordinary through the act of adoption (witnessed in comments about the visible fact of adoption, such as "What a wonderful thing you did adopting her!"), the lives of non-adoptees until now have been ignored as ordinary and apparently unworthy of study. In contrast, the approach taken in the current study suggests that if adoption is to be viewed as an alternative but legitimate way to build families, and if the needs of non-adopted children are on a par with other members of adoptive families, then attention to the impact of transracial adoption on all family members is an important consideration. In this sense, the non-adopted white siblings of transracial adoptees can begin to share the spotlight.

**Purpose of the Study**

As an educational researcher with interests in the construction and performance of identities through language and related discourses, and particularly on the stage of race relations, I am naturally curious about individuals relegated to the shadows. What is the meaning-- spoken and unspoken-- of transracial adoption for the heretofore marginalized white siblings such as my adoptive brother and sister? How do the discourses of race and adoption play out in their lives as conscripted members of transracial families?

Looking back on my childhood, I never heard my siblings complain about having a brother who was biracial or who received special attention as the "exotic" non-white adoptee. As far as I know, they were never teased or ostracized on my account. Yet my interviews with other non-adopted white siblings tell a different tale. My research set out to learn what sense non-adopted children made of having a sibling whom others may have targeted for discrimination. For instance, how did racism affect them as young people developing their own racial identities?
The current study was designed to explore race and adoption issues as they came up in transracial families. For example, it sought to give voice to such questions as: What does it mean to one's identity to be known as the brother or sister of the adopted child of another color? Do white non-adopted siblings themselves experience-- or do they even perceive-- prejudice and discrimination? Alternately, is their sensitivity to race and adoption heightened? If so, how are their identities impacted?

When white parents adopt children of color, the fact of adoption, an ostensibly private family affair, becomes public, no longer a carefully guarded family secret as it once was in the not too distant past (Melosh, 2002). Since transracial family members do not visibly "match" in the eyes of curious onlookers, popular notions of what a family is supposed to look like are challenged. From this perspective, transracial adoption positions adoptive parents and their children, who must answer or ignore the stares and overt questions of the curious, as visibly marked participants in controversies over definitions of family, race relations, interracial intimacy, and other public conversations. Given these dynamics, other research questions about non-adopted siblings arise: When the transracial family appears together in public, how aware are non-adopted children of the stares of curiosity or hostility, so commonly reported by transracial adoptees? Do the siblings themselves experience any discomfort or perhaps pleasure at being marked as a visibly different family? How do they navigate the gaze of public scrutiny?

**Learning from Non-adopted Siblings**

In the discourse about transracial adoption that has evolved over the past half-century, little has been said by, or even about, the biological children of parents who have adopted transracially. Given the preponderance of studies of racial identity among
transracial adoptees (see Chapter 2), the altered focus for this study takes on added significance, especially since it considers sociocultural understandings of the situated and negotiated nature of identities. What more compelling site for studying the performance of racial identities than among individuals of different races within the same family?

To investigate the impact and meaning of transracial adoption in their lives, I conducted a series of in-depth interviews with twelve adult siblings of transracial adoptees. Examining transracial adoption from the perspective of non-adopted siblings provided an opportunity to gain fresh insights into how racial identifications unfold in specific social contexts and how adoption issues may impact identity development.

While many of the early research studies painted an invariably rosy picture of transracial adoption, research conducted over the last fifteen years has shed new light on the life-long issues confronting members of what might be called "mature" transracial families, that is, families where the children have reached adulthood. The findings from these more recent studies helped to shape the route of inquiry for this study. For instance, interviews with white families of adopted Native Canadian children unearthed, perhaps inadvertently, data about non-adopted siblings. In her interviews with parents, Marie Adams (2002) found that several adult children (who happened to be present during the interviews) reported having sheltered their parents during the children's adolescent years by keeping them uninformed about their adopted siblings' troubling behaviors. For example, siblings had never told on their brother for sneaking out of the bedroom window late at night to go partying with friends.

The phenomenon of keeping secrets from (or protecting) parents made me wonder whether adult siblings now articulate unusual regrets or resentments beyond more
predictable sibling rivalries. For example, did they recount childhood experiences, with
racism perhaps (as are frequently reported by adoptees), or with other troublesome
behaviors-- either their own or their sibling's-- about which they have never spoken to
their parents? Did they wish their parents had never adopted a child of color? Did they
wish they had adopted a white child instead, or none at all? Did they express compassion,
anger, or worry over the challenges their parents faced raising children?

In a more positive vein, I wanted to ascertain whether the siblings felt they had
benefited personally from growing up in a transracial family: Have they themselves
considered adopting a child? Did they feel their understanding of and sensitivity to racial
issues-- or to changing definitions of family, for that matter-- had been heightened
because of the non-traditional composition of their families? (For the full set of interview
questions, see Appendix A).

**Significance of the Study**

Shifting the researcher's gaze from individuals who were adopted to the brothers
and sisters of transracial adoptees opened new possibilities for the exploration of racial
identity development within interracial contexts. Such a shift in focus may be of interest
to scholars across several academic disciplines, not just to researchers interested in
adoption. Among multicultural educators, for instance, racial (and other) identities are
held to be significant to the way individuals-- students and teachers in particular-- make
sense of their world and their lived experience (Tatum, 1997; Sleeter & Grant, 1999;
Howard, 1999; Nieto, 2004; Raible & Nieto, 2003; Yon, 2000; Dolby, 2000; McIntyre,
1999; Sadowsky, 2003; Sheets & Hollins, 1999). While racial identity formation has been
a frequent area of investigation by various adoption researchers (Simon & Alstein, 1987;
Miranda, 2003; Pinderhughes, 1997; McRoy, Zurcher, Lauderdale, & Anderson, 1982; Luker, 2000; Lieberman, 2001; Kim, 1999; Corbett, 1997, Johnson, Shireman, & Watson, 1987), not one to date has examined the racial identities of white and non-adopted siblings. In this regard, the current study breaks new ground.

Moreover, in contrast to the research described in this dissertation, few studies of transracial adoption have viewed it through a sociocultural lens. More often in the existing literature race is taken to be an essential attribute one possesses, while racial identities are understood as a product of psychology rather than as repeated identifications one chooses and performs in relation to others and one's environment. When race is reified in this way as a static, essential trait possessed by individuals that in turn influences their psychology, then racial identities can be viewed as completed outcomes of a socialization process (such as parenting or adoption) that takes place in childhood. Under this logic, parents are thought to impart under normal circumstances "their own" racial identities to their children. In the case of transracial parenting, researchers have looked at the racial identities of adoptees as a deviation from the normal parent-to-child transmission model. The outcomes of transracial parenting have been measured, following this conceptualization, as investigators attempted to use an appropriate research instrument. As a result, researchers have drawn conclusions about the positive or negative impact of transracial adoption based on the measurement of adoptees' racial identities or self-esteem.

This approach to research is problematic from a sociocultural perspective. To begin with, it reifies race and accepts typical understandings of race as "just the way things are." By contrast, from the critical and postmodernist standpoints used in my own
studies, both the reification of race and the essentialization of identities are necessarily problematized. From a sociocultural perspective, race is understood more as a *verb* rather than as a *noun* (Arvizu, 2002). That is, race is viewed as constructed socially and negotiated repeatedly through interactions between individuals and in response to multiple and changing contexts, as well as within and through various constituting discourses.

**The Pilot Study: Ethnographic Research in a "Community of Adoption"**

Previously, I had experimented with transcending the limitations of quantitative, modernist-oriented research by conducting a short-term ethnographic pilot study of identities in a "community of adoption" (Raible, 2002). I attempted to investigate, using qualitative (specifically, ethnographic) methods, the racial identities of community participants as fluid, dynamic, and socially constructed choices and performances that are negotiated between individuals in dialogue with each other and within available discourses. I applied poststructuralist and sociocultural theories of language (drawing on Gee, 1999; Pennycook, 2000; Luke, 2002, among others) to investigate how racial identities are continually enacted in response to the various subject positions made available to individuals through the multiple discourses in which they participate. In the pilot study, I drew on Stanton Wortham's (2001) methodology for narrative analysis to uncover the "kinds of selves" my study participants constructed through their use of language, by analyzing narratives from interview transcripts. In this way, I gained insight into the discursive construction of situated and negotiated identities within an adoption community.
Methodology and Design of the Dissertation Study

As an extension of my earlier research in the community of adoption, the inquiry described in this dissertation built on the pilot study. The current research set out to answer three broad, related questions:

(1) What is the meaning of transracial adoption to the non-adopted siblings of adoptees?

(2) What discourses do non-adopted siblings draw upon to make sense of their experience as members of transracial families?

(3) What kind of education and post-adoption support might members of transracial families need?

As already mentioned, the research undertaken for this dissertation built on my earlier ethnographic investigation of discourses of race and adoption (Raible, 2002). In the present study, I interviewed separately twelve non-adopted adults who grew up in transracial families with adopted siblings. The number and racial classification of interview participants were limited intentionally. I was interested not so much in casting a wide net to survey a broad sample of individuals who might then become mere statistics. Rather, I sought to develop an in-depth, if necessarily partial, understanding of the meaning of transracial adoption to particular individuals. Put simply, I prioritized quality data over quantity. I hoped initially that the ten interviewees could provide rich insights
into the meaning of transracial adoption in their own lives, and thus potentially shed light on the broader phenomenon for researchers, child welfare practitioners, adoptive parents, and others.

The study participants were selected from referrals made by contacts throughout the network of adoptive parent groups, agencies, and conferences that comprise a large part of what I call the "community of adoption" in which I participate as an insider. Participants were chosen according to the following criteria: age (with a preference for adults with established lifestyles, families, and occupations), status as independent adults (versus still-dependent children or youth who are living in their parents' households), status as the biological child of two parents who identify as white or European American (i.e., to minimize complexity by avoiding interviews with the biological offspring of "mixed marriages"), and geographic diversity (according to where they grew up, but limited to the United States; families who perhaps lived for a time in Africa or Latin America, while no doubt providing fascinating narratives, do not reflect the more typical transracial family experience I sought to document). In short, I gathered a diverse pool of mature white adults from various parts of the country that were raised in transracial adoptive families.

Drawing on Seidman's (1998) phenomenological interview methodology, each participant signed a form consenting to the interview, which authorized me to audiotape our conversation together. I developed a 60-question interview protocol, incorporating the kinds of questions articulated throughout this introduction (see Appendix A). Questions were carefully constructed to ensure open-endedness and to prompt interviewees to share personal narratives.
Taped data from the interviews were later transcribed, coded, and analyzed, using Wortham's (2001) approach to narrative analysis as well as critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2002; Gee, 2001). Because I was interested in the ways identities are enacted discursively, narrative analysis was chosen because it offers researchers a window into the operation of language in use. I will provide a more in depth discussion of Wortham's theory of narrative analysis in chapter 4. For now, suffice it to say that Wortham maintains that the narratives constructed by speakers in conversation with an interlocutor can replicate the relational dynamics at play in the narratives themselves. Wortham has shown that the narrator often reveals the "kinds of selves" with which he or she identifies, revealing how he or she wants to be seen. In other words, through a systematic analysis of the negotiated narratives enacted in the interviews, I attempted to gain insight into the multiple identities of my study participants. I was then able to document to some extent the various discourses upon which they drew to construct their narrative identities.

The findings from this study (discussed in Chapter 7) suggest that current practices in the community of adoption may be improved dramatically by the provision of post-adoption support services and family education that gives explicit attention to both race and adoption issues, and to both adoptees and their non-adopted siblings. Given the more balanced and circumspect picture painted by recent transracial adoption studies, including this one, I argue that such post-adoption services should be based on the documented needs of members of both young and mature transracial families. That is, service providers and researchers can ask families directly what they need in the way of support at different life stages as they negotiate complex issues of race and adoption. The
research described here contributes to the documentation of the needs of all members of mature transracial families.

Enhancing Support to Adoptees and Their Families

As alluded to in the preceding section, individuals in families formed through transracial adoption often face unique challenges related to complex, intersecting issues of race and adoption. In the pilot study (Raible, 2002), I began to document some of these challenges by investigating the ways discourses of race and adoption impact and actually create transracial adoption as a social practice.

In conducting that research, it became evident that traditional models for preparing adoptive parents frequently are limited by a number of factors. One is the accessibility parents have to educational resources, due in part to constraints of geography. Typically, only parents who happen to live near adoption agencies offering post-adoption assistance are able to benefit from any professional support such as family counseling or respite child care. Geographically isolated families, and those whose nearby agencies do not offer their clients services beyond adoptive placements, often must make do on their own with little or no training and support, either prior to or after the adoption (Dalen, 2001). Also, Monica Dalen (2001) found that adoptive parents, who had to “prove” their ability to be good parents in order to adopt, sometimes feel less inclined to return to the agencies that placed children with them when problems arise down the road. The result is that many transracial adoptive families find themselves unprepared for the challenges presented by the intertwined and complex issues of race and adoption.
Adoption by itself is a dramatic, life-altering event for families. Adoption has been shown to incur lifelong consequences for the different members of the adoption triad, that is, for birth parents, adoptive parents, and of course, adoptees (Pavao, 1998; Brodzinsky, 1990), as well as their siblings (Simon & Alstein, 1987; Ladner, 1977), who are not usually included in conceptualizations of the triad. Adoptions that cross race lines add, on top of the core adoption issues, a complicated overlay of concerns pertaining to difference and discrimination (Dalen, 2001; Bartholet, 1991). All of these factors suggest that ongoing support and education are vital to the well-being and happiness of family members and to the success (i.e., permanence and stability) of transracial placements.

**Research With "Mature" Families**

Devon Brooks (2000) is one of a growing number of researchers who have studied the effects of transracial adoption in adulthood. Brooks observes that, given the nature of the challenges faced by transracially adopted individuals over the life-span, there is good reason for child welfare professionals to routinely assess the needs of children who have been adopted transracially, in addition to assessing the potential for their adoptive parents to raise a child of another race. Yet in spite of the growing recognition among child welfare practitioners, it is regrettably true that too many parents never receive any amount of training in the core issues basic to adoption (Pavao, 1998; Soll, 2000), much less guidance in how to address race and cultural differences in their own families.

Based on existing research and on my own lifelong experience in the community of adoption, it has become apparent that far too many transracial families are improperly served and unprepared for the recurring challenges posed by transracial adoption.
Consequently, adopted children-- and later, adopted adults and their parents-- are vulnerable to potential problems. What remains murky in the literature, and what this dissertation addresses explicitly, are the consequences and impact of race and adoption issues for the heretofore overlooked non-adopted members of families touched by transracial adoption, namely, the siblings of adoptees.

While much of the literature on transracial adoption focuses on younger families with children still living at home, I am particularly interested in the impact of transracial adoption on members of mature adoptive families. I define mature families as families with grown children, in which parents and children typically do not live together any longer. Given the evolving diachronic understanding of transracial adoption, that is, over the course of the life span, which, as I have indicated, has only recently been documented, the developing research literature benefits from an expanded focus that includes the experience of other members of transracial families.

**Limitations and Challenges of the Dissertation Research**

Earlier studies that relied on adoptive parents' interpretations of their dependent children's experiences are inherently biased, although not necessarily without merit. Similarly, the current study is necessarily limited by its explicit focus on the memories and subjective interpretations of adult siblings of adoptees. That is, there are risks involved by relying on the childhood memories of interviewees, and asking them to reinterpret past events involving themselves and other family members. Just as interviews and surveys done with adopted children and adolescents are limited by the immaturity and dependent status of study participants, a reliance on one-shot interviews, even with adults, runs the risk of falling into the synchronic trap. As a researcher attempting to
contribute to a diachronic perspective on transracial adoption, I acknowledge that I ran the risk of representing adoption from a synchronic perspective, that is, as if adoption were a one-time, already completed event that occurred in the past only.

Selection of Interviewees

The decision to interview adult siblings who met certain criteria was not made arbitrarily. Even so, by limiting the pool of interviewees I recognize that I may have solicited particular perspectives while avoiding others. For example, selecting only adults who live on their own (rather than with their parents) reflects a class bias skewed towards people in middle to upper income brackets. It may also reflect a certain cultural orientation in which extended families are not expected to share the same household. However, given that transracial adoption usually occurs in middle class white families, my choice of interview participants nonetheless provides a pool of representative transracial families from which insights may be drawn.

A Partial View of Transracial Adoption

That families with mixed sibling groups do not reflect the composition of all transracial families should be obvious. That is, there are many transracial families in which all the children were adopted and none were born into the family. In fact, research by Brooks and Barth (2000) suggests that it is precisely in families with both adopted and non-adopted children that more problems may arise. Given this fact, the current study involving only families with mixed (adopted and non-adopted) sibling groups may paint a skewed picture of transracial family life, in that the interviews presented here potentially reflect more problems than are experienced by other transracial families.
However, it is important to keep in mind that this study did not set out to document problems or assess whether or not transracial adoption was successful. Rather, I wanted to find out what non-adopted siblings felt and said about their own experiences with transracial adoption. Towards the end of each interview, I did ask participants to define a successful transracial adoption and an unsuccessful one; I then inquired how successful they thought transracial adoption had been in their own family. In my view, this is quite different from me making such an evaluation as a researcher.

To reiterate, this study does not claim to represent some quintessential transracial adoption experience. Rather, it intends only to document the various experiences of a small but nevertheless representative group of individual siblings and their families.

**Role(s) of the Researcher**

As an insider who has worn many hats within the community of adoption, any research I undertake inevitably will be tainted by the biases informed by my own experience. Admittedly, my research will be tempered by inclinations of self-interest. Therefore, to counter such a tendency, I feel a special obligation to make transparent my various roles and investments in the community of adoption.

I began my involvement with transracial adoption as the relinquished birth child of an unmarried interracial couple (that is, a European American birth mother and African American birth father). Next, I spent nearly three years in foster care, since in the standards of that era I was labeled "hard to place;" social workers thought I was "too light" to go into a black family and "too dark" for placement with a white family. Interestingly, these same social workers nevertheless deemed it appropriate for me to be cared for in an African American foster home. There I stayed before being adopted by a
white family in 1963. As a result of these outdated explanations for moves into different family contexts, I used to blame social workers for their apparent lack of concern and understanding when placing children "experimentally" in transracial situations.

My biases and perspectives have been further shaped through my work (both volunteer and compensated) as an educator and consultant working with adoption agencies and parent groups over the last quarter century. As well as being a former foster child and transracially adopted son and sibling, I am also the adoptive father of two African American sons, both of whom came to me after extended stays in foster care. It goes without saying that my personal involvement and my passion for the issue continue to influence the manner in which I approach and understand this particular topic of research. For example, I have come to appreciate the quality of care provided by many foster families; as a result, I tend to part ways with researchers who continue to decry the negative effects of out-of-home care, whether provided by foster families or legal guardians who may be the children's kin.

Moreover, within the public discourse of transracial adoption, I have played numerous roles during my lifetime. For instance, I have argued over the years from various subject positions, and I am not ashamed to own all of them: I played the darling of adoptive parent groups as a teenaged panelist at various adoption conferences in the 1970s, when I regaled audiences with light-hearted, non-threatening stories of encountering both ignorance and acceptance. Ten years later, I found myself positioned by the producers and hosts of television talk shows as the "angry young adoptee" presumably opposed to transracial adoption (most notoriously, on the Joan Rivers Show and Sally Jesse Raphael in 1990). Later, in interviews by journalists I was represented as
a committed but struggling single parent of two special needs children adopted from foster care.

At the same time, over the past twenty years I have become known as a workshop leader, conference presenter, and public speaker. For example, I was asked to appear on screen in the documentary Struggle for Identity: Issues in Transracial Adoption. I was invited to join an adoptive parent organization's federal grant advisory board. In the 1990s, I was elected to a term as president of an African American adoptive parent group in Los Angeles. In 2000, I participated as an adult adoptee representative at a national summit of scholars and child welfare specialists gathered to set the research agenda for a federally funded study of transracial adoption. To this day, I continue my involvement in the community of adoption as an online consultant for one organization's "Ask the Experts" adoption web site (at www.nysccc.org), in addition to working as a trainer consulting to adoption agencies and adoptive parent organizations, and hosting my own informational web site, "John Raible Online" (at www-unix.oit.umass.edu/~jraible).

Finally, rather than choosing to engage any longer in the debate over whether children of color should be placed with white parents, I now focus on educating parents and others about the long-term needs of transracial adoptees and their family members.

To reiterate, this summary serves as an acknowledgement of my admittedly biased perspective on the topic at hand. Whereas many of the early studies can be read as emotional appeals and rationales explicitly in favor of transracial adoption, this study takes a more circumspect view. As an insider researcher with known (that is, public) opinions on the topic, the research described here has been undertaken with an eye
toward providing a well-rounded perspective on what I consider to be a complex and controversial social practice.

**Overview of Dissertation Chapters**

In Chapter 2, I review the existing literature on transracial adoption research, pointing out gaps addressed by the dissertation. Chapter 3 offers a detailed explanation of and rationale for my chosen approach to working with the data, while Chapter 4 provides a general explanation of the study's overall design and theoretical framework. Taken together, Chapters 3 and 4 articulate the ways I drew on narratology and used narrative analysis to develop findings from the audiotaped and transcribed interviews.

Chapters 5 and 6 present the data in the form of fully developed profiles for each of the study participants. To facilitate readability, the twelve profiles have been divided in half to be presented across two chapters, instead of the traditional one chapter. Chapter 7 presents my analysis of the data, while Chapter 8 offers a discussion of the findings from the interviews. It also documents the recurring themes that arose in the collected interviews. The final chapter (Chapter 9) discusses my conclusions, as well as the implications of the present study and recommendations for future research.
Chapter 2 provides background information to situate the current study of non-adopted siblings of transracial adoptees. This chapter is not intended to be read as a traditional literature review of transracial adoption research. Rather, my intent is to explore in broad terms the related discourses-- both academic and popular-- that inform the discourse of transracial adoption. In doing so, my aim is to offer some idea of the complex nature of the sociopolitical context in which transracial adoption has been practiced, discussed, and researched, with an eye to understanding the experience of the non-adopted siblings interviewed for this particular study.

In Chapter 2, I highlight the controversy that has surrounded transracial adoption. In my pilot study I showed how transracial adoption arises from the nexus of two constitutive discourses, race and adoption (Raible, 2002). In this chapter, I argue that transracial adoption remains controversial not just because race and race-mixing are
sensitive issues in our color-conscious society. Race is only half of the equation that generates controversy; equally important is the contested discourse of adoption. Due to the high visibility of transracial families—in which parents and children do not "match"—attention is called repeatedly to adoption as well as to race. Chapter 2 suggests that transracial adoption rests on a public view of adoption that is, at best, ambivalent (Melosh, 2002).

The Origins of Transracial Adoption

The first documented instance of a transracial legal adoption of a U.S.-born child was the adoption of an African American boy by his white foster parents in Minnesota in 1948 (Fogg-Davis, 2002). Nevertheless, in popular and academic discourse, the origins of transracial adoption are frequently attributed to the aftermath of mid-century U.S. military intervention in Korea, and subsequent humanitarian concern for children orphaned by that war. The popular concern for war orphans corresponded to a growing public acceptance of "stranger" (or formal) adoptions that were being promoted at the time by the increasingly influential profession of social work (Melosh, 2002, p. 105).

According to historian Barbara Melosh (2002), the adoption of children by strangers (rather than by extended family or acquaintances) became widely accepted during the two or so decades of optimism following the end of the Second World War. Whereas in the first decades of the 20th century most unmarried mothers would not think to formally relinquish children born to them out of wedlock, by 1970—the year with the highest number of adoptions recorded in U.S. history—some eighty per cent of so-called "illegitimate" children were legally relinquished. Melosh attributes the escalating rate of adoption to the growing influence of social workers who, as a profession during the first
half of the 20th century, successfully forged a broad middle class consensus that
promoted adoption as the "best solution" for a threefold problem social workers claimed
as their domain: the stigmatization of illegitimate children, the rehabilitation of the
"fallen" women who were their mothers, and the fulfillment of the desires of infertile
married couples who yearned to become parents (p. 4).

The North American public gradually became aware of transnational adoption due
to well-meaning efforts to find homes for the socially ostracized "Amerasian" offspring
of U.S. servicemen and Korean mothers (Ibid., p. 163). Public concern for "rescuing" the
unwitting child bystanders to (or victims of) U.S. foreign policy reflects a pattern noted
by historian Laura Briggs (2004) whereby, through its own interventions, the United
States paradoxically contributes to the very conditions from which children are then
deemed in need of rescue. Ironically, after escalating—if not causing—a localized crisis
for women and children (e.g., war and poverty), Briggs argues that the United States
positions itself frequently as the great rescuer. In her analysis of Madonna and child
iconography and the related visual trope of the motherless waif, Briggs demonstrates the
ideological work done by the trope on behalf of globalization and the new imperialism.
Furthermore, she links this iconography, U.S. foreign and domestic policies, transnational
and transracial adoption, and the discourse of rescue in a web of rationalization.

In the decade following the Second World War, 2,418 children born in Asia were
brought to the United States to be adopted (Simon, Alstein, & Melli, 1994). Interestingly,
two-thirds of these children were Japanese (1,602, to be exact; ibid.). Some of these
children were victims of the two atomic bombs dropped by the United States in 1945;
some were orphaned by other battles. A humanitarian effort inspired by pangs of
conscience prompted a few liberal-minded advocates in the United States to champion the plight of Japanese children, portrayed in the media as the innocent victims of overreaching U.S intervention (Briggs, 2004). These underreported statistics from the post-war decade help to dispel the misconception that transracial adoption did not occur prior to the adoption of Korean war orphans in the 1950s. Moreover, the pattern documented by Briggs (2004), whereby the United States both creates and then rescues child victims of its own policies, set the stage for transracial adoption on the home front beginning in the late 1940s.

As social workers realized that white North Americans could be persuaded to adopt children who did not necessarily resemble their new parents, agencies began to relax longstanding policies to physically "match" children and families. Matching had been child welfare policy from about 1930 to 1960, and not only according to race; religion, temperament, intelligence, physical appearance, and so on were other factors taken into consideration in the early days of formal adoption (Melosh, 2002, p. 54). Historian Barbara Melosh (2002) explains the prominence of matching:

Social workers emphasized matching as a tool used to craft a good "fit" between child and family. Matching also served the larger social purpose of boundary maintenance, and thus was a stay against fears of transgression associated with adoption (p. 102).

Significantly, in her study of adoption in the United States, Melosh found that the prevention of race-mixing was a central concern cited by the U.S. Children's Bureau in its advocacy for increased regulation of adoption (Ibid.). In other words, it is clear that the discourse of adoption had from its inception been concerned with identity, race, boundary crossing, and boundary policing. However, as the political climate in the 1950s shifted in
response to the demands for equality asserted by the Civil Rights movement, a liberal concern for the arguably innocent domestic victims of U.S. racism gained momentum. Thus, the plight of previously "unadoptable" biracial youngsters and, interestingly, Native American children on impoverished reservations began to draw public attention (Briggs, 2004).

**Transracial Adoption Under Scrutiny**

Over the course of its relatively brief history in the U.S. as child welfare policy and practice, transracial adoption has come to be studied by investigators of race and racial identity (Falk, 1970; Ahn, 1989; DeBerry, Scarr, & Weinberg, 1996; McRoy, Zurcher, Lauderdale, & Anderson, 1982), as well as by researchers interested in the psychological issues germane to the experience of adoption (Shepherd, 1964; Priddy & Kirgan, 1971; Simon & Alstein, 1987; Brodzinsky & Schecter, 1990). Legal scholars (Bartholet, 1993; Howe, 1994; Perry, 1994; Townsend, 1995) and researchers of policy and practice in the field of social work (Sellers, 1969; Nutt & Snyder, 1973; Chimezie, 1975; Grow & Shapiro, 1974; McRoy & Zurcher, 1983; Cook & Gedlak, 1986; Hill, 1977; Simon, Alstein, & Melli, 1994; Patton, 2000; Ladner, 1977; Melosh, 2002; Gilles & Kroll, 1991; Rodriguez & Meyer, 1990) have also taken an academic interest in the topic.

The existing literature on transracial adoption focuses generally on the experience of domestic adoptees, primarily African American, biracial (black/white), and Native American children adopted by white parents. The research also includes transnational adoptees, the vast majority of whom are from Korea (cf. Johnson, Shireman, & Watson,
Researchers have been interested predominantly in determining the outcome of transracial and transnational placements, regarding transracial families almost as subjects of a grand social experiment. A few researchers, such as Ruth McRoy and her colleagues, have compared transracial and inracial adoptions (McRoy & Zurcher, 1983; McRoy et al., 1982), while others have compared adopted and non-adopted children. Because of the young age of adoptees at the time of these early studies, many researchers relied mainly on the intrinsically biased observations made by parents of their children in childhood and adolescence.

The overall consensus of researchers from the 1950s to 1990 has been that transracial adoption posed no significant challenges or burdens for adopted children, and that such children turned out no differently from children adopted by parents of their same race (Dalen, 1999). Furthermore, proponents of transracial adoption frequently refer to research findings that show little, if any, detrimental effect on the self-esteem and racial identities of transracially adopted children (Simon, Alstein, & Melli, 1994). It is important to bear in mind that adoption itself is often taken uncritically as a given--or to state it more emphatically, as an inherently positive phenomenon in the lives of children. This assumption reflects the "best solution" pro-adoption bias documented by Melosh (2002) during the second half of the twentieth century. Meanwhile, throughout much of the literature, race and racism have been largely dismissed as playing little if any role in adoptive families.
While focused mainly on adoptees, the research on transracial adoption does include the experience of adoptive parents (Priddy & Kirgan, 1971; Simon & Alstein, 1987; Ladner, 1977, Grow & Shapiro, 1974; Adams, 2000; Barthalet, 1993) as well as that of adopted and non-adopted children living in transracial families (Simon & Alstein, 1987). Researchers typically position non-adopted children as the norm, using them almost as a reference group against which to measure the self-esteem and racial identities of adopted children. Significantly, no published research to date has examined in depth the impact of transracial adoption on the adult identities of non-adopted siblings.

There are a few exceptions to the predominant focus on young transracial families (i.e., families with transracially adopted children or adolescents who are still living at home). One exception is Simon and Alstein's (1994) longitudinal study of transracial families spanning a twenty-year period beginning in 1971. The team followed 204 families and compared the self-esteem and adjustment of transracial adoptees with their white siblings, both adopted and non-adopted. The study concluded that there were no significant differences between the three groups of children.

Another longitudinal study was originally designed to determine "whether race difference and racial isolation … pose a more potent determinant for a child's adoptive adjustment than the discontinuities and hazards associated with delayed placement" (Feigelman & Silverman, 1983). Feigelman and Silverman (1983) addressed a concern raised repeatedly by transracial adoption proponents: was making children wait for same-race adoptive parents was worse than placing them with parents of a different race? Based on data from the first two waves of the study, the researchers concluded that
delayed placements were more detrimental to an adopted child's well-being than
transracial adoption.

While the original study by Feigelman and Silverman (1983) did not specifically
look at non-adopted children, their data were used in a later study that included non-
adopted children. Devon Brooks and Richard Barth (1999) analyzed a third wave of data
obtained from these same adoptive parents, whose children had since reached adulthood.
Specifically, they looked at the influence of a number of variables, including family
structure, on the adjustment of adopted children of diverse backgrounds. When they
analyzed the impact of four different types of families, (namely, where the adoptee was
an only child, where there were only adopted children, where there were adopted children
along with non-adopted children, and where the adoptee was the only adopted child
among other non-adopted children), they found that adoptions were less successful when
adopted and non-adopted children were mixed together in one household. Parents
reported the most problems (e.g., with school, drugs, the law, and running away) when
adopted males—especially those who were white or African American—were raised in
families where they were the lone adoptee among other non-adopted siblings. This
finding may hold particular implications for the sibling groups represented in the current
dissertation research, since all of them, by design, are comprised of adopted and non-
adopted siblings together. It would be interesting, too, to examine the impact on a non-
adopted sibling if he or she were the only child born to a family in which all the other
children had been adopted.
The Transracial Adoption Controversy

Fifty years or so into the social experiment that has come to be known as transracial adoption, the practice of placing children of one race for adoption by parents of another race continues to generate controversy. At the convergence of contested discourses of race and adoption, transracial adoption highlights competing definitions of identity and personal happiness, as well as contested notions of the roles and responsibilities of parents (particularly mothers), other kin, and community in the lives of vulnerable children. Moreover, transracial adoption, particularly when it involves biracial children, in the words of political scientist Hawley Fogg-Davis (2002) "symbolizes white-black miscegenation, a social and once legal taboo that has persisted… since the slavery era" (p. 5).

To complicate matters even further, as part of the larger discourse of adoption, arguments both for and against transracial adoption frequently pit the rights of one party against those of another. For example, individual parental rights (e.g., an adoptive parent's right to adopt any child or a birth mother's right to privacy and anonymity) vie for supremacy over children's "best interests" (e.g., the right of children in the child welfare system to permanent adoptive versus temporary foster homes, or adoptees' rights to personal information such as their biological family’s history).

It is important to note that the transracial adoption controversy is situated within a larger context of social movements (such as the women’s movement and Gay Liberation) that gained prominence in the 1970s, including the movement for adoptees' rights and open records, and a parallel movement for adoption reform largely led by disillusioned birth mothers (cf. Sorosky, Baran, & Pannor, 1978).
The intensity of the controversy surrounding transracial adoption may seem surprising, given that only a tiny percentage of all adoptions actually involve parents and children of different races. For instance, Melosh (2002) observes that transracial placements "represented no more than two or three percent of all adoptions even at their peak in 1971" (p. 159). While government agencies do not maintain records of the exact numbers of such placements, we do know that the number of transracial adoptions declined sharply in the early 1970s. According to Elizabeth Bartholet (1993), a Harvard law professor and the parent of children adopted from Latin America, the number of transracial placements peaked in 1971. After reaching an all-time high of 2,574, transracial placements declined by more than half in 1973 to 1,091; two years later, according to Bartholet (1993), that number dropped again to only 831 transracial placements.

**Federal Legislation and Transracial Adoption**

It may be of interest to note that although the federal government does not require agencies to report adoptions as transracial, and therefore has no reliable data on the numbers of such placements in various states, Congress nevertheless saw fit to pass legislation in the 1990s to increase the number of transracial adoptions through the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA, 1994), which was clarified and amended two years later by the Inter-Ethnic Placement Act (IEPA, 1996). I interpret the MEPA-IEPA legislation as an emotional and political reaction to the continuing controversy, rather than to demonstrated need, and in particular, to effective lobbying by vocal proponents of transracial adoption. In the early 1990s, lawmakers were lobbied by pro-adoption forces (primarily adoptive parent groups) whose discourse asserted that without enough
minority families willing to adopt, too many children, approximately half of whom are children of color, would be left to "languish" in foster care (Simon, Alstein, & Melli, 1994). Such an argument reinforced the position of white middle class parents in the U.S. as the ultimate rescuers of needy children of color (Patton, 2000, p. 159), while self-servingly demoting foster families to second-rate status at best. Following the pattern observed by historian Briggs (2004), MEPA-IEPA maintained the tradition of focusing public discourse on the alleged benefits of domestic (and related foreign) policies for the middle class, while obfuscating critique of governmental complicity in the very crises that cause children to "need" adoption in the first place.

The pro-adoption lobbying of Congress, which was then moderated by more circumspect adoption advocates, resulted in the passage of MEPA-IEPA. Whether intended or not, the legislation's effect was to preserve the options for white adopters to adopt any child, with one notable restriction. Due to the complex history of intergovernmental relations between the federal government and American Indian tribes, it is now difficult, if not illegal in most cases, for non-Natives to adopt Native American children. Congress passed the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA, 1986) long before MEPA-IEPA in the 1990s. The ICWA resulted from concern over the alarming rate of adoptions of Native children away from their home communities.

To illustrate the crisis ravaging Native communities, Simon, Alstein & Melli (1994) documented how during one year (1974), up to thirty-five per cent of all Native children were removed from their families and were either placed in foster care, institutionalized, or adopted. Furthermore, the authors maintain that the rate of adoption
of Indian children was twenty times higher than the national adoption rate. According to Simon, Alstein and Melli (1994),

The ICWA of 1978 (PL 95-608) was designed to prevent the decimation of Indian tribes and the breakdown of Indian families by transracial placement of Native American children... [The Indian Child Welfare Act] was intended to safeguard Native American culture by keeping families and tribes together and within their native environments (p. 8).

As the authors of several of the most widely regarded studies of transracial adoption, the voices of Rita Simon and Howard Alstein especially resonate throughout academia, in the halls of Congress, and in the adoption community. It seems remarkable that, as outspoken pro-transracial adoption advocates, Simon & Alstein (1994) nevertheless strike a notably different tone when considering the transracial adoption of Indian children. In their own words,

The case of Native Americans is a special one. Native Americans have been subjected to a singularly tragic fate, and their children have been particularly vulnerable (p. 47).

The authors' tone sounds sympathetic, even apologetic, as they explain the necessity of a humane policy that, in their view, justifiably prohibits the transracial adoption of Native youth. Yet following their line of reasoning, one might just as reasonably argue that the case of African American communities, given the repercussions of three hundred years of slavery and discrimination, is similarly "tragic" and "special." Regardless, even though the Indian Adoption Project had placed approximately seven hundred Native children with white parents between 1958 and 1967 (Fanshel, 1972, cited in Melosh, 2002, p. 159), Melosh explains that the transracial adoption of American Indians is now outlawed, "rendering these particular adoptive families a historical artifact of a now-repudiated
social experiment” (Ibid., p. 160). It remains to be seen whether public opinion will similarly challenge, discredit, and halt non-Native transracial adoptions in the future.

**Race Discourse and the Marketing of Babies**

In the decade since passage of the MEPA-IEPA legislation that was designed specifically to motivate domestic adopters, there has been a slow but steady increase in the number of adoptions from foster care (Testa, 2004). According to Mark Testa (2004), director of the Children and Family Research Center at the University of Illinois, most of these children tend to be older than the infants usually sought by potential adopters. Significantly, many of the families adding to the rising rate of adoptions from foster care were relatives who had not been considered previously as potential adopters (Ibid., p. 119). Testa (2004) maintains that ”since 1997, relatives have become the fastest growing source of new adoptive homes for foster children” (p. 119).

In terms of the controversy, it is not unlikely that today’s social workers, many of whom remain skeptical of transracial adoption, may have shifted their strategy in response to the constraints imposed by the federal legislation. That is, to now prioritize for recruitment the extended family members (who may be of the same race as the children in care) may reflect one way to circumvent MEPA-IEPA’s pro-transracial adoption bias.

Meanwhile, adoptions of children from other countries, many of which involve white parents and children of color, increased dramatically in the same period. Since 1990, U.S. parents adopted an estimated seven to ten thousand children per year from abroad (Melosh, 2002).
Another significant fact continues to influence the controversy in ways that may not be openly acknowledged by the various factions: As Fogg-Davis (2002) points out, many, if not most, domestic transracial adoptions involve children who have at least one African American birth parent. To put it bluntly, children with lighter skin are easier to place than dark-skinned children. That biracial babies are preferred (that is, as the second-best alternative when parents find out how long they will have to wait for a prized healthy white infant) is reflected in the startling frequency with which agencies charge differentiated adoption fees. Simon, Alstein & Melli (1994) documented one such fee schedule in 1990: $7,500 for a white infant, $3,800 for a biracial infant, and $2,200.90 for a black infant (p. 11).

More recently, a 2004 article in the Christian Science Monitor reported that many agencies continue to use differentiated adoption fee schedules, for example, charging $40,000 to adopt a white baby, $18,000 for a biracial child, and only $10,000-12,000 for an African American infant. While agencies are careful to explain that they do not sell babies per se, they apparently feel justified in charging variable "fees for service," as if it somehow costs them more or less to supervise the home studies and placements of children according to their skin color. Such fee policies are eerily reflective of supply and demand economics, and the “desirability” of children according to perceptions of their race and color.

The Persistence of the Controversy

Among proponents of transracial adoption, the drop in transracial placements in the early 1970s is often attributed to the chilling influence that a small but prominent group of social workers allegedly held in the field of child welfare. Proponents contend
that adoption agencies were compelled to react cautiously to the infamous anti-transracial adoption position paper issued by the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW). In 1972 and in subsequent statements, the black nationalist-influenced NABSW went on record to condemn the adoption of African American children by white parents, equating the wholesale removal of children from black communities with cultural genocide (National Association of Black Social Workers, 1972; Simon, Alstein & Melli, 1994). In order to avoid the charge of contributing to the destruction of African American communities, the argument goes, many adoption agencies slowed considerably their advocacy of black child-white parent adoptive placements as a fairly recent innovation in child welfare.

Without question, the NABSW position paper has become a cornerstone of transracial adoption discourse. Indeed, it can be argued that later Native activists modeled their arguments supporting the ICWA on the black social workers' 1972 position. More than thirty years later, the NABSW resolution continues to be referenced, discussed, critiqued, praised, and attacked by transracial adoption critics and proponents alike (Yoest, 1996; Patton, 2000; Fogg-Davis, 2002; Simon, Alstein, & Melli, 1994; Neal, 1996; Raible, 1990). The document, although it would perhaps be written in less strident language today, nevertheless remains important to the debate because it raises unresolved concerns about the adjustment of children of color who find themselves living in predominantly white social environments still heavily tainted with racism.

No government agency maintains records of the exact number of adoptions. Moreover, many, if not most, adoptions are private arrangements without any agency involvement. According to Melosh (2002), adoptions arranged outside agencies "equaled
or outnumbered agency placements throughout the twentieth century, except for a few years at the height of the postwar adoption consensus" (p. 203). Nonetheless, recent census data indicate that another upswing in transracial placements may be underway (Pertman, 2000). Immigration statistics imply that interest has shifted from the domestic adoption of children in foster care to the transnational adoption of children from overseas. Several observers have suggested that adopting from orphanages abroad is gaining in appeal as a way to sidestep the phenomenon of birth parents appearing suddenly to reclaim their children lost to adoption (Corbett, 2002). Similarly, the recent rise in popularity of transnational adoptions may reflect an uneasy response on the part of some parents to the growing preference of adoption professionals and birth mothers for "open" adoptions, in which adoptive parents and birth parents maintain some level of ongoing contact after the adoption.

Regardless of where the children originate, transracial adoption continues to generate controversy, in academia and in popular culture. For example, the cinema occasionally takes up the debate as a source of dramatic entertainment (see, for example, the 2002 Australian drama “Rabbit-Proof Fence” and Hollywood's “Losing Isaiah” [1995], which starred Halle Barry as a rehabilitated birth mother trying to reclaim her son adopted by Jessica Lange; see also “Catfish and Black Bean Sauce” [2000], a dramatic comedy about two adult Vietnamese siblings adopted by an African American couple). Novelists grapple with the issue as well (e.g., Losing Isaiah by Seth Margolis [1993], and The Bean Trees [1988] and Pigs In Heaven [1993]. Barbara Kingsolver's novels about the debacle surrounding the adoption of a Cherokee girl, and Indian Killer [1995], Sherman Alexie's spoof of the murder mystery genre that features a disturbed Native protagonist.
who was transracially adopted; finally, see the 1968 classic *Edgar Allen* by John Neufeld, in which a white family caves in to neighbors’ racism and returns the black boy they had hoped to adopt. Adoption advocates, researchers across various disciplines, child welfare professionals, legal scholars, talk show hosts, parents, adoptees, adoption facilitators, and policy makers continue to debate whether white parents should adopt transracially, and how well they are able to raise children of color or deal effectively with racism (Simon & Alstein, 1992; Raible, 1990; Bartholet, 1993; Fogg-Davis, 2002; Patton, 2000; Adams, 2002). While involving only a small percentage of all adoptions each year, transracial adoption is likely to provoke strong emotion in public discourse for some time to come.

**New Perspectives on Transracial Adoption**

The recent work of scholars across academic disciplines offers fresh insights on the transracial adoption controversy. Barbara Melosh (2002), for one, has documented a general decline in the number of all adoptions, transracial or otherwise, beginning in the 1960s. Unlike those who blame the NABSW, Melosh, who is an adoptive mother, paints a broader picture to explain this decline. Several factors have contributed to less favorable popular perceptions of adoption. Among those Melosh lists are the feminist movement that resulted in wider access to contraception and abortion beginning in the 1960s, as well as the sexual revolution, which relaxed public opposition to out-of-wedlock pregnancy. Lessening the social stigma associated with illegitimacy, coupled with the greater tolerance of single motherhood has meant that more women who found themselves pregnant have opted to keep and raise children who otherwise might have been placed for adoption only a few years earlier.
According to Melosh, all of these changes throughout society combined to result in fewer babies becoming available for adoption. In a 2002 interview, Melosh added one final observation, one that warrants notice for the purposes of understanding the sociopolitical context in which transracial adoptions occur:

Welfare workers and the welfare system as a whole came under fire in the late 1960s and 1970s... What was once thought of as benign social engineering came to be seen as social control (Martin, 2002).

Melosh's (2002) central thesis is that the middle class consensus that had conceived of adoption as the "best solution" for illegitimate children, their unwed mothers, and infertile married couples began to crumble in the second half of the twentieth century (p. 239). As society as a whole turned away from the liberal optimism of the post-World War II decade, public and academic discourse alike reflected the growing conservatism. According to Melosh, "environmentalism gradually yielded to a pervasive biological determinism that renewed old fears of the risks of adoption" (Ibid). Clearly, it took more than the efforts of a small group of black social workers to cause the dramatic decrease in transracial placements while all adoptions were on the decline.

**Color-blind vs. Color-conscious Parenting**

Hawley Fogg-Davis (2002), who is a transracial adoptee and political scientist, has also challenged the way transracial adoption is customarily discussed as if the argument were simply over the right of white parents to adopt children of color. Refocusing the debate on the needs of adoptees, Fogg-Davis maintains that regardless of whether their parents raise them in a color-blind manner or not, transracial adoptees likely will be perceived in racialized terms and confronted with racism. That is, transracially adopted individuals will live most of their lives as adults, and moreover, as
adults who will be marked as people of color in a racially stratified society. Hence, Fogg-Davis calls for “racial navigation,” her term for the development of an awareness of race dynamics and racial identities, along with survival skills and coping strategies that others have long emphasized (p. 2; for earlier arguments in favor of the development of coping skills needed by transracial adoptees, see Crumley, 1997; Raible, 1990; Neal, 1993).

Central to Fogg-Davis’s (2002) argument, which focuses on the needs of adoptees over the life span, is the recognition that all children grow up, at least in the U.S., in a race-conscious social structure:

Although we may yearn for a colorblind society, or at least a society that treats racial classification as morally irrelevant, we should not dismiss the strategic value of equipping individuals with the capacity to navigate racial categories in the here and now... To move closer to a society free of invidious racial discrimination, we must first acknowledge the practical need for racial self-awareness. Which models of racial self-identification promote racial justice, and which do not? (p. 15)

Consequently, for Fogg-Davis, racial navigation is a process with which everyone ought to engage. It is more likely to occur when family situations prompt individuals to reflect on both the way society ascribes the individual to a particular racial category, and on the subjective self-identifications made by the individual. In arguing in favor of transracial adoption, Fogg-Davis cautions social workers to assess the ability of pre-adoptive parents to nurture the development of racial navigation—in themselves as well as their children.

This approach to the cultivation of coping strategies builds on the work of African American adoption specialists such as social worker Leora Neal (1993), psychologist Joseph Crumley (1997), and my own earlier work (Raible, 1990), all of whom prioritize explicitly race-conscious approaches to parenting. Critiquing studies of transracial adoption outcomes, Neal (1993) observes, “very few, if any, of these studies have dealt
with the racism encountered by children of color in society at large and how families have dealt with these issues" (p. 14). Neal also links the NABSW position paper to the historic struggle for civil and human rights going back to the anti-slavery movement. Her reference to the NABSW position statement indexes a racial discourse upon which many social workers (black, white, and others) draw in order to make sense of the controversy as they work to meet the needs of adoptable children within the constraints of legislation such as the ICWA and MEPA-IEPA. Making reference to slavery is a common device in race discourse, from a discourse analysis perspective, that serves to remind people of the legacy of hundreds of years of oppression at the hands of white Americans. It also signals the history of resistance and the continuing struggle for racial justice that remains unfinished. In essence, Neal attempts to shift the terms of the debate by situating the NABSW position within the historical discourse of resistance to white domination.

Even avowedly pro-transracial adoption researchers such as Simon, Alstein, & Melli (1994) hint at the problematic nature of color-blind discourse. Apparently without knowing it, Simon et al. point to the limited perspectives of many transracial parents:

Many of the transracial adoption couples mentioned that they became “color-blind” shortly after adopting; i.e., they stopped seeing the child as a black, and came to perceive the child as an individual who is a member of their family (Charles Zastrow, 1977, cited in Simon, Alstein, & Melli, 1994, p. 56).

In other words, transracial adoption is deemed a success when white parents no longer perceive their child as "a black." Such a perspective contrasts markedly with the color-conscious perspectives shared by a number of the non-adopted siblings interviewed for this dissertation, which will be discussed in later chapters. Suffice it to say that a number of the siblings agreed that when it comes to raising children of color, as Joseph Crumbley (1997) argues, a color-blind love is not enough. In addition to helping
transracially adopted children learn strategies to cope with racism, Crumbley advises adoptive parents to learn as much as they can about their children's birth family's history and culture.

American Studies professor Sandra Patton (2000) has also attempted to reframe the controversy using the lens of race. Patton applies narrative analysis to the public debate to demonstrate how a dominant narrative of white paternalism circumscribes its terms. In Patton's view, this narrative relies on simultaneously racist, classist, and sexist discourses:

In the ostensibly altruistic salvation narrative of transracial adoption…white families alone are deemed capable of “saving” black children from the fate of urban poverty, crime, drug addiction, and chaos…[This narrative] reads distinctly like a 1990s urbanized version of the “white man’s (or family’s) burden” of “civilizing the natives” (p. 159).

Patton also points out the related concerns, rooted in sexism and classism, over the reproductive capacities of poor women (particularly those who "keep having babies" who "end up" in foster care) as an essential trope of the narrative of paternalism. To imply that unfit mothers are solely responsible for the escalation of the foster care rolls hides the responsibility of the children's fathers, not to mention the complicity of policy makers, social workers, legislators (and those who put them in office) in the removal of children from families—and for the inattention to the conditions of poverty and desperation that arguably cause the problems of child abuse and neglect in the first place.

One begins to sense, in the accumulating new body of scholarship, a shift in how the transracial adoption controversy is viewed. Significantly, the new scholarship takes a deeper, more critical view of both adoption and race than that of earlier researchers.
Limitations of the Research Literature

Those who have followed the evolution of transracial adoption scholarship know that much of the existing research into its effects on individuals and families has been undertaken primarily with adoptive parents, and importantly, while their adopted family members were still children or adolescents (cf. McRoy & Zurcher, 1983; Simon & Alstein, 1987; Ladner, 1977). Other studies have included interviews and surveys of adoptees' parents and teachers, and sometimes, the young people themselves. These studies, which I characterize as synchronic (that is, they view adoptive families or adoptees as "snapshots" frozen in time), have attempted to document adoption outcomes, for example, by examining the racial identities of adopted children and adolescents, and their feelings about being adopted (Pohl & Harris, 1992; McRoy, Zurcher, Lauderdale, & Anderson, 1982; Johnson, Shireman, & Watson, 1987; Simon, Alstein, & Melli, 1994; Ladner, 1977, Grow & Shapiro, 1974; Ahn, 1989; Goldberg, 1989). This dissertation transcends the limitations of the synchronic orientation of these early studies, and argues for a diachronic perspective, which better captures the shifting identities of individuals over the course of the life span. I suggest that recent studies (including this one) of the effects of transracial adoption across various stages of life indicate that a corrective diachronic reorientation of adoption research may be underway.

Synchronic vs. Diachronic Studies

Most of the early studies of transracial and transnational adoption have concluded that transracial adoption poses few, if any, problems for transracially adopted individuals, and that overall, transracial adoption is a positive experience (Dalen, 1999). Many studies base their conclusions on assessments of adoption outcomes, such as the racial identities
of adoptees, their self-esteem, their psychological and social adjustment, or their bonds with their adoptive families. A limitation of outcome-oriented (or *synchronous*) research is its reliance on freezing the adoption experience in time. That is, racial identities and self-esteem levels are often measured as if they are developmentally complete once adoptees pass through childhood or adolescence. Synchronous studies share a tendency to conceptualize adoption as a terminal, one-time affair that occurred in childhood and is "over" once adoptees reach maturity.

This particular study diverges from the typical synchronous orientation. To begin with, it conceptualizes adoption socioculturally and discursively. It views adoption as a series of ongoing interactions and consequences that are constructed and negotiated over the life span, beginning even before childhood. For example, pre-adoptive parents and birth mothers who may be considering relinquishing their infants do not contemplate their choices in a vacuum, but rather make their parenting decisions within already existing discourses about adoption, race, family, and so forth. In other words, many forces come into play, all of which influence adoption decisions and their recurring, life-long consequences.

Along with this study, recent research tends to focus less on finite outcomes and more on the dynamic, lifelong nature of the adoption experience. For example, researchers have begun to document the fluid nature of racial identities in the context of transracial adoption, and the particular issues that adult transracial adoptees must negotiate over the course of their lives. Psychotherapist Richard Pinderhughes (1997) found that many transracial adoptees frequently report difficulty with fitting into social networks regardless of race, even in adulthood. In contrast to the rosy picture of
transracial adoption painted by the early research (Dalen, 1999), the latest studies suggest that transracialy adopted individuals do indeed confront specific challenges related to their adoptions. For instance, Anne Goldberg (1989) found that transracial adoptees (or parents on their behalf) seek mental health services with greater frequency than the general population.

More strikingly, Marie Adams (2001) documented a much higher rate of adoption disruptions among families with transracially adopted Native children than among same-race adoptions. Adams investigated the effects of adoption disruption on adoptive parents, and described a process of grieving that parallels the stages elucidated by psychiatrist Elisabeth Kubler Ross (1969). A number of these recent studies have reached rather more circumspect, if not explicitly pessimistic, conclusions about the long-term consequences of transracial adoption. Regardless, the findings from the latest research suggest the need for ongoing parent education and family support, both before --and perhaps more importantly-- long after the initial adoptive placement has been made.

**Context Redux**

One final note: Because of the contested nature of the sociopolitical context in which most transracial adoption research transpires, at least in the United States, a useful comparison can be drawn between U.S.-based research and studies in other countries. Monica Dalen (1999), a Norwegian researcher of transnational adoption, has analyzed the literature and has this to say about the different orientations and the discourses driving them:

On the whole, we can say that researchers in western Europe and particularly in Scandinavia have focused on a wide range of areas in the adopted child’s life, while in the USA/UK, they have focused more narrowly on ethnicity and their sense of belonging. In countries where racism and a dislike of strangers is
common, research activities are easily pushed towards politically sensitive problems. In those countries where the population is more ethnically homogenous, the researchers have been able to concentrate more calmly on studying adoption related to more psychological problems linked to separation, early attachments, and later adjustments (p. 6).

Apparently, there is no escaping the racialized and highly politicized context, particularly in the United States, in which the discourses of race and adoption intersect to constitute transracial adoption. This, in a nutshell, is the starting point for the study of non-adopted siblings described in this dissertation.

**Some Final Thoughts**

As an outgrowth of child welfare policy promulgated by the nascent profession of social work at the turn of the twentieth century, transracial adoption is a relatively recent innovation in the field of social work. At present, during the opening decade of the twenty-first century, the children from the early days of the social experiment begun during the aftermath of the Second World War have reached mature adulthood. Partly for this reason, documentation of the lifelong cumulative impact of transracial adoption on adult adoptees and mature adoptive families has only recently begun. That is, transracial adoption until quite recently has been discussed in the literature primarily in terms of its effect on young children and adolescents.

While researchers have studied transracially adopted youth, relatively few scholars have attempted to investigate the ways race and adoption combine to influence, for example, evolving family dynamics, shifting racial identities over time and in response to changing circumstances, or the life choices (and chances) of adoptees as they progress through their thirties, forties, fifties, and beyond. For now, the literature remains partial and limited because the voices and experiences of adult adoptees-- and other
members of mature families such as their siblings-- have not been included systematically.

Despite the latest research that has helped to reframe the terms of the controversy, and the increasingly ambivalent public perception of adoption in general (Melosh, 2002), transracial adoptions are likely to continue in the foreseeable future (Pertman, 2000). That is, in spite of mixed reviews from forthright adoption advocates (Holtan & Tremitiere, 1996; Simon, Alstein, & Melli, 1994), African American social workers (Neal, 1996; National Association of Black Social Workers, 1972), Native American activists and researchers (Nuttgens, 2001), adult adoptees (Simon & Roorda, 2000; Raible, 1990; Fogg-Davis, 2002), psychotherapists (Crumbley, 1997; Pinderhughes, 1997); or even candid adoptive parents (Bartholet, 1991; Adams, 2002; Melosh, 2002), recent trends suggest that there will continue to be adults willing, if not eager, to adopt children of other races for a variety of reasons (Pertman, 2000; MacGregor, 2002).

Because transracial adoptions are likely to regain popularity, particularly through the rapid increase in transnational adoptions, I believe that new research such as that described in this dissertation carries an added significance. Namely, it underscores the need for improved support and education for transracial families, whether they were formed years ago or in years to come. That is, even if all adoptions were to cease tomorrow, I argue that the families involved with the transracial adoption “experiment” over the last fifty years deserve ongoing support when family members require it.

Research already exists which hints at the kinds of post-adoption support that can benefit transracial adoptive families. For example, recent studies of kinship care (e.g., grandparents who are raising their adult children’s children) provide insight into the needs
of non-traditional (including adoptive) families. Ernestine Jones (2003) described kinship care as a growing practice in the United States, with nearly four million children living with relatives other than their biological parents. As an alternative to foster care and adoption, kinship placements are defined as either formal or informal, depending on the level of agency involvement. Jones (2003) found that grandparents, when asked to describe their needs in order to continue caring for their grandchildren, cited support groups, respite care, and emergency relief as their priorities. Placing the need for support groups at the top of the list parallels developments in the community of adoption, where parent groups comprise a key feature of both pre- and post-adoption services.

Comparisons of children in kinship care have been made with children in foster care and adoption. For example, Jones (2003) found that kinship care can provide children with a stronger sense of family support (p. 27). In contrast to children currently in foster care, and many who were later adopted from foster care, children in kinship care experience fewer disruptive changes, do not move as often, and continue to maintain some contact with their siblings and birth parents. Their self-esteem is higher, which may in part be due to the fact that relatives generally have a more positive perception of the children in their care than non-relative caregivers (Ibid., p. 27).

Educating foster and adoptive families about the benefits of helping children to maintain positive connections to their earlier, pre-placement lives is becoming an important component of parent education in the community of adoption (Pavao, 1998; Steinberg & Hall, 2000). Although based on a study of kinship care, Jones' (2003) findings underscore the importance of educational efforts to raise awareness among foster and adoptive families. In a few agencies, multicultural education has emerged, as well. As more agencies provide curricula for teaching anti-racist parenting skills, social
workers and parents increasingly accept these efforts as indispensable to transracial families. In addition, helping adoptive families to maintain contact with previous caregivers (specifically, foster families and birth families) may become easier by deepening an appreciation of racial, cultural, and economic diversity, and by increasing the level of cultural competence among parents and adoption professionals alike.

For now, suffice it to say that many would-be parents will travel thousands of miles, and spend easily as many dollars, to visit impoverished communities around the world in search of children to take home and call their own. Moreover, most of those children will be brown and poor, while most of the adopters will remain white and middle class. Meanwhile, some adoptive parents will continue to open their homes to adoptable children in the overpopulated U.S. foster care system, a disproportionate number of whom are children of color (and who, not incidentally, also come from impoverished families). Clearly, despite the unresolved controversy, transracial adoptions will continue in the coming years. I submit that transracial families will have much to gain from research-based support measures.

**Chapter 2 Summary**

This chapter included a review of some of the major studies of transracial adoption and related documents (e.g., legislation and position papers), and their contribution to transracial adoption as a hotly contested discourse. Chapter 2 contrasted the rosy picture painted by early researchers with the more circumspect view grounded in recent studies.

To be understood properly, the transracial adoption controversy must be placed in a broad historical and sociopolitical context that includes changing attitudes about
women's roles and the rights and responsibilities of various family members (such as adoptive parents and birth mothers, as well as the rights of adoptees). In addition, transracial adoption discourse was shown to be impacted by the dismantling of a short-lived, mid-20th century, pro-adoption consensus among the middle class (Melosh, 2002).

Chapter 2 also discussed some of the limitations of the existing body of research. The argument was made for diachronically-oriented studies to be added to the literature, such as the one described in this dissertation. Furthermore, as alluded to previously, the interviews with non-adopted siblings (to be discussed in subsequent chapters), suggest that an explicitly race-conscious orientation may supplant an outdated color-blind approach to meeting the needs of transracial families. In the next chapter, I will present the methodology used for the dissertation study, followed by an explanation in Chapter 4 of the theoretical framework for my current research.
CHAPTER 3
TRANSRACIALIZATION AND NARRATIVE IDENTITIES

Chapter 3 discusses the way I have conceptualized identity for the purposes of this dissertation. As an educational researcher with an interest in the ways people use language to construct and negotiate identities, particularly in multicultural contexts, I draw on contributions from the fields of sociolinguistics and narratology, as well as the philosophical orientations of postmodernism and poststructuralism, in order to lay out a theoretical framework for thinking about racial identity as narrative identities. The framework presented here serves to ground an overarching view of adoption, race, and transracial adoption as interconnecting discourses. Specifically, I establish how adopting such a viewpoint enhances comprehension of the socially constructed view of the narrative identities of non-adopted siblings of transracial adoptees, which were examined using Wortham's (2001) approach to narrative analysis.

Multicultural Education and Anti-racism

My decision to investigate transracial adoption by examining the narrative identities of the non-adopted white siblings of adoptees arises from two related research interests pertaining to identity development. From the field of multicultural education I draw a pedagogical concern for understanding the processes through which individuals learn to develop multicultural and explicitly anti-racist perspectives, which I view as a necessary aspect of personal identity work, particularly for those of any race who are committed to egalitarian interracial relations. My research is concerned with how
individuals come to know themselves as "raced" beings, and beyond that, as beings committed or uncommitted to anti-racism. By anti-racism I mean the intentional and learned effort on the part of individuals to resist and actively counteract the discursive process of racialization and its resultant behaviors that privilege the lives, needs, and experiences of one race above all others.

On a more abstract level, I have been drawn to the examination of identities as they are enacted discursively, that is, by what is known in sociolinguistics as language in use. The processes used to navigate safe passage through unstable and sometimes competing and contradictory discourses—and in the process constructing narratives reflective of various "kinds of selves" (Wortham, 2001)—transcends, in my view, the impulse to concentrate on essentialist notions of identity that are rooted in modernism. I suggest that conceptualizing identities as mutually constructed narrative understandings of selves holds out to multicultural educators and educational researchers alike the promise of an alternative theory of identity more suitable for the conditions of postmodernity.

Delving into the discourses influencing identities, or perhaps more aptly, negotiated identifications, dovetails with my personal commitment to anti-racism which, according to at least one school of thought in the field, remains a crucial aspect of multicultural education (cf. Nieto, 2004; Sleeter & Grant, 1999; Derman-Sparks & Brunson-Phillips, 1997). By combining these dual interests in anti-racism and identity, this dissertation addresses how individuals who are classified as white may experience and respond to the adoption of a brother or sister classified as non-white.
Postmodernism and the Social Construction of Identity

From a postmodernist perspective, identity can be said to operate more as a verb than as a noun (Arvizu, 1992). Sarah Joseph (1998) explains the critique of modernism offered by postmodern critics:

They have counterposed to the notion of a unified subjectivity the notion of multiple identities for individuals which would be derived from their different ‘subject locations.’... working as they do with a notion of a universe constituted by different systems of representations between which the individual has to negotiate (p. 27).

Broadly speaking, postmodernist theories of the subject challenge the humanist notions of a stable, knowing self that originated as a central concern of modernity. Yvonne Hebert (2001) summarizes a modernist view of identity:

It is a continuing, unique self for which essence is the key. It is prior to language-making. Seizing the self as an object, modernity emphasizes ego development, self-assertion, and individual accomplishment. (Buss, 1993, cited in Hebert, p. 2).

Tamsin Spargo (1999) articulates the influential contributions of the poststructuralist French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, specifically his work with the theory of subjectivity. According to Spargo (1999), Lacan "insisted that our identities are formed through language [and] are fundamentally unstable and in process" (p. 74). Patti Lather (1991) elaborates further on the links between poststructuralism and postmodern views of the subject, which are largely concerned with language and discourses:

Humanism posits the subject as an autonomous individual capable of full consciousness and endowed with a stable “self” constituted by a set of characteristics such as sex, class, race, and sexual orientation. Such a subject has been at the heart of the Enlightenment project of progress via education, reflexive rationality, and human agency... Such a subject has been de-centered, refashioned as a site of disarray and conflict inscribed by multiple contestatory discourses (pp. 5-6).
Underscoring the evolution of the concept of a stable, unitary self, Chris Barker and Dariusz Galasinski (2001) explain how such a concept supplanting earlier views pre-dating what came to be known as modern science:

The Western ‘I’ as a self-aware object is a modern conception which emerged out of science and the ‘Age of Reason’… surpassing the group- and moral-based identities of the Middle Ages (pp. 28-29).

From a postmodernist perspective, then, identities are understood to be fluid and dynamic instead of static and fixed. Thus, identity might be said to be something we do or perform; conversely, identity is neither "what we are" nor a formed essence possessed by individuals, nor even something rational science can quantify. Whereas modernity sees "identity as a problem" to be achieved or resolved, postmodernism views "identity as a strategy" to be used to achieve social goals through language (Hebert, 2001, p. 3).

Emphasizing the importance of language helps us reconsider the fluidity of identity. That is, a sociolinguistic perspective acknowledges how identities are constructed discursively and in relationship to others. Postmodernist (and particularly poststructuralist) interest in the instability of signs, representation, and by extension, language and knowledge itself, suggests that anything we can know through language (or discourse) would necessarily be dynamic, shifting, and "contestatory," to use Lather's (1991) descriptor. This is one of the primary reasons postmodernism is said to challenge the authority of scientism, humanism, grand narratives of truth, and other ostensibly stable realities. Barker and Galasinski (2001) aptly summarize the contributions of Jacques Derrida, another influential theorist of French postmodernist philosophy, who argued that everything exists in discourse. Barker and Galasinski explain that because human beings think only in signs,
there can be no truth outside of representation… There is no original meaning outside of signs, which are a form of graphic ‘representation’, so that writing is in at the origin of meaning. We cannot think about knowledge, truth, and culture without signs, that is, writing (pp. 9-10).

They go on to provide the theoretical link between discourse/language, epistemologies (ways of knowing), and the utility of textual analysis. The authors further observe that semiotics, as applied in literary criticism and cultural studies, "taught us that texts were not to be taken at face value but were to be approached as constructions of signs which could be analyzed to illustrate how meaning was generated" (p. 8). They elaborate further:

The instability of signs is temporarily halted in the context of pragmatic narratives since we comprehend the meaning of words when we are able to use them… (p. 21, emphasis added).

Barker and Galasinski (2001) go on to say:
The instability of meaning in language leads us to think of culture, identities and identifications as always a place of borders and hybridity rather than fixed, stable entities (Babha, 1994). All cultures are zones of shifting boundaries and hybridization (Barker & Galasinski, 2001, p. 11).

In this way, the authors make the link between identity and narrative, two important components for understanding the discursive construction of identities drawn upon in this dissertation.

**The Mutability of Race in Adoption Discourse**

These concepts of hybridization, unstable identities, and contested discourses from disciplines such as critical applied linguistics and cultural studies help to supply the rationale for a social constructionist, anti-essentialist model of identity. Consider the application of such a model in the following example from the "real world" of adoption:
In the field of child welfare, even one’s racial classification can change, sometimes at the whim of a well-intentioned social worker simply wielding a pen. While conducting the ethnographic pilot study in preparation for this dissertation (see Raible, 2002), I learned that it is not uncommon for a child's racial designation to be changed on identifying documents (that is, in written texts). This might happen when a social worker believes that a child’s chances for being adopted have been compromised because of the child's minority status. In some agencies, there is a monetary incentive to place children who can be described as white rather than children of color, since prospective parents are often more willing to adopt—and pay higher fees to adopt—a white child. As a result of what I refer to as the commoditization of babies in the marketplace of adoption, a social worker might intentionally change, for example, a "Puerto Rican” or "biracial" designation to "Italian" on the child’s identifying papers in an effort to make the child appear more adoptable/marketable (i.e., "white").

This questionable practice is by no means confined to the community in which I conducted my ethnography. In Looking For Lost Bird: A Jewish Woman Discovers Her Navajo Roots, author Yvette Melanson (1999) relates her dramatic story of finding out later in life that she was adopted from a Navajo Indian reservation, and her subsequent search for and reunification with her biological Native family. The point here is how clearly adoption as a discourse highlights the social construction of—and contingency of—identities, even those marked by something commonly believed to be as “permanent” as race or, in the case of Melanson, ethnicity. I offer these examples from the discourse of adoption as a way of illustrating concretely the malleability of identity as socially constructed through discourse.
A further insight into identity is this: We can’t simply be who we wish to portray ourselves to be; other people with whom we interact, and with whom we must engage in negotiations, often play a huge role in the success or failure of the performance of our “situated identities” (Gee, 1999). Situated identities are understood to be performed identities that are either accepted and recognized or rejected by others in one’s social group as one tries to establish one’s place in a given community or group. Situated identities correlate to the narrative understanding of identity advanced by narratologists, discussed in the next section.

**Narrative Identities**

According to some social scientists who attempt to understand reality through the framework of social constructionism, the notion of *narrative* can be employed as a metaphor for the self (Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997; MacIntyre, 1997; Gergen & Gergen, 2001). From a narratological standpoint, a coherent sense of self emerges from an individual’s experience of life as a *storied* ordering of that life emerges. Narratologists maintain that through our relationships and interactions with others our sense of self emerges. In other words, according to this view, narrative selves are actively constructed through discourse (Wortham, 2001). Even if we accept theoretically the postmodernist challenge to the notion of fixed, unitary selves, narrative identities still provide a way to think and talk about our individual experiences and interactions with others.

Psychologists Kenneth Gergen and Mary Gergen (2001) offer a useful definition of narrative identity. They contrast their view with more traditional psychological accounts, which to their way of thinking, view identity as an achieved "state of mind":

The mature individual, on this [traditional] account, is one who has ‘found,’ crystallized,’ or ‘realized’ a firm sense of self or personal identity... However,
from the present vantage point, the individual does not arrive at a stabilized state of mind. Rather, he or she develops the capacity for understanding him or herself in this manner and to communicate this understanding creditably to others. One does not acquire a state of “true self” but a potential for communicating that such a state is possessed (p. 173).

According to Gergen and Gergen (2001), humans use language to communicate this self-understanding through the narratives they construct in interaction with each other: "This delicate interdependence of constructed narratives suggests that a fundamental aspect of social life is a reciprocity in the negotiation of meaning" (p. 179). One of the tensions in the narrative view of the self is between, on the one hand, a fairly consistent, repeatedly enacted self-narrative, and on the other, the way self-identity remains in flux because it responds to the narratives of others with whom we interact. In other words, complicating a narrative sense of ourselves is the fact that we do not simply arrive at self-understanding via our own agency or authorship. Our self-narratives are informed by the self-narratives of others in which we may find ourselves playing a role. Furthermore, not only are we scripted through their use of language into the personal narratives of individual others; we are simultaneously subject to (or subjects of) the larger narratives at play within the cultures we inhabit. Philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre (1999) describes the sociopolitical contexts of narrative identities in a particularly insightful manner:

We are never more (and sometimes less) than the co-authors of our own narratives. Only in fantasy do we live what story we please. In life... we are always under certain constraints. We enter upon a stage we did not design and we find ourselves part of an action that was not of our making. Each of us being a main character in his [or her] own drama plays subordinate parts in the dramas of others, and each drama constrains the others (p. 251).
That is, all individuals can be said to enact their narrative identities within the discourses circulating throughout the cultures they inhabit.

**Discourse and Discourse Analysis**

Discourse, for the purposes of this dissertation, refers to much more than language alone. I draw an understanding of discourse from the Foucauldian sense of the word. Joseph (1998) offers the following explanation of Foucault's use of discourse:

> For Foucault, discourse frames the way in which we perceive the world; it constitutes objects for us through systems of signs and ordering. It determines how people think. Power, he maintained, was incorporated into discursive practices, circulating at the capillary level to permeate society in both its pleasurable and coercive dimensions… Cultural practices become, in this perspective, multiple sites of contestation over power. (p. 175).

Building on the Foucauldian view as interpreted by Joseph (1998) and others, I define discourses as amalgams of attitudes, material conditions, and social practices (including language and other sign systems) whose association has become accepted and used by particular groups or institutions in order to create certain ways of knowing reality through a shared sociopolitical context of meaning and interaction. Put more succinctly, discourse is "a historically situated material practice that produces power relations" (Spargo, 1999, p. 73). Foucault reminds us that discourse is not limited to language, but concerns a whole range of regulated cultural practices which constitute individuals, and which they also constitute; in the process, they bring themselves into being as particular kinds of people, or subjects. Subjects then are said to take up *subject positions* within various discourses (Henriques *et al.*, 1984), which have the effect of delimiting the ways reality may be talked about and known. According to this reasoning, subject positions are understood as
that perspective or set of regulated discursive meanings from which discourse makes sense. To speak is to take up a pre-existent subject position and to be subjected to the regulatory power of that discourse (Barker & Galasinski, p. 31).

For Foucault, "discourse constructs, defines and produces objects of knowledge in an intelligible way while at the same time excluding other ways of reasoning as unintelligible" (Ibid., p. 12). In this way, discourses are said to serve both regulatory and epistemological functions.

This perspective on discourse can be applied to an analysis of transracial adoption as a social practice. From a discourse perspective, transracial adoption is constituted at the junction of two discourses, namely race and adoption, which are in turn related to discourses of—and importantly—ways of thinking about and enacting family, community, and various “situating identities” (Gee, 1999). In other words, transracial adoption literally comes into being as a discursive social practice enacted through linguistic and material conditions, which over time have come to be accepted as commonplace and even institutionalized. Two of those institutionalized conditions and ways of knowing are what we know as "race" and "adoption."

As anthropologist Edward Bruner (1999) observes, "different narratives are foregrounded in the discourse of different historical eras" (p. 269). To borrow Foucault's term for tracing the history of discourses, the genealogies of both race and adoption as discourses can illuminate a deeper understanding of their sociopolitical contexts, as I will demonstrate in the following two sub-sections.

**Adoption Discourse**

Looking at adoption as a discourse, we can see clearly how adoption is a social practice that relies heavily on the use of language backed by institutional power to
construct various subjects. Key terms from the lexicon of adoption discourse (italicized in what follows) bear this out:

Adoption begins when a *birth mother* surrenders or *relinquishes* her child. Alternately, sometimes a family court judge writes orders to *terminate* the *parental rights* of a child's original *biological parents*, effectively turning a child into a legal *orphan* and potential *adoptee*. State-employed social workers then become responsible for finding new homes for relinquished children who are now rendered *adoptable*. (In the case of *hard-to-place* children, they may be considered *unadoptable.*) One way social workers accomplish their task is by creating special texts known as *adoption registries* to describe the children in positive terms in order to attract potential adopters or *prospective parents*. These adopters are encouraged to peruse these registries that are filled with descriptions of adoptable children along with their photographs. Next, once the *adoptive parents* have been approved by an *adoption agency* and a *home study* has been written, again by social workers, the court formally *amends* the *birth certificate* of the adoptee. This act literally deletes from the text the names of the birth parents and substitutes the names of the adoptive parent (or parents). These records are usually *sealed*, in an effort to protect the anonymity and privacy of the birth parents. In this way, the adoptive *placement* becomes *finalized* with the filing of authorized *adoption papers* capped by a judge's *order of adoption*. Through these discursive, state-regulated acts, biologically unrelated children and adults become kin and the practice of adoption becomes a legal and recognized social practice.

Other adoption narratives come into play in adoption discourse, as well. There are the *adoption stories* told by many parents to explain in simple terms how their children
entered their new families. Increasingly, social workers encourage adoptive parents to record these adoption stories in what are known as life books created especially for adopted children. Additional adoption narratives, such as stories about older adoptees who search for and reunite with their birth parents (and in some narratives, reconnecting with long-lost siblings) circulate in the discourse and contribute to the construction of adoption as a storied practice, allowing it to be narratively enacted and understood.

**Racial Discourse**

The partner discourse to adoption within transracial adoption discourse, it should be apparent by now, is race. Racial discourse involves, among other things, learning to “read” and classify human bodies as signs or even texts according to socially constructed categories of difference. As a social practice, the discourse of race marks individuals as colored, Negroid, minority, Oriental, mulatto, white, or non-white, to cite a few examples. As a result, the visual reading of bodies racially assigns them to various categories based on skin color, eye shape, hair type, and other putatively recognizable yet ambiguous physical characteristics. Significantly, white typically remains the default category of racial difference; that is, whiteness usually goes unmarked, thus serving as the norm from which the racialized "Other" deviates and against which it is read (McIntosh, 1988). Once bodies have been racially read, marked and classified, racial discourse then attributes personal qualities according to generally agreed-upon stereotyped readings and understandings. In this way, through repetition and over time, race comes to be seen as a logical and normal way of viewing human differences and knowing the world; in other words, race has become both a regulatory discourse and an
epistemology. I call this process of learning to read and respond to human bodies in racial terms *racialization*.

Race as a discourse, like adoption, is infused with tropes from narratives circulating throughout U.S. culture. One familiar trope is the *pathological black family*, whose corresponding narrative portrays it as a matriarchy still reeling from the effects of slavery (Moynihan, 1965). Significantly for transracial adoption discourse, it is this same victimized black family, ostensibly headed by unfit and/or impoverished, abusive, possibly drug-addicted parents, that causes black children to be in need of adoption in the first place. In transracial adoption parlance, children who have been removed from unfit parents but who are not fortunate enough to be adopted are said to "languish in foster care," commonly understood as an undeniably tragic fate. (Of course, it should be noted that foster care frequently provides a life-saving—if not altogether wonderful—respite from otherwise difficult childhood circumstances. That is, many foster parents are generous, compassionate, and loving surrogate parents to children who arguably might be better off living apart from their biological parents.)

Other narratives from race discourse invoke familiar characters, such as the superior *white missionary* (from the related discourse of colonialism) who spiritually or materially "saves" poor black (and brown, red, and yellow) *natives*. Transposed to transracial adoption discourse, the saintly “missionaries” are rewritten as the noble adoptive parents for poor children of color who are in need of the rescue only white middle class parents can provide (see Laura Briggs, 2003, for an insightful analysis of transracial and transnational adoption that links foreign and domestic policy and what she calls the “iconography of rescue”).
Certain historical narratives at play within racial discourse reveal an underlying preoccupation with miscegenation and related concerns over regulating sexuality and controlling population growth, particularly among the poor. Each of these historical narratives, to some degree, is brought forward into the present to influence contemporary transracial adoption discourse. Political scientist Hawley Fogg-Davis (2001) finds one such example in the "pathology of biraciality" (p. 85). The defective product of miscegenation recognized in popular culture (e.g., literature and film) is, of course, the mongrelized "tragic mulatto."

Other race narratives are concerned with biological race-mixing and social intermingling between the races as well. For example, politicians periodically attempt to secure votes by appealing to fears of a growing racialized urban underclass, understood as largely "colored." Such fear mongering was seen in the 1990s, for example, in the discourse of welfare reform advanced by neo-conservatives. It has also played a role in renewed calls for increased prison construction, fed in turn by cries for more effective policing in crime-ridden ghettos, and even in the "English-only" schooling initiatives which seek to limit pluralism by imposing Americanization on multitudes of brown-skinned immigrants. In each of these discourses, voters understand implicitly that a multicultural, multilingual, burgeoning, out-of-control underclass is rapidly increasing in epidemic proportions.

Race Narratives, Sexuality, and Transracial Adoption

What these narratives have in common is a hysteria-inducing image of hordes of poor, sexually promiscuous, sometimes unmarried (and by implication, immoral), and often unfit women who burden society by giving birth at "alarming" rates (Schneider,
Removing children from their broken homes ruined by pathological families is presented as a reasonable solution to a variety of related social problems. The rescue-by-removal of poor children feeds directly into adoption discourse. Interestingly, miscegenation also comes into play due to the visibly multicultural character of this urban underclass. That is, that the throngs of the poor who frequently inhabit integrated neighborhoods in which interracial relationships are more likely to develop is not lost on middle- and ruling class fear-mongers and social reformers. Historically, crowded cities have been represented narratively as dens of iniquity where prostitutes and pimps of all colors, along with drug-abusers, dealers, and other purveyors of immorality, bring normally segregated individuals into close proximity and even intimate physical contact with each other (Schneider, 1992; Gordon, 1999). Social reform movements have long been concerned with maintaining strict race and class boundaries between communities (see Melosh, 2002, for an excellent history of adoption in the United States and its concern with policing racial boundaries).

Racialized sexuality is referenced in yet other narratives, exemplified in hysterical concerns over the legendary black rapist who preys on innocent white womanhood. We see further evidence of historic fears of race-mixing in the classic early motion picture "Birth of a Nation," which served to valorize the Ku Klux Klan by playing on white fears of uncontrolled black male lust. The nation’s shameful history of the lynching of black men particularly (often accompanied, not incidentally, by their genital mutilation) testifies to the unrelenting power of this trope of black masculinity as it has circulated throughout U.S. culture in the not too distant past.
Updated in transracial adoption discourse, parental concerns over the budding sexuality of teenaged sons (and to some extent daughters) who were adopted into white families, and typically raised within predominantly white communities, reveal lingering anxiety over the consequences of race-mixing. For instance, as transracially adopted adolescents begin to date and select potential mates, often across lines of race, their partner choices may resurrect the unresolved social question of the propriety of interracial sexual relations and related concerns for possible "half-breed" or "mulatto" offspring, and their status within extended families, both by adoption and by marriage.

As we can see, race discourse is steeped in unequal power relations. From the point of view of anti-racism, racial discourse focuses attention, in part, on protecting civil and human rights that continue to be compromised by racism. Social relations in this society, more often than not, have prevented people of different races from truly getting to know one another, much less live together harmoniously in common neighborhoods and families. The lingering national obsession with race-mixing and miscegenation is foregrounded when white parents adopt children of color (just as it is by the presence of multiracial families formed by other means, as well). Transracial adoption, as the nexus of two constitutive discourses, thus calls into question fundamental beliefs about our identities, and how (and even whether and in what contexts) we think of ourselves as members of particular groups, families, communities, and races.

By untangling just a few of the narrative threads at play in the discursive webs comprising the genealogies of race and adoption in U.S. society, we can begin to appreciate how discourses of both race and adoption intersect to powerful effect to influence the ways transracial adoption gets enacted, talked about, and understood. In
turn, we can surmise that the ways researchers, parents, adoptees and their siblings, social workers, and other discursive subjects think about transracial adoption informs the narrative constructions of individual selves and diverse Others, as participants taking up subject positions within various related discourses.

**Narrative as a Discursive Identity Process**

The social practice of transracial adoption can be examined using the tools of discourse analysis, if we consider that all social practices arise from and are embedded within discourses. Yet the way transracial adoption is discussed usually remains more in line with modernist views of identity and related categories of difference such as race. A review of the research literature on transracial adoption from the last half century reveals a pervasive understanding of identity that is markedly different from more recent postmodernist understandings. In the literature, as I showed in Chapter 2, a recurring concern over measuring the self-esteem and racial identities of transracial adoptees reveals the essentialist orientation of many researchers. That is, self-esteem and racial identity frequently are discussed as if they are quantifiable entities possessed by (or lacking in, depending on the researcher’s findings) individual adoptees. In addition, parents and children are talked about uncritically as if they “are” of one race or another. Such a view is in keeping with positivist theories about how identities work and how selves are formed. In the case of transracial adoption studies, race is often reified as an objective, unitary category with a life of its own into which researchers, using their appropriate instruments, simply have to fit research subjects after duly evaluating the outcome of their adoption experiences. This is one example of how race becomes reified in essentialist terms within transracial adoption discourse.
In contrast, I advance an alternative understanding of identity in this dissertation. Henry Giroux (1999) provides a useful comparison between "old" and "new" approaches to identity: “Within the discourse of the ‘old identity,’ identity was seen as fixed and self-contained, as opposed to open, complex, and unfinished” (Giroux, p. 236). James Gee (1999) also contrasts competing views of identity in unambiguous terms. In the modernist view, Gee argues, identity is often described as a “core sense of self,” or something that is fixed over time (p. 39). In contrast, Gee prefers to speak of “situated identities,” which are frequently called social positions or subjectivity by researchers who use a postmodernist lens.

Gerd Baumann (1999), the Dutch social anthropologist, adds to an anti-essentialist conceptualization of identity, challenging the “reifying discourses of culture, community, and mutually exclusive identities” that are, according to him, unfortunately all too common in discourses of multiculturalism (Baumann, p. 153). Baumann observes that all identities can be understood as identifications in specific contexts. That is, they are situational, flexible, creative, and idiosyncratic. According to Baumann, people make choices about whom to identify with, including when and where. Identity is more than “what” we are; thus, Baumann is more concerned with the how of those identifications.

Because I have come to share these views of identity that see it not as some static entity possessed by individuals, but rather as a dynamic, shifting, and contested process of multiple identifications over time (and of course, understood to be contingent on the changing specifics of the social contexts in which those identifications become enacted), I have opted to apply analytical tools which can help explicate the how of racial identifications, as opposed to the what or why. Hence, this study intentionally parts ways
with earlier studies of the racial identity formation of individuals, which tended to focus on personal psychological factors (see, for example, Cross, 1991; Harris, 1995; Helms, 1990; Demo & Hughes, 1990). Instead, I have attempted to examine racial identities as discursive phenomena that are accomplished in part by language in use. In this sense, identities might be understood better through inquiry into the sociopolitical contexts in which—and the social practices through which—multiple identifications are negotiated (see, for instance Yon, 2000 and Dolby, 2000 for recent similar approaches to multiple identities). Informed by a poststructuralist concern for subjectivity and the subject positions made available through discourses, this study appropriates a sociocultural perspective to examine simultaneously the experience of individuals and the discourses affecting transracial adoption in the narrative construction of identities.

Perhaps before proceeding further a definition of narrative is in order. According to Coffee and Atkinson (1996),

Denzin (1989) describes a narrative as a story of a sequence of events that has significance for the narrator and her audience. The story (as do all good stories) has a beginning, a middle, and an end, as well as a logic that (at least) makes sense to the narrator (p. 54).

Establishing the methodological link between interviews and narrative analysis, Coffee and Atkinson cite Mishler (1986) whose qualitative research "considers interview responses in terms of the stories they embody" (Coffee and Atkinson, 1996, p. 56). In other words, the current study of non-adopted siblings follows a similar approach, by analyzing in a methodical way the narratives generated in participant interviews.

Looking at the construction of identity from a poststructuralist perspective turns out to pose a theoretical challenge, in terms of analyzing data. On the one hand, as an
educational researcher, I attempted to discern patterns, and through the act of interpretation impose a sense of structure as I fashioned qualitative data into a coherent story line. Nevertheless, as I mentioned earlier, there is something to be said for the impulse toward narrative coherence, even if we reject modernist theories of the stable, unitary self. Since humans, after all, are natural storytellers who use narrative to make coherent sense of their life experiences (MacIntyre, 1997), an examination of the narratives at play within constitutive discourses helped to illustrate the how of racial identifications. Consequently, a look at narratives, or the storied interpretation of personal experiences, affords researchers a "snapshot" of language in use as it unfolds, temporarily halted, as speakers make meaningful identities out of discursive phenomena.

To accomplish this effort to snap such “pictures,” I have borrowed liberally from the sociolinguistic theories of discourse advanced in critical applied linguistics by theorists such as Chris Barker and Dariusz Galasinski (2001), Norman Fairclough (1992), and Alistair Pennycook (2001), and others. The former remind us that it is through narratives that humans use language to make meaning from the swirl of discursive phenomena:

The instability of signs is temporarily halted in the context of pragmatic narratives since we comprehend the meaning of words when we are able to use them (Barker & Galasinski, p. 21)

For Barker and Galasinski, narratives are constructed relationally, since language is understood as a "tool used by human animals to do things in the context of social relationships" (p. 15).

Fairclough (1992) also points to the relational character of discourse, and links it to identity. He goes one step further to suggest that discourse functions on three
constructive levels simultaneously. It works on the first level to create social identities (or subject positions). On the second level, discourse constitutes social relationships, and on the third, systems of knowledge and belief. Fairclough refers to each level respectively as the *identity, relational, and ideational functions* of discourse (p. 64).

Keeping in mind Fairclough’s three constructive levels, I hypothesized that discourse analysis might prove to be a valuable analytical tool. My approach to the study of transracial adoption therefore draws upon Fairclough’s interest in the identity function of discourse, especially as participants take up racialized subject positions. My hybridized methodology also examines the relational and ideational functions of discourse by looking at the narrative construction of selves, drawing on the methodology developed by Stanton Wortham (2001).

Wortham’s work with narratives demonstrates how the ways people tell stories about themselves frequently parallel the dynamics lived by the characters that populate their autobiographical narratives. The occurrence of this phenomenon, documented by Wortham (2001), caused me to wonder if such parallelism might provide insight into how individuals understand their positions in various discourses; specifically, how members of transracial families make racial identifications, and how they understand their roles in discourses of adoption and race.

**Race Still Matters**

I recognize that for many whose life experience is shaped by transracial adoption, it is impossible to talk about adoption without also talking about race, and vice versa. Indeed, this was verified during my pilot study in a community of adoption. Since transracial adoption results from the nexus of two constitutive discourses, both adoption
and race provided the focus for the dissertation study. Of specific concern was a critical examination of the contexts provided by various narratives that influence discursively scripted racialized subject positions (Herman, 1999).

To be sure, I have come to understand race no longer as a reified marker of a personal essence (i.e., as a quality of an identity possessed by individuals), nor as a scientifically provable fact of reality. In contrast, I have found that race is better understood as it has been defined by scholars such as Henry Giroux (1999), and Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1993). Giroux describes race “as a set of attitudes, values, lived experiences, and affective identifications, [which] has become a defining feature of American life” (Giroux, p. 234). In other words, I recognize and accept that race continues to hold social and political significance throughout society, even if it has been generally discredited as a biological fallacy by physical and social scientists (Omi & Winant, 1993).

As a researcher working within the critical tradition, I have conceived the current study largely as an inquiry into the discursive construction of racial identities. I have taken up the challenge of uncovering at least some of the ways in which human beings living in our still race-conscious, yet increasingly postmodern, society use language to construct, perform, and enact various racial identifications. Ultimately, I see the de-essentialization of race as a potentially useful strategy within the larger political project of transforming racism and eliminating race-based inequities existent throughout society. It strikes me as worthwhile to figure out the different ways race is "done" at the micro-level, in this case among members of transracial families, since doing so offers an
opportunity to develop insights into how racialized epistemologies might be reoriented toward a more explicit anti-racism at the macro-level.

Before this last objective is interpreted mistakenly as a call for color-blindness, let me quickly say that it most definitely is not. The outright denial of attention to race when all the major institutions of our social system function to maintain racial inequalities serves the interests of no one, except perhaps the racially privileged who rarely have to think about race—either their own or anyone else's. David Theo Goldberg (1997) clarifies the distinction between what I am calling "color-blindness" and anti-racism:

I want to emphasize here the distinction… between the sort of nonracialism widespread among whites and the form of praxis I will call here counterracism (emphatically, a counter to racism, not a reverse discrimination), which is committed not only to transform the significance of racial categories but to contest the exclusions of racist practices (p. 12).

Given the challenges posed by postmodernism, particularly as it unfolds in the twenty-first century, both as a condition and as a theoretical orientation, I concur with anthropologist Gerd Baumann’s (1999) assessment of the utility of qualitative research, particularly ethnography, for advancing our growing understanding of postmodern multicultural identities:

An ethnographic study of multicultural realities as lived in one place can produce new clues that fill in the theoretical gap we have noticed: the gap between people claiming reified identities and their everyday necessity of crosscutting identifications. People who live in a multicultural milieu need to do both to reach their personal, family, or community goals (p. 139, emphasis added).

Since I begin from the assumption that identities (even racial ones) are processual and created discursively, rather than static, fixed essences given at birth or transmitted to individuals through later socialization processes, it made sense initially to
investigate multicultural micro-communities—in this case, transracial adoptive families—as ethnographic sites where diverse identifications are enacted, negotiated, contested, and co-constructed. From such a starting point flowed my interest in unpacking the discourses in which identities are embedded, and which they also help to create, which I discussed at length in the pilot study (Raible, 2002).

**From Racialization to Transracialization**

Based on my research in communities of adoption, I have observed various ways in which members of transracial adoptive families engage with discourses of race. As I will demonstrate in subsequent chapters, some of these new ways transcend what might normally be expected from individuals as a result of their racialization process. Racialization refers to the process of leaning to notice and name differences in racial terms; it contributes to what many theorists describe as the social construction of race (e.g., Omi & Winant, 1993). Racialization then encourages individuals to take up various predictable subject positions in race discourses.

If circumstances (such as transracial adoption or interracial marriages/partnerships) encourage individuals to transcend the usual forms of engagement with race, they may be led to develop an unusual praxis (Freire, 1970) of learning, action, and critical reflection that is rooted in anti-racism. I call that praxis *transracialization*. That is, transracialization occurs when individuals are able to transcend their prescribed subjectivity as individuals who are classified as white, for example, and even come to see themselves, in the words of one interviewee, as "no longer white," or "beyond white," leading them to take up what I describe in the following chapters as "post-white" subject positions.
Transracialization is not to be confused with color-blindness, nor with transculturalization or transculturation. Color-blindness implies a stance of denial, an avoidance of engagement with race in any critical way. On the other hand, while being related to transracialization, *transculturalization* is the term coined by A. Irving Hallowell (1963) to describe specifically how individuals enter a new culture. According to L. Schaub (2001), "in emphasizing the phenomenon of individuals crossing from one culture to another, Irving draws a distinction between 'transculturalization' and 'transculturation,' which refers to the acculturation of groups of people."

In my view, racialization holds that most individuals in our race-conscious society learn of the existence of race almost as if by osmosis. Goldberg (1997) describes its effects on racialized subjects:

They take for granted the recognition of racial difference: they make racial claims, assert racial truths, assess racial value— in short, create (fabricate) racial knowledge. In this sense, racial knowledge is integral to the common sense, to the articulation, of modernity's self-understanding (p. 27).

Goldberg explains the ideological function racialization performs, in particular, the ways in which modern science has taken up the notion of race as a "founding focus" (Ibid., p. 28):

Epistemologically, power is exercised in naming and in evaluating. In naming or refusing to name, existence is recognized or refused, meaning and value are assigned or ignored, people and things are elevated or rendered invisible. Once defined, symbolic order has to be maintained, serviced, extended, operationalized. In this sense, the racial Other is nominated into existence… The practices of naming and knowledge construction tend to deny any meaningful autonomy to those so named and imagined, extending over them power, control, authority, and domination (Goldberg, 1997, p. 29).
It is interesting to consider the powerful influence of the tropes of gaze and its opposite, blindness (and its offshoot color-blindness), in race and adoption discourse. For instance, I have written previously on the ways social workers and researchers frequently position transracial adoptees as "objects of the mystical gaze" (Raible, 2003). Color-blindness, as an option to be exercised primarily by those with race privilege, reflects a similar subject position of dominance. That is, those with more power have the authority to see what they want to see and ignore what they choose to ignore. Speaking of colonial masters, Goldberg (1997) writes:

Hidden from view, blind to the world and to themselves, colonizers transform self-determining subjects into objects, and naturalized objects into colonial subjects, into subjected peoples (p. 84).

In Goldberg's (1997) view, the "strategic invisibility of the marginalized" is crucial to representations of the powerful, whether colonial masters abroad or the racially privileged at home (p. 86). In stressing the power of looking, Goldberg writes, "Along with the power of naming, the power of the gaze can relegate the Other to a position of subservience" (p. 84). In contrast, then, to a color-blindness that denies the hegemony of race, transracialization provides an opportunity to level the discursive playing field, by allowing all individuals to actively see and name race, but more importantly, to transcend and reinscribe its meanings.

Racialization and Transracial Adoption

Racialization, particularly for those classified as white, typically occurs in an emotionally safe learning environment as children grow up with family members and others who look like them, share their racial designation, and hold in common the values and worldview of their immediate community. Through trial and error in the use of
racialized language (e.g., labels to categorize people) and from the example of adults and peers, racialization teaches individuals how their community defines itself, and in so doing, whom it considers to be outsiders or Others. Eventually, racialized subjects come to recognize how their specific community often represents one side or other in an ongoing racialized contested discourse that began long before their birth.

During childhood and adolescence, the process of socialization in the rules governing one's community binds individuals emotionally and psychologically to their neighbors. First, individuals internalize how to recognize physical differences and to interpret them as racial. Then they learn to recognize as potential allies those on whom they can depend in times of crisis. Usually, those allies look like them and share their racial designation. By delineating the social boundaries of what is considered their territory, racialized communities establish who the outsiders are, that is, where "our" turf ends and "theirs" begins. Without ongoing proximity to and intimacy with people from diverse communities—particularly in the absence of long-term relationships of caring and mutuality—I would argue that most individuals learn to feel safe in their own neighborhoods, on their own turf, and on the other hand, to perceive as dangerous Others who are different.

I would argue further that no one in the United States escapes the racialization process, and few of us question its hegemony. Significantly for transracial families, racialization usually takes place in monocultural settings in which parents and children racially "match." Under typical circumstances, it is through children's interactions with others who are similar to them, as well as with those who are different, both in face-to-face interactions and vicariously through the media (including television, films,
advertising, video games, and text books) that ideas about race are taught or discovered, tested, and passed on (Giroux, 1997). As a result, most of us learn to accept uncritically—and internalize as our own—a dualistic, “us-versus-them” view of the world, while race is socially recreated in each new generation.

Transracial adoption, of course, introduces unusual circumstances, which can effectively trump the process of racialization. "Transracial" literally means crossing the lines so carefully drawn to keep the races discernible and effectively segregated. Through the act of adoption, individuals who have been positioned discursively as binary opposites, if not actual enemies, become kin to each other, with various consequences to be discussed in the following chapters.

**Chapter 3 Summary**

Chapter Three made the case for investigating racial identities in transracial families using the lenses and tools of discourse analysis, critical applied linguistics, narratology, and postmodernism. Narrative identities were discussed as a way of thinking and talking about the instability of racialized selves in the discursive swirl of race and adoption. While racialization is the term I use to describe the ways in which individuals are taught to use race as an epistemology, *transracialization* describes the critical praxis that may occur when individuals effectively transcend predictable racialized subjectivities, usually as a result of, for example, transracial adoption or interracial marriages/partnerships—in other words, through long-term relations of caring with diverse Others. The theoretical framework presented here grounds the methodology described in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 4
METHODOLOGY: DISCOURSE ANALYSIS
AND NARRATIVE IDENTITIES

This chapter explains the hybridized methodology used to generate and analyze
data for the dissertation. The methodology described below is grounded in the way I have
contemplated identity. I discuss my approach to collecting data and analyzing
participants’ narratives for insight into the identities of non-adopted siblings of transracial adoptees. I explain how I developed two kinds of narratives (i.e., both longer \textit{profiles} and shorter \textit{vignettes}) from the interview transcripts (Seidman, 1998). Then I demonstrate, using the treatment of one participant’s transcript as an example, the application of several tools used by discourse analysts and other researchers to interpret the participants' words, and by extension, their multiple identities.

\textbf{Research Questions and Participants}

As mentioned previously, the current research project set out to answer three questions: What is the meaning of transracial adoption to the non-adopted siblings of adoptees? What discourses do non-adopted siblings draw upon to make sense of their experience as members of transracial families? What kind of education and post-adoption support might members of transracial families need?

To address these questions, I interviewed separately twelve non-adopted adults who grew up with siblings who were transracially adopted. Both the number and racial classification of interview participants\footnote{I prefer the term "participants" instead of "subjects," because I reject on principal the positioning of individuals in transracial adoption studies as “guinea pigs” or "subjects" of a social experiment.} were limited intentionally. That is, I was interested not so much in casting a wide net to survey a broad sample of individuals who might then become mere statistics. Rather, I sought to develop an in-depth, if necessarily partial, understanding of the meaning of transracial adoption to particular individuals. Nevertheless, I anticipated that the narratives of the twelve siblings could provide rich insights into the meaning of transracial adoption in their own lives, and thus shed more
general light on the phenomenon for researchers, educators, child welfare practitioners, members of transracial families, and others.

Each sibling signed a form consenting to the interview, which authorized me to audiotape our conversation together. I developed a script consisting of sixty interview questions, incorporating the kinds of questions articulated in Chapter 1 (see Appendix A for the full set of questions). Each question was constructed carefully to ensure open-endedness and to prompt the siblings to share their personal narratives about race and adoption.

Nine interviews were conducted via telephone, while three were conducted over e-mail. Data from the interviews were later transcribed and analyzed, first using a method borrowed from discourse analysts James Gee and colleagues (2001), and then using an adaptation of Stanton Wortham's (2001) approach to narrative analysis. Gee, Allen, & Clinton (2001) examined the “I-statements” of research participants to analyze their use of language to construct identities, while Wortham (2001) focused on the “kinds of selves” represented in the autobiographical narratives of individuals.

My decision to focus on the identities of non-adopted siblings as they relate to various discourses echoes a more general interest in discourse analysis among educational researchers who have become interested in sociocultural and sociolinguistic scholarship in the past decade or so. For example, Ann Egan-Robertson (1998) used the work of literacy researcher Brian Street (1993) to illustrate interdisciplinary approaches to educational research. In her words, Street (1993)
categorized literacy programs as following either an autonomous or ideological model. The autonomous model holds that literacy is a neutral technology that is acquired by individuals and results in cognitive consequences, such as the acquisition of rational thought; the ideological model holds that literacy constructs
social and power relationships, and asks who benefits from these relations (Egan-Robertson, 1998, p. 453).

Following this line of reasoning from critical sociocultural scholarship, I theorized that adoption can be thought about in similar autonomous or ideological terms. When adoption is conceptualized as an autonomous social practice, it can remain decontextualized and viewed as benign or politically neutral. If, on the other hand, adoption is viewed from an ideological or critical perspective, it can be understood as a social practice that constructs relations of power, for example, to benefit some while disenfranchising others. Viewed as a social practice formed and enacted through discourse, it follows that transracial adoption can be analyzed using the tools of discourse analysts.

Because I am interested in the ways identities are enacted discursively, and particularly in the stories individuals construct as part of their identity work, I borrowed from Stanton Wortham's (2001) methodology of narrative analysis. Wortham maintains that the narratives constructed by speakers in conversation with an interlocutor frequently reveal the "kinds of selves" with which the narrator identifies, revealing how he or she wants to be seen. Through a systematic analysis of the narratives enacted during the interview process, I documented more than forty of the multiple identities of non-adopted sibling narrators, to be discussed in Chapter 7.

Following each interview, which lasted anywhere from sixty minutes to more than two hours, I transcribed each conversation. Then in a subsequent revision of each transcript, I omitted the interview questions to leave the participant-narrator's words standing alone. I borrowed heavily from Irving Seidman’s (1998) methodology for this
approach to crafting such "profiles" from the responses of interview participants.\textsuperscript{ii} Next, I reviewed each profile in two stages of analysis. First, I looked for I-statements (borrowing from Gee et. al, 2001), and statements about race and adoption. This first phase of analysis gave me an initial sense of the participants' identities and their roles in the discourses under investigation.

This first phase of discourse analysis also led me to focus closely on shorter sections within each profile that, when combined with similar sections, resulted in a coherent narrative specifically addressing race and adoption. This approach to "winnowing" the interview data is explained by Seidman (1998) as a way to reduce thousands of words from an in-depth interview to a manageable length, resulting in a nonetheless compelling vignette, defined as "a shorter narrative that usually covers a more limited aspect of a participant's experience" than the longer profiles (p. 102). For the purposes of this dissertation, the vignettes I analyzed addressed specifically the participants' experiences with race and adoption.

The second analytic phase involved a systematic, line-by-line discourse analysis of each vignette, using Wortham's (2001) approach, in order to understand more deeply the kinds of selves each narrator portrayed himself or herself to be. To give readers a better understanding of my hybridized two-phase analytical process, I will demonstrate its application using data from one participant as an example. An excerpt of that profile is presented here, followed by the shorter vignette crafted from it:

\textsuperscript{ii} (For a detailed explanation of the development of participant profiles and vignettes, refer to Chapter 8 of Seidman's Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences, 2nd edition, pp. 95-112).
Profile 1: Shawn DiMarco

I grew up primarily in Massachusetts, and spent four years in New York in the 1970s and 80s. Our family was a pretty normal family. My mother stayed home most of the time until we were in junior high school. My dad was the primary breadwinner. I have a younger brother, Brian, and a younger adopted sister, Ellen. Brian is two years behind me, and Ellen is five years younger. Ellen was adopted from Korea in 1975. I was six, my brother was four. We lived in New York at the time. I remember getting out of school early and driving to the airport to meet the plane.

I guess I am a fairly centered, fairly normal person. I'm a big sports fan. I have a family myself. I've been married for three years. I have one daughter who is now eight months old. I have a pretty happy, stable life. I've been living in New York City for eight years.

In the early 1970s, we didn't know that many people that had adopted kids. Certainly not all that many that were transracial, although my mother was pretty active about getting us integrated into a community with other families that had adopted kids, particularly transracial. There were a few families that we knew. But I never really thought all that much about it. I mean, Ellen was just our
sister, that was the way it was. I don't remember it ever being a big issue, positively or negatively, really.

I think early on my mom decided it was important for my sister to try to stay connected to her Korean heritage. So she joined some community groups that had other adopted kids. They did Korean festivals, fairs, and language classes, things like that. The rest of the family was involved at certain times. We went to picnics, barbecues, family get-togethers. There were things just for the adopted kids, but then also sort of introducing the rest of the family to the culture. We thought it was pretty interesting. It was the early 1970s, so it was just a bunch of kids (laughs). We didn't think too much about the different races or anything like that at that point in my life.

I guess when I was dating I was predominantly attracted to people within my race. But I dated African American women and a few Asian women, in college and later. I got married three years ago to a woman who is white. We dated and lived together for a number of years before we got married. We had a child together.

Our family talked about adoption just every now and then. My parents told me and my brother, before they made this decision to adopt, what they were thinking about
doing. At the time we were pretty young. But I think we understood what the deal was. I mean, we were always aware that Ellen was adopted, but since she just became a member of our family, we didn't really talk too much about it. Then as she got a little older into her early teens, she started to have emotional problems that resulted in large part from her difficult early years adjusting to being adopted, and things like that. So then it became more of a prominent issue within the family.

Ellen had a lot of different psychological problems. She bounced around to a lot of different therapists. My mother was always pushing to find the right people. I guess my mother had a sense that a lot of it probably stemmed from attachment issues and things like that. So fairly early on, she found some therapists that really specialized in that kind of stuff. It became fairly clear that while there were mental health issues, a lot of those could be traced back to the issues Ellen might have had as a youngster. We had been told that she came from an orphanage. But we later found out that-- she actually met her biological family maybe four or five years ago-- and we found out that she came from a rather large family, and she was a late addition. She was first put into an orphanage and then her grandparents went and got her out and tried to
raise her, realized they couldn't, and put her back into an orphanage. So she had a lot of unstable early, early months of life, which now they know can be pretty damaging to a kid. Ellen was-- we thought-- eighteen months old when she came over, but now we think she was probably fifteen months, fourteen months.

I'm certainly no psychiatrist, but I think what they know of early childhood development-- and what we were educated on as we went through a lot of this-- was that the early months, the first year, the first two years of life really have a lot to do with kids forming emotional attachments and feeling secure and stable. And when kids grow up without that they have a lot of abandonment issues and issues with trust. That certainly played out in the behavior that my sister exhibited.

I think I always thought my parents were pretty courageous for doing what they did. Certainly living in New York City now, you see a lot of it. It's really become kind of the rage, especially with Chinese girls. It's a lot more prominent. Nowadays, you have groups like Adoptive Families Together and other organizations. I think prospective adoptive parents have more information now than they did back then. I think back then, it was just assumed that you bring this kid over regardless of their background, and
plop them in the family and everything will be fine. You know, they'll be better off for it, that was sort of the general perception. I think my parents probably got into this without really knowing a lot (laughs), other than that they wanted to do it. Nowadays, I think there is a lot more information available and a lot more education available to parents about some of the problems the kids have or could potentially have, and really a lot more awareness of what it really means to take these kinds of steps.

You know, hindsight is twenty-twenty. My mother realizes now, looking back, that some of the behaviors that Ellen exhibited even when she was much younger, like when she was six, seven, eight years old, before it sort of played out in behavior, that there was something wrong. When she got older, there was everything from stealing and lying, to stealing credit cards and running up bills, fairly self-destructive behavior like that. When she was much younger there wasn't so much. But my mother says, looking back on it, that she could always see that there was, at times, kind of a distance. At the time, I probably wasn't emotionally aware enough to notice. I was a kid myself.

As kids, the three of us were pretty close, especially when we were real small. I wasn't around as much when a lot
of it started. Ellen and my brother Brian have a much more adversarial relationship. I was always the older brother. I tended to give her the benefit of the doubt. My brother called her on a lot of her stuff, so they had a much tenser relationship during those years. He bore the brunt of a lot of it while I was off at college. I was around during the summers. I was home and she was in and out of different hospitals. So I was aware of a lot of it. For example, we went to family therapy and things like that together. But for a good part of the year I was gone. She was in and out of state hospitals. And it was tough to go and see her.

Ellen's doing very well now. Once she got out, she had problems. For instance, she was in and out of college for a year or two. She ran into trouble there. And then she disappeared for about two years. She got married at one point. She was in contact for a little bit, but not a whole lot. And then out of the blue-- my mother always said that when Ellen would make contact again it would be through me-- and sure enough, so it had to be 1996 or early 1997, we came home and there was a message on my answering machine. She had been out in California, living with a different guy. She had been doing different jobs. She came home and moved back with my parents for eight or nine months, and then went back out to California, and stayed in touch more.
Then she met this guy she's with now. They've been together about three years and living together. She's held down a job. She's had problems with jobs. She would steal from her boss. But for the past three years she has held a job. This guy seems to be a great guy. He's a bit older, and he's had some problems. But for whatever reason they seem to balance each other out. I guess two people with problems like that sometimes understand, or whatever. He's great. We all like him. He comes around quite a bit. They drop by my parents' house quite a lot. My wife and I go over there with the baby. She always comes down. She was down here a few weeks ago.

Growing up, my parents had some friends who were African American and Indian, so we knew different races and stuff. They tried to explain to us that there were people who judge other people differently based on their race. But we didn't really talk about race more than that, just the right and wrong of it. Race wasn't really discussed. It was culture more than anything else. We went to the World's Fair in Knoxville in 1980 and went to see the Korean Pavilion. It was important to see that. Ellen got special treatment there. The performers and dancers recognized that she was Korean and really made a big deal about her. So I
guess it was more cultural differences. It wasn't really a racial thing.

I am pretty liberal. I have friends of all races. I've lived in a big city for so long, in the neighborhood I live in we are in the minority. It's a Hispanic neighborhood. In graduate school, it was predominantly Asian. At work, it's people of all different races and sexual preference. So I've been immersed in it for long enough, and I think I always grew up with a sense of right and wrong about making judgments about people based on race that it's never been an issue for me. My friendships don't have all that much to do with race. The circle of friends I hang around with is pretty mixed racially. My comfort level with people doesn't have that much to do with race as opposed to just who the people are. I notice racial differences, I just don't think about them too much. Unless it's a language problem, then it's a little more (laughs). Especially up here, it's heavily Dominican or Spanish. You find yourself in circumstances where everybody is speaking a different language, and it's tough to kind of feel comfortable. But I don't feel anything other than, "These people can speak two languages and I can't."

Ellen has never talked to me about racism. I don't know. She has always mostly lived in a fairly metropolitan
environment. Part of the reason she went to California during those years was for the much bigger Asian population. She doesn't really talk too much about it though. She makes little jokes, like, "You can't drive in San Diego, there's too many Asian ladies." Sort of self-deprecating remarks, but nothing of a really serious nature.

Having a sister who was adopted from Korea, I guess I'm a little more attuned to racial differences and people's feelings. It may have made it easier for me, in some instances, to meet people and befriend people and get along with people of other races. It may give me more credibility with certain people who were not sure about my motivations until they found out that I'd had this sort of other experience. As you get to know people and you talk about your family, things like that. There were definitely times when certain people said, "Ah you know, I didn't realize you had that kind of family background." When people find that out about me, they trust your intentions or motivations more. This would be with any person of color, I think, sometimes. I don't think I've ever actually tried to use it. It's just something that comes up as you get to know people. I might say, if I met someone who is Korean, "Oh you know, my sister is Korean, I've been to
Yes, I've been to Korea. It just so happened that my wife's parents lived there for about three years. They also lived in China. They worked for Motorola as ex-pats. We thought it was a great opportunity and so my wife and I went for a couple weeks. This was before Ellen had been back. My mother had been over and met a bunch of people who helped her with her adoptive parent group, and who were involved with Korean adoption on the other side. I met a couple of the people she had met over there. At this time, my sister was still out of the picture.

Ellen had talked at one time about wanting us all to go as family. After she went and met her biological family, there was a rough period. She had some problems. But I think it turned out to be the best thing for her. I think it helped contribute to her getting beyond some of the issues she had. Or at least, come to terms with some of them. At first Ellen said it was a great experience, but then as it settled in and she realized that some of the stories she had been told weren't true, for example, that she had a different birthday, and that she had a family over there, she was wondering, "Why did they get rid of Korea." It's like something you try to find when you meet somebody new.
me?" I think she has made her peace with that. But I don't think she is in touch with them now at all.

In our family, I would say the end result was successful. It certainly had its ups and downs, but, I mean, we're a pretty connected family. You know, we all get together at the holidays. I think my brother and sister still have issues they haven't fully resolved. What kind of impact did that have on their relationships with my parents? But overall, we're still in touch, we get together, we're involved in each other's lives. On a scale of one to ten, I'd say probably seven and a half. My brother might not rate it the same as me. I don't know; he might not.

Phase 1: Identifying three types of narrative statements

The first phase of discourse analysis involved an approach adapted from James Gee (1996) and Gee and his colleagues (Gee, Allen, and Clinton, 2001). For Gee (1996), discourses consist of ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing that are accepted as instantiations of particular roles (or types of people) by specific groups of people…" (p. viii, emphasis added).

From this perspective, identities or roles within discourses can be analyzed by a close reading of the texts created by speakers and writers. Applied to the interview transcripts, the first phase of discourse analysis involved three rounds of close readings of the
transcripts to discern specific kinds of statements: round 1 focused on identifying I-statements embedded in the narratives; round 2 focused on statements specifically about race, and round 3, statements specifically about adoption.

During Round 1, I-statements were identified as utterances in which participants talked about themselves in the first person, and when usually beginning with the pronoun "I". Table 4.1 shows representative examples of I-statements from Shawn's profile:

Table 4.1: Examples of Shawn's I-statements

I grew up primarily in Massachusetts.
I have a younger brother.
I remember getting out of school early.
I guess I am a fairly centered, fairly normal person.
I've been married for three years.
I have one daughter.
I was predominantly attracted to people within my race.
I dated African American women and a few Asian women.
I'm certainly no psychiatrist.
I always thought my parents were pretty courageous for doing what they did.
I probably wasn't emotionally aware enough to notice.
I wasn't around as much when a lot of it started.
I am pretty liberal.
I have friends of all races.
Initially, I found that round 1 provided some indication of how much or how little the interviewees talked about race in adulthood. In Shawn's case, for example, in only a few of his I-statements did he mention anything to do with race, and then only in response to a specific question: "I dated African American women and a few Asian women in college;” “I think it depends on the environment they grow up in, whether they think race is important.” Some of the statements analyzed in round 1 also resurfaced in round 2 as race statements, and again in round 3 as adoption statements. Below are a few examples of Shawn's adoption statements and race statements from rounds 2 and 3, followed by a brief interpretation of his identities based on all three rounds that comprise phase 1:

Table 4.2: Examples of Shawn's adoption statements

Ellen was adopted from Korea in 1975.
We didn't know that many people that had adopted kids.
My mother was pretty active about getting us integrated into a community with other families that had adopted kids, particularly transracial.
I don't remember it ever being a big issue, positively or negatively, really.
Our family talked about adoption just every now and then.
We were always aware that Ellen was adopted.
She started to have problems... that resulted in large part from her difficult early years adjusting to being adopted.
I always thought my parents were pretty courageous for doing what they did.

Table 4.3: Examples of Shawn's race statements

It was pretty much a middle class, predominantly white neighborhood.

But I dated African American women and a few Asian women, in college and later.

I lived in a lot of different cities early in my career... and they were predominantly African American or white.

I got married three years ago to a woman who is white. But she obviously looked different enough that I think people realized she was not our biological sister.

But we didn't really talk about race more than that, just the right and wrong of it.

The circle of friends I hang around with is pretty mixed racially.

My comfort level with people doesn't have that much to do with race as opposed to just who the people are.

I notice racial differences, I just don't think about them too much.

Ellen has never talked to me about racism.
Interpretation: Bear in mind that Shawn’s race and adoption statements, as well as his I-statements, were drawn from the entire profile transcript. When reviewing the data from rounds 1, 2, and 3, the first thing I noticed was how few of Shawn's race statements have to do with childhood memories, and how most of them refer to his life now as an adult. Shawn rarely mentions race when reminiscing about his childhood, and then mainly in response to an interview question or prompt. One possible explanation might be that race became salient for Shawn only after he moved to more cosmopolitan, urban environments as an adult. Using the white racial identity development model proposed by Janet Helms (1990), we might surmise that until adulthood, Shawn’s racial identity was at the pre-contact stage of development.

Other statements made by Shawn have to do with talking about differences in cultural rather than racial terms: “Part of the reason she went to California... was for the much bigger Asian population;” “Race wasn't really discussed. It was culture more than anything else.” Physical or racial differences were minimized in Shawn’s awareness, unlike many of the study participants who reported numerous instances of dealing with questions about their adopted siblings and why they looked different. On the other hand, Shawn felt he was exposed to Korean culture, for example, by the family’s visit to the Korean pavilion at the 1980 World’s Fair. In keeping with the theme of downplaying race, Shawn reports, “Ellen has never talked to me about racism.”

From analyzing his adoption statements, it appears that Shawn feels that his family made an effort to participate in adoptive family group activities: “My mother was pretty active about getting us integrated into a community with other families that had adopted kids, particularly transracial.” Yet interestingly, he offers a contradictory
perspective when he claims that “we didn't know that many people that had adopted kids” and “I don't remember it ever being a big issue, positively or negatively, really.”

In terms of his racial identity, we might surmise that Shawn performs his roles in race discourse in the fashion that arguably typifies educated, middle class, non-racist (or "liberal," to use his own word) males who comprise an elite group accorded the privilege of not having to think much about race: “I’m pretty liberal;” “I notice racial differences, I just don't think about them too much;” “My friendships don't have all that much to do with race.” That is, whiteness remains the default category, and therefore goes unmarked and unspoken, giving Shawn—and others like him—an “invisible knapsack” of unearned white male privilege and power (McIntosh, 1988). As a result, race is something not generally talked about openly or brought into Shawn's everyday conversation. Instead, race comes up only in response to explicit questions such as those posed during this interview.

**Phase 2: Microanalysis of vignettes**

The second phase of analysis involved, first, crafting shorter narratives (i.e., vignettes) from the longer profiles, drawing largely on the race and adoption statements identified in Phase One, and second, applying to each vignette the systematic analytical methodology developed by Stanton Wortham (2001). Narratologists maintain that the notion of narrative can be understood as a metaphor for the self (Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997; MacIntyre, 1997; Gergen & Gergen, 2000). In the narratological view, a coherent sense of self emerges from an individual’s experience of life as a storied ordering of that life emerges (Mishler, 1986).
Moreover, narrators frequently introduce characters that give substance to their narratives. Attending to the ways in which narrators position and give voice to each character provides analysts with an indication of how narrators view themselves in the story. For Wortham (2001), the point of narrative analysis is to discern the "kinds of selves" being constructed as narrators relate stories about themselves. For the purposes of analyzing the vignettes contained in the interview transcripts, Wortham's methodology provided another way to explicate the multiple identities of non-adopted siblings.

The vignette on race and adoption crafted from Shawn's profile transcript can be seen in Table 4.4:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Transcript text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I think early on my mom decided it was important for my sister to try to stay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Connected to her Korean heritage. So she joined some community groups that had</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>other adopted kids. They did Korean festivals, fairs, and language classes, things like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>that. The rest of the family was involved at certain times. We went to picnics, barbecues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>family get-togethers. There were things just for the adopted kids, but then also sort of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>introducing the rest of the family to the culture. We thought it was pretty interesting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>We didn't think too much about the different races or anything like that at that point in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>my life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I think I always thought my parents were pretty courageous for doing what they did.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Now it's really become kind of the rage, especially with Chinese girls. I think back then</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>it was just assumed that you bring this kid over regardless of their background and plop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>them in the family and everything will be fine. You know, they'll be better off for it, that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>was sort of the general perception. I think my parents probably got into this without</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>really knowing a lot (laughs), other than that they wanted to do it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Growing up, my parents had some friends who were African American and Indian, so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>we knew different races and stuff. When we got to the age when we heard slang and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>terms they told us-- they tried to explain to us that there were people who judge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>other people differently based on their race. But we didn't really talk about race</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
more than that, just the right and wrong of it. Race wasn't really discussed. It was
culture more than anything else. We knew Ellen was Korean. I guess it was more
cultural differences. It wasn't really a racial thing.
I am pretty liberal. I have friends of all races. I've lived in a big city for so long, in
the neighborhood I live in we are in the minority. It's a Hispanic neighborhood. In
grad school it was predominantly Asian. At work, it's people of all different races and
sexual preference. So I've been immersed in it for long enough, and I think I always
grew up with a sense of right and wrong about making judgments about people based on
race that it's never been an issue for me.
My friendships don't have all that much to do with race. The circle of friends I hang
around with is pretty mixed racially. My comfort level with people doesn't have that
much to do with race as opposed to just who the people are. I notice racial differences, I
just don't think about them too much.
I lived in the South for a number of years. People's attitudes down there were
completely different. Even the big cities down there where the populations are much
more, just in terms of numbers, there are a lot more minorities. And yet the cities are so
gerographically segregated. Whereas in Boston or New York you may have little pockets
of it. Like, this is a white neighborhood or a black neighborhood or an Asian neighbor-
hood. But the lines really blur. There are sort of people living next to each other

table
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Transcript text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>everywhere. But in Atlanta, the interstate cuts the city in half, north and south.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Everybody white lives on the north side of the interstate and everybody black lives on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>the south side. There was an ingrained sense of, We don't mix with those people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Having a sister who was adopted from Korea, I guess I'm a little more attuned to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>racial differences and people's feelings. It may have made it easier for me, in some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>instances, to meet people and befriend people and get along with people of other races.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>It may give me more credibility with certain people who were not sure about my</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>motivations until they found out that I'd had this sort of other experience. This would be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>with any person of color, I think, sometimes. I don't think I've ever actually tried to use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>it. It's just something that comes up as you get to know people. I might say, if I met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>someone who is Korean, Oh you know, my sister is Korean, I've been to Korea. It's like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>something you try to find when you meet somebody new.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Phase 2, Round One: Identifying key episodes and characters

The first step in Wortham’s approach is to conduct a systematic, line-by-line
examination of the narrative text in order to identify the key events that make up the
episodes within the vignette. To continue with the example from participant Shawn, I
identified seven episodes in his vignette. Table 4.5 shows each episode and their
 corresponding events and characters:
Table 4.5: Episodes in Shawn's vignette of race and adoption

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Episode</th>
<th>Lines</th>
<th>Events</th>
<th>Characters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>Mom’s parenting decisions</td>
<td>Shawn (S), mom, Ellen (E)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2-8</td>
<td>Participating in adoptive family group activities</td>
<td>S, E, other family members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>9-14</td>
<td>Reflecting on TRA</td>
<td>S, mom, dad, adoptees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>15-21</td>
<td>Learning about diversity</td>
<td>S, E, mom, dad, family friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>21-31</td>
<td>Social circles &amp; friends</td>
<td>S, diverse friends, Hispanics, Asians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>32-40</td>
<td>Comparing South &amp; North</td>
<td>S, blacks, whites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>41-49</td>
<td>Disclosing his TR experience</td>
<td>S, E, people he meets</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in Table 4.5, Shawn's vignette consists of seven narrated episodes. Some episodes are only one line long; others take up several lines. Shawn (S) becomes a character in his own story, since he places himself in the narrative that he tells during the interview. Additional characters are his sister (E), his own parents, and friends of different races.

**Phase 2, Round Two: Types of selves narrated into being**

The next round of analysis attempts to discern the kinds of selves Shawn constructs in telling his story. In other words, what kind of person is he narrating into being? Each of the seven episodes in Shawn's vignette was examined and coded based on the nature of the narrated events in the episode. I identified four different types of selves, as shown in Table 4.6:

Table 4.6: Shawn's narrated selves

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of self</th>
<th>Episode</th>
<th>Narrated events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evaluative self</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Assessing mom’s decision to connect with Korean culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Assessing parents’ decision to adopt from Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Comparing race relations in the South vs. the North</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural self</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Affirming Korean culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Exposure to family friends of different races &amp; cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Circle of friends now; Hispanic neighborhood S. lives in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Travel to Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflexive self</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Reflecting on changing perceptions of TRA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Comments on his comfort level &amp; immersion experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Heightened awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Care about how he discloses that he has an adopted Korean sister &amp; has traveled to Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral self</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Parents’ liberal values as his own</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Descriptions of Shawn’s four selves:

1. *Evaluative self:* In episode 1 Shawn assesses his mother’s decision to connect the family with Korean culture. In the same episode, he evaluates his parents’ decision to adopt a child from Korea. Shawn’s evaluative self draws comparisons between race relations in the South and the North (episode 6).

2. *Multicultural self:* Shawn’s multicultural self affirms the value of learning about Korean culture. Additionally, in episodes 3 through 5 he describes being exposed to friends of different races and cultures, both as a child and as an adult. Shawn also comments on traveling to Korea and on how he brings this experience into conversations with people as he gets to know them (episode 6).

3. *Aware self:* Shawn’s aware self comments on his changing perceptions of transracial adoption (episode 2). He also reflects on his comfort level and immersion experiences in episode 4. Shawn describes his heightened awareness of race issues, and the care he takes when he discloses that he has an adopted Korean sister and has himself visited Korea (episode 7).
4. Moral self: Shawn’s moral self accepts his parents’ liberal values as his own. For example, he explains how his parents taught him “about people who judge other people differently based on their race” (episode 4).

Clearly, Shawn feels a strong affinity for his sister. By the same token, he expresses close affinity with his parents. It goes without saying that Shawn's heightened awareness builds on the solid foundation laid by his parents during his childhood. Yet race was downplayed in his upbringing; in contrast, it is mostly by engaging in conversation with his adult friends that Shawn reports becoming more “attuned to racial differences and people's feelings" (lines 41-42).

Each of the other eleven interviews was analyzed using the methodology described above. Chapter 5 provides an in-depth discussion of the findings from the discourse analysis of the profiles and the narrative analysis of vignettes. Before that can occur, however, a broader discussion of the theoretical framework guiding this study will be offered in Chapter 4.

Acknowledging the Gifts of the Study Participants

To close this chapter, I feel compelled to provide a few words of a more personal nature, specifically about my role as an insider participant-researcher. Treating the private lives of individuals methodologically and analytically always presents challenges for conscientious researchers. I have attempted to treat the words and personal experience of each sibling participant with the utmost respect and sensitivity. I hope this becomes evident in this and subsequent chapters. As I listened intently in my role as interviewer, and again later, as I became immersed in analyzing the data, I was struck by the almost palpable love expressed by each sibling, as each talked about their adopted brothers and
sisters, their families, their personal struggles and triumphs, and their private memories, feelings, and wishes. I was keenly aware of the honor and privilege granted to me as the audience-researcher, of being allowed to bear witness to a process of highly personal sharing and self-disclosure. I hope readers of this study come away feeling similarly privileged and grateful to the non-adopted sibling participants.

**Chapter Four Summary**

For this study of racial identities in transracial families, I interviewed twelve adults who were not adopted but grew up with siblings who were adopted transracially. Taking a sociocultural and sociolinguistic perspective of identities as socially constructed primarily through discourse allowed me to analyze the narrative identities of interview participants. This analysis was accomplished in two phases. In Phase One, participant *profiles* were crafted from the interview transcripts (Seidman, 1998), drawing largely on an adaptation of the discourse analysis methodology developed by Gee, Allen, & Clinton (2001). Specifically, I identified three types of statements, namely I-statements, race statements, and adoption statements.

Based on the this analysis, shorter participant *vignettes* were then crafted (Seidman, 1998) primarily from race and adoption statements, to be analyzed in Phase Two using Wortham's (2001) methodology for narrative analysis. Using the data from one participant as an example, Chapter 4 demonstrated how a systematic process of close readings and interpretations of the vignettes provided insight into the *types of selves* (Wortham, 2001) narrated by the participants. A presentation of the profiles of the twelve study participants follows in Chapters 5 and 6.
CHAPTER 5

PROFILES OF THE STUDY PARTICIPANTS, PART 1

The following two chapters present the interview data in the form of individual profiles of the participants in this study. For ease of reading, the twelve profiles have been divided into two chapters. Chapter 5 presents profiles of siblings whose adopted brother or sister is Korean or African American, while Chapter 6 presents those whose siblings are biracial.

Each profile opens with a brief introduction, including background information about each participant and a list of the siblings in the family, along with their ages at the time of the interview. Each list of siblings identifies by race or ethnicity those siblings who were adopted transracially. In an effort to protect the anonymity of participants and their families, all first names and family names used are pseudonyms.

Table 5.1 gives an overview of the twelve non-adopted sibling participants. The first column gives the sibling group’s family name, while column 2 identifies the siblings’ names, with participants’ names in boldface. Column 3 shows the ages of siblings in each family at the time of the study, and the last column indicates the siblings who were adopted transracially in each family.
Table 5.1: Family groups of the non-adopted siblings

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<td>1. DiMarco</td>
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<td>Brian</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ellen</td>
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<td>Korean sister</td>
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<td>2. Beemon</td>
<td>Louisa</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dale</td>
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<td>3. Buruffski</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Jonathan</td>
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<td>Korean brother</td>
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<td>4. Swenson</td>
<td>Henry</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Bobbie</strong></td>
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<td>Elsa</td>
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<td>Sheila</td>
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<td>African American sister</td>
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<td>Charles</td>
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<td>African American brother</td>
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<td>5. Van Dyke</td>
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<td>Darla</td>
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<td>Nina</td>
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<td>6. Bradford</td>
<td>Jacob</td>
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<td>Chet</td>
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<td><strong>Ashley</strong></td>
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<td>Venus</td>
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<td>African American sister</td>
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<td>7. Malvaux</td>
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<td>David</td>
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<td>Russell</td>
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<td>Lola</td>
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<td>8. Roth</td>
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<td>Zawadi</td>
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<td>biracial sister</td>
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<td>9. Manheim</td>
<td>Jamal</td>
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<td>biracial brother</td>
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<td>Dirk</td>
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<td><strong>Alexis</strong></td>
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<td>10. Benjamin</td>
<td>Tony</td>
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<td>biracial brother</td>
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<td><strong>Doug</strong></td>
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<td>11. O'Toole</td>
<td>Roger</td>
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<td><strong>Margaret</strong></td>
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<td>Daniel</td>
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<td>12. Kaufman</td>
<td><strong>Nicole</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Malcolm</td>
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<td>biracial brother</td>
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**Profile 1: Shawn DiMarco**
As mentioned in the methodology chapter, Shawn was raised along with his biological brother and adopted sister in Massachusetts. Readers may want to refer back to Chapter 4 to revisit Shawn’s profile.

_Siblings in the family: Shawn (35), Brian (33), Ellen (30, Korean adoptee)_

**Profile 2: Hannah Beemon**

Hannah lives in the same rural community in the mid-west where she grew up. Hannah is the youngest of three siblings. She and her brother were born into a Roman Catholic family after their parents had already adopted her sister Louisa. Her college-educated parents both worked during her childhood. Hannah, who at the time of this interview was about to get married, is currently employed by the business office of an automotive company.

_Siblings in the family: Hannah (22), Dale (25), Louisa (28, Korean adoptee)_

I am twenty-two years old and have lived in Tompkins Corners all my life. I live out in the country. It's not a big city, just a little town. Pretty much everybody knows everybody else. I work out in Great Falls, which is about forty minutes away from Tompkins Corners. I work for a corporation that manufactures parts for the auto makers. I'm in the Accounts Receivable department. Right now I am still living with my parents. But my fiancé and I are
closing on our house hopefully soon. We just bought a house that's about fifteen minutes from where I grew up.

My mom and dad, they've been married for about thirty-five years now. They adopted my sister Louisa. She is six years older than me. They were married for about four years or so when they adopted Louisa. Then three years later they gave birth to my brother Dale. And then three years later they gave birth to me. I'm the baby of the family.

I would describe myself as, I guess, somewhat hard-working and very organized. I like to have things very organized and very clean. I care about my family and my friends very much. I like to have a good time. I mostly keep to myself. I don't like to go out all that much. I'm more of a homebody person. But I love to be with my family and my friends. My way of feeling loved and being loved is to be with my family. I don't get to see my sister as much as I like to, but we see each other on the weekends.

I think adoption is a wonderful thing. I'm all for it, of course, because you know, I grew up with it. A lot of our other family members and cousins are adopted, so it's a very common thing in our family, and I'm completely comfortable with it. I know that some people I talk to wouldn't even consider it. For example, my fiancé, we want kids of our own, but he doesn't even really consider
adoption as an option right now. But he comes from a big family where it was all his parents' children. I mean, I don't eliminate it out of my future if it comes to that. My fiancé loves kids. He definitely wants kids, but you know, he definitely wants kids of his own. So we haven't really gotten into the adoption talk. But it's certainly an option in my future.

My sister was born in Seoul, South Korea. She was about three to six months old when she came. My parents always explained right from the beginning that my sister was adopted. But when I was very little I never thought anything of it. I considered her completely our family, our blood. It never crossed my mind that she was different at all. But then, of course, as I got older you remember that she's adopted. But even still, I never think of it. I always think of her as like my real sister. It's hard-- I sometimes have to remind myself that she's not really blood-related.

I didn't know any other families like ours personally. As kids we had gone to Korean culture camps together-- my brother, sister, and I-- where we had interacted with Korean adoptees and their families. So we had gone to these camps with all these other kids and learned together the Korean culture and everything. But I never really knew any
other families of adoptees from Korea or anything like that.

Our neighborhood growing up was actually a dirt road. There were only a few houses on our road, and not really any kids or anything. It wasn't really in a neighborhood. It was more like a country road. But now we're getting more houses down here. We never really played with any neighbor kids. At first we went to a Baptist school, and then later we went to Tompkins Corners public schools. For our earlier years, probably my sister up until eighth grade, we all went to this private Christian school. We all carpooled with other parents and their kids. I went to the Christian school up until my third grade year. I really loved it there. We all liked it there. It was a very small school. We were friends with everybody in all grades. It was out in the country, too. There was white, some Asian and Latino, I believe, and African American—I'm trying to think of anything else. I think that was about it. Then we went to Tompkins Corners schools. They were basically like any public school that I can think of. It was mostly all white, but also we did have a small percentage of African Americans, a very small percentage of Mexican and Asian.

As for my dating history, I'm mostly attracted to people in my own race. I'm not sure if it's just kind of
the way I've been -- not like brought up, but I mean because I personally don't believe too much in interracial marriages. But that is just me. We were not brought up like that. My family is very open-minded, and you know, they let us make our own decisions. But I kind of mostly believe not really in the interracial relationships. But I've never really been attracted to any other race besides white. But that's just me personally.

My family talked about adoption every now and then. I mean, we're completely comfortable with it. We talk about, you know, we totally embrace my sister's culture and where she's from and everything. We support her in finding out whatever she can. She's gone to Korea a couple times herself on tours and stuff. We completely support her in finding out her past and everything.

If I show a picture of my sister to someone, they'll ask, "Oh, is she adopted?" I'll confirm, yes. But I never even think of it (laughs). No one ever made a big deal of it. Mostly everyone who asked, they thought of it as a good thing. They're like, "Oh, that's great." I've never met anybody who has ever had a problem with it or disagreed.

I know with my sister, because she's Korean, that some people are racist and may not accept her as much. I know that maybe-- this was not the case with us-- but with
maybe other adopted kids and families, I don't know, I would wonder if maybe they might have not been as close or accepting with the siblings, maybe. But that was not the case in our family. We were very close. At first when we were kids, I was not as close with my sister. But then as we got older I became much closer with her than with my brother. As we got older we bonded a lot more. Once we were in high school and college—- it could have been because of the vast age difference, because she was six years older. We never really had anything in common as kids. She was a teenager and I was still little, but we didn't really start bonding or having that great of a connection until I was a bit older.

I've never had a problem with anybody or with anything over the fact that she'd been adopted. I'm so happy she's in the family! I consider her as my real sister. As far as I know, with both sides of my family it's been all positive. I've never heard anybody talk about it in a bad way at all. I don't really have a specific example. I can just tell it's positive because of the way they act toward my sister and my other adopted cousins. I can just tell it's very accepted in my family. It's kind of common in our family. I've always felt proud and kind of unique that I have a sister that's adopted and from Korea. I've never
felt negative or bad about it at all. I've been lucky. I don't think anything has ever really come up in my life where it has been an issue with me.

Sometimes, I think maybe when I was little, out of maybe, like, selfishness, because I felt like, because she was adopted, she was special and got treated as more special. Or because of more personal things, like me and my mom (laughs). There's some big issues between us. It's kind of like where I feel that I think my mom is so accep-- wants my sister, throughout these years, has always wanted her to be such a part of this family, and not feel different or left out, that I kind of always felt that she liked her over me, kind of, growing up (laughing).

Throughout my childhood, race was never an issue, really. We accepted everybody. Of course, we grew up as Christians and accepted everybody, and everybody was equal. I basically never thought bad of any race. We were never taught to like one race above another. My dad is pretty cool with everybody. But now that I'm older, I can see my dad will express more about certain races. It's just that sometimes I'll hear him make comments about African Americans or Mexicans. I mean, he's never made any racial slurs or anything like that. But you know how parents can be when they're watching the news, and like someone commits
a crime, he's like, "Oh those you know." But we were never taught to dislike any race or to treat anybody unequal. Me, I accept everybody. I have no problem with anybody or any race. So it was never anything negative.

We've always supported my sister for getting involved with her culture and learning more about it, and finding out stuff about her culture. We supported her a couple years ago when she went on the-- I don't know if you have heard of Holt International, but it's like an adoption agency. They had a tour for the Korean adoptees to go over there. She went on that. We totally supported her in that. We were so happy for her. She was just so excited, she loved it. She went back there to actually help out at the orphanage that she came from. She was a volunteer for a summer after she took that tour. She spent a whole summer there. We were really happy for her and excited. We wanted her to embrace her culture and everything. We thought that was great that she really enjoyed it.

If I see another family with a little girl from Korea, it'll go through my mind, like, Oh, that's sweet. I wonder if she's adopted like my sister? Or I'll notice that and think, that's so great that they did that, too, and adopted someone from another land. But I never approach them or
anything (laughs). You know me, I keep to myself. But I always think of it as a good thing.

I've heard of things like-- because some people are racist-- I think Louisa did the National Guard for a little bit. This was a very long time ago, and I was kind of young. But I remember hearing that she didn't like it there because some of the other girls were making fun of her racially. But I think that's really been the only time when I've ever heard of anything racist happening. But then I've heard of things like when she might go into a store and just because somebody's racist. But not really about her just being in a white family, or anything like that, but just because of people who are actually racist.

I think of Louisa as just having a different nationality than me. Otherwise I consider her as my true, real sister. I mean, I know where she came from, but she's basic-- because she grew up here with us, she's basically just like me. It's just that she's from a different nation.

But I think I remember when I was there at camp-- I never really thought of it, cuz I was a kid and I was very young-- I had a good time being there with everybody. And I made Korean friends. I'm trying to remember if there were other races there besides Caucasian and Asian. I know there was some Caucasian kids there. We were not like the only
ones. But it was basically mostly all Koreans. But back then I didn't think anything of it. I thought it was a very cool camp. I thought it was cool because I knew that this was my sister's culture. I always kind of admired her stuff because, like, my parents-- she always had these Korean, she had a lot of her Korean culture in her room. Like she would have the Korean dolls and everything, and books and everything. My parents supported that, and would let her embrace her culture as a child. I kind of always admired that, and was interested in her culture as well. So I thought it was really fun to go to that camp. We got to learn how to use chopsticks and stuff like that. I thought it was really cool.

I would have to say to social workers to tell the parents that they should embrace their child's culture, wherever they may come from. I just think that's a great thing. I've heard of some parents-- my sister knows someone she went on the tour with, this Korean girl, her parents had her get this surgery on her eyes to make her eyes more American, instead of the slitted Asian. My mom and I just thought that was so wrong. I just think it would be great more for the parents to not change how their adoptive kid is, just to fit our society. I think it would be great to embrace their culture and who they really are, and let them
not be afraid to find out about their past, or to actually find out more about where they come from, who they are. To accept them, and let their child accept themselves: show their child that the parents like who they are, and show them their culture. Let them have things from their nation. From my experience, I thought that was a great thing. Not kind of block it out, like no, you're our family now.

When Louisa talked about how much she loved it in Korea after the tour, it kind of worried us that maybe she might move there. But we wouldn't have considered it as a rejection because we know that she appreciates us and has love for us, and considers us her family. We are her family, and I don't think we would have ever thought of it as a rejection, and she would never have made it seem like that at all.

I think my experience has opened my eyes and made me maybe a more accepting and better person, and to accept other people's culture. I am comfortable with other races and talking to other people. I've never had a problem with that. I think it's because I know how to interact. It's made me more comfortable with other races, especially Asians.

Profile 3: Katrina Buruffski
Katrina Buruffski grew up in the eastern United States during the 1980s and 1990s. She is currently enrolled at a small Roman Catholic college in New England. She is one of two children in the family. Her brother Jonathan was adopted from Korea at three months of age. Katrina's family has been actively involved with adoptive family groups, as well as in a number of Korean cultural activities. For example, everyone in the family has traveled at some point to visit Korea.

_Siblings in the family: Katrina (21), Jonathan (19, Korean adoptee)_

I was born in 1983 in New Hampshire, but soon after we moved to Massachusetts. I would say we were a pretty tight-knit family. We would hang out with the extended family on the holidays and what not. The neighborhood we lived in was pretty much white Irish Catholic. Most of the areas I've lived in and the schools I've gone to have been mostly Irish Catholic, which I am not, on a side note. I am Polish and Catholic.

Transracial adoption is something that we have always talked about, like bedtime stories with the theme of adoption. I remember one story about a bird that lived in different nests. It was in a book, one of those childhood stories. I forget what it was called, but things like this. Adoption was always a concept I was familiar with. We knew quite a few other families like ours, from the many adoption events and clubs and organizations that my parents
belonged to. We knew a lot of families through that: Adoptive Families Together, Open Door Society, you name it, I am sure my family was involved. One major thing for my brother was through Tufts University, the Korean Students Association had a brother-sister sort of group. I remember a lot of times at Tufts University, a lot of families that had adopted Asian kids had these big brothers and big sisters in college. It was a good program.

I went to Catholic school my whole life. My brother went to the same schools as me except for middle school. He left to go to the public middle school in sixth grade because it was a little bit larger and more diverse. I think my mom thought he would have fared better in a bigger school. It was a public school. As soon as he left, his best friend, who's another Korean, went, too. So I think it was along those lines. Jonathan's best friend was Korean American, not adopted, and his parents are both from Korea.

My family talked about adoption all the time. It was a pretty common topic, especially since we were so involved in so many activities, specifically my brother. He went to Korean school and other things like that. We went to a Korean culture camp when I was probably five or six. We went a couple years in a row. I don't think it really even fazed me at all that I was the only girl that was white in
this entire group of people who were not. I remember really enjoying it. I think maybe there were one or two other kids who were not adopted there, but very few.

Growing up, a lot of people were pretty curious, so people would ask me about my brother quite a bit. Sometimes I feel like an ambassador to the world of adoption because, I mean, I think on one hand a lot of people-- unless you're close with someone-- might not directly ask someone who's adopted. So it's sort of easy to ask someone like me who might know about it, but not necessarily take offense or have it be a personal question that they're asking.

In those teenage years, it was one of those things like more of a burden. It made me a little bit different, and in high school, you don't want to admit that you are different in any way, shape, or form. That was not the way to go. So in those days it was tough. You don't really want to talk about it as much. Especially since for two years my brother didn't go to the same school as me. He was still in the middle school, so it was easy to sort of get away with it at that point. But I think that as I've grown up and become more knowledgeable about the topic I definitely don't mind talking about it, and I freely answer the numerous questions that I do get. When I was younger, I would say, "Oh, this is my brother." People would always
say, "Wow, he doesn't look like you." I would say, "Yes, you are quite observant" (laughs). Then they would ask when was he adopted, when my parents decided to adopt, and things like that, how he knew he was adopted. I get quite a lot of questions. I usually answer the questions. I was just sort of used to talking about it. So answering the questions wasn't too much out of the ordinary.

In all the adoption groups and things like that, being the non-adopted child has always been something that hasn't been addressed. That is sort of an issue now. I think they are calling it "the invisible child," or something, I don't know. There's a term for it now. But sort of--sometimes there wasn't a place in the whole scheme of the adoption world. Just in that general realm, overall it added another dimension to my life, but it hasn't been something too difficult or anything like that.

There might have been times when I was little and my brother was driving me crazy that I wished they hadn't adopted (laughs). But overall, I think it has been such an influential part of my life that I definitely wouldn't be the same person without it. Here's an example: I think this is my life's plan. I want to become a child and family lawyer, and deal with issues like child abuse and things like that that affect children. So I feel like obviously my
family situation has helped determine that, sort of led me in that direction.

My brother lived with a foster mother for three months. He actually met his birth mother two years ago. We've gone to Korea a few times. I went-- the whole family went-- four or five years ago. Then my mother has gone back with my brother, and then with my brother and my dad. The first time we went we toured the country, and we met the foster mother, but that was it. At that point they hadn't found his birth mother.

Going to Korea was quite the cultural experience. There was culture shock (laughs) like they write about because when we were visiting the fish market and eating dinner in the traditional Korean restaurants, it was quite amazing. That was such an interesting experience because usually, it was my brother who would stick out in public, since he was the Korean with the white family. But this time around, it was the total opposite. Obviously, there aren't a huge number of tourists in the country, and my dad is 6'10", so we definitely stuck out (laughs). We were there for two weeks. It was fascinating.

Watching my brother, he was definitely excited about going to Korea. He had always been looking forward to it. It definitely gave him a different perspective and made him
really look at things a little bit differently, realizing the whole cultural aspect of it. I think he benefited from visiting Korea and things like that. Meeting his birth mother obviously was a pivotal experience. When he was little he would write letters to his birth mother that would end up at the agency. So I think it was definitely something he had always looked forward to.

We definitely talked about Korean culture and differences and similarities, things like that. Race was something that was obviously discussed, but mostly in the context of the Korean culture, I guess. We knew other Koreans. For example, the owner of the liquor store down the street was Korean. I think because he was Korean, my family befriended him. There were a couple of other Korean Americans that-- actually, when Jonathan went to Korean school, my dad carpooled with other kids that lived in our town. They were not adopted, they were just Korean. Their mother was friendly with my parents. Also Jonathan's friend's parents, things like that. There were definitely other Koreans around that they were friends with.

Especially since I have been to Korea, that's a difference that I've also talked about. People are usually surprised when they find out. I would say most people haven't traveled to that area of the world, so it's kind of
intriguing that someone actually has visited an Asian country. It doesn't happen often, unless someone has a specific reason like I had.

Transracial adoption almost emphasizes all the issues that might surround adoption because it makes it even more obvious. People are going to know right away that you're adopted. So they'll be curious or whatever. I think it adds a whole other element to adoption. I think because of all the camps, and because of his friendships with other adopted Koreans and Koreans in general, I think for Jonathan it was pretty easy. I think he found a place in the sort of like adopted Korean community where there was that sort of—where everyone shared that conflict. So I think for him it was a lot easier.

I think kids did make fun of Jonathan for having so-called slanted eyes. I also know that it was said around me if my brother wasn't there. So it still bothered me. I would always be like, "Wait a minute." Or I wouldn't speak up and it would just bother me. I definitely felt uncomfortable. Most of the time I didn't say anything because I really didn't want to start a fight or anything like that. Depending on who it was, if it was someone I might have known a little bit better, I probably did say something.
Nowadays, I think people don't even realize when they say racist comments. It bugs me but usually I don't really say anything because people are so used to doing it that they don't even realize what they are saying most of the time. It's easily one of my biggest pet peeves that people make very racist comments that just roll off their tongue and they don't even think twice. It's definitely something that's always bothered me, stereotypical racist comments.

I would say I am white, but Caucasian if it was a more formal situation. But overall I would call it a transracial family. Which I kind of didn't realize until I read a magazine once. I always viewed it as, I have a brother who was adopted from Korea. But then there was an article in some teen magazine about a transracial family. I said, "Oh wait, that's me!" (laughs). I would say Jonathan is Asian, Korean, anything like that.

My brother had a pretty bad experience at college in Virginia with one of the security guards that he had to file a report on. I forget what the interaction was, but it was something that was pretty racist. He had to take care of that and follow up, because he was adamant that it shouldn't happen again. It definitely bothered him. I don't think he had encountered it so directly and so blatantly until then.
I would certainly consider adopting, depending on what my family circumstances are, if I have the money and the time to have a whole bunch of kids running around the house. If I did adopt, it would probably be someone who is not white, because I have often joked about making sure that my parents have no white grandchildren, so that when there are pictures on the desk of all the grandchildren, there is not one white kid in the whole picture (laughs). But we'll see what happens.

Something I wish my family had done different: I know there was some attempt at balancing out all the Korean activities (laughs) with some cultural activities that I could try to relate to. For example, we went to a Polish fest. It was really just kind of a riot, drinking beer and eating kielbasas (laughs). Nothing more than that. No real cultural parts of that. I think if there had been something a little bit more substantial than the Polish fest, something like that could have provided, maybe that would have been advantageous.

Profile 4: Bobbie Swenson

In the 1960s, Bobbie Swenson was already a teenager when her parents brought two African American children into the family. Bobbie works as a professor in a prestigious college in the northeast. As well as being the sibling of two transracial
adoptees, she is the mother of two adopted African American children and two white children born to her.

* Siblings in the family: Henry (49), Bobbie (48), Elsa (42), Sheila (38, African American adoptee), Charles (36, African American adoptee)

I was born and raised in the mid-west in the 1950s and '60s. I would say my family was morally conservative but politically liberal. My parents were child-centered, but held high expectations of their children. Education was very important. Culturally, we were more blue collar than white collar, despite my parents’ educational levels and jobs. Religion was an important part of the fabric of life, and extended family was most of our social life.

Transracial adoption is such a big subject. It is naïve to think that race does not matter, that love is all that counts. Consequently, given a choice between white and African American parents for an African American child, African American parents are clearly better. On the other hand, if parents are willing to change themselves—meaning including interracial friendships and experiences in their own lives, and not just "expose" their children to role models— it can work. When parents are committed to being an interracial family, it is an incredibly enriching family
for the biological siblings, capable of transforming who they are and what they want to do with their lives.

Because I was sixteen at the time my siblings were adopted, I was aware of its significance from the outset. I started thinking about what kind of family I wanted for myself as a grown-up almost immediately. It was a year or two later that I experienced hostility directed at me, and that was a surprise. I also immediately experienced warmth from members of the black community.

Our family talked a lot about adoption, meaning not every day, but probably every week, though sometimes only briefly. People would comment virtually whenever I was with my siblings, and if I met someone whom I knew but who had not seen my siblings before. Occasionally a stranger would ask questions, too. We were always very visible when we would go somewhere as a family; i.e., people would look at us. Sometimes I would look around at all of us when we were just our family by ourselves and feel incredibly blessed. There were so many experiences, and they were all different.

Our parents told us that they adopted because they loved children and there were children who needed homes. I remember thinking, of course, it is somewhat more complicated than that, but also that it was true. Now I see
that, because of my experience, I am a different person. I suppose, also, that I am specifically aided in working with African American students and clients, because of my own experiences as a sibling and as a parent.

I think there are many issues for adoptees: Who they look like, act like, have talents and troubles like. Whether their talents or difficulties are biologically determined. Why their birth parents couldn’t or didn’t want to raise them. Whether they have diseases that will show up later. Where their birth parents are, and whether they are happy and well, etc. If they have biological siblings. Whether they will ever see --or may even have unknowingly encountered-- biological relatives. How they fit into the extended adoptive family. Whether they are “really” either the ethnicity or race they were born into, or something less valid. And many more. I am sometimes sad for the pain I hear from my sister Sheila, and wish that she would not have had to experience it.

Whenever the topic of adoption came up with acquaintances, sometimes someone would express surprise at my views, ask about my family, something like that. I didn’t "handle it" so much as just tell them facts. Now as an adoptive parent, the issue comes up in different ways,
and sometimes I feel more angry at people’s attitudes than I did as a kid.

When I was still living at home, the topic of race would come up fairly often. I had African American friends, and I had a friend who came from South Africa, and race would often come up. I remember first seeing an African American woman in downtown Minneapolis, and asking my parents about her. Then being told both about race and the history of slavery, etc. I was less than five years old then. I also remember my grandmother, who had a fourth grade education, making negative comments about African Americans as tenants, that they did not pay their rent, or something like that, and my father arguing with her. This was before my siblings were adopted. I would say my family talked quite often about racial issues in the political sense, but seldom about racial differences. After my siblings were adopted, we joined an interracial church, and we went to events there. Even before my siblings’ adoption, we had gone to demonstrations in support of civil rights, and we read and discussed books related to race.

I always wanted to adopt, and have adopted, myself. I think adoption shifts the focus away from biology and towards love and shared experiences. It has probably decreased my attachment to my identity as a Swedish
American. It has made me feel a familial sort of connection to other adoptive families, and more connected to the whole world. Genetic links in the end--like nationality, really--don’t matter nearly so much as people think.

I think transracial adoptees face specific issues: that their adoption is always on display, and that people somehow feel entitled to comment about it because of its visibility. And also, making a place for themselves as African Americans, or defending that place against people who say they aren’t really black. Figuring out how to manage an African American identity but loving or being loyal to white family members, particularly as teenagers when there are so many identity struggles. I think there are many different iterations of these issues, and they are different for boys than girls, and also may differ depending on appearance.

Identifying myself racially is hard. I feel like I am not white, and yet I know that I do not have the experiences or identity of a person of color. I cannot really explain this. I suppose if I were to label myself, I would have to say I am white racially, and both Swedish American and African American culturally, but that is not very satisfactory. I interact socially mostly with African Americans or whites, though I have some Asian American
friends. I am comfortable in most all racial settings, including settings in which I am the only white person.

I have been treated poorly by clerks in stores and nurses in medical centers because I have been with a black child. I have been told racial jokes with an assumption that I would like them, and then felt hostility when I objected. My brother Charles faced threats of violence a number of times. Someone once tried to run him over with a car, and chased him with a baseball bat. When he played college baseball, he would have racial epithets shouted at him. Sheila has been followed in stores, and had her checks refused, and had her work unfairly evaluated. Many more things too.

If the social workers working with pre-adoptive parents are African American, great. If they are white, they need to learn about themselves and their own racial feelings before they could possibly help a couple to sort out what they feel. Also, it is imperative that African Americans be part of that process, even if not the social worker, because if you can’t feel comfortable talking to an African American about raising a black child, you are not ready to do it.

I would say be sure to tell parents that if this is not something they can really do, it is okay, and they
should not do it. Some parents adopt physically handicapped kids, some take on risk about birth parent drug use. Some take on legal risk, and it is not a sign of moral superiority to be able to take on particular challenges. It is wrong to the child, however, to do something you are not prepared to do just so you can have a baby sooner. If you cannot yourself value the culture of your adopted child, and enjoy being with persons of your child’s race, your child will not do so. Looked at the right way, that is not another obligation, but a great opportunity. Expect that you cannot give your child everything he or she needs, and be willing to let them find it from others. If you mind being visible, transracial adoption may not be the thing for you to do. You will have to let go of the idea of a child as being a little version of you – but that’s an idea every parent should give up. Also, look for the black community to be supportive – I have almost always found support there. Start thinking of yourself as belonging to the black community, because in many ways, you will.

As I am getting older, I am more humble in believing I have answers. I feel I am doing the best I can. But I would tell parents to adopt at least two children of the same race. Talk a lot. Listen a lot. Go lots of places to see different parts of many communities. Maybe your family can
fit in the local A.M.E. church, but not at a street fair, and maybe the opposite, just as African American families themselves vary in what parts of the community they participate in.

I do wish my family of origin had had more African American friends and adults in our lives prior to adoption. We did not have enough knowledge about the psychological issues, but we did have lots of knowledge about social and political issues. We were very willing to work at it, but we were not connected with people who may have had similar experiences.

I’m not sure what the minimum standard is for a "successful" transracial adoption. But what you hope for is a child who grows up happy, developing their talents, working on their weakness, spiritually growing, loving and learning to live— that much every child needs— and also with a comfort with themselves as members of the race they are. A positive feeling about that race, and a sense of belonging to the group, including having friends in the group, an appreciation for at least some aspects of the culture of that group, and awareness of most aspects of that culture, yet also able to love family members who are of a different race.
Profile 5: Michael Van Dyke

Mike was the first of two children born to his parents. He has two sisters: Darla, who was adopted when he was three years old, and Nina, born when he was nine. As Mike reports, the family relocated to a more urban environment--in this case, the nation's capital--in order to expose the children to greater diversity. Mike still lives in the Washington, DC area where he works as an administrator in the public schools.

In his narrative, Mike makes reference to a book about transracial adoption which features his sister Darla and other transracial adoptees. In fact, Mike's sister is well-known in the adoption community for speaking about her own experiences growing up in a transracial family.

Sibling in the family: Mike (36), Darla (35, African American adoptee), Nina (25)

I grew up in the D.C. suburbs. We moved to the suburbs from upstate New York in 1972 when I was four. I was born in 1968. I went to high school in '82 and graduated in '86. My parents adopted Darla when I was three and she was two. The reason my parents said they adopted was that they wanted a playmate for me, and they weren't planning on having any more children. So they were surprised about nine years later when my youngest sister came along. Nina is twenty-five, so almost ten years younger than me.

I didn't realize it at the time, but after I became an adult looking back on it, well, what my parents did was pretty brave. Because at the time, the late 1960s, after
Martin Luther King was assassinated, there was a lot of tension, a lot of tension in the city, as you probably know. I viewed Darla's adoption as a compassion kind of thing. I really think my mom had a love for and cared about black children, and she felt that more people needed to adopt black children in the inner city, particularly at that time when the race riots were happening. The opportunity presented itself. "I care, and I want to do something to help society." I'm just hypothesizing and trying to put myself in my mom's shoes.

Darla and I were very close. We still are. I can sense her moods very easily, and where she's coming from. We grew up the first ten years of our lives very close. Even though we had our typical brother-sister spats, I always looked out for her. I was always trying to be her guardian, making sure that kids weren't picking on her, and stuff like that.

Our neighborhood growing up was predominantly Caucasian, I would say. It was working class, or blue collar as they would probably label it. It was a one block or two block radius that we hung out on, so that's really all I knew. But I didn't go to the public school there, so I wasn't as close to the kids in my neighborhood. Later, when we lived in Virginia for a year, it was mostly Caucasian as well. That was the only year I went to public
school. There were one or two black families. There were really no other races or ethnicities. That was pretty much it at the time.

The church that I go to ran a private school. Darla and I attended the same school until eighth grade. The school and the church were a little more reflective of the U.S. as a whole, in that when we were in high school, we'd have maybe one black family on the whole block, but at school we'd have, in a classroom of thirty kids, for example, you might have five black kids instead of just one. So there was a little more diversity. Then at church, it wasn't so diverse, except in the youth group. I remember the youth group was really a good mix of different kinds of backgrounds-- economic backgrounds, too-- and there were kids from the neighborhood of the church, which was more urban. So I did get more exposure that way. That's one of the reasons my parents wanted us to go to that church, for both of us-- Darla and I -- to be more exposed to diversity.

That's not something I realized until I was like eighteen. And then Darla helped me understand that a little more, too, how it's important for her, growing up black in a white family, and how you need exposure to other black people. Otherwise you think there's only that one way.
There are other ways of living that you need to understand about. Otherwise she wouldn't have her sense of self. But I didn't understand those things when I was sixteen. She had to kind of educate me a little bit (laughs). Now, after reading the book she's in, I understand a little more about that, too. Of course, in college, I took some sociology classes, and that helped me understand things more.

A lot of my friends were Indian, African, white, and African American. I had a really diverse high school experience. Now, Darla went to a public high school because-- I never understood that, and I still don't, totally-- I've never really asked my parents about this: She went to public school because I think my parents thought that Darla would benefit from having more black friends. She didn't have very many black friends, and they thought she would do better in that environment. Well, it was really quite the opposite. It kind of backfired, I think, because she didn't have a very good high school experience. She was kind of unfortunate. I felt bad about that, but I didn't really think about it too hard until many years after high school. I didn't know about all the bad stuff that went on in high school. I kind of had a sense of it, but my parents really didn't tell me much about it. They kept it between them and her, and Darla
didn't tell me very much. It was really hard for her. She got picked on a lot. She had a lot of issues. A lot of kids picked on her because she "talked white." These were kids who were never exposed to anybody who talked or thought or acted like Darla did.

I don't have anything against transracial adoption. I think it's a good idea for certain people. But I do think people need to become very culturally aware about themselves, about their own culture and about other cultures, minority cultures particularly, if you're going to adopt a minority child. Of course, you're never going to learn it all, because you can never learn everything about one culture. It's a lifelong experience, I think. I don't have any kids of my own, but I think that when you raise a child, you realize as a parent that it's a lifelong endeavor. When parents adopt, they should look at all their options; transracial adoption is one option. Parents should look at all their options.

It might take a little more serious thought when you do adopt across race lines because of the way society is still today. I do think society is slowly changing, but it's taking time. We're making progress, as far as understanding culture, understanding how race plays a part in people's perceptions and actions. I think we all have
lots of learning to do. If you're of the majority, if you are Caucasian like myself, we're never going to understand completely, particularly, what it's like to be an African American. I find it interesting in my job position, because I'm in the minority where I work-- I think I'm the only Caucasian male at my place of work, which puts me in the minority, of course-- it's kind of interesting to be on that side of the fence and view things that way. So I can see at least a little bit how things might be perceived if you are a minority. I'll never know truly how it is, but it's an education every day.

As far as dating goes, I have dated both out and inside of my own race. I tend not to look at just one criteria for a person on whether to date them or not. But in high school I did have a girlfriend who was black, and I did have a girlfriend who was white, at a different point. I've been attracted to black women, I've been attracted to some white women, I've been attracted to some Asian women. I ask myself a little bit: Would I be comfortable in an interracial marriage? I tend to not dwell on it too much. Thinking about it now, I'm more so a little less apt to date outside my race, because I see now how difficult other people can make that for you. As I get to learn more and more about how people think, particularly in the job I'm
at, I understand how people have reservations about interracial dating. And I can understand some of the logic behind it-- and some of it's not logical-- but I can understand where they are coming from a little more. When I talk with African American friends and families, I can understand some of their reservations and where some of their perceptions come from. On the other hand, I sometimes just want to say, "You know, those perceptions may be true for you, but they may not be true for this person." It's complicated. There's always an underlying theme of power lost or power gained, unfortunately. Some people feel that you're usurping some kind of power dating outside your race, or you're losing some power, or you're-- I don't know. It's interesting. I feel kind of-- I step back sometimes. Some people can be very pessimistic about interracial dating and some people are more blasé about it. I think I'm in the middle somewhere. Some people are, you know, "whatever;" some people are "no, definitely not." I'm somewhere in the middle.

Our family did not talk much about adoption. It didn't really come up at table discussions. I don't know why that is. I guess they didn't feel like it was a major deal to talk about. I think part of their reasoning may have been that they didn't want Darla to question herself too much,
because they were worried about how she would deal with that. They did encourage her to find out about her birth mother, even before she was eighteen. Darla started asking about that, and so they said, "You know, when you're eighteen you can find out that information."

We had friends we would visit on occasion, or even strangers in the street, who would stop and ask, "Who's that?" And I would say, "This is my sister." They didn't give me a hard time about it, because after that, the conversation usually ended (laughs). One or two times, I think Darla has told me this-- I don't really remember these things, I probably block them out unconsciously-- one or two times somebody had said a derogatory remark towards me or my mom or dad, or to Darla. But I don't really remember those. I was probably too young to remember.

Sometimes we'd encounter a little animosity. Mostly what I noticed were a lot of curious stares. What's funny is that now, when Darla and I go out, people think we are boyfriend and girlfriend, which I get a kick out of.

Just from learning from Darla, adoptees have to deal with questions about who your parents are, why they gave you up-- that's a typical kind of question no matter what your ethnicity is-- you would definitely ask that as a child growing up because you are forming your self-
identity. It's important for every child to ask, "Who am I? Where did I come from?" Every person should ask that. I think an adopted person has to-- that question is a really big one for them, especially because around them they do not see where they came from. Literally they don't, because they don't see their birth mothers, usually. So with Darla, that was a big deal: Who am I? Where did I come from? That was a big deal. Especially when you don't look like your adoptive parents. That's probably one of the questions you are asking as soon as you realize the hue of your skin is different from these people who take care of you and put food on the table for you. How am I different from my parents, since I'm adopted? I think it depends a lot on when the child was adopted, too.

Transracial adoption has made me more conscious of race, which is kind of a no-brainer. I mean, obviously. I guess I do look at race a little more carefully. I try to understand how it plays a big part of our perceptions. I like to think I do that a little more than the average person. In that respect, transracial adoption has played a part in my life. Having an adopted sister who's black has changed the way I perceive things.

Sometimes I think I did think that I wished my parents had never adopted, when I would get mad at my sister. But I
don't think I ever verbalized it. I don’t think it was ever spoken. It's something that probably on an unconscious level I have a little bit of question in my head about-- with my parents-- "Why did you?" When I say that, I realize that comes from a not so nice place, and I shouldn't have thought that. I shouldn't even-- you know. I just know that's not a nice side of me, and I've never really been angry at my parents or at Darla. The thought has crossed my mind. I'm still trying to work through that and deal with it. Whether I am angry at my parents or not, I'm not sure. I'm not sure.

Adopting a kid is very much a conscious decision, and would be thought through. That's why I was surprised to hear that my dad would have had reservations. Because I thought, "Well, this is something that you planned together." I just figure, people have kids, adopted or not, they talk long and hard about it, and they think about the future. That's why I'm still impressed with my parents, because -- I don't know, I've never really asked them-- I thought that they thought long and hard about this. I mean, they changed where they lived, and moved to a completely different state. They didn't really know a whole lot of people when they moved here. They uprooted their lives and
changed everything primarily for Darla and myself, to have a different environment to grow up in.

In elementary school, I remember going home, Darla and I were getting in the car together. My mom would pick us up from school. Other kids would see that. I felt different, not in a bad way. I did have moments of pride. I would always stamp out that pride, though, because part of my upbringing in our church. They follow a lot of what Calvin had to say, and for Calvinism, pride is the master sin of the devil. Calvinists in general are very, very modest. Very, very modest. We don't brag about things. So I grew up with that. I didn't go around gloating and bragging to anybody: "Well, my sister's black" (laughs), stuff like that. But I did feel a little sense of pride that we were very different, and that there was nobody in my school that I knew of who had a sibling of a different race. There were people in our church, but nobody in our school, that's for sure. We're different, that's all, from a lot of people. But I think more and more, we're not as different anymore.

We did not talk much about race, to my memory. I mean it's not like we had conversations over dinner about race or about differences between races or similarities. They didn't really dwell on it too much. Darla said once somebody asked the four of us when we were walking down the
street why they had adopted. And my dad gave a short answer, because we were walking. I'm told this by Darla-- I think they said some negative remarks about that. They didn't think we should have done that. They were black people. I don't think a white family would do that. Although they might have thought that, they usually wouldn't say it. But there are a lot of black folk who would come right out and say it. I'm saying in general, people would do that, but I don't remember it. Darla remembers more. My parents talked about it between themselves. But they didn't really talk about it with us. They just said these people have different beliefs than us. My parents probably said something about, "You know, we're all God's children, it doesn't matter. And we're raising you in the way we see fit, and we think we're doing a good job." But I don't know exactly what my parents would have said to us. I don't remember.

From my grandfather I got the message that he wasn't very big on black people. I remember my grandfather and the way he treated Darla. At first, he was very loving. I think around when she became an adolescent he was a little less so. I think part of that was some anger at my mom for divorcing my dad. Because it was my mom's decision, actually. He never said anything in front of me. But as I
got older, around twenty-one, twenty-two, I kind of sensed that that was his leaning.

I'm white or Caucasian racially. I check off that box. Culturally, I don't know. My name is Dutch, but I don't speak the language, which I think is a primary indicator of culture. Dutch American is different. I have some Dutch American-ness about me. When I'm not around all people who are Dutch American, I notice I have some Dutch American-ness about me. I tend to be tight with money. The whole stereotype of Dutch people is that they are stingy. I think with any stereotype there is truth to it. But I view myself as American more than anything.

I went to Holland actually, four years ago, to visit some relatives, my dad's uncle and aunt, and their family. These are people I met when I was seven, because my dad took me to Holland when I was seven. My dad never took Darla. She had to go on her own. She went when she was in college. She had a great time. She loved it. She likes being on the stage. But my dad took just me when I was seven. Before they adopted Darla, my mom, my dad, and me went when I was a baby. When he took me there when I was seven, I didn't have a good time, but it was good for my dad, because he was born there. He came through Ellis Island when he was twelve. He's an immigrant. Growing up, I
didn't recognize the importance of that. But as an adult you recognize how unique and interesting that is. So it was a big deal for him to take me there.

I hadn't been back since I was seven. So four years ago I decided to go, and my dad happened to be there also. So we hooked up, we met up near his boyhood home. That was kind of neat. I tramped around the towns and neighborhood he grew up in just to get in touch with that. To be honest, when I came back, I felt more American. I felt like, there is a part of me in me from this country of Holland, but most of me is American. I love all the things about America, the traditional things. When I was there, I did feel American too. But I also felt a lot of Dutchness. I sensed that I could tell that this was where my roots were, a little bit. Just in the way the people looked, you can look at the physicality of people, a lot of tall, blonde, blue-eyed people, which is what I look like.

I'm pretty flexible in any group, I think, depending on the person. At school, I don't have a problem being the only Caucasian male, because I've been there three years, and prior to that I was in another school a mile away from there. This is all close to where I live. So I'm familiar with the population. Growing up in this county, I've gotten familiar with the demographics. So it's not like I'm
uncomfortable. But there are times I do feel like there's nobody here who's thinking the way I'm thinking. Or there's too much of a group mentality, of group thinking, and not enough people thinking creatively on their own to come up with solutions. Sometimes I attribute that to race, but I'm still trying to figure that out. For the most part, I think people's thoughts and actions generally are patterned after the way they were raised. Race might play a part in it, but it's not like a simple cause and effect pattern.

My circle of friends is pretty integrated. Like, I'll hang out with some teachers on Friday nights, and that's mostly African American. And then I have some friends at church that are mostly white. Then, my best friend is black, but he got married and moved to Cleveland. His mom still lives in this area. She lives a block or two away from me. I'm close with her. I take her to church sometimes. But I don't talk with my best friend much anymore. He leads a busy life up there in Cleveland. We talk on occasion. When he comes down to this area, we try to get together.

I've never really felt racism directed towards me. I probably should say I have. Every once in a while, you hear other people say it about other people, when people's guards are let down. And I do have some friends who I think
might say that, unfortunately. I wouldn't really call them my friends, more like acquaintances, people I know. One or two times, when people made a racist joke, I didn't say anything. I just kind of shut up. Then after the fact, I felt bad that I didn't say anything. The other times I've said something. I said, "Hey, I disagree with you." I tend to be really rational, so I wouldn't get in a heated argument. I would try to logically explain to them, try to have a debate: "I disagree with that comment, I don't feel that's an appropriate thing to say." I know people that are this way. Actually, once or twice I told people my sister is black. I said, "I have a problem with what you said. My sister's black." They apologized right away.

I always have concerns about telling people about having a black sister whenever I do say it, especially in this area. People think I'm trying to do something, like I'm trying to make a political statement, or I'm trying to make some kind of statement about myself, that I'm this high and mighty person: "Look what we have, we have this black sister." So I'm conscious of that. But I have grown to realize that that is an important part of me, that I have this adopted sister who happens to be black. But I'm definitely selective in who I tell. I think it changes how people see me. So I don't just go around advertising it. I
mean, I don't make a big deal about it. I mean, most people don't usually go around bragging about their siblings.

I would like to have children some day. I haven't made a conscious decision like, "One's going to be adopted, and one's not." It would be nice to have a kid. If we couldn't have kids, then I would seriously consider adoption. If we could on our own, then I would be less inclined to adopt, to be frank. There was an R&B singer a couple years ago who committed suicide. She had a white father, I think, and a black mother, or vice versa. I think she was going through those same kinds of issues of identity, too. I think drug abuse was involved there, too. She reminded me of transracially adopted kids growing up who have to come to terms with the way their race is portrayed in the media, which is a big part of how kids' identity is formed, unfortunately. Because that affects their peers, their peers start to perceive their race that way, so then you either buy into that, or you don't. If you don't, you become an outsider, and that's even harder then to form your self-identity.

Let's say you adopt a black child. I think it's important for those parents to have other parents who are black as their friends. I think it's really important for a white family that's going to adopt a black child to have
other black families in the neighborhood. My parents had a few black friends in the church, but not as many as they probably should have. My best friend was in our church. He was a couple years older than Darla, so they kind of took her on as their stepchild, in a way. You know how black folk say they are godparents, well, they are her godparents. To be truthful, when you have people of different races growing up together, you realize that there are differences, but the differences aren't as important as the similarities. If you're healthy, I don't think you dwell on the differences so much as the similarities, the strength that you have with those similarities-- in an ideal world. But there's a lot of stuff that society is going to throw at you that you're not prepared for as a kid, I think.

Parents who adopt really have to understand the seriousness of what they are doing, that if they are adopting within their own race or outside it, that you have to treat that child as your own blood child. You are making them a part of your family, too. That's a serious step, I think. When you adopt outside of your race, there are going to be detractors, and you need to be aware of that. It can't be all blue skies, and you have to understand that for some people, race is the defining-- a very central part
of their lives, particularly for black people in this country because of the experiences of their ancestors. So I think white people have to understand that. I don't think we ever will completely; as I was saying, it's a lifelong learning experience. I see it every day, because I see different kinds of black families, some very successful, some not so. For example, I see a lot of well to do families that are black, and some not so well to do.

In our family, on a scale from one to ten-- ten being the most successful-- I would say it fluctuates. But at this point in time, I'd say transracial adoption was probably at like a 7. When we were growing up, I thought it was pretty good, say, in the 8 or 9 range. I don't think it's ever going to be perfect. And then with my parents divorcing, I think that made it take a downward turn, obviously. When Darla was in college, she still talked to my dad quite a bit. Now they don't really talk very much, unfortunately. But she does talk to my mom a lot now, so in that respect it's good. There's no animosity, for the most part, in what they say. So, I don't know, I guess it's around a 7 or 6. I think, though, to get the true gauge of that, you have to ask the adopted child. Because ultimately, it's really their situation. They have to deal with it more on a daily basis than I do. I'm not the
adopted child, so I don't know what that's really like completely.

It's very hard at times to watch what Darla is going through. I feel bad. I feel like I should be the peacemaker. I've never wanted to take sides. I never wanted to be adversarial to anybody. But I think it's something for them to work out, my sister and my dad. I don't think it's something that I need to-- They are adults and they should be able to handle this. I don't think it's my job. I listen to Darla talk about it. My dad will talk to me about it a little bit. He doesn't talk about it much. I think he doesn't like some of the things she shares publicly.

For myself, I think it's a good, cathartic experience for Darla. I think it's like therapy, and it helps her grow, because she gets to see how other families did the transracial adoption thing. It's important for her to understand, and she's learning about herself and her identity that way. I've also learned about her a lot, too, and her perception of our family. I didn't really know what her perception was until well after high school, college and later. After college, she started opening up about her perceptions of our family, which I found kind of interesting. I don't always agree with her perceptions, but I'm coming to understand them now a little better.
I think that my dad is proud of her, but, like me, he has different perceptions about her growing up. I think he feels that she takes a negative slant on transracial adoption. When she says, "It's okay to do, but x, y, z," he takes that as more of a negative slant towards transracial adoption, and he doesn't like that. I myself think her views are balanced. I think she tells the not so nice stuff as well as the good stuff. As you can see, I've thought a lot about these things, I guess more than the average person. I'm sure there are other people like me. You just don't hear about them as often.

Profile 6: Ashley Bradford

Ashley grew up as part of the “hip-hop” generation in a small-sized city in the northeastern United States. Her home community of College Hills is known as the locale of one of the world’s leading universities. Ashley has two siblings who were adopted transracially. Ashley and another brother were, to use her words, “born to” the family. As is mentioned repeatedly in Ashley's narrative, Ashley's mother was very active as a leader in adoptive parent organizations during the siblings' childhood and adolescence. Ashley, who has no children yet, currently works in the financial district of a major city in California.

_Siblings in the family: Jacob (33, biracial adoptee), Chet (31), Ashley (28), Venus (26, African American adoptee)_
I'm careful about disclosing details about my family. My experience with when I have told people about my brother's and sister's race is that sometimes they say, "Oh, that explains this or that." But my interest in racial equality or my interest in equality in general, that's not why I think that information is important. Also, I don't want to tell people, especially in this hip-hop culture where being black is cool, I don't just throw out the fact that my brother and sister are black, because I'm not trying to use it as a badge or anything. If I just threw it out there I'd feel like I was just trying to gain something.

If I just met you, and assuming that you were somebody that I would want to share such information with, I would tell you that I'm part of a transracial adoptive family, and I'd probably tell you the ages of my siblings. But if I didn't know anything about you or your beliefs, I would not share that I have a black brother and sister because I don't want to use that as some sort of like-- I don't know-- because people make assumptions about my sensitivities around race based on the fact that I have a black brother and sister. I would like to think that I would have the same sensitivity even if I didn't have a black brother or sister. But that doesn't need to be the explanation to
other people about why I am the way I am. So I think it really depends, I mean it depends for me on who I'm talking to. It's about I don't think that you know what to do with this information properly.

I am twenty-eight years old. I am the third oldest child. My brothers are older: Jacob is 33, Chet is 31, and my sister Venus is 26. I grew up among academics. The neighborhood we grew up in, most of the families were somehow involved with the local university. Also, we lived very close to the housing for the international students of the university. But College Hills was really like a small town. I would say it was mostly white and middle class with a sprinkling of color here and there.

My sister and I were very close, and I would experience some of her stuff about that. But I don't think it affected-- I think about it a lot and I think I'm now identifying some things that may have -- issues around being part of an adoptive family particularly-- as having affected me, but more in the long run, I think.

I dated in high school someone who was of Latin descent. Often non-whites are the people I date. This is not to say that I haven't dated white people, but now, for instance, I am in a pretty serious relationship with a person of Latin descent. I dated black guys throughout high
school and through my dating career. I think that is directly related to being part of a transracial family. But I don't think I actively go looking at all. I think I'm open to meeting people of whatever race they may be. But I do know that I am highly wary of the white male. And I do think that also has to do with the white males I am around here in this particular region, particularly just because of their limited experience. I know that they don't have certain experiences that I do, and a certain discomfort. It is admittedly, I guess I would say, prejudice. I mean, I think that feeling has found its way into what I find physically attractive.

I don't remember a time when transracial adoption has not been an issue, that is, hasn't been talked about in my family. It's just so evident, how could you not talk about it? My older brothers were always around ever since I was born, so it was normalized immediately.

I have a number of memories of being on the bus and basically sticking up for my sister and me-- sticking up for both of us. The comments were always offensive to my little self. The question was always, "That's your sister?" Somehow that would always come up. "Well, she's not your real sister." That was the biggest thing. My rebuttal was, "She's my real sister. She's not fake, is she?"
something also that my parents had taught all of us, which made perfect sense, so I had those things at the ready to say. Some people would think about it, and say, "Oh yeah, but..." And then they would term it differently, maybe less offensively. "How come she's black and you're white?" Then I would say, "Venus was adopted."

I feel like transracial adoption was a big part of my growing up experience. I was proud of it. I mean, I loved my sister and I was proud to defend her. I didn't want her to get hurt. I was happy to do it, and I was a little smart ass. I was not quiet about it. Now I feel-- and for a while I've felt-- really grateful just for having this experience, these different experiences. It gives you a different outlook on life. At the time, I felt an inkling of that. I knew it was challenging and that we were different. I knew our family was in its own category, a transracial adoptive family, and I was fine with that.

Adoption issues have become more and more clear to me, for example, thinking about abandonment and what that must feel like: Why didn't my parents want me? That's a major issue for adoptees. I think that mostly from what I've learned from my family and my mother is that I think it impacts a lot of areas of life for adoptees. Also, not looking physically-- not being biologically related, you
don't share these features and such. I imagine that especially if you hear, "Oh, you have your dad's" --(for the biological child)-- "you have your dad's such and such," that there's a connection there being expressed that doesn't really exist for the adoptee. And though it's probably-- well, I can't surmise, but I imagine that's an issue.

I'm starting to think about, and I don't know, it's hard to say, but I guess I've thought about sort of recently a feeling that if so much attention was paid to them. I didn't have a feeling of jealousy or anything at the time. I guess that sometimes I would maybe roll my eyes just at whatever thing was going on, but that could just have been regular sibling and children things.

But, yeah, now I've been thinking a bit about how that affected me. And also again, I can't say what it would be like if Venus were my born-to-sibling, but like I said before, it was just like my role as her protector that I gladly took on. As she gets older, my role is changing in that respect. And so that's a little weird. But I don't know. Who knows what that has to do with adoption? I guess it could just be because-- I was just the bigger sister, so maybe it didn't have anything to do with that. She was my little sister, and we always got questioned about us being
related. And I knew that it was not something to be rude about or joke about, because it's a sensitive issue for adoptees, or for my sister, let's just say. Defending her and not wanting her to get hurt, and knowing that there were more chances for her to get hurt because of our racial difference. That kind of intensified the big sister thing. Venus actually became my protector when she got older. We were pretty much a team at that point in that sense. We both stuck up for each other in whatever situations.

I do remember an incident when I was probably in middle school. There was some big blow out or something. Venus and I got in a fight when she kept picking up on my phone calls or something like that, and it turned into some big issue. Pretty normal around our house, but with screaming and stuff like that. And I said to my mom, "I just know that I'm not adopting when I get older." Because that's the explanation I used at the time for why this big fight was happening, and why Venus was hurting me, which is another thing that she did. That's one time that I remember as a very clear memory. The comment wasn't related to race, just to clarify, it was about adoption. And later I felt bad, as I got older. It was a childish remark.

It makes me really uncomfortable hearing people talking about adoption and race in offensive and uneducated
ways. Mostly because if it's about my brother and sister, it's a direct offense against me.

Race was also talked about a lot, often hand in hand with the adoption discussion. As soon as Jacob was old enough to be racially profiled, even before that, there were discussions of race, about being black in this society. We were exposed to a lot of different cultures, not just African American. They involved Venus and Jacob in black culture activities, so we were observing it by way of them being involved in it, involved in it ourselves (we being Chet and I). I later went to Africa with my parents when Jacob was studying abroad there. Around the house there was exposure to basic things like black images, books, toys, TV shows.

There must be a time in a person of color's life who is adopted -- an adoptee who is a person of color with white parents -- when they feel that they're missing out on black culture. Clearly it's a different experience to be black than to be white in the U.S. I know it became an issue for Venus especially when, well, now, actually: she's at a historically black college. Having your authenticity as a black person questioned.

My parents educated themselves extensively, or tried to, about having kids of color in a white family. One would
hope that I would have had some similar experiences if we had all been white. Yet, I know my experience stands for something. But I don't know that I necessarily would agree with Oh, your sister and brother are black, so yes, you are an authority. But it certainly gives me some insights that they don't have, or knowledge.

Racially I identify myself as white. I guess I have a hard time with identifying myself culturally. I feel more comfortable around marginalized people. I consider myself a different culture than even just a white family, non-adoptee. I consider myself part of the transracial adoptive culture, really. I've identified it as that, but what does that mean to people who don't know anything about it? There were people in high school who had parents of different races, non-adopted. And I felt closer to them immediately, especially around people who have the same experiences as me, or similar. I feel that I'm not the same as the common, traditional white family.

Then, of course, there were times when Venus was stopped in a store and accused of stealing something. Jacob was told he couldn't walk across the university campus because he looked quote unquote “suspicious.” Now and then, I hear things, overhear things, or in conversation with people, people will say things that are racist. It's not
directed towards me, because I'm white. I used to always challenge them. And then I started realizing when it will make a difference and choosing when I should challenge them. Generally, if I don't say something, I always end up feeling like I should, or later, that I should have. I always feel uncomfortable and like I should say something. Then there's also the feeling of getting tired from having to always be the teacher. But yeah, I hear things. For example, I work in the financial district, and as you might guess, it's pretty much all white men. So you can imagine.

I've thought of adopting. It is something I would consider. When I think about considering adoption, it is particularly adopting kids who are not white. I was thinking about whether I would specify that I would want black kids, I don't know. I think people should adopt responsibly. I don't think it always happens. Being at an adoption conference recently and hearing people talk, I was a little uncomfortable with the white parents and hearing how little they are preparing their black children, so I wouldn't be one of them.

I think there should be requirements, although I think it's probably unrealistic. I think a lot of parents don't really know what they're getting themselves into. And I think they should be exposed to the struggles that are
going to come up. Also, I think it's not right to raise a child of color in an all white community. And if the prospective parents are not comfortable around people of color, then that's a real issue right there. You need to be able to -- so much has to do with race -- and you have to be able to be friends with people of color, and, I think, be an active anti-racist. I think it starts with something as simple as smiling to a black person on the street. And being aware of racist and prejudiced actions, like the cliché of grabbing your purse, and then not doing those things. Actively involving yourself in things that will expose you to people that are not white, learning about other people's culture, or other cultures. Speaking up when you hear something racist. I learned from my mom, and from having a black brother and sister. The first step is to acknowledge the fact that, as a white person, you have a privilege that a person of color doesn't have. You have to know that. Because society is not color-blind, that breaks it down pretty simply. How can you be color-blind if society isn't?

I remember attending an adoption conference and observing white parents of black kids and other kids of color listening to Joseph Crumbley [see chapter 2] speak. Regardless of the fact that everything he's saying is true-
- I believe it to be true, and I agree with him-- they were not accepting that. They would raise their hand and say things about being color-blind, you know, "Why should I make it a big deal?" They were not being receptive and learning from him, and trusting that he knows. I mean, that's what these workshops are there for, to teach you. And if you can't change your way of thinking, then you should not be adopting a black child.

I think that you need to be open about everything, and talk about it from the beginning. The white children, the born-to child, is as much a part of the family as the parents are, meaning they're going to have as much involvement with the adopted child. They need to hear the same things the adoptive child hears. Your white child should know the facts about racism as well as your adopted child, and issues about transracial adoption.

Based on the experience of some white non-adoptees, I guess I never felt jealous or ignored. I'm sure it had to do with the fact that I was proud and defensive of my family. It was my duty as well, so it was something that I'm working on. I wouldn't say duty I guess, but it was me. It was important for me to defend it, or explain in certain situations. So I never felt like I was slighted or something like that, because I was involved.
Chapter 5 Summary

This chapter presented the profiles of six participants whose adopted siblings are either Korean or African American. The last profile is included here since Ashley has two adopted siblings whom she identifies as African American, although her brother is biracial. While it is too early to comment on them individually, taken as a whole, these profiles give an indication of how the experiences of non-adopted siblings reflect the cutting edge of race relations. The next chapter continues with the remaining profiles, this time of six participants whose siblings are all biracial, even though many of them also identify as African American. After all of the profiles have been presented, my analysis will be offered in Chapter 7.
CHAPTER 6
PROFILES OF THE STUDY PARTICIPANTS, PART 2

The previous chapter presented Part 1 of the profiles of non-adopted sibling participants, namely those whose adopted brother or sister is Korean or African American. Bearing in mind that the placement of the biracial siblings here in a separate chapter is solely to facilitate the presentation of the data (by dividing it roughly in half), chapter 6 continues with Part 2, the remaining profiles:

Profile 7: Melanie Malvaux

Melanie spent her childhood in the 1960s and 1970s living on the east coast. Melanie's mother taught high school, while her father was a Protestant minister. She grew up as the oldest of four siblings, two of whom were adopted. Melanie's narrative is particularly poignant in that it describes how her younger brother continues to wrestle with adoption and race issues well into adulthood. From her perspective as a psychotherapist, Melanie describes how her brother's struggles impact the other family members in deep and often challenging ways.

*Sibling* in the family: Melanie (38), David (36), Russell (32, biracial adoptee), Lola (30, biracial adoptee)

I am thirty-eight years old, born in 1966. I was raised in Pennsylvania for thirteen years, and then New Jersey. I am the oldest of four kids. I have a brother by birth who is two years younger. His name is David. The next
one is my brother Russell, who is thirty-two, and then my sister Lola, who is thirty. Both of my younger siblings were adopted as infants.

I would describe our family as more complex than we realized. I think we had the notion that we were a pretty typical, pretty "normal" family. And yet, we were the most unusual looking family in the town and school, etc. But I don't think we thought that, at the time. Both my brother and sister are biracial. Russell is darker-skinned than my sister. Lola has often been confused with being Hispanic, which she's not.

My brother being darker skinned, the one thing I remember is that he was the most "different" looking, and therefore the one that was paid attention to the most. Walking down the street, people would stare at him as opposed to my sister. Russell was definitely identified as African American, while for Lola, it has certainly been an issue for her, you know, what does she identify as? And what do people perceive her as? People really default to Hispanic with her, which is not the case.

In Pennsylvania we lived more suburban than when we moved to New Jersey. We have always been active in our church community. My father is an Episcopal priest. We were middle class. In New Jersey, there was more city influence,
I would say, because we were twenty minutes from Manhattan. So my younger siblings had more diversity in their elementary school than they would have had in Pennsylvania.

Russell came to us when he was six days old. I remember it was a snowstorm in southern Pennsylvania, which is not a common occurrence. I remember, too, because he really was a beautiful baby. That, of course, was the comment that we got. I recall taking him to kindergarten, so I guess I was five. I took him to kindergarten for Show and Tell. I remember that vividly.

I can tell you about a critical image I have in my head when transracial adoption began to mean something. Actually, I can't tell you a time when it didn't! When I was twelve, my brother's behavior was very busy— he was a busy kid. I remember people looking at him, and I felt the assumption, "Well, he's different, and that's why his behavior is bad." It felt to me like there was an equating of race and behavior, even at the age of five. I must have thought at the time that part of it was because he stood out in terms of looking different from a lot of people around him. I remember there was this undercurrent of feeling that he was kind of a bad kid, even though he wasn't. Maybe he was hyperactive, I don't know, maybe. Over time, my brother has struggled all of his life. I know
there is stuff that nobody knew to pay attention to. So whether it was ADHD, or bipolar, or some mental illness reality for him, I don't know what it is. I just remember that his behavior was always what people paid attention to.

As a teenager, I was definitely the good kid. I never got into trouble, didn't think about getting into trouble. I was very involved with church things and drama at school, athletics, school government, all that stuff. I graduated in 1984.

I remember being a junior in high school. I was always involved with school plays. There was a guy who was a year older who was African American and very dark-skinned. He was interested in me and I remember that being overwhelming, like, "I don't know what to do with this." I never dated him. But certainly there was the potential there and it was an opportunity, and I just couldn't. I don't know. I didn't know what to do with that. So I've always dated white men, and pretty clean-cut, similar to me, involved with activities, not prone to getting into trouble. Looking back on it, probably, in truth, I didn't date interracially because of the difference. Living my life always feeling stared at as a family, could I handle that in a relationship? I chose not to.
My family did not talk about adoption much, not near enough. We didn't know any other families like ours. We never went to adoptive family gatherings or picnics, anything like that, not a one. It's funny, because my mom recently said-- now, my work is all about adoption, it's kind of been my focus for the last ten years-- she said to me, "You know, when we were adopting your brother and sister, we just figured it was like bringing a puppy home. You take care of it, and--." So, out of the goodness of their hearts, they didn't see anything wrong with that philosophy. And there was nobody to challenge that philosophy because we didn't even know enough. It wasn't that they didn't want to do the best for their kids. There just wasn't a Dr. Joyce Pavao around. They didn't know. (My career happened when I came to Boston to do my master's degree in social work. In my second year I did an internship, which is where I met Joyce. Because my family is connected by adoption, she was interested in talking further with me. So I interned with her when she started her own practice, and then I stayed there for seven years. And now I'm in private practice continuing to work with families connected by adoption. That's my whole deal.)

It most profoundly affected me when people would come up and say, "Is that your real sister?" I remember when I'd
meet a new friend and they would come to the house, they'd meet my brother, and then they'd say, "Ooh, I can't wait to see what your father looks like." You know, Mom would be home. So they were just not getting it, not trying to figure out where Russ fit in. I also remember going to restaurants, and the feeling that everybody in the restaurant was staring at us. I probably just kept it to myself. I don't remember either of my parents saying anything about it. I just remember feeling angry about it, but I don't remember talking about it, even to my brother or sister.

I chuckle now because it was such a profound decision, and I don't think my parents really knew what they were doing. And again, not-- it goes back to that puppy story. They wanted to take care of kids, and that's what they saw themselves doing. Which they did, to some degree. But I just see how much more transracial adoption affects families than I think people realize. As I worked in the field, I became more aware of that, as I worked with tons of families. Initially, what my siblings went through influenced my chosen career and my awareness. But as I've done the work, certainly I've seen more of how it has impacted me. But also, my parents were terribly uneducated
and unsupported. I hope that other parents don't have to struggle that way.

The first thing that comes to mind is the profound sense of, Who am I? What am I connected to? I see with my brother there's no resolution to that yet. How do I make sense of this world? Both my siblings have searched for their birth parents. My sister has met her birth mom and has chosen not to have much of a relationship with her. And my brother has searched and tried to connect with his birth mom, who is not interested in having contact with him. So I think it's worse for him. He made the attempt to search, and she said, "No thank you." I know it was very hard on him. It's just another rejection.

There are absolutely issues and concerns I have had to face due to my parents' decision to adopt. For me, it plays into being the good girl, the perfect older sister. There wasn't a lot of energy once my brother Russell blew through the house. As a kid, he was always busy, into things, whether it was when he was two and pulling books off the shelves, more than any of the other two-year-olds around. Or when he was five and running out of the classroom and not able to sit still in the circle, and then as a teenager when we later found out that he was climbing out the second
story window and going into Manhattan every night, unbeknownst to anyone else in the house.

Sadly for him, Russ has spent the last ten to twelve years in and out of jail, and is currently incarcerated. He has struggled all of his life. Nobody knew what to do or how to help him. It's awful. Russell has burned bridges twelve times over. I have not seen him in probably two years now. My sister is really done with him, for now. She always got the brunt of his crap. She knew—Russell told her that he was climbing out the window and going into Manhattan, don't tell Mom and Dad, that kind of thing. She was always pulled into his stuff. I think she is just so bitter about all of that. So right now she is really done with his shenanigans.

My two brothers—Russ, who is in jail, and my other brother, David—have never had much of a relationship. David's wife actually has maintained a relationship with Russ. Again, when he got out of jail most recently, they were there to help him in a lot of different ways. He screwed up again, and even they are kind of tired.

With Lola, who was also adopted, she's a really smart person. Growing up she was an easy kid, although school was not easy for her. She's very funny, smart, and charming.
She was a real delight. I think that's what I remember growing up, that she was a fun, easy, "well-rounded" kid.

I do remember very profoundly, though, when she went away to college in upstate New York for a semester, it was beyond traumatizing for her, because she was not accepted anywhere, anyhow. She was shunned by other African American students, you know, fraternities that were predominantly African American. Really blatant stuff, like, "You're not allowed at this party," that kind of thing. It threw her into a tailspin because for her, that's how she was identifying. Then to be told, "You don't fit in here," she was like, "Hold on a minute." That was huge. She lasted one semester. Since then, Lola has been searching. She came home and went to different colleges, and tried different careers and different boyfriends. Interestingly, she has always dated African American men. Now she's engaged to a man who is Peruvian, but identifies with people of color.

I never thought that my parents shouldn't have adopted, but I did think it could have been done in a different way. I think that awareness has come in the last ten years as I've been working. I see that there are adoption issues and there are ways to support families, and we had nothing. Literally nothing. I felt profoundly sad that things had to be this way. It did, it took such a toll
on everybody. As I've gone into this field as a therapist, it's shed a lot of light and has worked for my family. But prior to that, I don't remember talking about our situation as adoption issues at all.

Adoption is so much a part of my life now in terms of friends and colleagues. All of my siblings have families that are complex. My brother David has a daughter who is adopted, and is in the process of adopting another child, but not transracially. It's interesting. I've decided I definitely wouldn't adopt. I wanted the opportunity to give birth. I was very lucky enough to be able to do that easily with both of my kids. As far as my husband is concerned, two kids is the right amount. Also, I see the challenges all the time in my work, and growing up. So it really honestly would not have been something I would have wanted to choose. It's sad. It's a sad statement to make, but there it is.

In my family, I don't think we talk about a lot, in truth, ergo, I'm a therapist. We just kind of went along. We didn't delve into anything. We didn't process anything. We just didn't. For example, we certainly didn't talk about race. My parents had African American friends who would come to the house. But I don't know if race came up with them as adults. I don't remember talking about it. The way
it felt growing up, the message was "We're not going to make a big deal out of it."

I can still remember many instances, and it was more just the staring. You know, "Who's he? What's he doing here?" Blatant questions like that. People would come to our house, and ask, "Who's that little boy? Are you taking care of him?" That kind of thing. I always responded in an angry way to questions like that. How dare you ask the "real brother/real sister" question? It infuriated me. How dare you ask that? I kept it to myself. I felt it, but I kept it to myself. I didn't have the understanding that people didn't have any understanding.

Because Russell was in trouble, that became the focus. I don't remember race being as big of a deal. My brother and sister told us about three incidents of racism that happened after I moved out of my parents' house. They were stopped by police in the town on their way home. It was a profound shock for my sister. There were two times that she was stopped. My brother had been involved with the law for a long time, but for my sister to be stopped. That's just not anything I would ever even think of for myself. It was such a blatant description of racism for her.

The tricky thing is, and I see it with my brother and sister-in-law. They don't want to hear about it, because
they haven't had to face it yet. They don't want to hear it. They may have an easier time because their adoption is not a transracial adoption, and they also have a very open adoption with their daughter. The birth mom is young, and they give her space to create the relationship that she can tolerate. They're very connected to their daughter's birth grandparents, who are more similar in age to them. So I think just for that, they'll have an easier time, because their daughter will have mirrors that a lot of the kids I work with just don't have, and search for.

To parents, I would say surround yourself by as many people as you can who know about this adoption stuff, and have mirrors for your child. Not just a token, you know, "We have this friend who is black," but make real connections in the community for your child to have connections. I think the big thing for me growing up was that my brother and sister were different, and were looked at as different, and they weren't supported in having relationships that would help them feel less different. Even though we had friends of color, in our family, because things weren't talked about, there wasn't the opportunity to process. If you are going to live with a family with racial diversity, educate yourselves, and find connections that make sense for everybody in the family.
My advice to families is talk about it, in a real, purposeful way. Obviously I'm a proponent of therapy, and I'm a proponent of therapy not when there are problems, but throughout the course of your life. Like I said, I've worked with people for eight years-- the same people-- and different things come up over time. I think it really helps to have a facilitator to say, "This is what we're noticing, help us out." Or, "How do we talk about this, does this make sense?" That kind of thing. Probably because that was what was lacking for me, I would say, talk about it.

A successful transracial adoption is a family that has had struggle upon struggle, but they are willing to beat down the doors on every resource necessary in order to figure out how to get help to be a successful family. I don't know that I could define a successful family. I know the process towards being successful means advocating like you've never advocated before, finding connections, finding resources. Listening, paying attention to what's going on and what people are saying to your kids.

An unsuccessful transracial adoption is going in with blinders. One thing I heard all the time growing up is, "You're so special." If I hear "You're so special" one more time-- "Your family is so special, that was so nice of you." Going in thinking that it's not going to be
different, because it is different. It just is. You can pretend that it's not different, but things don't work that way. And people suffer when you think that way.

Transracial adoption was not very successful in our family. Not very. I think it could have been a whole lot different. I'm not saying it would have been perfect, and I'm not saying we wouldn't have had problems and difficulties. But it could have been different. I think all of us as siblings would say the same thing. Unfortunately, I think Russell and Lola have suffered in ways that they didn't necessarily have to, and that we have, as a family. I know my parents have seen pain they might not have necessarily had to. But given all that, I do think the benefits outweigh the negatives. Absolutely. Honestly, I wouldn't wish it any other way. I just wish there had been experienced adoptive parent leaders and adoption therapists out there. It would have been a whole lot better.

Profile 8: Levi Roth

Levi Roth was born into what he describes as a family of "major hippies" in the mid-1970s. His parents, who were inspired by the Zero Population Growth movement, had two children already when they decided to adopt his sister Zawadi, a biracial (black-white) infant. Levi likes to use rather colorful language to underscore his points, which might offend some readers who are bothered by profanity.
I was born in 1976 and grew up in the outskirts of College Hills. I was born on a couch, actually, out in a pretty rural situation. My parents were major hippies. My mother came from real scrapper roots. Her mother’s side of the family were Texas and California trailer trash. She met my dad when she was performing for his parents. His family had a kind of resort hotel for Jews an hour away from the city. They met and kind of tuned in and turned on kind of a thing, and basically tried to be as poor and hippied out as possible for many years: majorly austere, natural foods, wooden toys, all that kind of stuff. Then they broke up when I was four, after adopting Zawadi. But yeah, we lived in some intentional hippie communities. That was the general idea of it. Then they broke up and both got remarried.

I guess I am kind of a natural continuation of the way I grew up. I’m into alternative energy and different types of intentional, sustainable living. I’m a professional card player. I was a glass blower for ten years. I’m a pretty active person. I play a couple different instruments. I have a martial art I do, and I also do yoga. I go to Hawaii...
every winter and surf. I like to get around. I'm into dogs. I keep my life real full, which is both good and bad.

Zawadi was basically my little angel when we got her. She was like six weeks old, and I was four years old. I definitely fell in love and completely doted on her in every way I possibly could.

As far as the issue of transracial adoption, we didn't discuss it as such. My parents just wanted to adopt a child. I think they wanted a girl, but I don't think they put in any specifics. They were trying to be open to whatever the community needs were at the time. I think the first time I noticed the difference was when I had a friend come home with me after school. He hadn't been over the house, and he didn't know my family. And we go to Zawadi's school in the car to pick her up. She comes running out and he doesn't even know it's my sister. He's like, "Whoa, what an afro!" (laughs) I hadn't even considered she had an afro. I was like, "Afro, what's that?" It hadn't occurred to me. But she had a monster. It was like the Jackson 5. She had amazing hair.

I'm pretty dark-skinned, being half Jewish. The Jewish side is pretty Sephardic in origin. So me and Zawadi are actually almost identically colored. Obviously, we have different features, and I have straight hair and
everything. But in the summer time, we both walk around about the same color. So I hadn't really-- it wasn't really an issue for me. Until I saw how the world was reacting to her, really.

We came in contact with other families with a lot of adopted kids, later on when we started going to an alternative school for junior high and high school. Earlier on, another family we knew had adopted a Vietnamese refugee. I was really good friends with her little brother. So there was another family that was doing it. They adopted another white child, so it was going around. We definitely weren't anomalous in the community that we were in. We were living at that time out in a community they call Long House. There's other families there, like the Vietnamese girl. They lived up around the corner from us. Another adopted kid, Manny James, was the cutest kid, who is biracial. I used to baby sit him all the time. I was in love with him, too.

Adolescence was a blast. Obviously, at the time you think stuff is rough. But again, I was pretty well-adjusted. I had an active love life. I lost my virginity when I was thirteen. I thought I was going to marry the girl. She got pregnant. She was actually black. On and on, I had lots of sagas with girls. Also, I played every major
school sport trying to figure out who I was and what I was really into. I was super competitive academically until I fell in love with that first girl.

I started dating really early. But at first I dated exclusively kind of princesses, like I tried to find the prettiest girl there was. They were all white, from very clean families, very haughty, snotty girls until I was thirteen. Then I dated only black girls with serious attitudes for the next four years, until I was seventeen. I couldn't stand white girls. They fucking annoyed me so bad. They didn't like to dance, they didn't want to party. They didn't want to do anything. They just wanted to sit there and be snotty with little sweaters on or something. I don't know, I couldn't figure it out. That's really my impression of them for years. I just couldn't-- their whole culture, I just felt totally alienated from.

I mostly only hung out with black kids as far as out of school stuff. I mixed with whoever in school, but when I was actually pursuing some kind of culture out of school, it was always hip-hop culture, and always black girls, whatever I had to do to get on the basketball team just so I could get deeper into that scene.

We talked about adoption only when it became an issue. It wasn't a topic necessarily like politics, health food,
or sex, or something that came up all the time. Zawadi was a very emotionally needy child, so it would come up as a result of her being adopted and feeling not as authentically part of the family. Whatever it was, something like that would bring up the issue of adoption. It would usually come up with something to do with—she had a lot of discipline problems (laughs), you could put it that way. But only at home. She was an angel to everyone else, pretty much. Zawadi always took it out on the people she knew could take it. I feel like my parents equated discipline with uncaring parents. They couldn't figure out how to discipline and turn kids into respectful humans while still loving them, somehow maintaining the feeling of love with their kids but putting them in line. They didn't know how to do it.

So Zawadi would really push the envelope a lot, and got away with a lot of stuff. It was always just explained that she needs a little bit more, because you know, “She's got these feelings of want that you guys can't understand.” I knew to a certain extent it was true. But I also knew that it was enabling the dynamic that I didn't think was healthy at all. So she would just do whatever she had to do, whether it was getting undressed and streaking through the house naked at seven or eight when my friends were over
and who I was trying to be cool in front of, or just whatever, throwing a fit, making a lot of noise. All she got was pure unadulterated love at home and support, no matter what she was doing, even when she should have been put in check.

We're a really loud, stick our feet in our mouth all the time kind of family. There's no taboo subjects at our dinner table. It gets pretty offensive. So everything came up, all the time. The true nature of humanity is how skin is only skin, and all that obviously good stuff. I think Zawadi was told she was adopted as soon as she asked. They didn't push it on her. She put the question to them. She was probably five or six: "Mommy, how come I look different than you?" Ma, of course, told her and explained the situation and why her parents put her up for adoption.

I thought of Zawadi as biracial. That was what was interesting, as I was saying, how my view of her kind of changed as the world started reacting to her, because it was obvious that she was black out in the world. Even though I didn't consider her any more black than white because she was half and half, so why is she only black? For instance, she walked into a store downtown where racial profiling is the norm. My mom had a bunch of shops downtown and would attest to it. Embarrassingly, she would attest to
it, that primarily the people the shopkeepers had to worry about who were shoplifting downtown were young black girls. This is what the storeowners said. They are not going to publicize this, if you went up and asked them, they're not going to say this. But it doesn't make for a more accepting or fair world for people to go around judging each other before they know who they are obviously. But that is what's going on.

And I would watch Zawadi, and watch how people would react to her. You watch her walk into a store and their eyes are glued to her. But if she would be with one of my other white sisters, they'd still keep their eyes on her. That was pretty interesting. She went through the whole thing. She was like, "Who am I supposed to identify with? Here I am in this culture." If anything, realistically she was more white than black because she was half and half genetically, but she grew up primarily in a completely white culture. And not just a white culture, but a very particular subculture of the white culture. She was basically a serious hippie kid. She wasn't talking Ebonics growing up. That was not the scene. Then she gets out in the world and everyone is calling her black. And she'd always just considered herself, herself. Her best friends were white, black, Asian, and Indian. She never ever tried
to hang on to one scene more than another. She really created a life where she was floating above all the cliques.

I think identity was a big thing to her. Trying to find out what it means, how to balance the societal pressure with your own true nature, all those heavy issues. I think if she did decide to accept any one label, it definitely would be black. We would talk about it. She'd say, "It doesn't matter what I think of myself. It doesn't even matter if I'd never met a black person. If I walk into a store and nobody knows me they look at me and think black." It was kind of a giving in type of thing. And not in a bad way, but just like accepting the world for what it is. If the world is going to look at her that way, then she is black. Also, I think Zawadi was more attracted to the black culture because it wasn't as sterile and as boring. The same reasons that I was attracted to it growing up, she was.

I don't know if you know a lot of Jews behind doors. It's such a weird thing about Jewish culture where they are so self-deprecating. Everything is about making fun of Jews, making fun of white people. That is what she was steeped in growing up. We were always the butt of our own jokes. And these other cultures-- generally more
"primitive" cultures—were revered, really, in our family. So Zawadi grew up with the message of, you know, (laughs) "White America is fucked, and you've got to be you, but at the same time, you know, black culture is not perfect either." It's just more fun generally, is I think the kind of message she was getting from us the whole time.

I have experienced racism all across the board, but way more racism from blacks towards whites. Mostly not directed at me. I've put myself in some weird situations. I moved to Buffalo with one black friend of mine. He grew up in College Hills, but then his family moved back to Buffalo. I lived in a section of Buffalo where you could spend a year and you wouldn't see a white person. It was totally not really cool for me to show up and be white. We'd just attract too much attention. It would be a bad scene. And I'm pretty dark, and especially when I was a teenager, I'd really look Hispanic. So we'd go down there and we'd tell everyone I was part Cherokee, and part, I don't even know what— we came up with something like Dominican, something, anything, I was some kind of mutt, but had no white in me at all. I got to basically live in this entirely different culture. You know that book, Black Like Me? That was not the intention, but like, we wanted to be able to go and hang out and go party and not start a
fucking riot. It totally worked out. Nobody questioned, and everyone was totally intrigued by the Cherokee thing. And I do have a little bit of Native American, so I didn't feel horrible about saying it. But it was really just a survival thing, and kind of a fun game because my friend thought it was real funny. I spent almost the whole summer there when I was fifteen. And we pulled it off. Nobody ever knew, except for his family, and they thought it was hilarious. But they were all down with the program. They didn't want me getting into any trouble. I was definitely in way over my head.

But yeah, I definitely saw racism because I had grown up spending time around all white people that didn't think there were any black people around or any Asians around, so they would say whatever the fuck they wanted. And I was around a lot of black kids that said whatever the hell they wanted, because they didn't think any white kids were around. And then also straight up racism, like, you know, on the football team or the basketball team. There were some heavy racial incidents when I was at the high school. When I started dating black girls, the movie "Jungle Fever" hadn't even come out yet. Interracial dating wasn't the cool thing to do. It was actually really uncool. We used to get a lot of nasty looks. There was this black teacher who
used to do the most amazing things. He is the most vocally, blatantly, proudly racist person I've ever met. He used to take my little thirteen year old girlfriend -- who I was in love with and who was in love with me -- aside and tell her she needed a real man, a black man. As long as she was dating a white guy, she'd never know what a real man was. I can't tell you how much shit I got from him and how much he tried to interfere with my relationship.

I know some people from like the Waldorf community, people that are really into and only will adopt, like Guatemalan kids or something. But they are not actually teaching their kids -- the kids are getting older and they want to know about Guatemala, and they want to know, what's their identity? A lot of people are not necessarily prepared to take that, to go on that exploration with the kids. They just want them to grow up and, "You're here, honey, you grew up in College Hills, that's your culture now." But that's not reality. Everyone wants to know what kind of world they come from.

I think that was going on for Zawadi. That's why I think it's important, because I think it would have been weirder for her, for instance, if she had grown up in the College Hills area with some rural family that just ate TV dinners and watched sitcoms at night. That's just real
hardcore insular white culture, and that's not how it was. We had lots of different races and even nationalities coming through the house. We had all kinds of different Europeans that were friends of the family coming in. My parents were friends with tons of different young black professionals that were from different cities, and what not, that came in and brought different experiences. Zawadi had examples in her world of almost every kind of person, really. She saw possibilities for herself. She saw examples of who she was. She saw mixed ethnicities. She saw pure, she saw racism from every different side. I feel like that made her decisions about her own identity even easier, because she saw it. She didn't have to go out in the world to find somebody like her, put it that way. Some kind of idea of the culture that she might want to be involved in was presented to her.

I feel kind of weird even saying all this stuff. I'm obviously not qualified to tell people who are going to adopt what to do. But I just feel like a lot of people go into it really idealistically. Like they are going to save these refugee kids, and they don't fucking know what they are getting into. And their kids-- I see it a lot. Their kids rebel, and they want to have an identity. Especially the way the youth culture is today, you know. The thing is,
you don't want to tell anyone not to adopt a child, because people have their own motivations for stuff. But I think that is a real issue that becomes real for the child. More than anything, they're going to have to get out in the world and come to terms with the fact that some family somewhere didn't or couldn't take care of them, for whatever reason. So their parents raised them up, and that's a heavy thing.

Profile 9: Alexis Manheim

Alexis was raised in a politically liberal family active in their Protestant church in the 1960s and 70s. She is the youngest of three children. In her narrative, Alexis describes coming to terms with her brother Jamal’s racial identity as a “mixed race” African American.

siblings in the family: Jamal (43, biracial adoptee), Dirk (41), Alexis (39).

I grew up in the 1960s and 1970s, mainly in Rhode Island. I have two older brothers. Jamal, the oldest, was adopted before I was born. The other one, Dirk, is my natural or biological brother. We are just a few years apart in age. Jamal is African American, although I grew up not really giving a lot of time to considering his race. I simply viewed him as my oldest brother or my adopted brother. When I did consider his race, I grew up thinking
of him as being of “mixed race,” and somehow it was important to know that his birth mother was white and his birth father was black. I always thought of his birth parents in the past tense. As an adult, I began to consider him African American or black since that is how I think he identifies himself.

I am a white married woman and the mother of two children, who are both biologically my husband’s and my children. However, I would not describe myself this way outside this study. In fact, my race would not be one of the primary descriptors I would use if some one asked me to describe who I am. I would probably only use it if I were asked to describe myself physically or racially. It still seems somewhat odd to talk about my brother and myself in racial terms.

My parents, at first, thought that they might not be able to have children of their own. They became aware of the huge need for homes for international children and considered international adoption. As they learned more about it, they learned that particularly children of mixed race in this country were in need of adoptive parents. My mother became pregnant during this process, but they had already decided that they wanted to adopt a child so they continued along this path. They adopted my brother because
they were told he would be hard to place and would soon be “unadoptable.” I thought it was terrible that people would not want to adopt my brother. I thought it was great that my parents did. I did not understand why racial considerations were an issue.

I grew up thinking of Jamal as just my brother, and most of the time not of any particular race. I thought any discussion of race set him apart. I remember my parents telling my brother that he would grow up to be proud of the color of his skin and that he was handsome, as well as smart and creative. I never really understood what being proud of his skin color meant. I knew he was different, but I did not understand the challenges he faced due to racism until he discussed it with me as an adult. Ironically, in a sense, I grew up to be proud of the color of my brother’s skin. I am happy that we have a more diverse family than many.

I have always lived in white, upper middle class, suburban neighborhoods. I did not date a lot of people, but those boys (and later men) whom I did date were white. Early on, I was attracted to and really liked an African American boy, but he was not interested in dating me. I generally feel most comfortable socializing with people I
know through work or through my children’s activities. Race is not a factor.

Growing up, I talked about adoption with a fair amount of frequency, as new people met my family. This was mainly because my brother was a transracial adoption and the people asking were unfamiliar with this type of family makeup. Pretty much every time someone new met my family. Also, I remember once a stranger on the bus asked my natural brother and me why my adopted brother did not look like us. It was summertime, so for some reason we said, “Oh, he tans better than we do.” Other times I would recount the adoption story my parents had told me with varying degrees of detail. People seemed curious so somehow giving more details seemed easier. I often talk about my brother now when people make racist comments, discuss adoption, or discuss issues related to race.

As a child, I always felt different because it was so visually obvious that my adopted brother was adopted. We did not discuss race a lot, but when we did, we discussed the problems of prejudice and why it is wrong. I can remember people making mean comments to my brother. I do not really remember any specific examples, but I know he did face racism, particularly as he got older in high school and college. We did not really discuss how people
should cope with racism, but only that it was wrong and that we should rise above it. Our family did participate in cultural events through church. We also had items from different cultures in our home and discussed religious differences.

I have always felt that having a transracially adopted brother has helped me better appreciate diversity. I think adoption, in general, is a wonderful opportunity for both parents and children, but like any family it is not without its challenges. I think transracial adoption can add other challenges to the mix, but can also create a wonderful opportunity for appreciating and better understanding diversity. I think the success of any family depends a lot upon the individuals. I also think children need and deserve stable, loving home environments, above all.

Adoptees do have to struggle with who they are and how they fit in with the family. They know they are part of the adopted family, but they also know that they are different. They are more likely to have trouble understanding their place in the family since they cannot point to any given relative and feel they inherited some traits or interests of that relative. In addition to trying to figure out how they fit in the family, transracial adoptees have the added issue of knowing they look different and that people can
tell right away that they are different from other family members. The adoptive parents may also define race differently than the adopted child.

As an adult, I feel it has helped to make me who I am. I have more of an awareness of racial issues and the complexities involved. It comes up a lot. Sometimes due to racist comments. I hear racial comments from time to time at work. Sometimes in trying to figure out why racial tensions exist. Also, a friend at work has a transracially adopted son; she and her husband are white; their son is black. They had an older adopted son who was white. Unfortunately, he is now deceased.

Transracial adoption has shaped the way I think about family makeup and how family has a broader meaning. I also am aware of some of the difficulties my brother faced growing up and the difficulties his adopted sons faced. When I was starting my own family, I decided not to adopt because I wanted to experience having my own biological children. I later thought I could share my experiences about cultural and racial multiculturalism by talking about my experiences and about what my brother had told me about his experiences. My children now have friends of different racial and cultural backgrounds, although we do not
necessarily live in a fully integrated neighborhood or school district.

I have had several conversations with Jamal about transracial adoption. We did not really discuss this until we became adults. As a child, I thought racial differences meant prejudice. As an adult, I understand more the multicultural aspect of it. I also understand more of the complexities, and how other factors play into the mix including socioeconomic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. I do not think I would have thought as much about this or been as sensitive to this subject if I did not have a transracially adopted sibling.

A successful transracial adoption would be one that acknowledges, celebrates, and faces head on racial differences. An unsuccessful transracial adoption would be one in which families do not understand racial differences or one in which certain members feel racially superior. I think it was fairly successful in our case, since within the family we all got along and tried to discuss racial issues and why prejudice was wrong. In hindsight, I think it would have been easier for my brother if my parents had had African American friends and exposed my brother to a more multicultural neighborhood. As an adult, I can see the
benefits of this for my whole family, but as a child I was not particularly concerned about this.

Now I would tell adoptive parents to discuss racial differences. Participate in support groups. Celebrate cultural differences. Learn about tools for combating racism. I wish we had helped my brother with his racial identity. I think my parents did the best they could to provide a loving and stable home, and they did their best in trying to deal with racial issues. Of course, they had no help back then. Today’s adoptive families are being taught that it is important to acknowledge racial differences and to interact with people of a similar race and culture as the child. Talk to other adoptive parents about transracial adoption. Read about the challenges and rewards. Be prepared to understand and deal with racism. Celebrate what we can all learn from diversity. Transracial adoption is a complex issue. While good parents are what is needed most, parents still need to understand the complexity and work to find solutions.

Profile 10: Doug Benjamin

Doug is another product of the 1960s and 70s, that era of radical idealism. He lives and works in Seattle, Washington. After Doug was born, his parents decided to expand their family through adoption. In the early 1960s, transracial adoption was
virtually unheard of, at least in his family’s community. In his narrative, Doug describes in matter-of-fact terms how little preparation his parents received during the adoption process.

Siblings in the family: Tony (44, biracial adoptee), Doug (43).

I was born in Illinois, and lived there from 1961 to 1970. Then we moved to Connecticut, and I lived there from 1970 to 1982. We grew up in mostly white neighborhoods. I am now married and the father of two girls. I work as a university professor, and I am a political liberal.

I have mixed feelings about transracial adoption in general, and about the whole transracial adoption controversy. While I feel that our family experience was largely a success, it would be a good thing to encourage more minority families to adopt. In recent years, I have talked with my brother and my parents about transracial adoption. But for a very long time I was unaware of the issue. It was really only as an adult, through conversations with my brother, that I became aware of the negative sides of transracial adoption.

On the personal level, it is hard to imagine not having my brother in our family, and it would have been a real loss to me. I also feel that my brother had a loving family that might not otherwise have been the case. On the
other hand, he was essentially isolated from African American culture. I was oblivious to this issue until I was an adult. As I said, I became more aware through conversations with my brother.

While we were growing up, people asked me about my brother infrequently, usually with no more than cursory questions. For example, occasionally people would ask why my brother looked different than me. When I would say that he was adopted, they accepted that answer. But this was rare, as I said, only cursory questions.

Our family talked about adoption very little. Initially, my parents told me it was so I could have another sibling. It was not until adulthood that I realized it was because they had had fertility problems. I accepted it as normal, really without question. Thinking about it now, I think adoptees must wonder about who their birth parents were and why they were given up for adoption. For transracial adoptees, I imagine there's a feeling of isolation that is probably two-fold: feeling like an outsider in the culture the family is associated with, and occasionally an outsider in the family itself.

Since Tony was adopted when I was 1, he was always part of my family. We did talk some about race or racial differences, mostly in terms of civil rights. We grew up in
a liberal environment. Race issues were almost always discussed in relationship to equal rights. Racial differences were talked about at an early age. We marched in a rally as part of the Civil Rights Movement when I was quite small, and that is one of my earliest memories about the issue of race.

These days I interact predominantly with people of the majority culture here in Seattle, which is largely white. While that may be a passive act, it must reflect my comfort level. While I have experienced no overt instances of racism, I do remember a few instances of shouted racial slurs directed at my brother. My own teenage years were pretty normal with no major upheavals. In terms of my dating history, I have only dated white women.

Adoption has shaped the way I think about family in that genetic relationship is not the basis of family. My wife and I have not considered adopting a child of any race. I think that social workers need to tell families what resources are available to openly discuss transracial adoption. I would encourage prospective parents to interact with other transracial families. There should be efforts to introduce children directly to the races of different cultures, and make connections with similar families.
I think my parents were prepared to deal with adoption, but unprepared for the transracial issue. I would say that a successful transracial adoption is when there is continued family love and interaction through life. On the other hand, an unsuccessful transracial adoption results in alienation from family. Based on those definitions, transracial adoption was successful in our case. For myself, I think I am much more aware of racial issues. I wish in retrospect that our family had recognized the issue and had taken a more active role interacting with other transracial adoptees.

Profile 11: Margaret O'Toole

Margaret O'Toole grew up in a large, politically liberal Roman Catholic family in Massachusetts in the 1950s and 1960s. Like the parents of participant Levi Roth, Margaret's parents had been influenced by the growing concern for over-population. After having six children by birth, Margaret's parents decided to adopt a biracial toddler in 1967.

_Siblings in the family: Roger (51), Margaret (50), Nicholas (48), Pete (46), Mary (40), Nate (36, biracial adoptee), Daniel (35)_

I grew up in Massachusetts. I was born in 1954. Our family was very large. I was the oldest daughter. So I was the responsible kid, the designated babysitter. I had five brothers and one sister, including Nate. Everyone was very
smart and very competitive. We were brought up Catholic. My parents were very liberal-minded. They had six children and it was the 1960s, and they thought that we should do something else for the world, like adopt an interracial child. They thought it would be great for our family, and bring civil rights into the family. My mother wrote a couple articles that were published in magazines. One was called "Love is Colorblind." I think it was in a *Family Circle* type magazine. So they had six children of their own and then adopted a mixed racial child more for political reasons, I think, than for the sake of the family.

Nate's mother was white and his father was African American. The other thing about Nate is that he was adopted at birth, by a young couple who gave him back after six months because he screamed too much. In other words, they just weren't ready to have a child, I guess. Then he lived in an orphanage for the next year, year and a half, and was considered unadoptable for that reason. When my parents adopted him, he basically had a mental age way below normal. Within a year in the family, they had him retested and his mental age had quadrupled, something like that. It just went to show how the orphanage was not a good place for him. There was nothing wrong with him. It was all environmental factors at that time. So the adoption for
Nate was really critical, I think, for his whole life. That's the way I remember the story: he was adopted for six months, given back, and then my parents adopted him when he was two.

I am a mom. I have three children. I am very lucky to be married to a man who has enough money to support myself and the family so that I can paint and not have to worry about how much money I am making from my art, which makes a big difference in my life. I didn't want to work full time where I wouldn't be able to put my kids first. I consider myself to be a painter, but I'm a mother first. I worked in mental health for several years, and then studied painting afterwards. Then I gave it up and worked in marketing and advertising for about five years. Then I started having children. The oldest is now in college, and I have two boys at home still.

Where I lived was a very small town. I grew up where the state university is. It's very rural, so there's nothing there except the university. It was an almost completely white area. Actually there were two black students in my graduating high school class of 180 kids. The two black kids I knew at the time, I didn't consider them to be any different than anyone else that I knew. I felt like my parents did a good job-- maybe it was partly
the times, too-- I feel like I judge people after I get to know them, not by what they look like, although everybody has some prejudices, to some extent, about people. Not just in terms of race, but religion, looks, whether they're fat or thin or whatever. I might make prejudgments, but I really try to be very open-minded about people until I get to know them.

When I was in college I actually dated a black man for two or three years, which is kind of interesting. I don't know if that's typical. I mean, I'm not sure if that had anything to do with having a brother who was interracial or not. I found that it was very difficult at the time to be a mixed race couple because I felt like the black population was extremely-- I'm trying to think of the word-- not welcoming. Particularly black women didn't want to have anything to do with me as, you know, a girlfriend (laughs) of a black man. It's interesting. It's sort of a part of my life that I sometimes forget happened. Because I never even told my husband (laughs) that I went out with a black man. But it was interesting. It was interesting. I really feel like I learned a lot about the culture, the African American experience. I learned some good things. When we broke up, it didn't have to do with his being black, although that certainly made it difficult to have a normal
relationship, because we couldn't have any friends in common. At the time— I think now there are many more mixed race couples. If you have the same goals and the same ideas, it works out.

I remember when the adoption happened I was very worried about it, because I felt like my parents were ruining our family. I felt like we had this wonderful family where everybody looked the same, you know? Like brothers and sisters, and they were bringing in this kid who was a stranger, who looked different, and I felt like this isn't going to be our family anymore. And so I guess the good part about that is that within a few years— it was less than a few, I don't know when— but I just remember a few years later being so proud of the fact, because it was so unusual that this happened. But at the time, when I was thirteen, I felt so guilty. I felt incredibly guilty because deep down I thought, this is wrong. What they are doing is wrong. I think it had to do with my age. I don't think my younger siblings felt that way at all. I don't think they were there yet. I don't know how my older brother felt.

These were feelings I kept very much to myself. I didn't feel like I could say anything at all about it. I felt like my parents would think I was a bigot or
something, that I wasn't-- I didn't feel I could say how I felt without being told that that wasn't a good way to think. It was hard because after the first three weeks my mother was having a very difficult time. It was very difficult for her because she had a two and a half year old, and she was adopting a two year old, and I remember she had decided that it just wasn't going to work. She told us that Nate was going to go back to the orphanage. My memory is that all my brothers and sisters were saying, "Mom you can't do that, this is terrible." I felt deep down sort of secretly glad, that this is the best thing, it's not good for our family to have him here. I certainly felt differently later. But I'm just telling you the truth. I really felt upset about the whole thing. I really think it had to do with how old I was more than anything else. But I felt tremendously guilty that I felt this way, too.

I also do think that it was very difficult for my younger brother, Daniel, who was two and a half, to suddenly have a two year old come into the family. It might not be something in general that happens under these circumstances but I really feel like Daniel's life would have been a lot different without Nate. Nate became sort of a star. He was just a very easy-going, such a great kid. I
mean, Daniel is too, but Daniel had a much harder time through school. It was very tough for him.

I didn't really date when I was in high school at all. I certainly liked specific kids. But I didn't really have a boyfriend until I went to college. I would say that the men I was attracted to before I met my husband were quite different. I don't know what I was looking for. I dated more than one black guy. I had one relationship with a black man, and I also dated a couple others after that. I met my husband when I was about twenty-four. We got married when I was twenty-seven.

My parents had to be very open about adoption, because obviously we were all not adopted and Nate was going to know pretty early on that he was different from everybody else. So we were just very open about it with him and with anybody who asked.

Nate doesn't have the super kinky hair. It's more wavy, dark hair. Growing up, I think people wondered if he was maybe Latino. He's not that dark, although he certainly looks different from the rest of us, because we are all pale and freckled. So he didn't look like-- I can remember the family Christmas card would go out and my piano teacher would see it and say, "Why does this one look different from everybody else?" So people would ask questions. I
remember that anytime the conversation came up where I said my youngest brother is adopted and they would say, "Oh, how did that happen?" I'd end up having to tell them the whole story. They would always think it was so amazing in a much more positive way. It was always a positive way as opposed to a negative way. Nobody was ever negative about it.

I was gone out of the family during Nate's teenage years. My parents went through a difficult time when Nate was eleven or twelve, they were separated for a while. At one point, Nate and Daniel were home with my father while my mom was in Texas. He did an exchange with a professor in Paris for a year, and he took Nate and Daniel with him, and they went to French school for a year and learned French. They were thirteen at that time. I think that was a good experience for him, too.

The other thing I want to mention is that Daniel was smoking marijuana when he was in middle school and doing stuff that was-- he had a much harder time. I don't think Nate-- Nate may have. If he did anything, he may have. He did much better at school. He went to an ivy-league college. He was happier socially. Dan was sort of a miserable teenager. He was incredibly bright, too. He was just so smart, I don't know if the school system failed him, or the family failed him, somebody failed him. He
studied art in college, he is an artist of some sort, but he really isn't doing anything now. I don't think he would ever say that he could imagine life without Nate, but I think it was very hard for him because Nate was so successful. They are still fairly close.

If people asked about why Nate looked different, I would say that he is mixed racial. Everybody thought he was so cute when he was little. I can remember my girlfriends in high school saying, "Oh, we love Nate, he's so cute." They thought he was the cutest thing they ever saw because he was like five or six. I agreed with them. He was cute, and we had a very special relationship. I really was sort of the second mother in a way to him. I felt very, very close to him. It was hard when I went away to college, they were only eight. So they were still little. I feel like I missed their--I always say they because Nate and Dan were so close in age. They were both very cute kids, and it felt like I missed their growing up. I had to stay away from home, for my own reasons.

I usually say Nate is mixed racial. I don't think of him as African American, only because he was part of my family. He's my brother. There was a time when he was in college when he really identified himself as more African American than he did growing up. He was pulling away to a
certain extent, and he might have thought more at that point. But I just identify him as my mixed racial brother who was adopted. I think he probably thinks of himself as African American, but I don't know. I think it's always been a difficult thing for him. Because he isn't really white, and he's not really African American. He's not really either, and I think that's hard for him. I think he felt pretty much white. I don't think people treated him any differently. I don't think he was as obviously African American as the two or three other kids that were. He went through a major--I don't know when it started. But he really wanted to find his birth mother, and he finally did. He actually got to meet his father, who died of a heart attack within the year after Nate saw him. He felt very blessed that he got to meet him. He was very full of trying to find his identity and where he came from, and meeting his birth siblings. I think that was helpful for him.

When I was dating people I found it extremely difficult from both sides. If we were walking down the street, I remember people giving us dirty looks. Then I remember how I felt around the black kids, too. I think when I had that black boyfriend that they were not very happy about it. You know, it's kind of funny. I wondered if part of it for me, was saying, "Okay, you guys are so
liberal and civil rights minded, how do you like this?" (laughs). Who knows? I just think as a teenager I was pushing the envelope all the time. I think my father was very uncomfortable with that, and was very happy that it didn't end up lasting. He would never say that.

I think mixed racial adoption is a good thing. It leads to breaking down those prejudices that everybody has a history of in some way. There are so many kids-- there may be many kids in Nate's position. But everybody wants an infant. Yet in our family, a two-year-old benefited greatly, and was every bit as much a part of the family.

I think a child should have the opportunity to be adopted by whoever is most suited to give him what he needs, and it shouldn't have anything to do with race. If you're going to say that white people shouldn't adopt black people, then I don't think we should be adopting Chinese babies, or Mexican babies, or any other babies either. The fact is, we in this country are very wealthy, and we have the means to use that wealth to take care of children that need to be taken care of. I don't see anything wrong with that. The alternative is that these kids are brought up in more poverty with more problems, maybe as orphans. I just think the more children that have the more chances to succeed the better off the whole world is.
I think transracial adoption was exceptionally successful in our family. People found the story to be very unique and exciting. I felt like they were more interested in me because I had this family that was so different. An unsuccessful transracial adoption would be a kid that would become very angry maybe at some point in his life, that he wasn't brought up by whichever racial group or cultural group he belongs with, and the anger is either then turned inward or outward, and he's not a happy member of society. You want your kid to grow up grateful for what they have. I want my kids to grow up feeling like, "I've been privileged and I want to do something for other people." Not, "I'm angry with the world for not being just the way I wanted it to be." I don't know whether that is something you can give a child.

Profile 12: Nicole Kaufman

Nicole grew up with a “light-skinned” brother who does not always appear to be biracial. As a result, Nicole says she did not think of her brother's situation as a transracial adoption. However, now that she herself is going through the process of adopting a child, Nicole is learning about the complexities of transracial adoption and reevaluating her brother's identity and experience. Nicole's narrative is particularly poignant, in that she discloses the impact of the death of her mother on her and her brother's experience of childhood.
I was born in 1970 and grew up in Florida. I lived in Florida from 1970 until 1994 when I moved to California. I am sure everyone's family is complicated, but I would say mine started out traditionally. You know, it was my parents, me, and my brother, who is four years younger than me. We had a trauma in our family, which is that my mother committed suicide when I was ten and my brother was six. I guess I look at “pre-that” and “post-that.” Before that, we were your average family. After that our family went through a lot of different issues that came out of that.

I would consider myself a relatively independent person. I don't live near any of the rest of my family. I would describe myself as someone who wants to learn and better myself in this lifetime. When I graduated from the University of Florida, I packed up my car and traveled with a friend. By way of Canada, you know, we were just driving around, I ended up in the Bay Area. I'm still here. Now I have a kid and I'm married. My son is four, and he is my biological child.

While I was growing up, we lived in suburbia-type neighborhoods, and it was still pretty white. As I got older, the neighborhood got a lot more mixed, but it was
relatively white. I went to a pretty diverse high school that was half black and half white. We were bused there.

My dad was a salesman for a construction company. He never seemed happy with his job. He's happier now that he is retired. My mom was in the field of teaching. She used to teach at my pre-school. Then when I started elementary school she didn't work anymore.

Malcolm's birth mother is white, and his birth father is black. I was pretty little when he came. I remember being excited. I remember going to get him, and what he was wearing. He was two months old.

I hadn't even heard the phrase "transracial adoption" until my husband and I started looking into adoption ourselves. The thing about my brother is that people still--he is not dark-skinned. He is light-skinned. People still skip over something, you know. Some people don't even know we are not biological siblings. If you look, you can tell he has certain traits. He has African American hair, the texture, but it's not dark. It's kind of brown. His eyes are brown. I think though, people just see that the rest of his family is white maybe, and just assume. I don't know what people think if they meet him alone. I'm half Jewish, and I get the tan part. To me, Malcolm looks biracial.
I would say we are close, but we live far away. Malcolm lives in New York. We talk on the phone and see each other sort of often. I feel like we've been getting closer. After my mom died, we had all this stuff going on in my house. It ended up being a time when my brother went to go live with my grandparents, so he wasn't at our house. We were like super close before that happened. And then we were separated for a while, so I feel like in a way we are rebuilding our relationship. Him and I are the closest to each other than we are to anyone else in our family.

My dad decided to send Malcolm to live with his parents when I was fourteen, and I think Malcolm was ten. My dad was remarried at the time, so that was basically what was going on. Then we had a stepbrother at that point, who is also biracial. But we are not in touch with him at all, because once my dad and step-mom got divorced, we just haven't been in touch at all. He was four years younger than my brother. I have a lot of anger now over it. I feel like my dad and my grandparents didn't hold our relationship sacred, me and my brother. They used to live in Florida, and then they moved to Washington, D.C. with my brother, and we never got to visit. So we just didn't get to see each other, pretty much all through high school. Then when I went to college I would go up there on my own
and visit. I'd like teach him to skip school, and be a bad influence (laughs).

We've talked about it a little bit. Malcolm is not as mad as me about any of it. He has a different view on life, I guess you could say. He just kind of like says, "Well, I'm just going to take care of myself, I'm just going to move forward." That's his attitude, whereas I'm like, "I'm pissed! Why weren't the adults making better decisions?"

We didn't know any other families with adopted kids. My family didn't talk about adoption at all. All I knew was that we adopted Malcolm and he was my brother. I don't know why I wasn't that curious about it or I didn't really ask that many questions. For some reason it seemed normal to me. But like I said, I don't know anyone else who had that experience. It never seemed like something that-- you know, no one ever asked. I don't know what Malcolm thought about it. I know what he thinks about it now, but I don't know what he thought about it growing up. Now he says he thinks about it a little bit. This is kind of his style. He said that he more wonders who his birth parents are in terms of his health history, and things like that. But he's not really interested in finding his birth mother because he just doesn't want another person in his life that he would-- I guess he looks at family, older family, as people you
are responsible to, and it's more of a chore. You don't really get anything out of it. So he's not really interested in adding someone to that list.

I used to not say, if people said, "Oh you know, you both look so much alike," or whatever. I used to not say anything. I don't even know why. But now if I say, "Oh, he's adopted, we're not biological siblings," now I am more dealing with that curiosity and that what-do-you-say kind of thing. I think since he could pass for either race, people didn't know that he was adopted. Plus, when he was older, we didn't live together. But no one asks us that now, either though. When we go out and we're together, nobody asks us. I don't notice anybody staring.

Malcolm knew he was adopted, and I knew. I'm sure even if he doesn't often think about it, I would think he would have to wonder who his parents were before he came to this family. I would think he might wonder if because he was adopted, if that's how my dad was able to give him to my grandparents. I would think. Basically, only recently that question popped in my head. What's weird is that the whole time growing up, I never questioned that he was my brother, or that my parents could have thought anything different about me versus him. I think that now that I'm an adult, now that I have a biological child, now that I'm thinking
of adopting a kid, that's more how those questions are coming up for me.

I've talked about some of this with Malcolm. I've posed it as, "What's your opinion on these things, or these things that my adopted child might feel?" I've asked him some of what he feels. One thing that was weird that he said when I first told him that we were going to adopt a kid, he said, "Oh that's so great that you're going to do that for a kid," or something. I don't know why I thought that was a strange response. Like, that's a good deed that parents do, I don't know, that the kid gets more out of it than the parent.

I had no idea if he was going to say-- I mean, we do talk. We talk a lot more, recently. I'm like one of the only people he does talk to about his feelings. He's not really that open about his feelings. He has a girlfriend, but they don't live together. He has been through so much, I think, with getting moved to my grandparents' house, and having whatever issues that I would think anyone would have surrounding abandonment with adoption. He graduated from an Ivy League school, he went back and got his MBA, and he is very independent. So he's like, in my eyes at least, successful. He's living his life, not letting things stop him from doing what he wants to do. You know, he travels to
Tibet and Thailand. But I think there are some things he hasn't looked at. That's just the way our family was. Our family didn't talk about anything bad that happened. We didn't talk about anything that might be like a difficult subject. That's what was modeled. They just felt like, if they didn't talk about it, then that meant that everything was okay. I would think that that could have had the opposite, or have negative implications, around adoption. Like whether that meant that my brother wasn't able to ask questions. But he seems fine with the fact that no one checked in with him, you know, "How are you doing? How are you feeling about Mommy and Daddy?" I know that he went to counseling briefly with my grandparents, but that was around him moving in with them and not being with my dad. I don't know if they also discussed adoption in the counseling, but I think it was brief, like two sessions or something.

Because of the way I feel about my brother, I feel that adoption is a valid way to be a family. I always thought that maybe I would adopt, but not until I was an adult. I did think about adoption before I gave birth to my son. Actually, I did want to get pregnant and do that. My husband and I, before I had my son, said that we'd probably have two kids biologically and then adopt a third kid. Then
after I had one kid, I felt like I didn't want to have three kids. I felt like that would be too much, so then it came down to, "Well, if there's only one more kid, do you have that kid biologically or do you adopt it?" And so we weren't in agreement at the beginning about that. And then there was time, since I wasn't ready to have a second kid anyway. When we were ready to have another kid, we decided to go ahead and adopt.

It is a conscious decision to adopt transracially, but it's weird. It's like this conscious decision that doesn't really have logic to it so much. It's kind of a feeling, I don't know why. I have always just pictured that when I adopted that I would adopt an African American baby. I just thought that would be great to add that to my family, not like I'm chalking up-- I don't know. It's so weird, I don't know how to discuss it, really. I picture a black child or biracial, either one.

My family never talked about race or racial differences. If Malcolm ever got teased for looking different when he was younger or something, I don't remember those conversations happening. I actually wonder-- I don't know why I've been afraid to ask him how he describes himself. I mean, he lives in New York City, so it's pretty mixed. His girlfriend is like half Japanese
Hawaiian and half white. She looks Japanese Hawaiian. A lot of his friends are white, but you know, he went to NYU. That's more white kids, you know what I mean? And I went to public school, but he went to private school, so like, same thing. When he went to live with my grandparents, they put him in private school in Washington, D.C. D.C. is diverse, but it was still private school. There were also people from other countries, that kind of diversity, but it wasn't like there were many low-income black kids there.

We didn't talk about racism or prejudice. I know that in my family, everyone has prejudices, but they are all Democrats. My husband's family is more likely to make a racist comment. My family, it's not something I think they would say or feel. My dad's side of the family is Jewish, my mom's is Christian. I don't really know, I guess they are from England or something like that. Now that I've talked to my dad about adoption, I swear it took a while, but it's like, "Oh yeah, he's an adoptive parent." I'm out here talking to all these adoptive parents, and I'm like, "Oh yeah, my dad is one." I said, "Well, Malcolm might be interested in hearing his adoption story and how it happened, you might want to write it down and give it to him." So he emailed it to me, too, and he said somewhere in there that when they found out that there was this birth
mother who had already given birth and that they could get the child immediately, that they said-- I guess this is how they posed it-- "We want to let you know that the father's race is questionable," or something like that, "are you willing to take a baby that is whatever" -- I don't know how they put it-- "biracial?" My dad said that they said, "Yeah, we'll do that, but if the baby is really dark, we think that might be too difficult for us to do." And when I heard that, I was-- I appreciated that he was honest with me about it, but it kind of upset me. I talked to my brother about it, and he was like, "No," that didn't bother him, and that's just how the situation was. There weren't tons of biracial families, you know? So my dad says his birth father was black, but we never met him, or the birth mother. My parents never encouraged Malcolm to go searching for his birth parents.

I'm sure moving to D.C. was probably better for him. You know, it's a city, and there's less racism there than in Florida, and now he lives in New York. I personally didn't know anything about racism. Then I went to this school that was, like I said, pretty much half and half. Everyone kind of hung out, but still, the white kids were best friends with the white kids, and the black kids were best friends with the black kids. I remember my boyfriend,
who wasn't from the school, he was black. I was at a friend's house sleeping on the sofa, and I heard them talking about it. I was kind of like half asleep. They were saying something like, that that was bad. They were white, this was high school, and they were surprised. They didn't even know him. I don't know, that was like the day I started to realize that there are rules that are happening out there. I didn't go out with him that long, but just because he was a jerk. I had another two boyfriends that were black, and another guy that I liked, but we never whatever, became anything else. My dad didn't really know what I was doing. He never met any of my boyfriends until I had a serious boyfriend in college.

I go to Jamaica and I go to Africa. Not often, but I've been to those. That's the weird thing. I feel connected to black culture. But now that I'm going to adopt, I realize that I don't have any black friends, you know? I guess that's just a side note. I live in a diverse community, but it still sort of socially segregated. Just socially, I mean, everyone interacts, but in terms of like, who are your three close friends, socially it seems like still, you know.

Since I'm about to adopt a black child, I'm nervous that there are going to be people who feel that white
people have taken enough things from black people, why do you now have to take one of their children? The thing is, in my situation with my brother, it didn't seem to be negative for him. He seemed to be who he is, you know what I mean? Now that I'm reading a lot of other adopted kids' experiences, I realize that you have to make sure that they are able to feel connected to the black community. So I don't know. I feel like in the big picture, the world would still be better if race was not an issue. I realize that it is an issue, but like, I want to go towards the belief that it doesn't have to be, and that ultimately, that would be the goal. I feel like people staying separated from each other, I mean it's unfortunate that the situation is like a black family is going to have a hard time adopting a white kid. You know, it doesn't go both ways. But I think it would be better if all of that was happening, if people just loved who they love, married who they marry, you know what I mean?

If I were presented with a baby who looked like my brother, I wouldn't be disappointed. It's still an opportunity for people to come together and just be mixed, you know? I don't know if that makes sense. But I'm not looking to adopt a white child. I guess that's not what I'm wanting to add to my family right now. My husband is
totally into it. I think he's more nervous than me about his family's reaction, even though they already know. I think it's this sense of both admiration and curiosity about this other life and being black. We don't really have any black friends (laughs). It's sad, really. The truth is we don't have that many friends, but still, we have acquaintances. I would say if we were to name our three best friends, they would definitely be white. We have this one friend, the dad is black, the mom is white. We're not that close but we hang out with them some times. But I wouldn't consider them good friends. We see them sometimes and the kids get together sometimes. We've told them what we're doing just to see if they have any insight on it or whatever. They've kind of said, you know, mentioned things that you come up against, people looking at you and wondering how your family fits together. But they don't think it's a bad idea. You know, they married outside of racial lines or whatever.

I didn't know anything about open adoption until I took a class. We were actually going to do international adoption. We had already started to get a baby from another country. We were doing it on our own. We didn't even know you had to find an agency. We weren't getting anywhere. Then we took the class and started thinking about the
benefits of open adoption, then we decided we would do it that way. We were trying to do it through St. Vincent in the Grenadines. When we were there, these two women were there adopting kids--each adopting a kid from St. Vincent. And so we were there when they got their kids. They were staying in a house for a while until it went through. They were from Canada. So I guess that's kind of how that idea came about to do it from there. Plus we figured that's a place we'd want to go back and bring the kid, to know where he's from. Like I didn't want to do Jamaica, because I felt like there actually we would get a lot more animosity about taking one of their kids, you know? Have you ever read the book *Pigs in Heaven*? I thought it was really good. The first one is when she adopts the kid, but the second one is when the Cherokee Nation is trying to get the kid back. It's really interesting, I think, because you know, the woman in the story who adopts the kid is like, "This is my kid, I've raised her since she was three, she was abused in your custody, and now she's my daughter." But the Cherokee Nation is like, "We have this knowledge about what it means to be a Cherokee that you will never be able to pass on to her." So it's a good book.

I think it's natural for a kid to want to know where they came from and why, and I want my kid to have that
opportunity to find out. That's what an open adoption allows. When I told my brother that, he was like, "Yeah, I think that's really great." Even though he doesn't want to find his birth mother, he thinks that that would be good. I think he sees that if this is like known and set up for the birth mother, that it's more likely to be a more peaceful reunion or something.

I don't think of my brother as a transracial adoption. When I'm reading about it now, that wasn't my family. I guess I am learning that that was kind of unique, which scares me a little bit about adopting now. I went into it thinking, "I'm going to love this child just like I love my brother and it's all going to be fine." Now I'm like, "Oh my God." It's already shown me a lot about what goes on in the world. Because I'm white I don't see these things. I know racism happens but I don't see it. I mean I see it on the global or national scale, but I don't necessarily see it on a day-to-day basis, you know? But now I'm realizing how it does happen. So yeah, the things I've been reading for this class I didn't see as my family. We plan on doing the transracial classes, too. I mean, I'm doing it because I want to know.
Chapter 6 Summary

The twelve profiles presented in Chapters 5 and 6 collectively reflect a heartfelt and poignant perspective on the realities of life in transracial adoptive families. Each profile in its own way illustrates the love among siblings that transcends race or color. Yet, taken as a whole, the narratives remind us of the enduring significance of race. As a researcher, I consider it an honor and a privilege to have been allowed to witness the personal disclosure shared with me during each interview. I hope that the analysis presented in the following chapter does justice to the lived experience of the non-adopted sibling participants and their families.

CHAPTER 7
ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPANTS VIGNETTES

This chapter focuses on the narrative identities of the twelve non-adopted siblings. As explained in Chapter 4, each of the profiles was analyzed methodologically, and then crafted into a shortened vignette (or narrative about race and adoption). Subsequently, each autobiographical vignette was analyzed in terms of the “kinds of selves” narrated by participants (Wortham, 2001). Narrative analysis documented a total of twenty-seven different kinds of selves that were then grouped into five composite narrative identities.
Kinds of Selves Narrated by Non-adopted Siblings

Bearing in mind the multiple “selves” that individual speakers portray while articulating their autobiographical narratives, my analysis of the participants’ vignettes revealed a total of twenty-seven different kinds of selves (depicted in Table 7.1) relating to discourses of race and adoption:

Table 7.1: Participants and their 27 kinds of selves

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sibling participant</th>
<th>Kinds of selves narrated in the participant’s vignette</th>
<th>Sibling participant</th>
<th>Kinds of selves narrated (continued)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moral self</td>
<td>Happy-go-lucky self</td>
<td>Safe self</td>
<td>Evaluative self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Bobbie</td>
<td>Aware self</td>
<td>10. Margaret</td>
<td>Aware self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visible self</td>
<td></td>
<td>Moral self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Informing self</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sisterly self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anti-racist self</td>
<td></td>
<td>Comparative self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pro-adoption self</td>
<td></td>
<td>Multicultural self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Ashley</td>
<td>Aware self</td>
<td>11. Katrina</td>
<td>Visible/invisible self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anti-racist self</td>
<td></td>
<td>Adoption-savvy self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-white self</td>
<td></td>
<td>Comedic self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching self</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sisterly self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Therapist self</td>
<td></td>
<td>Color-blind self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sisterly self</td>
<td></td>
<td>Invisible self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visible self</td>
<td></td>
<td>Angry/wounded self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multicultural self</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pro-adoption self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Safe/practical self</td>
<td></td>
<td>Uncertain self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Readers may find it useful to revisit Chapter 4 for a step-by-step demonstration of the methodological approach to documenting the selves depicted in Table 7.1 as they were enacted discursively in the profiles. Recall, for instance, the four selves found in Shawn’s vignette (analyzed in Chapter 4): Shawn’s evaluative self assessed his mother’s efforts to address Korean culture in the family, and also drew comparisons between the race dynamics that he experienced in the different regions of the United States in which he has lived. Shawn’s multicultural self reported his travels to Korea, his belief in the importance of learning about other cultures, and his friendships with diverse individuals. There is a natural overlap between Shawn’s evaluative and multicultural selves, evident, for instance, in his assessment of race relations. This is a good example of how one participant enacts multiple selves in the same narrative. At the same time, his aware self voiced Shawn’s changing perceptions of transracial adoption over time, as well as his
awareness of cultural issues, and of the reactions of others when he discloses that he has an adopted Korean sister—all of which could also be attributed to his multicultural self. Lastly, Shawn’s moral self appropriated his parents’ liberal values and re-articulated their lessons about “people who judge other people differently based on their race.”

After reviewing Shawn’s four selves along with the twenty-three additional selves narrated by the other participants (see Table 7.1 above), I grouped similar kinds of selves together in five categories based on how narrators talked about race and adoption (see Table 7.2 below). That is, all twenty-seven selves were clustered as a way to represent a tendency, pattern, or recurring theme that arose when similar kinds of selves were considered together. For example, the narrated selves that described awareness (e.g., of race and/or adoption issues, self-awareness, and their awareness of how others react to their transracial families) were clustered to represent an Aware Sibling composite narrative identity. The remaining selves were similarly clustered to create four additional composite identities: the Safe Sibling, the Responsible Sibling, the Moral Sibling, and the Transracialized Sibling.

These interpretive categories illustrate what I regard as the five composite narrative identities of this particular group of non-adopted siblings. Table 7.2 illustrates the five composite identities and their constitutive selves:
Table 7.2: Composite narrative identities and their clustered *selves*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composite narrative identity</th>
<th>Comprised of these <em>kinds of selves:</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Safe Sibling</td>
<td>Silent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>rational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>happy-go-lucky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>comedic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>invisible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>color-blind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>anti-“raced”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>practical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>common/unique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>safe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Responsible Sibling</td>
<td>Brotherly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sisterly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>informing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>adoption-savvy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pro-adoption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>therapist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>responsible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Moral Sibling</td>
<td>Evaluative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>apologetic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>integrationist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>anti-racist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pro-adoption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>multicultural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>angry/wounded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>silent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>wounded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>moral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Aware Sibling</td>
<td>evaluative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>comparative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>contrastive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>visible/invisible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>uncertain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>self-aware</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To reiterate, Table 7.2 shows the kinds of selves that, grouped together, comprise each composite narrative identity. Again, there is a degree of overlap, with some of the selves being assigned to more than one cluster. Discussing the narrated selves in terms of composite identities has the added benefit of minimizing the tedium of presenting in detail all twenty-seven disparate selves from the step-by-step narrative analysis process. Next, a brief description of each narrative identity composite is provided as a way of illustrating five distinct approaches taken by participants as they engaged discourses of race and adoption.

**The Safe Sibling**

The Safe Sibling composite identity includes selves that were reported as oblivious to race or adoption issues and generally unaware of any problems, challenges, or struggles facing their siblings, other adoptees, and/or people of other races. Safe Siblings sometimes used humor to defuse—or avoid altogether—potential discord or confrontation. They might adopt a happy-go-lucky, carefree identity, for example, ignoring, downplaying, or denying the existence of challenges related to race or adoption. A Safe Sibling identity also includes examples of selves that were narrated, at times, as remaining silent amidst potential controversy, for example, when racist comments or jokes were made in their presence. Mike at one point, for example, preferred to maintain a “rational” identity when someone told a racist joke, rather than argue with the joke-
teller. Safe Siblings also tended to remain invisible, avoiding the spotlight of public scrutiny that often shines on parents and adopted children in transracial families. Similarly, Safe Siblings talked about how they sidestepped engagement with controversial topics such as racism or interracial dating. Some Safe Siblings described themselves as staying securely at their “comfort level.”

The Responsible Sibling

The selves that expressed feelings of love, caring, and responsibility for an adopted brother or sister have been clustered under a composite Responsible Sibling identity. Correlating to these enactments of caring and concern were those selves that took responsibility for educating others and answering their questions, for example, about the physical differences between siblings in the family, or questions about adoption. Ashley, for instance, talked about helping others use more sensitive terminology when discussing adoption, opting for “born-to” or “biological” in place of “natural” or “real” to distinguish non-adoptive sibling relationships.

Responsible Siblings often described themselves as defending and protecting their adopted brothers and sisters from teasing and other insensitive or intrusive remarks from strangers or classmates. Some of the Responsible Siblings went even further, becoming adoption-savvy advocates who became steeped in learning about adoption issues. Melanie epitomizes this degree of responsibility, having built a career as a therapist who works primarily with members of the adoption triangle.

The Moral Sibling

The Moral Sibling cluster includes narrated selves that expressed a deep concern with adhering to religious teachings or ethical and political principles. For instance,
Doug, Margaret, Alexis, Bobbie, and Shawn all identified themselves or their families of origin as liberals. A number of Moral Siblings reported their active participation in a community of faith, for example, in Roman Catholic or Protestant churches. Moral Siblings portrayed themselves as good, decent individuals who are, in principle, committed to liberal ideals such as racial integration and equality. Moral Siblings sometimes apologized for or rationalized the racism they observed in their extended families and social circles. They also frequently made value judgments based on the attitudes and actions of individuals. For example, they contrasted themselves with other white people, or made comparisons between their own and their parents’ values or racial views.

**The Aware Sibling**

The Aware Sibling composite identity incorporates selves that were narrated as self-aware as well as knowledgeable about race and/or adoption issues. In their narratives, Aware Siblings sometimes took multiple perspectives on controversial issues such as transracial adoption or interracial dating. Aware Siblings frequently narrated their identities as having become more aware over time. Awareness was also evident in the evaluative identities constructed in the interviews, with Aware Siblings comparing and contrasting their own families with other families, or drawing comparisons between overtly racist versus more or less tolerant family members, friends, and associates.

Aware Siblings often enacted meta-awareness, specifically, an appreciation of becoming aware of how others viewed themselves and their families. They tended to acknowledge also how their views have changed, particularly through conversations with their adopted brothers and sisters, hearing about and learning from their experiences, and,
in a few cases, as active participants in dialogue with friends of diverse backgrounds and co-workers outside the family.

Some Aware Siblings, like Moral Siblings, expressed concern about maintaining humility and personal integrity. For example, several spoke of intentionally not trying to gain some perceived social advantage simply for having a sibling of color, and not trying to “score points” by bragging to others that they have a brother or sister adopted from another culture. On the other hand, Shawn alluded to his full awareness of how people frequently reacted more favorably to getting to know him when he disclosed his trip to Korea and the fact that he has a Korean sister. Similarly, other participants reported being aware that others found them “more interesting” when they mentioned casually in conversation, or showed a photo of, their unconventional families.

**The Transracialized Sibling**

The Transracialized Sibling composite identity includes selves that were described as actively anti-racist. They also narrated a cultivation of multicultural awareness over time. In this regard, they overlapped with many of the same selves included in the Moral and Aware Sibling composite identities. Transracialized Siblings tended to describe themselves as becoming increasingly sensitive to and aware of racial and cultural issues, specifically, more aware than others who do not share their experience of living in a transracial family. They also reported having a history of intimate involvement with people of color outside the family. Some Transracialized Siblings expressed a commitment to acting as anti-racist allies to, for example, their adopted siblings or to their own adopted children. Bobbie, for instance, detailed the ways transracial family experience has influenced her career and parenting commitments,
through second-generation transracial adoption and through her work with her clients and students of color.

Transracialized Siblings also tended to describe their families of origin and their own racial identities in creative ways, for example, as a “complex family with racial diversity” or as belonging to the “transracial adoptive community.” A few Transracialized Siblings enacted what I have collectively labeled post-white identities that reflect their unique experiences transcending racialization. This is one way of explaining how Ashley, for example, described herself and her family as different from the mainstream white family, and her expressed affinity with other people who are, in her words, “marginalized.” Similarly, post-whiteness might explain Bobbie’s claim that, in some ways, she does not “feel white,” and her insistence that she is as much African American culturally as Swedish American. To cite one further example, Levi’s anecdote of spending a summer living with an African American family where he was immersed in an urban environment and “passed” as a person of color can be understood as an instantiation of a post-white identity, particularly given his history of interracial friendships and dating.

In Chapter 8, I will offer a more in-depth discussion of the five composite narrative identities. For now, suffice it to say that they are representations of characteristic ways in which the study participants engaged the discourses of race and adoption, rather than denoting discrete psychological stages of development.

**Thematic Tensions in the Narratives**

While an analysis of the ways in which participants narrated their personal experience with race and adoption resulted in the documentation of five narrative identity
clusters for the non-adopted siblings, further analysis of these composites led to the emergence of six recurring themes. These themes suggest a series of tensions between dynamics at play within the narratives. Thus, I refer to these recurring dynamics as “thematic tensions.” When considered in light of the five composite narrative identities, the thematic tensions illustrate individual approaches to similar situations or challenges across the narratives. I shall argue in the next chapter that the thematic tensions cumulatively represent choices related to living a life defined most prominently by racialization, or conversely, by transracialization.

I have identified six thematic tensions, which are listed below (with descriptions to follow immediately):

1. disclosure/non-disclosure,
2. visibility/invisibility,
3. racism/anti-racism,
4. same-race relationship-building/interracial relationship-building,
5. safety/risk,
6. inward feeling/outward emoting.

**Thematic Tension 1: Disclosure/non-disclosure**

Several participants raised the issue of when and whom to tell (when their adopted sibling is not present) about the interracial composition of their families. Some siblings expressed concern about how others might interpret their motivations for disclosing that information. Because most people have been conditioned to assume that family members racially “match,” the decision to “come out” as a member of a
transracial family might be compared to disclosing that one has a close relative who is gay or lesbian. The parallel lies in the fact that non-adopted siblings’ perceptions of themselves as “different”—as well as the actual non-conventional composition of their transracial families—are hidden from view, especially when they interact with others alone (that is, without the presence of their adopted sibling). The hidden nature of these differences allow others who are unfamiliar with their families to presume their conformity to perceived norms, in this case, to racial matching, understood to be a direct consequence of racialization. The similarity goes further, in that a number of participants described the different reactions of people—both positive and negative—to having their basic assumptions challenged through the participants’ acts of disclosure.

**Thematic Tension 2: Visibility/invisibility**

The decision about if and when to disclose operates as the flip side of the usual heightened visibility of transracial families that occurs when adopted and non-adopted siblings appear together in public. Brothers and sisters who do not “match” frequently confront stares and questions. Most of the participants talked about how they dealt with such curiosity and the assumptions others made about their sibling relationships. For example, Mike related the story of being mistaken as “boyfriend and girlfriend” when he goes out in public with his sister. Bobbie’s anti-racist self narrated an alternative experience of whiteness (i.e., devoid of race privilege) when she was with one of her African American children and received poor treatment on several different occasions. Ashley and Melanie’s responsible selves described the persistent questioning of their respective sisterly bonds, and the anger they felt whenever the “Is that your real sister/real brother?” question arose. On the other hand, Hannah’s safe self remained
color-blind, downplaying the racial differences between the siblings in her family. Alexis used humor to counter a stranger’s curiosity about the visible differences between the siblings in her family, with her witty “he tans better than we do” rejoinder.

Related to the theme of visibility is the concurrent concern, or lack thereof, for what both Ashley and Katrina called the “invisible child.” Both participants’ adoption-savvy selves described taking on the teaching role to educate others in the proper use of adoption-sensitive language. Katrina expressed feeling like an “ambassador to the world of adoption,” while Ashley mentioned taking part in a recent panel discussion on the invisible child. Katrina’s multicultural self also expressed a desire for increased attention to her usually hidden cultural heritage as a non-adopted sibling, for example, wanting more than one-time family attendance at the Polish Fest to sample beer and kielbasa as examples of her heritage.

Thematic Tension 3: Racism/anti-racism

A number of siblings described overhearing racial jokes and overtly racist comments, and how prevalent they are in white social circles, particularly in the workplace (described, for instance, in the narratives of Alexis, Mike, and Ashley). Some participants mentioned the assumptions by others that they would share their racist viewpoint or find racial jokes funny.

A number of siblings expressed feeling uncomfortable in the presence of racist comments and in environments they perceived as racist. Several told of feeling burdened by the responsibility to say something, and later of the guilt they experienced when they didn’t speak up. Ashley described her unease when her family visited relatives who lived in a town where she felt stared at, and where Confederate flags were visible on trucks
with gun racks. She described how one particular relative had come a long way in terms of her awareness of race and adoption issues, yet still chose to live in this unfriendly and potentially dangerous (to Ashley’s responsible self) environment. Ashley’s dilemma of whether to participate in family trips to a setting that is problematic for a transracial family (i.e., one that includes black children and their non-adopted white sibling allies) is an instantiation of the tension between racism and anti-racism.

**Thematic Tension 4: Same-race relationship-building/interracial relationship-building**

Choosing to date or not to date interracially presented an opportunity and a challenge for a number of participants. Ashley’s aware self admitted to an ongoing attraction to men of other races and a simultaneous wariness of white males. Margaret’s multicultural self, on the other hand, perceived disapproval and non-acceptance from black women when she dated African American men in college, even as she expressed gaining insight into black culture based on her brief interracial dating history. Melanie recognized that an older black male student in high school was attracted to her. Yet, as her safe self confessed candidly, her subsequent discomfort prevented her from acting on the attraction. Particularly poignant (and telling) was Melanie’s description of feeling “overwhelmed” at the time, and how she “didn’t know what to do with this” unusual situation.

**Thematic Tension 5: Safety/risk**

The thematic tension between, on the one hand, coming to love and care for a sibling of color as a full-fledged member of the family, and on the other, the ongoing unsettling public reactions to transracial family ties appeared again in adulthood as a
tension around perceptions of safety and risk, for example, the risks of choosing to parent. Many of the participants described their thinking about becoming parents, and why they chose—or chose *not*—to adopt.

Speculating on other potential risks that adoptive parents may face, Mike’s aware self voiced the way a media-reported suicide of a biracial R&B singer reminded him of some of the same issues faced by transracial adoptees. The safety/risk dichotomy was evident in other areas of participants’ adult lives, as well. Doug’s safe self, for example, mused that his mostly white social environment could indicate his personal “comfort level.” On the other hand, Shawn’s multicultural self described his own “comfort level” in his New York City neighborhood where most people speak Spanish. His chosen locale, and his reportedly diverse circle of friends might be said to demonstrate his willingness to risk transcending the confines of racialized conditioning.

**Thematic Tension 6: Inward feeling/outward emoting**

There is a noticeable tension between non-adopted siblings’ own inner feelings and the outwardly expressed feelings of others. A number of siblings described intense feelings related to adoption and race issues, for example, feelings of love, pride, anger, guilt, jealousy, and gratitude. This was evident in a number of comments made by participants: Ashley, Bobbie, Margaret, and Mike all expressed deep pride in their transracial families, although Mike described his struggle to suppress his prideful feelings in order to honor the teachings of his religion. Alexis’s aware self described not understanding as a child when her parents would tell her brother to be “proud of the color of his skin,” yet how she now takes pride in that very aspect of her brother’s identity. Ashley’s aware self expressed feeling “grateful” for her experience, even as she
sometimes encounters ignorance and misunderstanding about adoption and race. Bobbie’s moral self similarly expressed “feeling blessed” to be part of a transracial adoptive family that spans two generations, in addition to increasing anger and impatience when she encounters the insensitive comments of others.

Making sense of all these emotions was made more complicated when siblings felt unable to voice their feelings or otherwise express themselves to their parents and other family members. Mike’s inner struggle to suppress his pride, and Melanie’s description of feeling “overwhelmed” by the prospect of an interracial romance, are poignant reminders of the intensity of feeling that can be experienced by young non-adopted siblings. Similarly left to her own devices was Hannah, who reported wondering, as a child, if her parents loved her adopted sister more than they loved her due to all the attention paid to Korean culture in the home. Mike admitted to entertaining similar “not so nice” jealous thoughts about his adopted sister at one point. Ashley revealed the continuum of non-sibling emotional responses, by describing her intense loyalty to her sister and her willingness to protect her, but also how, at times of inter-sibling conflict, she would “roll her eyes” at her sister’s antics, particularly when they were attributed to adoption-related “abandonment” issues. Finally, Nicole’s narrative describing the way in which her family was unable to speak together about her mother’s death sounded a particularly sad and somber note.

Together, the six thematic tensions described above represent a few of the complex situations that arise within the context of transracial family life. Some of the choices made by participants in response to these situations will be discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter 7 Summary

This chapter began with a discussion of the analysis of participants’ autobiographical vignettes. By applying the narrative analysis methodology described in Chapter 4, I documented twenty-seven different kinds of selves as narrated by the non-adopted siblings. These selves were then clustered into five categories that I based on their similarities; the resulting categories were presented as five “composite narrative identities.” After further analysis of the identity composites pointed to the emergence of six thematic tensions at play within the narratives, each tension was presented and discussed. Chapter 8 will share the findings from the analyses covered in this chapter.

CHAPTER 8

FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

This final chapter discusses the findings of the study based on my analysis of the participants’ narratives. One result of the narrative analysis, particularly when all of them were considered together, was the emergence of six thematic tensions. This chapter offers a discussion of the recurring thematic tensions as they relate to the composite narrative identities of the participants. Then, I revisit my original research questions and present the findings that address them, with particular attention given to their implications for the adoption community and for education, as well as my recommendations for future research. Finally, the chapter ends with a few concluding remarks on the possibilities of transracial family life and their lessons for the unfinished project of racial integration in the United States.
Findings Related to the Narrative Identity Composites

As I suggested in Chapter 7, one way of describing characteristic approaches to engaging race and adoption discourses is to think of how they are reflected in narrative identity composites. To recap, I identified five identity composites, namely, the Safe Sibling, the Responsible Sibling, the Moral Sibling, the Aware Sibling, and the Transracialized Sibling. These clusters emerged as it became apparent that one group of participants in particular had collectively narrated their identities in ways that were simultaneously anti-racist and multicultural, as well as aware, moral, and responsible. Moreover, they demonstrated a willingness to push beyond the safety of what were described as their “comfort levels” that arguably are encouraged by racialization. Together, the ways in which they narrated their experiences with transracial adoption led them to enact complex identities that represent the kind of multilayered, sophisticated involvement with race and adoption discourses that I believe is beneficial to transracial family members—parents and children alike. Of course, given the multiplicity of the kinds of selves that individual non-adopted siblings might narrate to describe their personal experience—and their, at times, contradictory nature—there are likely to be found additional composite identities that could be documented by future researchers working with other groups of non-adopted siblings. In other words, I acknowledge that the five narrative identity clusters detailed in this study may not reflect the only ways non-adopted siblings engage with race and adoption, particularly in other contexts and in dialogue with other researchers.

Even so, the five narrative identity composites I have developed here do serve as a useful heuristic model for thinking about racialization and transracialization. The
composites were developed to illustrate the sociocultural understanding of identities taken in this dissertation. That is, they are to be understood as situated in the specific context of this particular study of transracial adoption, and with this group of non-adopted siblings who were engaged in interviews about their experiences with adoption and race.

Rather than rank the composites in some ascending order of developmental progress, I view them more as a way of simply distinguishing transracialized from non-transracialized approaches to narrating one’s identity. That is, the first four—the Safe, Responsible, Moral, and Aware Siblings—represent what I would characterize as un-transracialized (or, it could possibly be argued, as pre-transracialized, but that again presumes a developmental progression). The four un-transracialized identities are distinguished from more obviously transracialized identities. I make this distinction not because I think un-transracialized identities are somehow less worthy or developed than transracialized identities. Rather, I am emphasizing that un-transracialized identities reflect identifications delineated mainly by racialization, that is, as more limited by racialization than those enacted when racialization is transcended. In contrast, the ways in which the four transracialized siblings narrated their identities are indicative, in my view, of approaches to race and adoption that may prove more helpful and effective to members of transracial families, adopted and non-adopted alike. Distinguishing the kinds of experiences that can lead individuals to enact transracialized identities points to the perspectives and commitments that I believe help transracial families to live lives that are fully integrated and multicultural, and more adoption-savvy and anti-racist than if family members remain un-transracialized.
Based on the experiences of these participants, one might surmise that transracialization is a fundamentally moral enterprise. Moral Siblings did concern themselves with the ideals of fairness, inclusion, and the rejection of prejudice and discrimination. In fact, some of the Moral Siblings characterized themselves as actively anti-racist, while others remained more passive, that is, more often merely espousing heart-felt ethics rather than acting on them. Yet, the model of composite identities proposed here suggests that Moral Siblings stop short of fully integrating their lives, for example, missing the opportunities to develop long-term relationships with people of color outside the family.

While transracialization does involve issues of morality and awareness, dedication to such lofty ideals by themselves does not lead to a transracialized identity. A number of what could be considered Aware Siblings (e.g., Shawn, Katrina, Melanie, Margaret, and Nicole) narrated what I have called adoption-savvy or adoption-aware identities, indicating their familiarity with the major issues impacting adoptees and adoptive families. For example, Shawn articulated his take on the psychological damage that can accrue when children are moved through multiple placements at an early age, while Margaret reported how her brother’s “mental age quadrupled” after he settled into his second (and permanent) adoptive home. However, I found that awareness of adoption issues did not necessarily correlate with a similar awareness of race issues. Melanie’s aware self perhaps represents the pinnacle of adoption awareness among the participants, having dedicated her career to providing adoption-sensitive psychotherapy for members of what she called “complex” families. Yet while Melanie’s multicultural self mentioned racial issues, her description of her lifestyle did not reveal any long-term involvement
with people of color outside the family; nor did her multicultural self articulate an explicit
commitment to anti-racism. Similarly, Katrina’s aware self described numerous activities
in which her family participated to address her brother’s cultural (rather than racial)
heritage, including traveling to Korea and attending Korean culture camp. In so doing,
Katrina’s narrative described a family that effectively paid attention to cultural issues, yet
stopped short of taking up a discourse of anti-racism.

In contrast, the four siblings who were found to narrate transracialized identities
also articulated adoption issues. For example, both Levi and Mike spoke extensively on
what they understood to be adoption-related struggles manifest in their respective sisters’
behavior; both indicated that their parents had named the issues as adoption-related
during their childhood. Both participants also described their intimate engagement with
multiple interracial friendships, to the degree that they enacted what I labeled “post-
white” identities. Similarly, both Ashley and Bobbie’s aware and anti-racist selves were
equally at home taking up discourses of race and adoption, and both clearly narrated post-
white identities, as discussed in Chapter 7.

Transracialized Siblings typically described their current neighborhoods and
friendship circles as multicultural, integrated, and diverse. Most reported personal
experiences with dating interracially. Significantly, while they tended to espouse a
commitment to integrationist ideals in principle, Transracialized Siblings do not now
necessarily advocate for interracial marriages, partnerships, or adoptions as realistic
goals. Their awareness and personal experience has helped them to develop more
complex understandings and circumspect views of such controversial social practices,
and the ability to view them from multiple perspectives. For example, having dated
“outside their race” and having discussed the issue with friends of color, a number of Transracialized Siblings expressed pessimism or resignation in the face of the challenges faced by interracial couples. A few even declared candidly that they have tried interracial dating and decided that its consequences are simply too difficult for them to deal with personally.

Post-white and transracialized identities differentiated Transracialized Siblings from other integrationist (e.g., color-blind or multicultural) identities, and from participants who enacted un-transracialized Aware Sibling identities, as well as from others who, for whatever reasons, chose not to narrate themselves as participants in integrated social circles (e.g., those enacting Safe Sibling identities). Perhaps the single most important characteristic distinguishing this composite identity is the way in which all the Transracialized Siblings reported actual experience with forming and maintaining interracial friendships and other long-term caring relationships outside the family. Such an example is seen in Mike’s discussion of his African American best friend and his best friend’s mother whom he still drives to church, now that his best friend has relocated. He also described socializing with co-workers after work hours, and being comfortable as the “only white male” in his predominantly African American professional community.

The next section revisits my initial research questions and discusses the findings for each.
Findings Related to the Research Questions

Question 1: What is the meaning of transracial adoption to the non-adopted siblings of adoptees?

While it would be exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to capture fully all the various shifting meanings of transracial adoption to the twelve individual participants of this study, it is both possible and worthwhile to risk offering a few overall generalizations. To begin with, all of the non-adopted siblings who took part in this study in one way or another articulated their abiding affection for their adopted sisters and brothers. In this sense, each participant described how transracial adoption had influenced his or her life in positive ways. While none of the participants expressed any regret over their parents’ decision to adopt, several did wish, in hindsight, that their respective families had been better prepared to address complex issues of race and/or adoption. For instance, they compared the resources and training available to today’s families (at least in some locales) with the dearth of resources when their own families of origin were young.

Participants defined their respective families in various ways, for example, as non-traditional families, as complex families, as families with racial diversity, and simply as interracial or transracial adoptive families. It is noteworthy that, for the most part, non-adopted siblings did not default to defining their families exclusively as “white families.” That is, they acknowledged that what may have begun as white or racially unmarked families had indeed been transformed by the act of transracial or intercultural adoption, a transformation, moreover, that required an expanded redefinition of their family in racial and/or cultural terms.
Even so, some of the siblings downplayed differences between “born-to” and adopted children in their families. That is, they minimized the difference adoption had made in the way their families thought and talked about children, intra-family relationships, parenting, and so on. Other participants, however, stressed the importance of naming adoption as a significant influence in children’s lives, and used adoption as the basis for explaining some of the emotional struggles and psychological problems reportedly present in the family. These different approaches were found to reflect their parents’ preparedness to model how—or even whether—to talk about such issues.

**Question 2: What discourses do non-adopted siblings draw upon to make sense of their experience as members of transracial families?**

While this dissertation focused primarily on discourses of race and adoption as constitutive of transracial adoption, I found that participants drew on several other discourses as well, such as gender, culture, trauma, and biology. For instance, one participant described herself as playing the role of the “good” daughter in her family. Several discussed *intercultural* (as opposed to transracial) adoption in terms of bringing a child into the family from another land or culture. Nicole used the discourse of trauma to talk about how she and her brother had been profoundly impacted by the tragic death of their mother.

Another finding confirms that all of the participants drew on adoption discourse. They frequently both appropriated and critiqued various terms from this discourse to narrate their relationships, such as “natural,” “biological,” and “born-to” brother, “birth mother” and “real sister,” and so forth. As just mentioned, several siblings also drew upon discourses from biology to discuss the ways they have come to redefine family, for
instance, as encompassing more than genetics and defined by far more than biological relatedness.

As might be expected, participants took up discourses of race in quite different ways. A few siblings resisted outright the notion of race, preferring not to label themselves or discuss their families in racial terms. For example, one participant narrated her experience in a color-blind manner, while another stated how “odd” it made her feel to describe herself and her brother in racial terms. A few participants expressed uncertainty about how to describe their own or their sibling’s racial or cultural identity. The majority of participants, however, engaged with a prevailing color-conscious racial discourse by using terminology such as “people of color,” “white,” and other racially explicit identity labels to describe themselves and their siblings. Some participants emphasized cultural differences over racial ones, while others stressed race as a defining influence in their own lives and the lives of their family members.

**Question 3: What kind of education and post-adoption support might members of transracial families need?**

To answer Question 3 actually begins a discussion of the main implications of this research. As I explained in Chapter 1, I began with the assumption that transracial families would, in fact, benefit from explicit education that addresses issues of race and adoption, *and* from effective post-adoption support. I drew on a study of families that are involved with kinship care to suggest examples of the kinds of supports that would assist adoptive families. Chief among these were respite care, financial assistance, for instance, to pay for therapy and specialized education services, and ongoing support groups for family members.
Many of the participants in this study confirmed that families frequently face the complex issues of race and adoption with little, if any, pre-adoption preparation or post-adoption follow-up support. In what follows, I offer three implications for serious consideration by members of transracial families and the broader community of adoption, as well as in the field of education:

1. Non-adopted siblings desire to talk about the complexities of race and adoption, two key issues in their lives that frequently remain avoided as topics of conversation in their families. Adults who work with non-adopted siblings (and their families) need further education in order to facilitate discussion and exploration of these issues with young people.

2. If transracialization provides a way to engage race discourse that transcends the typical limitations of racialization, family members (and others) may benefit from support that encourages them to make significant lasting connections with individuals across racial boundary lines.

3. The related notion of post-white identity development is one way to conceptualize and name subjective experiences with transracialization; as such, it suggests new opportunities for transracialization outside the context of this study, for example in the training and development of professionals in education and the field of child and family welfare.

If this research with non-adopted siblings matters, I would hope that families and the professionals who work with them will learn from the participants’ experiences with
racialization and transracialization. To begin with, in the adoption community leaders of adoptive family groups and service providers at adoption agencies can rethink the activities and services they currently offer to transracial families, making sure that they address the special concerns of non-adopted siblings. Secondly, adoptive family group leaders and adoption professionals alike can use the narratives presented here as a catalyst for reflection on their own identities and engagement with race and adoption discourses. Beyond the community of adoption, educators who are concerned with multiculturalism and anti-racism can appropriate the concepts of racialization and transracialization. I maintain that transracialization is a goal that merits the attention of social workers, educators, transracial family members, and others who advocate integration and multiculturalism. Particularly for individuals who are usually classified as white, the notions of transracialization and post-white identities as discussed in this study may provide motivation to extend and deepen their involvement with individuals and communities of color.

**Post-white Identities and the Need for Post-adoption Support**

From my perspective as the researcher who is also an adoptee and adoptive parent, the collective impact of the narratives has been both moving and inspiring. I discovered that I was touched by powerful passages in all the narratives. Yet I found myself especially moved, and even inspired, by the efforts of the few individuals who struggled, during my interviews with them, to articulate what might be understood as a new discourse to name the ways in which they identify and label themselves racially and culturally. For example, recall Ashley’s unusual response to my question of how she identifies herself: “I consider myself a different culture than even just a white family,
non-adoptee. I consider myself part of the transracial adoptive culture, really. I've identified it as that, but what does that mean to people who don't know anything about it?” In her response, Ashley is narrating an alternative approach to “doing whiteness” that is personally meaningful to her. Yet sadly, she recognizes that her personal definition probably does not register with most people outside of a particular and very small discourse community. In so doing, Ashley signals the broader issues of the marginalization from mainstream society experienced by many transracial family members.

I discussed earlier (in Chapter 7) as “post-white” the unusual, creative, and idiosyncratic ways in which those who narrated transracialized identities responded to questions about their racial identities. In summary, post-white identities manifest an active personal effort to redefine what it means to be white in the context of transracialization. Transracialization can be understood as the process that begins once an individual recognizes how “living with racial diversity,” to borrow a phrase from Melanie’s narrative, triggers a unique learning trajectory that leads to an interrogation of the typically unspoken rules of racialization (i.e., the predictable process of learning how to “do” race). Rather than implying an “after-white” or “no longer white” identity, post-white identifications signal an intentional break with racialization based, in the case of these individuals, on their unconventional familial circumstances and on their ongoing intimate involvement with people of color outside the family. All of the participants who narrated transracialized identities reported histories of interracial relationship-building with peers outside their families, for example, through dating, close friendships,
communities of worship, and the like. Yet none of these experiences came easily or without a great deal of thought and effort.

Pre-adoptive parents in particular can be assisted during the home study process to make decisions about shaping a transracialized lifestyle for themselves and their children. For example, families can be encouraged to think carefully about how their chosen neighborhoods, schools, houses of worship, and other community resources support—or do not support—transracialization. When they recognize how their social networks reflect racialization rather than opportunities for transracialization, families can be encouraged to relocate to more diverse communities that offer greater access to multicultural schools and neighborhoods where they can begin to cultivate long-term relationships with diverse individuals.

In terms of ongoing support after adoption, numerous participants mentioned the lack of supportive adults—for instance, in the roles of teachers, parents, or therapists—as they were left on their own to deal with complex issues and feelings pertaining to race and adoption. This suggests that educators who are responsible for the training of teachers, therapists, social workers, and others need to become adoption-savvy and transracialized themselves, and incorporate these perspectives in their professional training program curricula.

**Transracialization in Action: Findings of the Thematic Tensions**

A number of recurring themes prevailed across the participants’ narratives. A consideration of the narrative identity composites as a whole suggests the presence of six recurring themes. The six thematic tensions as I documented them in Chapter 7 are labeled as follows:
(1) disclosure/non-disclosure,
(2) visibility/invisibility,
(3) racism/anti-racism
(4) same-race relationship-building/interracial relationship-building,
(5) safety/risk,
(6) inward feeling/outward emoting.

As I mentioned in the preceding chapter, these thematic tensions can be viewed as choices for the non-adopted siblings to make or at decisive moments of opportunity. The recurring thematic tensions across the narratives illustrate individual approaches to similar situations. Each tension can be understood as presenting an opportunity to choose between living a life delimited by racialization, or alternatively, by transracialization. In what follows, I discuss the significant findings and implications for each of the six thematic tensions:

**Thematic Tension 1 (disclosure/non-disclosure)**

Several of the non-adopted sibling participants described the caution with which they broached the subject of disclosure. For example, Ashley’s aware self mused, “I don’t think you know what to do with this information properly.” Because of her sensitivity to race issues, Ashley does not want to come across as using her experiential difference as a point of unearned privilege. On the other hand, Shawn’s multicultural self talked about sharing the fact, when he is getting to know new acquaintances, that he has a Korean sister, and about his own travels to Korea. Disclosure for Shawn serves almost as a way of signaling—particularly to people of color—that he is not like other whites. Other
participants used disclosure of their sibling’s race and adoption status to counter racist jokes or offensive comments about adoption (verbalized by the moral self of Alexis, for example), even gaining an apology in the process (as reported in Mike’s narrative). The tension between disclosure/non-disclosure at times provided non-adopted siblings with a chance to distinguish themselves as different from other white people, and in the process, enact post-white identities. One implication is that non-adopted siblings can learn to strategically use disclosure of their unconventional family backgrounds as a way to replace mistrust with trust and silence with communication.

**Thematic Tension 2 (visibility/invisibility)**

As mentioned in Chapter 7, most of the participants talked about how they handled public attention, such as curiosity and the assumptions others made about their sibling relationships. In the community of adoption, social workers, therapists, and family group leaders all need to attend to the unique needs of non-adopted siblings. Because their visibility engenders a wide array of public reactions, the time may be overdue to establish support groups and culture camps specifically for non-adopted white children in transracial families. Such supports can break the isolation and marginalization reported in the participants’ narratives.

**Thematic Tension 3 (racism/anti-racism)**

Non-adopted siblings must deal with this tension because of the presumption of racialization as normative. That is, their apparently white skin automatically signals presumed complicity with race separation and fear of the Other, rather than their unexpected solidarity with people of color or their cultivation of an explicitly anti-racist perspective. This tension underscores Ashley’s plea for adoptive parents to include their
non-adopted children in family lessons about confronting racism, just as they must prepare transracial adoptees. Such lessons can begin naturally when parents model how to address the racism reported within the extended family. For example, when grandfathers’ relate stories of fighting the “Japs” or grandmothers express mistrust and dislike of African American tenants, adopted and non non-adopted siblings alike can and do learn from their parents’ responses—or in some cases, their lack of response.

**Thematic Tension 4 (same-race relationship-building/interracial relationship-building)**

Interestingly, of the twelve participants, only Ashley reported current involvement in a romantic relationship with a person of color at the time of the study. Looking back on her experience, Melanie confessed that she based her decision to forego interracial dating largely on the pressures she witnessed while growing up in a transracial adoptive family with two siblings of color. As she reported, “Living my life always feeling stared at as a family, could I handle that in a relationship? I chose not to.”

On the other hand, a number of participants narrated successful experiences with forming friendships across racial lines. Such relationships are manifestations of transcending the restrictions of racialization. Particularly noteworthy was Levi’s tale of “passing” as a person of color when he spent one summer living with an African American family. Similarly representative were Mike’s story about maintaining a relationship with his best friend’s mother long after his friend had left home for a job in another city, and Ashley describing how she felt an affinity to schoolmates from other interracial (although not necessarily adoptive) families in her high school.
I cannot emphasize enough the significance of interracial lifestyles and relationships to the development of transracialized identities. If there is one finding that offers a clear implication for addressing racism in our society, it is the influence of long-term caring relationships that transcend the color line. While they described their friendships, dating histories, and ongoing involvement with people of color in very different and highly personal terms, the collective narratives of Mike, Levi, Ashley, and Bobbie resonate with a degree of clarity and complexity when it comes to articulating race issues. It is noteworthy that these participants did not all report growing up in multicultural neighborhoods. Nonetheless, they described opportunities to attend integrated schools and churches where they were able to form lasting relationships with a diverse group of friends. They also differ in the kinds of communities they have chosen to live in as adults; some have settled in large metropolitan areas where there is a great deal of diversity, while several reside in the same city that is often described as a “college town.” In this particular city, there is a variety of highly “visible” families whose children attend its schools, including interracial families (headed by parents of different races), families of international graduate students, families headed by gay or lesbian parents, and adoptive families of all kinds. This particular environment offers, at least on a small scale, a multicultural milieu to those who opt to take advantage of it, as these participants did.

**Thematic Tension 5 (safety/risk)**

Among the twelve sibling groups represented in the study, four are involved with second-generation adoptions: two by actual participants, and two by the participants’ siblings. Of the participants, only Bobbie has adopted transracially, while Nicole was
going through the home study process at the time, in the hope of adopting a black child. Ashley and Katrina’s multicultural selves both expressed a desire to adopt transracially in the future, while the other siblings’ safe selves described opting for pregnancy as their preferred way to parenthood. As mentioned, two participants reported that one of their siblings had adopted children: Alexis mentioned that her adopted biracial brother had adopted twice, whereas Melanie’s “born-to” brother had adopted a daughter, although not transracially. Only Melanie, the therapist who is deeply involved with adoptive families professionally and whose heart-wrenching narrative described her adopted brother’s ongoing personal struggles, articulated a clear and honest reason about why she herself would not adopt transracially.

While many of the participants described their thinking about becoming parents, and why they chose (or, in some cases, chose not) to adopt, others speculated on other potential risks that adoptive parents face. Mike’s aware self voiced the way a media-reported suicide of a biracial R&B singer reminded him of some of the same issues faced by transracial adoptees. Shawn’s responsible self emphasized the education that parents should receive about possible psychological problems of adoptees, using his sister’s multiple moves through the orphanage and in and out of her birth grandparents’ care almost as a cautionary tale. At the same time, Shawn’s multicultural self described his New York City neighborhood where most people speak Spanish. His chosen lifestyle demonstrates some willingness to risk transcending the confines of racialized conditioning, although Shawn never articulated an explicitly anti-racist perspective. Rather, the manner in which he described how racial differences were downplayed in his family, while cultural differences were emphasized (with, for example, different
members of the family making the trip to Korea), manifest more of a multicultural identity than a transracialized one.

**Thematic Tension 6 (inward feeling/outward emoting)**

A number of siblings described intense feelings related to adoption and race issues, for example, feelings of love, pride, anger, guilt, jealousy, and gratitude. There is at times a noticeable tension between non-adopted siblings’ own intense feelings, on the one hand, and the outwardly expressed feelings of others. This tension was evident in a number of comments made by participants: Ashley, Bobbie, Margaret, and Mike all expressed deep pride in their transracial families. Alexis’s aware self described not understanding as a child when her parents would tell her brother to be “proud of the color of his skin,” yet how she now takes pride in that very aspect of her brother’s identity.

Many participants talked about the awkwardness they experienced when confronted by others’ insensitive reactions, e.g., their curiosity, hostility, prejudice, or adulation. At some point, the majority of these non-adopted siblings encountered outsiders who voiced strong feelings in response to their encounters with the participants’ families. Whether the reactions of friends, kin, acquaintances, and strangers revealed skepticism, wonder, or unease, there was a noticeable tension between non-adopted siblings’ own intense feelings, on the one hand, and the equally intense and outwardly expressed feelings of others. The vignettes of many siblings reflected this ongoing tension, namely, the tension between their own inner feelings and those expressed by outsiders on a recurring basis.

It is understandably challenging to give voice to these feelings when they are embedded in two hard-to-talk-about discourses. However, when parents and other adults
do not model how to communicate effectively about race and adoption, their children are left to figure out the workings of these complex phenomena on their own. Alternately, the children may feel silenced. Making sense of all these emotions is made more complicated when siblings feel unable to voice their feelings or otherwise express themselves to their parents, other family members, and adults outside the family. Again, the implication is for adults to commit to learning more about the complexities of race and adoption issues, in order to incorporate adoption-savvy and anti-racist perspectives in their work with young people.

It is worth repeating that the composite identities were not intended, at least initially, to represent a stage model for the development of non-adopted white sibling identities. Rather, they began as a heuristic device to cluster the various kinds of selves that emerged in the data. The five composites were intended to serve a heuristic function, chiefly, to illustrate the numerous and creative ways in which participants enacted multiple selves when narrating their personal experiences with race and adoption.

However, after careful consideration, I arrived at another perspective on the identity clusters. I do acknowledge that the composite narrative identities can be read as representing a non-adopted sibling’s progression from a “pre-transracialized” identity to a “transracialized” identity. Nevertheless, it should be noted that this development is rooted in the narrators’ varied experiences as reported in the vignettes, and should not be thought to reflect the moral worth or psychological maturity or immaturity of any of the participants. Furthermore, one individual can—and often does—manifest multiple composite identities at any given time. As reflected in the profiles, these identifications
are fluid and often shift at various points in one’s life. For instance, Shawn could be said to enact, at various moments, a Moral, a Multicultural, and a Responsible sibling identity. The first four composite identities—the Safe Sibling, the Responsible Sibling, the Moral Sibling, and the Aware Sibling—do suggest un-transracialized or pre-transracialized identities, whereas the Transracialized Sibling narrative identity represents a non-adopted sibling who has effectively integrated, or transracialized, his or her life.

**Implications for the Community of Adoption**

In adoption discourse, non-adopted children in adoptive families have recently been dubbed the “invisible children” (see Chapter 5) in recognition among a growing number of parents and adoption professionals that their needs and experiences have been largely overlooked or rendered invisible. However, according to their collective narratives, as non-adopted siblings who frequently find themselves caught in the spotlight focused on their transracially adopted brothers and sisters, this particular group cannot truly be described as “invisible.” They can more accurately be described as *sharing* the spotlight of public curiosity, scrutiny, and reaction. Nevertheless, their individual and collective experiences as non-adopted children in adoptive families have certainly been overlooked and marginalized, even within the community of adoption.

Some participants reported feeling different from their peers at school or work because they have a sibling who was transracially adopted, or because they sensed that their family was different from other families. A few siblings described feeling different from other white people in general, or even "not white," due to their unique experiences. While their feelings of difference may be hidden, non-adopted siblings all too often find themselves in the public spotlight, becoming visible targets of unsolicited attention, both
positive and negative. What is remarkable is the way all the participants manage, to paraphrase Nicole, to hold their sibling relationships sacred.

Adoption professionals, therapists, parent group leaders, and others who work with adoptive families must increase their sensitivity to the needs of non-adopted siblings in transracial families, and learn to help families “hold their relationships sacred.” That is, the transracial family unit as a whole can be addressed in the classes, trainings, and consultation work provided throughout the adoption community. Explicit attention should be given to educating families and professionals alike about race and adoption issues, and their impact on adopted and non-adopted children. In this way, the adoption community can manifest its affirmation of the importance of communication, even—or especially—about the “hard-to-talk-about” and complex issues of race and adoption. Particularly as society moves away from its earlier public support for adoption (as suggested by the dismantling of the pro-adoption consensus; Melosh, 2002), discourse within the community of adoption must redouble its efforts to keep discussion focused on these twin issues.

Another implication of transracialization is that evidence of its influence can be required of prospective adoptive parents before their home study is completed. If parents cannot demonstrate the ways in which their lives are already transracialized, social workers can make sure to develop with their clients a plan for transracialization before, during, and after placement of a child of another race in the home.

**Implications for Education**

If we accept the concepts of racialization and transracialization and the related influences on the development of non-adopted sibling identities put forth in this study,
the question for educators—particularly those involved in the preparation of adoption professionals and teachers in multicultural schools—is this: If transracialization offers a way to effectively break down the predictable racial barriers erected through racialization, how can we foster transracialization throughout our educational institutions? In other words, short of requiring all families to adopt transracially, are there other ways to encourage the development of long-term intimate relationships between individuals of different races and cultures? From my perspective, the choice is between resigning ourselves to persistent racialization and segregation (or, alternately, merely tokenistic efforts towards pluralism), on one hand, and making a conscious effort to transracialize our lives and institutions, on the other.

If we were to apply this perspective in the fields of teacher education and multicultural education, we might pose the following question: How can educators develop fully integrated lives that include meaningful interracial friendships with peers that go deeper than superficial and less enduring relationships, say, between teachers and their students in diverse classrooms? That is, what can teacher educators do to cultivate long-term intimacy among peers that bridges the gap separating members of different communities? The experience of non-adopted siblings suggests that transracialization requires more substantive and intentional planning than multicultural curricula, practitioner courses for professionals, or even one-time immersion experiences such as culture camps. Teacher education programs, for instance, might consider how to create intensive multicultural learning environments where pre-service teachers from diverse backgrounds can live together, and in the process of close collaboration develop lasting ties of friendship and collegiality that transcend lines of race. At the same time, teacher
educators can be sure to recruit to the field individuals who bring extensive experience with transracialization in their own lives. That is, as in the recruitment of prospective adoptive parents, transracialization can be mandated as a prerequisite, rather than a hoped for—but frequently unrealized—attribution.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Future researchers, including myself, may apply the concepts of racialization/transracialization to the field of multicultural education, as mentioned previously. In addition, other questions remain to be explored: Does transracialization occur in other contexts outside the community of adoption? Are there parallels between the experience of non-adopted siblings, transracial adoptees, and biracial/bicultural siblings in interracial families (i.e., with parents of different races)?

In terms of developing post-white identities, can other intimate environments where long-term interracial relationships of caring develop (e.g., in the armed services, in cloistered religious communities, in boarding schools, or among incarcerated populations) cultivate transracialized identities? If so, what can educators learn from such communities about creating genuinely integrated learning environments? In the community of adoption, how does transracialization work in families headed by parents of different races, and in families of color where the parents identify culturally one way, while the children identify another? What are the most effective ways to facilitate transracialized identities in the professional preparation of educators, therapists, social workers, and others? Finally, if transracialization is found to occur only in very limited and controlled environments, what are the social implications in terms of the unfinished project of racially integrating the United States?
**Conclusion: Choosing a Child and Choosing Sides**

Transracial families are on the cutting edge of race relations in our society. They confront not only challenges and struggles, but savor great blessings and joys, as reflected in the narratives collected here. The notion of *choice* echoes throughout the narratives of non-adopted siblings. For example, several siblings reported that growing up in a transracial family had expanded their later lifestyle choices, such as their parenting and partnering decisions, and their choices about the kinds of communities they preferred to live and work in as adults.

In a sense, the element of personal choice can be said to reflect a predictable extension of the initial choice (or decision) made by their parents to adopt a child of another race or from another land. The choices permitted for adult non-adopted siblings must be understood, in this context especially, to reflect a degree of privilege reserved in our society only for some. In the community of adoption, the group with the most choices available to them is comprised of white middle class and upper middle class parents, particularly adherents of mainstream religions, and those who identify as heterosexual. At the other end of the spectrum are those with fewer options (and status), who are accorded less say in the profound decisions that incur lifelong repercussions. This second group includes birth parents, adoptees—and non-adopted children born to adoptive families. It will be interesting for researchers to track developments in the community of adoption, for instance, as increasing numbers of gay and lesbian parents seeking to adopt apparently are encouraged, if not forced, by agencies to adopt transracially, whereas the scarce (and highly prized) “healthy white babies” are reserved for “more desirable” (i.e., heterosexual) parents. Even so, for the beneficiaries of greater degrees of privilege and
choice, such as the families represented in this study, decisions about adoption and about how families are constructed have allowed certain families to create lives based on their own terms, however unconventional they might appear to outsiders.

Having conducted this study with non-adopted siblings, I now suggest that choosing to adopt a child is a manifestation of privilege, and should be understood as much more than a demonstration of paternalism, altruism, or rescue. Moreover, transracial adoption especially is a decision that comes with a set of subsequent, and in some cases, recurring consequences that are put into motion once a child joins a family through adoption. One way to think about these momentous parental choices is to reflect on their impact on the other children in the family, namely, their non-adopted or “born-to” children. This study has shown how, by bringing into the family an adopted child of another race, the entire family unit becomes positioned within complex discourses of race and adoption. We have seen how a transracial adoptive family can respond in several ways. That is, they can choose to minimize race and try to remain safe, oblivious, and color-blind, or they can embrace racial and cultural differences and educate themselves about, and eventually take up in a principled way, anti-racism and multiculturalism. In transracializing their lives, they may even nurture the development of post-white identifications.

Choosing to participate in the social experiment of transracial adoption represents, in a manner of speaking, a choice between opposing sides. When adoptive parents make their decision to adopt a child of another race, they also decide the fate of their children, adopted and non-adopted alike, as participants in the contest between the forces of racialization and transracialization. As I have tried to argue, the major implication of this
study focuses on developing more effective approaches to, in a word, integration. That is, the narratives gathered here that collectively describe transracial family life can be understood as first-hand reports of honest attempts to create integrated families and, by extension, multicultural communities. Integration is an especially apt word to use in this context, however outdated it may sound to 21st-century ears. Integration calls forth the discourses rooted in the social movements of a by-gone era, a time characterized by unbridled idealism made manifest in passionate personal commitments. The young families created during that era’s climate of optimism and idealism arguably reflect, in the lived experience of the now mature study participants, our society’s unfinished and, in some cases, generally abandoned struggles for equality, liberation, and peace.

If transracial adoptees constitute one group of “guinea pigs,” their non-adopted white siblings can be understood as yet another group from the decades-long social experiment now coming to fruition. Moreover, while the political winds have long since shifted, mature transracial families have been left tossing in the wake of still-troubled waters, seas left churning due to the unresolved nature of the related controversies and incomplete social reform movements that gave rise to child welfare innovation in the first place.

Partially as a result of our society’s collective abandonment of youthful idealism and the post-World War Two consensus that advocated racial equality and integration, many of today’s transracial families now find themselves left without a rudder or moral compass to navigate safe passage through treacherous territory. And yet, of necessity, they persevere in uncharted waters—even as our society has moved on to seek other shores. The national will has moved away from broad-based liberal support for
affirmative action, peace and justice movements, and social welfare programs to now embrace corporate welfare, war abroad, and escalating rates of incarceration domestically, while anti-immigrant sentiment appears to be on the rise, manifest, for example, in English-only initiatives sweeping the land.

Nevertheless, transracial families can still be said to represent the cutting edge of our nation’s continuing love-hate fascination with pluralism, and our simultaneous revulsion and attraction to the risks and promises of racial-mixing. Even in the face of misunderstanding and insensitivity, as Ashley so poignantly declared, the unusual experience of being a non-adopted sibling in a transracial family “stands for something.” That something, in my view, is the unfinished project of racial integration. That experience moreover demands attention to the unglamorous details of how we will live together and care for one another, despite persistent racialization, and in the face of increasing polarization along other lines of difference.

In order to support today’s transracial families, adoption professionals, educators, and others must renew their commitment to the lofty ideals of racial integration. However, instead of a limited and outdated color-blind approach, an explicitly race-conscious yet postmodern (i.e., non-essentializing) anti-racism that acknowledges the enduring significance of race (and the durability of racism) offers transracial families a way to participate actively and effectively in the discourses of race and adoption. Moreover, the cultivation of post-white identities, as brought about through the cultivation of long-term relationships of genuine caring between members of different racial and cultural groups, can provide options—actual opportunities to transform one’s lived reality—at least for the limited group of comparatively privileged families who
make the decision to adopt a child of another race. In the final analysis, choosing to adopt a child transracially means making a choice—or not—to transracialize one’s life, and the lives of all members of the family, parents and children, adopted and non-adopted siblings alike.

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**APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

Getting to know you

1. Where did you grow up and in what era?
2. How would you describe the family you grew up in?
3. How would you describe yourself?
4. What are your thoughts about transracial adoption in general?
5. Can you tell me about a time when transracial adoption began to mean something in your life or the life of your family?
6. Did you know anyone else who was adopted when you were growing up?
7. Did you know any other families like yours?
8. If you had to, how would you label your family and the individual members of your family?
9. What kind of neighborhoods did you live in as a child?
10. What was your school experience like?
11. How would you describe your teenage years?
12. Can you describe your dating history? (Whom have you partnered with?)

Adoption discourse

13. How much did your family talk about adoption?

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14. Did your family take part in any adoptive family group events (e.g., get newsletters, go to picnics, conferences, camps, take part in studies)?
15. Did other people ever ask you about your adopted brother/sister(s)?
16. Can you tell me about a time when you had to deal with other people's curiosity about adoption in your family?
17. What was the story your parents told you about why they decided to adopt?
18. How did you feel about that story?
19. What issues do you think adoptees face that non-adopted people don't have to think about?
20. Are there any issues you personally have had to face because of your parents' decision to adopt?
21. Can you tell me about a time when you might have wished that your parents never adopted? Or that the adoption could have been different in some way?
22. Can you tell me about a time when extended family members talked about adoption, either positively or negatively?
23. Can you tell me about times when the topic of adoption came up in school or with acquaintances?
24. Was there ever a time when you felt more or less loved or appreciated by your parents because you were not adopted?
25. How has adoption shaped the way you think about family?
26. Can you tell me about times when you felt different or special because your family included adopted children?
Race discourse

27. How much did your family talk about race or racial differences?
28. Did your family take part in any special events having to do with culture or race?
29. Can you tell me about a time when you had to deal with other people's curiosity about the racial differences in your family?
30. What issues do you think transracial adoptees face that people who grew up with parents of the same race don't have to think about?
31. Are there any issues you have had to face because of your parents' decision to adopt a child of another race?
32. Can you tell me about a time when extended family members talked about people of different races, either positively or negatively?
33. Can you tell me about times when the general topic of race or racism came up in school or with acquaintances?
34. Was there ever a time when you felt more or less special, lucky, different, or privileged because of your race or color?
35. How did you come to notice and/or learn about racial differences as a child?
36. How do you identify yourself racially and culturally?
37. How would you identify your siblings?
38. Where do you feel comfortable socializing (racially)? How about your siblings?
39. Can you tell me about times when you encountered racism?
40. Can you tell me about times when your sibling faced racism?

Perspectives and recommendations

41. Have you considered adopting?
42. What advice would you give to social workers who are preparing today's families to adopt a child of another race?

43. What message do you have for parents who are thinking about adopting?

44a. What do you think of the whole transracial adoption controversy?

44b. How would your parents answer that same question?

44c. How would your adopted sibling(s) answer?

45. Can you tell me about a time when you talked openly to your siblings about transracial adoption?

46. Can you tell me about a time when you felt transracial adoption was not such a great idea?

47. Can you tell me about a time when you felt transracial adoption was something worthwhile or important?

48. How has your thinking about transracial adoption changed over the years?

49. Can you think of anything families should do intentionally if they are going to raise children of different races together?

50. Is there anything you wish your own family had done differently?

51. If you could go back and change anything in your family, what would you change?

52. How prepared do you think your family was to deal with adoption and race issues?

53. How important do you feel adoption issues are to different members of your family?

54. How important do you feel race issues are to different members of your family?

55a. What would be your definition of a successful transracial adoption?

55b. What would be your definition of an unsuccessful adoption?

56. Based on those definitions, how successful was transracial adoption in your family?
57. Can you tell me about a time when you felt like your experience in a transracial family benefited you?

58. Can you tell me about a time when transracial adoption actually harmed someone you knew?

59. Is there anything you wish you could tell your brother/sister(s) that you have never said to them about this topic?

60. Similarly, is there anything you wish you could say to your parents (or other family members) about adoption or race that you have never said to them?