TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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Lay Abstract

In this thesis, I will explore the issue of transracial adoption in the United States of America, wherein Caucasian American parents domestically adopt African American children that are not biologically or genetically related to them. Given the historical, political, and social climate in America, African American children need certain goods in order to navigate this aforesaid climate, and African American parents serve the traditional role of providing these said goods to African American children. Because of this, influential opponents of transracial adoption, such as the National Association of Black Social Workers, have argued that White parents should not be allowed to adopt Black children in America, as they will be unable to provide these aforesaid goods for their adoptive Black children. In this thesis, I will provide a typology of these goods and I will argue that White parents can provide these aforementioned goods for their adoptive African American children.

Abstract

In this thesis, I will explore the issue of transracial adoption in the United States of America, wherein Caucasian American parents domestically adopt African American children that are not biologically or genetically related to them. In 1972, the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) released an influential position paper, which articulated a strong objection to the practise of transracial adoption. Their position paper has informed and inspired strong objections from other opponents.

The NABSW and other opponents of transracial adoption argue that there are certain goods that African American children need, goods that are essential to their healthy development within the United States of America, given its historical, political, and social climate. African American parents and the African American family–adoptive or otherwise—have traditionally been responsible for providing these goods to African American children. Furthermore, the aforesaid opponents of transracial adoption believe that White parents cannot provide these goods to their adoptive Black children, they cannot serve the traditional role of African American parents and the African American family, and thus should not be allowed to adopt African American children.

In the first chapter of my thesis, I develop a typology of these goods, wherein I philosophically explicate and define exactly what these goods are and why they are important for African American children. In chapter two, I explore the issue of whether African American children need African American parents to provide these goods for them, or whether White parents and families can sufficiently serve the traditional role of Black parents and provide these goods to their adoptive Black children. Finally, in chapter three, I explore the moral responsibilities that Caucasian American parents who adopt African American children have in order to provide for the aforementioned goods, and meet the unique needs of their children.

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Thank you to my committee, Dr. Elisabeth Gedge (my supervisor) and Dr. Stefan Sciaraffa (my secondary reader), your guidance has been invaluable. The first instance of my thesis began as a paper for Dr. Gedge's advanced ethics class. At the time, I had no vision of an extended project on transracial adoption beyond the paper that I wrote for the class. However, my committee members have been instrumental in helping me create an extended thesis project that I could not have envisioned without them. The interest that they have shown in my work, and the critical comments that they have given me along the way have been very helpful. I am forever indebted to you!

Excerpts of this thesis were presented at Arizona State University, University of Florida, University of Waterloo, Gonzaga University, and the Canadian Society for the Study of Practical Ethics (CSSPE). I am very grateful to the audience for all of their constructive feedback, especially to the graduate students at these conferences—their interest in my project was what inspired me to keep going during the tough times. I will like to extend a special thanks to Kristie Dotson and Kurt Blankschaen, whose comments on my paper at these conferences spurred a critical breakthrough in my thesis project.

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Dedication

For Trayvon Martin, for Freddie Gray, for Tamir Rice, for Michael Brown, for Eric Garner, for Sandra Bland, for Alton Sterling, and for Philando Castile. For all the lives they choose to erase, for all the lives they choose to reduce, for all the lives they choose to ignore, and for all the lives they say do not matter.

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Declaration of Academic Achievement

This thesis represents original research and writing that I conducted under the guidance of Dr. Elisabeth Gedge and Dr. Stefan Sciaraffa. I proposed the topic of transracial adoption in the United States of America, one that has been debated since the practise became prominent in World War II. An opposition to transracial adoption is grounded on the assumption that there are certain goods that African American children need, and only African American parents can provide the aforementioned goods to them. However, in the literature on transracial adoption, there is a messy articulation of the philosophical definitions and implications of these goods. The contribution that I believe I made to the topic of transracial adoption is to provide a coherent philosophical definition of these goods. From a typology of these goods, I was able to explore the intricate concepts of identity and moral responsibility that necessarily arise from questions on transracial adoption. Also, a cogent philosophical articulation of these goods allows one to really answer the question of whether adoptive White parents can provide these goods for their African American children, and thus, whether a moral opposition to transracial adoption is justified, as advocated for by the National Association of Black Social Workers.

The National Association of Black Social Workers 1972 Position Statement[1]

The National Association of Black Social Workers has taken a vehement stand against the placement of Black children in white homes for any reason. We affirm the inviolable position of Black children in Black families where they belong physically, psychologically, and culturally in order that they receive the total sense of themselves and develop a sound projection of their future…The family is the basic unit of society; one's first, most pervasive and only consistent culturing life experience. Humans develop their sense of values, identity, self-concepts, attitudes and basic perspectives within the family group. Black children in white homes are cut off from the healthy development of themselves as Black people…the socialization process for every child begins at birth and includes his cultural heritage as an important segment of the process. In our society, the developmental needs of Black children are significantly different from those of white children. Black children are taught, from an early age, highly sophisticated coping techniques to deal with racist practices perpetrated by individuals and institutions. These coping techniques become successfully integrated into ego functions and can be incorporated only through the process of developing positive identifications with significant Black others. Only a Black family can transmit the emotional and sensitive subtleties of perception and reaction essential for a Black child's survival in a racist society…We fully recognize the phenomenon of transracial adoption as an expedient for white folk, not as an altruistic humane concern for Black children. The supply of white children for adoption has all but vanished and adoption agencies, having always catered to middle class whites developed an answer to their desire for parenthood by motivating them to consider Black children…The National Association of Black Social Workers asserts the conviction that children should not remain in foster homes or institutions when adoption can be a reality. We stand firmly, though; on conviction that a white home is not a suitable placement for Black children and contend it is totally unnecessary (NABSW Position Statement On Transracial Adoption, 1- 4).

[1] The 1972 statement that the National Association of Black Social Workers released opposing transracial adoption in the United States of America.

Introduction

History of Transracial Adoption in the United States of America

Western tradition——of which the United States of America is a part——has always favored biological kinships to adoptions (Nagarsheth 47). Adoptions began as a way for adopters' to have heirs in the event of their death (Hermann 148). This original purpose of adoption is actually one of the main factors that contributed to adoption being seen as inferior to biological kinships, as the Catholic Church opposed adoption as a strategy for inheritance (Nagarsheth 47). Furthermore, social workers simply did not believe that adoptive parents would be able to love their adopted children in the same way that biological parents love their children (Nagarsheth 48). However, in the 1920s, adoption of non-related children proliferated within American society, as adoption became an acceptable means of solving the issue of child homelessness (Nagarsheth 48). Before World War II, adoption was unregulated by the State, but it came under State regulation after the war (Nagarsheth 48). After World War II, there was an influx of homeless children due to the effects of the war, and social workers began to support a permanent placement of these homeless children in adoptive homes (Nagarsheth 48). Furthermore, "in the 1940s, due to state regulation, social workers deemed adoption as an adequate solution for illegitimate babies and unwed mothers" (Nagarsheth 48).

Transracial adoption has experienced a rocky history in the United States of America. Due to the legal classification of race in the country and the legal enforcement of segregation within the country, interracial sex, interracial relationships, and interracial marriages were illegal in many states and socially unacceptable in others (McElroy 235). As a result of this social and legal segregation, transracial adoption was illegal in many

states, and socially unacceptable in others. “Transracial adoption began in the late 1940s, then increased in the mid-1950s, increased again in the mid-1960s, and became almost non-existent by 1975” (Hermann 149). As Valerie Phillips Hermann argues, there are various reasons that explain the origins of transracial adoption. Firstly, after World War II——which lasted from 1939 to 1945——many children around the world became homeless and many parents engaged in inter-country adoptions, which Hermann believes undoubtedly encompassed transracial adoption (149). The Korean War——which lasted from 1950 to 1953——and the Vietnam War——which lasted from 1955 to 1975——also led to an increase of White parents’ adoption of non-White children (McElroy 237). World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War explain why the trend of transracial adoption steadily increased from the 1940s to the 1970s. Secondly, trans-religious adoptions, which preceded transracial adoptions, were crucial to the development and acceptance of transracial adoption (Hermann 149). Thirdly, transracial adoption also developed because many White parents desperately wanted to have children but could not, and transracial adoption was seen as a solution to the problem (Hermann 149). There was a significant decline in the number of White children available for adoption and a significant increase in the number of minority children available for adoption as well, and White parents who wanted to adopt children had to begin considering transracial adoptions as a way to meet their desires to become parents (McElroy 238). As Hermann argues, the significant decline in the number of White children available for adoption was due to changing social attitudes during the sexual revolution regarding contraception, abortion, and illegitimacy, which meant White women who would ordinarily give up their children for adoption began keeping them (150). Fourthly, the quality of the foster

care system began to deteriorate, and since there was a significant number of minority children within the foster care system, transracial adoption was passed around as a solution to the problem of finding these children loving, suitable, and permanent homes (McElroy 238). Finally, the 1960s was also the period of the civil rights movement, and this period saw a growing interest in the unity and harmony between different races, and this contributed to the rise of transracial adoptions (McElroy 238). All of these factors contributed to an increase in the practice of transracial adoption in America.

In this project, I am interested in the practice of transracial adoption——more specifically, in instances where non-relative White American parents domestically adopt African American children in the United States of America. As Hermann states, "Joyce Ladner has documented that the earliest case of transracial adoption involving a Black child and White adoptive parents was in 1948 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Laura Gaskin, a Black social worker, made the placement. After observing the child move between various foster homes and determining that there were no available Black homes, Gaskin placed the child with White parents" (150). There was a significant increase in the amount of Black children within the Foster care system in America, there was also a shortage of Black adoptive families, all of this coupled with White parents' increasing demand to adopt, led to social workers and adoptive agencies reevaluating their race matching adoption policies (Nagarsheth 47). Because of this, White adoptive parents adopted about 50000 Black and Biracial children between 1968 and 1972 (Nagarsheth 51). Transracial adoption placements wherein White parents adopted Black children began to gain popularity, and this popularity continued all the way to the early 1970s. However, transracial adoptions became virtually non-existent in 1975. The question

becomes, what contributed to the sudden decline in its popularity? In 1972, the *National Association of Black Social Workers* (NABSW) issued a statement, which unequivocally condemned transracial adoption placements concerning Black children (McElroy 238; Nagarsheth 51; Hermann 149).[2] In one year, the NABSW's statement led to a thirty-nine percent decrease in the number of transracial adoption placements involving Whites parents and Black children, and by 1975, transracial adoption placements virtually stopped (McElroy 239). In response to the NABSW's statement, lawmakers implemented policies and guidelines that mandated same race matching for adoptions (Nagarsheth 52). However, as of recently,

> The Howard M. Metzenbaum Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 (MEPA), prohibits an agency or entity that receives Federal assistance and is involved in adoptive or foster care placements from delaying or denying the placement of a child on the basis of the race, colour, or national origin of the adoptive or foster parent, or the child involved. In 1996, Congress enacted a law amending MEPA, the Interethnic Adoption Provisions (IEP), which forbids agencies from denying or delaying placement of a child for adoption solely on the basis of race or national origin (Transracial Adoption Statistics from *Adoption*).

Furthermore, 40% of adoptions today are of White parents adopting Black or Brown children (Dawn Davenport, *The National Infertility & Adoption Education Nonprofit*).[3] As such, policies have been passed to replace the race matching policies that directly followed the release of the NABSW's statement. Furthermore, the number of transracial adoptions has steadily increased since 1975, and the social acceptance of transracial

[2] There was also a corresponding move by the Native American community to stop the corresponding removal of Native American children from their homes and their placement in White homes.

[3] I was unable to find statistics that only showed the percentage of White parents who adopt Black children domestically; they always seemed to be lumped with statistics on Brown children. Furthermore, even though this paper is focused on domestic transracial adoption placements, as is the NABSW, I was unable to find statistics that showed how many Black children were adopted domestically as opposed to internationally. It is my hope that future statisticians will address these concerns.

adoption placements has also steadily increased since then. However, none of this changed the immediate and powerful effect that the NABSW's statement had on transracial adoption placements, and the powerful influence their statement continues to have today. Scouring the literature, one cannot help but notice that most arguments that articulate an opposition to transracial adoption placements are directly grounded in the NABSW's 1972 statement on the issue. The questions becomes, what reasons did the National Association of Black Social Workers have to oppose transracial adoption placements in the United States of America, and were these reasons philosophically and morally sound? These questions——and more——are the issues that I will endeavor to address within my thesis project.

Thesis Outline

The first chapter of my thesis directly picks up on and addresses the worries laid out by the National Association of Black Social Workers in the statement that they released in 1972, in which they assert their opposition to transracial adoption. In their statement, the NABSW argue that there are certain goods that African American children need, goods that are essential to their healthy development within the United States of America. Furthermore, the NABSW——as well as other opponents of transracial adoptive placements——argue that these goods are only available to African American children within African American homes, and White parents will be unable to provide for these goods. However, the philosophical articulation of these goods throughout the transracial adoption literature is messy at best, and ineffective/nonexistent at worst. In the first chapter of my thesis, I develop a typology of these goods, which include physical, psychological, and cultural belonging; the developmental needs of Black children in

American society; and the healthy development of racial identity in America. In my typology, I provide a philosophical definition and explanation of what exactly these goods entail and whether or not these goods are essential for African American children, such that an adoptive parents' inability to provide for any of these goods will be seen as a good moral reason to disfavor their placement in that adoptive home.

The second chapter of my thesis goes on to use this typology of goods as a conceptual resource. In this chapter, I explore the question of whether it is, indeed, the case that African American children need African American parents and African American homes in order to provide these goods to them. By extension, was the NABSW right to oppose transracial adoption on these grounds? In the chapter, I explore the issue of identity, and by extension the issue of a Black racial identity, especially as it relates to identity development, personal identity, and collective identity. I do this, through the works of Hawley Fogg-Davis and Anthony Appiah. I also explore the issue of a transracial identity, as articulated by Sally Haslanger, a phenomenon of identity development that can take place within transracial adoptive placements. Through close philosophical analysis of these aforementioned concepts, I will argue that White parents will be able to sufficiently provide their adopted African American children with the goods defined in the typology. Consequently, I will argue, that their inability to provide these goods for their adopted African American children cannot ground a moral opposition to transracial adoption placements.

In the third chapter of my thesis, I take my philosophical explorations a bit further. In the first chapter, I argue that there are certain goods that all African American children need within American society. In the second chapter, I argue that it is possible

for White parents who adopt Black children to sufficiently provide for these goods. In the third chapter, I will argue that given the arguments in chapter two, if adoptive White parents want to be able to sufficiently provide for these goods, they have certain moral responsibilities towards the African American children that they adopt. I frame the discussions in this chapter, with respect to the moral responsibilities that White parents have, in the context of the vulnerability literature articulated by Catriona Mackenzie, Wendy Rogers, and Susan Dodds. I argue that given the vulnerability of all children, there are certain moral responsibilities that all parents—regardless of biological or social kinship—have towards their children. Furthermore, I argue that given the specific vulnerabilities of adoptive placements, there are moral responsibilities that all adoptive parents—regardless of the race of the children and the parents—have towards the children that they adopt. Finally, I argue that given the previously reiterated moral responsibilities that all parents and adoptive parents have towards their children, the further vulnerabilities present in transracial adoptive placements necessitate certain moral responsibilities as well. These moral responsibilities, I will argue, not only ensure that White parents who adopt trans-racially will be able to provide their Black children with the goods necessary for their healthy development, it will also answer to some of the worries articulated by the NABSW in their influential 1972 statement——worries that were well-founded, but that I will hopefully assuage at the end of my thesis project.

Chapter One[4]

In *The Fire Next Time* published in 1963, James Baldwin writes a letter, *My Dungeon Shook: Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation*. The letter, as explained by the title, was addressed to Baldwin's fourteen-year-old nephew, and it focused on the centrality of race in the United States of America, the racially discriminatory climate that has led to the oppression and dispossession of Black bodies in the country, and all of this, by implication, was a sum of Baldwin's own experiences and what he suspected might come to be the experiences his nephew will likely face throughout his own life. In 2015, Ta-Nehisi Coates published a book, *Between the World and Me*, which draws inspiration from James Baldwin's aforementioned work, and in this contemporary account, Coates writes the book as a letter to his fourteen-year-old son. Both books are at once visceral in their symbolism and intellectually challenging in their analysis of race in the United States of America.

These two books are important because they express the burden of the cumulative generational effect of racism, so that, it is and always has been up to Black parents in America to teach their children about what it means to be black in a country that devalues them because of the colour of their skin, and consequently how to survive the resulting racial prejudice and violence that they are likely to face throughout their lives. These books display, in real time, the passing down of this knowledge. However, in cases of transracial adoption (TRAs), this generational racial continuity is disrupted. And, because

[4] The content of this thesis project is highly adapted from a paper that I wrote for my Advanced Ethics Class, *The Ethics of Transracial Adoption in the United States of America*, in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the class, with the class itself being taken in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Masters degree program in philosophy at McMaster University.

of this disruption, White people will find themselves as parents to Black children, expected to teach them about what it means to be Black in America without the associated cumulative generational burden of racism that usually inspires this discussion, as was the case for Baldwin and Coates. This disruption causes the displacement of the 'inviolable position of Black children in Black homes', as was advocated for by the *National Association of Black Social Workers* (NABSW).

In 1972, the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) released a position paper stating their opposition to transracial adoption in the United States of America. The organization is responsible for releasing one of the most influential, uncompromising, and controversial position statements on transracial adoption. As Andrew Morrison notes, "In 1971, the number of TRAs in America reached an all-time high of 2574. Although skeptics had continually voiced concerns, opposition to TRA did not truly gain force until 1972 when NABSW publicly announced their stance against TRA…NABSW's position has remained essentially unchanged for the last thirty years. NABSW's announcement was likely instrumental in the significant decline in the number of TRAs. Between 1971 and 1972, the total number of TRAs fell by more than one-third, from 2574 to 1569…by 1975; the annual number of TRAs had dropped to 831" (167-168). From their 1972 statement, it is clear that the NABSW believes that there are certain important and necessary goods that Black children need in America; goods that they can only obtain in Black homes, being raised by Black parents; goods that their White adoptive parents cannot sufficiently provide for them. In this chapter, my main objective is to develop a typology of some of these aforementioned goods, and some of the prima facie challenges faced by White parents raising Black children in America.

The Physical, Psychological, and Cultural Displacement of Black Children

"We affirm the inviolable position of Black children in Black families where they belong physically, psychologically, and culturally in order that they receive the total sense of themselves and develop a sound projection of their future"

In this section, I am going to explore three goods that Black children need, goods that opponents of transracial adoption do not believe that they will be able to obtain within their adoptive White families. These three goods entail the child feeling like they belong physically, psychologically, and culturally within their homes. However, opponents of transracial adoption——most prominent of which is the NABSW——have argued that when White parents adopt Black children, the aforesaid children will experience a physical, psychological, and cultural displacement within their homes. The NABSW argues that Black children physically belong to Black families because there is no chance of them resembling their relatives (1-2). The physical distance also comes about because of the different skin colors of both the parent and the child. The immediate physical differences between the White parent and the Black child means that there will be natural differences between the parents and their children with respect to their hair and skin. As Morrison notes, "white parents who adopt Black children may not properly know how to care for the child's hair and skin. Although this may sound absurd or minor, every interviewed parent with a Black child recounted circumstances where they were confronted with not knowing how to properly care for their child's hair or skin" (186). There was an episode of the television show, *This Is Us*, wherein two adoptive White parents of a Black boy were debating whether or not their son requires sunscreen. In that same episode, they realized that the reason why their son had razor bumps was because

the barber that they had been taking him to did not know how to cut Black hair, and he needed to be taken to a Black barber or a barber who had experience cutting Black people's hair. They came to these realizations after a somewhat friendly confrontation with a Black woman. Thus, we can understand the argument of a Black child only physically belonging in a Black family by understanding the ways in which the Black child can feel apart from their family because of their racial differences and physical dissimilarities, and the fact that there are natural physical differences between White and Black people with respect to their skin and hair type, which could impose a barrier to proper care for their children's skin, hair, amongst other things. Of course, these differences are made salient because of the racial norms that exist within the United States of America, and the ways in which these aforesaid norms exist to exacerbate the distance between people of different races within society. As such, based on the aforementioned issues above, it is my contention that one of the important goods that Black adoptive families seem to be more likely to be able provide to adopted Black children over White adoptive families is the good of feeling as though the aforesaid child physically belongs within their adoptive family unit.

The next issue that I will explore is the ways in which transracial adoptive placement may cause the Black child to feel psychologically displaced within their homes. As Morrison notes, "opponents base their arguments on the premise that in order for Black children to meet their psychological developmental needs, they must be placed with Black parents. They claim that cross race adoption is psychologically damaging to Black children" (178). The psychological displacement begins with the distance that one will expect an adoptive child to ordinarily feel in a society that operates as though the

bio-normative conception of the family is the norm. However, for Black children adopted by White parents, there is an added dimension of psychological distance that extends beyond that of a non-transracial adoptive placement. The psychological displacement stems from the physical displacement that said child would already feel within the families due to the racial differences and physical dissimilarities that exist between parent and child. Furthermore, it is not just the physical dissimilarities between parent and child that will cause this psychological displacement, rather, part of this psychological displacement comes from a significant absence of Black people within the Black child's social circle (NABSW 3). The fact is, middle-class White people——who are more likely to be the ones adopting Black children, given the institutional restrictions to adoptions and the amount of resources necessary to adopt——are more likely to live in predominantly White neighborhoods given the history of legal segregation in America, the effects of which still exist today. It can be very disorienting and lonely, not having role models who look like you within your immediate familial and communal environment. This feeling can heighten the potential development of psychological problems in adoptive children. Morrison notes that major studies conducted over the past thirty years indicate that transracial adoption does not result in an increased chance of psychological problems or emotional scars (183). However, these results do not change the psychological distance that is likely to exist, and the Black child is likely to feel, especially within their, likely, predominantly White neighborhoods, with parents, neighbors, and friends that do not look like them. As such, based on the aforementioned issues above, it is my contention that another important good that Black adoptive families seem to be more likely to be able provide to adopted Black children over White adoptive

families is the good of feeling as though the aforesaid child psychologically belongs within their adoptive family unit.

The final issue that I will explore in this section is the ways in which transracial adoptive placement may cause the cultural displacement of Black children within their White adoptive homes. The NABSW argues,

Ethnicity[5] is a way of life in these United States, and the world at large; a viable, sensitive, meaningful and legitimate social construct. This is no less true, nor legitimate for Black people than for other ethnic groups. Ethnic identification is an old concept and entrenched practice in total society, but on some levels appears to be new as it moves from a negative into a positive light. Overt ethnic identification, especially for Blacks, was long suppressed by the social and political pressures speaking to total assimilation of all peoples in that great melting point. We were made, by devious devices, to view ethnic identification as a self-defeating stance, prohibiting our acceptance into the mainstream. Black people are now developing an honest perception of this society; the myths of assimilation and of our inferiority stand bare under glaring light. We now proclaim our truth, substance, beauty and value as ourselves without apology or compromise. The

[5] The NABSW uses ethnicity and culture interchangeably. There are those who might press on this linguistic back and forth between two terms that have differing implications. There is good reason to believe that culture and ethnicity are not synonymous. One's race seems to connote an external identification that is imposed on them, an identification that they may or may not adopt as their own. For example, my racial identity is that of a Black person, and it is an identity that is externally imposed on me before I can even choose to claim it for myself. Ethnicity seems to be related to one's race, but it can also be distinct from it. As was argued in *Boundless,* "Unlike race, ethnicity is not usually externally assigned by other individuals. The term ethnicity focuses more upon a group's connection to a perceived shared past and culture." For example, as we will see in this section, African Americans ethnicity is being African American. However, one's racial identity can be Black but their ethnicity different from their race. For instance, I am Black, but my ethnicity is not tied to that, but as a Nigerian, my ethnic identity is Igbo, as it was for my father and his father before him. Culture, on the other hand, seems to connote a shared understanding with respect to one's values, beliefs, norms, morals, symbols, and maybe even their language. One's culture can stem from both their ethnic and racial identity. For instance, there is a culture attached to being Black in Canada and there is also a culture attached to being Igbo, and both of these cultural identities define me, separately and together. It is hard to say if the NABSW knew this when writing their statement and it is not for this paper to defend their choice of words. The reader can keep this note in mind. However, given that they used these words interchangeably, I will be working within that linguistic framework. Wherever you see ethnicity, sub in culture, and I will use the word culture except when quoting directly, as done above, and the word ethnicity is used.

affirmation of our ethnicity promotes our opposition to the trans-racial placements of Black children (NABSW Position Statement On Transracial Adoption 1).

As indicated above, the National Association of Black Social Workers believes that being immersed in African American culture is very important for Black people. The NABSW argues that White parents will be unable to provide their black children with a substantive immersion into their culture. They also fear that transracial adoptees will be forced into the same forms of assimilation that the NABSW believe have been forced upon the Black community. In its most extreme form, "the NABSW has described transracial adoption as a form of cultural genocide. Black people as a cultural group, it argues, have an interest in making decisions concerning Black people and in preserving Black people as a distinct cultural group. Transracially placed Black children, the NABSW fears, will not identify as Black in the sense of identifying with Black culture" (Forde-Mazrui 959-960). This NABSW's view falls in line with that of many opponents of TRA who believe that transracial adoption diminishes Black culture and that Black children can only acquire a Black cultural identity in a Black family (Morrison 183).

When faced with an argument of this scope, the most pressing question that one needs to address, first, is whether there even is a Black culture within the United States of America. Anthony Appiah argues that people who share a common culture usually share a language, which allows them to participate in a complex set of mutual expectations and understandings (86). He argues, "people [with a common culture] will share an understanding of many practices—marriages, funerals, other rites of passages—and will largely share their views about the general workings not only of the social but also of the natural world. Even those who are skeptical about particular elements of beliefs will nevertheless know what everyone is supposed to believe, and they will know it in enough

detail to behave very often as if they believed it too" (86). He argues that people who share a common culture will share values, beliefs, signs, and symbols (86). Appiah insists that given this definition of culture, African Americans cannot be said to share a common culture. As David Wilkins argues, unlike many groups within America such as Native Americans, Asian Americans, or Hispanic Americans, Black Americans do not have an alternative cultural frame of reference (23).[6] Even though African Americans are descended from African slaves who trace their culture back to their African forbearers, whatever culture existed between them and said forbearers have long been destroyed through the efforts of slave owners and the passage of time (Wilkins 23).

As such, "while African Americans can claim African culture, we have never had the luxury of relying on our African heritage to provide a set of common symbols and beliefs within which we can organize our lives" (Wilkins 23). However, as Appiah and Wilkins note, just because African Americans do not share a common culture does not necessarily mean that Black culture does not exist within America. Appiah argues, "Many people who think of races as groups defined by shared cultures, conceive that sharing in a different way. They understand black people as sharing black culture by definition: jazz or hip-hop belongs to an African-American, whether she likes it or knows anything about it, because it is culturally marked as black" (90). These aforesaid things are culturally marked as Black because they are created and promoted by Black Americans. Black Americans have "produced distinctive styles and modes of expression, attitudes and beliefs about political and social issues, customs and practices, that are recognized and understood (if not always agreed or followed) by a broad range of blacks

[6] This is also were African American children adopted domestically differ from Black children who are adopted transnationally by White American parents.

across geographic and social lines" (22-23). As Appiah notes, many of the things that are culturally marked as Black can include literature and art as produced in the Harlem Renaissance; music which includes Jazz, Funk, and Hip-Hop; dance which includes the cakewalk, popping, locking, twerking, dabbing; many types of expressions within fashion, the culinary arts, and even dialects within American society. As such, I believe that it makes sense to talk about Black culture within the context of transracial adoptions.

The next question that is worth addressing is whether African American children learning about their cultural identity is an important value that can ground the imperative against transracial adoption. The way that many people have chosen to respond to this question can only be described as red herrings. Morrison argues that the number of transracial adoption is far too small to have far-reaching consequences as it did in the case of Native Americans; having a loving home as opposed to remaining in foster care far outweighs concerns for preserving a Black cultural identity; state legislatures have ruled that the best interest of the child far outweighs all concerns about a loss of cultural experience (183-184). The claims that Morrison makes are weak, seeing as how the number of transracial adoptive placements of Black children in the United States of America is significant, and it is a number that is continually rising. Furthermore, stating that an adoptive and stable family is preferable to staying in foster care does not, in itself, answer the question of whether the Black cultural identity is one that is worth protecting. Kim Forde-Mazuri also cites the fact that courts and agencies do not permit the advancement of a child's culture at the expense of their individual interests (961), as if that answers the NABSW's worries, given that their statement was released to influence policy, and without asking the question of whether it is reasonable to separate what is

seen as a child's best-interest from the promotion of their cultural identity. It is my contention that teaching and promoting the Black cultural identity is an important value that can be used to ground an opposition to transracial adoption.

Black culture was created, and continues to exist, as a means to articulate the oppression and successes of African American people; it plays an important role in strengthening the Black community within the United States of America, an important point around which the issues that African Americans face are articulated and addressed; and, it can be an important way for African Americans to understand their past, influence their present, and shape their future. Insofar as the social construction of racial norms remains salient within American society, and the colour of one's skins shapes the way that people and institutions interact with said persons, an exposure to and an understanding of Black cultural identity will be an important moral value worth defending. It is important for Black children to be exposed to Black culture, and by extension to the Black community as a whole. Marginalizing—or not exposing—African American children to their culture can create feelings of alienation from the Black community, and this may bear on the psychological welfare of the child, as it emphasizes feelings of displacement and loneliness.

There is another case where the issue of Black cultural identity is pertinent and this is the case of transnational transracial adoptions. In this project, I am focusing on the domestic transracial adoption placements, but transnational adoptions can highlight the ways in which our social construction of cultural identity and our need to provide for the psychological needs of Black children in America can shape the discussion of a Black cultural identity——so, permit me this slight and short digression. In *Footnote Three*, I

discuss the differences between race and ethnicity and the implications that this has for one's cultural identity. These differing implications become more prominent in cases were White parents trans-racially adopt Black children internationally, in a process known as transnational adoption. In the case of domestic transracial adoptions, the race and ethnicity of the child in question seems to be inseparable. However, this is not the case in situations of international transracial adoptions. What happens when a White parent in America adopts a Black child from Nigeria whose ethnicity the child shares with the Igbo ethnic group in the country; the question becomes what cultural identity the NABSW's statement is referring to. To paraphrase the issue more simply, when thinking about what cultural identity the parents have a duty to impart on the child, are we referring to the Black identity, the Igbo identity, or both?

The child is not African American in any meaningful sense, if we take African Americans to be the persons descended from slaves, who have no knowledge of their specific cultural entanglements to any one ethnic or cultural group in Africa. The aforementioned adopted child is undeniably Igbo—–that much we know. Being Igbo forms a substantive part of their ethnic identity, and part of their cultural identity will stem from being Igbo, and as such, the question becomes whether or not White parents can meaningfully teach them about their Igbo cultural identity. However, the issue is more complex than that. Since the child is Black, once they step into America, they will not be able to escape their skin colour. As stated in the aforementioned *Footnote*, race is externally imposed, and part of the reason why this is the case is because race is so visible and immediate, and as such, inescapable. Thus, the identity of this child is also going to have to be grounded in their physical location, which in this case is America and

not Nigeria. Thus, there is a sense in which the child is now connected to the historical, political, social, and cultural context of being Black in America, if for no other reason than because people will act as if this were the case. Thus, there is a sense in which this child, now, has a legitimate claim over things that are culturally marked as Black in America. Thus, the parent seems to have an added duty to introduce and expose them to the culture that stems from their race as well. Exposing the child to the African American cultural identity is an important way for them to understand the historical implications of their skin colour, to ensure that the child has access to the Black community in order to abate feelings of physical and psychological displacement and to have access to the community's resource, and in these ways, the child comes to understand their place within American society. So, in the case of transracial-transnational adoptions, culture has a double meaning; their culture is connected to their ethnic identity which stems from a shared past with their ancestors; but, their culture is also connected to their racial identity, which is grounded in the geographical location that the child comes to occupy. I hope that I have been able to clearly state why physical belonging, psychological belonging, and cultural belonging are important values that ought to be protected in order to ensure the wellbeing of African American children, and a foreseeable displacement from said values can ground a moral opposition to transracial adoptive placements.

The Developmental Needs Of Black Children Within American Society

"In our society, the developmental needs of Black children are significantly different from those of white children. Black children are taught, from an early age, highly sophisticated coping techniques to deal with racist practices perpetrated by individuals

and institutions…Only a Black family can transmit the emotional and sensitive subtleties of perception and reaction essential for a Black child's survival in a racist society"

The next issue that needs to be addressed involves the developmental needs of adopted African American children, why these needs are important, and the ways in which this value can ground an opposition to transracial adoption. Many opponents of transracial adoption argue that it ought to be morally and socially impermissible, given the fact that White parents cannot meet the developmental needs of Black children, as they are unable to teach them about highly sophisticated coping mechanisms to deal with the inevitable racism that will be directed towards them, both from other individuals and from institutions. Navigating racism involves a very delicate balance between active resistance, concession and compromise and the NABSW argues that White parents will not be able to "transmit the emotional and sensitive subtleties of perception and reaction essential for a Black child's survival in a racist society" (NABSW Position Statement 2). Their argument rests on the assumption—however questionable—that White parents will be unable to teach their children the skills necessary to cope with racism, seeing as how they have not had the first-hand experience that Black Americans are forced to deal with within society (Forde-Mazrui 953). Morrison picks up on this point when he asserts that opponents of TRA argue that white parents cannot teach Black children how and when to fend off or ignore racism and racial insults; white parents cannot discern the subtle appropriateness of fighting back and submitting during encounters with racism; and white parents will not emphasize Black strength and worth as a way to counter prejudicial situations (177-178). Teaching their children how to navigate racism within society and the skills necessary to cope with said racism is paramount to the role that Black parents

are forced to play in their children's lives in America. This role was acutely addressed in an episode of Black*ish* wherein the Johnson parents and grandparents were debating some of the ways to talk to their children about police brutality given the string of persistent shootings of African Americans, and some of the ways to effectively handle this situation. This aforementioned example is just one of the many instances wherein African American parents have to teach their children about racism and how to navigate said instances of racism within the American society. The developmental needs of Black children are essential to their survival within American society and it can, in many instances, quite literally be a matter of life and death.

I hope it has become clear that seeing to the developmental needs of African American children is an important value upon which we can ground an opposition to transracial adoption. Morrison attempts to answer to some of the worries that opponents of TRA have with respect to their belief that White parents cannot adequately provide for the developmental needs of their adopted Black children. Firstly, he argues that since prejudice is rife in American society, one's skin colour does not preclude one from having a first-hand experience with prejudice, and thus, the aforesaid adoptive White parents can draw on these experiences when teaching their child how to deal with racism within American society (179). This is a very weak argument. The NABSW rightly argues that the prejudicial experiences that African Americans face, the historical burdens they've had to overcome, and how these burdens translate to their individual, communal, and institutional realities are unique. Of course, prejudicial experiences are not one-dimensional, and more often than not, there could be intersecting prejudicial experiences that people across racial and class groups face. Morrison presumes that interaction with

any kind of prejudice means that one will, potentially, be able to identify and address particular forms of prejudices, and this is simply false. To the point about not understanding the 'sensitive subtleties of perception and reaction' to racism, the delicate balance between discerning racism, fighting back or conceding, all I can say is that this is a struggle that Black people have to face their whole lives. There is no toolbox on how to deal with these situations, and it will all come down to personal experience and preference. Everyday, as a Black woman, I face certain racial micro-aggressions or I am confronted with racism both at individual and institutional levels, and I have to decide for myself whether it is appropriate to fight back or concede. The answer to this question will be very different for different people, and in the end, the delicate balance that we have to strike with respect to this situation is one we will have to negotiate and revise for the rest of our lives. This is a life-long learning process; a learning process that I believe comes easier to African American parents than to White parents, just by virtue of their own personal experiences and through the transference of inter-generational lessons, passed down within Black families. As such, I think that it is worth considering whether or not White parents possess the capacity to provide for the developmental needs of their adopted African American children within the highly racialized climate that is America. Furthermore, not being able to provide for these aforementioned developmental needs is grounds for a moral opposition to transracial adoption.

The Racial Identity Of Adopted Black Children In America

"The family is the basic unit of society; one's first, most pervasive and only consistent culturing life experience. Humans develop their sense of values, identity, self-concepts,

attitudes and basic perspectives within the family group. Black children in white homes are cut off from the healthy development of themselves as Black people"

The next issue that I will address in this chapter is the issue of racial identity and how this value can ground an opposition to transracial adoption. In this section, I am going to address the substance of what I believe a Black racial identity is and why it is an important value to instill in African American children. However, as in the last section, questions about whether Black parents are uniquely positioned to instill said racial identity over White parents——while it may be briefly alluded to in this section——would be addressed in the next chapter. The subsequent question that this section needs to answer is two-fold. Firstly, I will address what a Black racial identity is, and what it entails. Secondly, I will address whether having a Black racial identity is necessary for an African American child to undergo a healthy development.

Kim Forde-Mazrui picks up on this point when she notes what opponents of transracial adoption have to say about a 'Black racial identity'. As Forde-Mazrui notes, "opponents of transracial placement argue that a Black child needs Black parents in order to develop an appropriate racial identity. What is meant by the term racial identity, however, is ambiguous. It could mean simply that the child identifies as a Black person, or it could mean something more—namely that the child identifies with Black culture" (946). This raises the question, what is the difference between identifying as a Black person and identifying with Black culture.

With respect to identifying as a Black person, there are two *senses* with which we can understand the term, *'The Weaker Sense'* and *'The Stronger Sense'*. To identify as a Black person in the weaker sense, one simply needs to have an understanding that they

are Black, and as such, that the colour of their skin is a socially salient feature within the American society. As I have previously stated, given the historical and political state of America, the colour of an individual's skin has implications for how one will be treated in the country. One of these implications——the one that opponents of transracial adoption are most interested in——is the racism that an African American child is likely to face within American society. As such, *Person A* identifies as a Black person in the weaker sense if they satisfy two conditions. The first condition is that Person A ought to understand that within America, the colour of their skin will be regarded as Black. This may seem like a trivial point until you consider the case of transracial adoptee Chad Goller-Sojourner. Goller-Sojourner did not have an understanding that he was Black, and in fact, he used to be afraid of Black people (Belton *The Root*). As he, himself, stated, "one of the interesting things from when I was younger is when you grow up with white parents, white neighborhood, white church, your default identity is a white kid. Blackness comes later…People always reminded me I was black" (Belton *The Root*). The second condition is that Person A ought to understand some of the historical, social, and political implications——which I would not go through in-depth here——of the colour of their skin within America, one of which is the racism that will likely be directed towards them by virtue of the colour of their skin. These two conditions must be met for Person A to be regarded as identifying as Black in the weaker sense, and taken together, these two conditions creates an understanding in Person A that they are Black.

To identify as a Black person in the stronger sense, one does not just have an understanding that they are Black in America——the definition of which is indicated in the above-mentioned conditions——but, they take being Black as being a central part of

their identity. To this end, an individual who identifies as Black in the stronger sense would, likely, derive a sense of value and worth from being an African American——this sense of value and worth would extend to both the struggles that African American have faced, have overcome, and continue to face, and the successes of other African Americans within their society. Furthermore, identifying, as Black in the stronger sense would serve to politically and socially orient said individuals towards some of the personal goals that they set for themselves——such as striving to work with an organization that addresses institutional racism within America——and towards striving to participate both in the activities of the Black community and the goals that the Black community strives to achieve within the larger American society. Notice that the aforementioned Person A, who identifies as Black in the weaker sense can understand that they are Black and they can understand some of the implications of being Black in America, without necessarily taking being Black as a central part of their identity or as a way to socially or politically orient their life goals. Of course, it is also not difficult to see how the burden of racism within American society, an awareness of said racism, and having to deal with said racism, can lead someone to take being Black as a central part of their identity——although, this is not necessary.

Identifying with Black culture is conceptually different from identifying as a Black person. The phenomenon is conceptually different, but not necessarily practically different. As I noted above, Appiah argues that Black culture exists insofar as there are certain things that are marked as Black within American society——such as African American literature, African American style music and dance, art produced by African American people, amongst other things. These aforementioned things comprise African

American culture. For Person B to identify with Black culture, two conditions must be met. The first condition is that Person B possesses an awareness of some of the things that African Americans take to be a fundamental part of African American culture. The second condition is that Person B comes to embrace these parts of African American culture; they come to take ownership of these parts of African American culture; and they come to participate in said parts of African American culture, either through active consumption, active creation, or both——this may lead individuals who identify with Black culture to further Black culture, in a meaningful way, within American society. It is easy to see how an individual who identifies as Black in the stronger sense will be more likely to identify with Black culture than an individual who identifies as Black in the weaker sense——the aforesaid individuals are more likely to embrace Black culture, identify with its creation, process, and content, and work hard to further it. As I noted above, Black culture is an important part of articulating the oppression and successes of Black people in America, and it forms an important locus of the African American community. African American children who are *not exposed* to Black culture may feel culturally displaced and psychological alienated within American society. However, exposure to Black culture fulfills the first condition with respect to the process of identifying with Black culture, but not the second condition, as an individual might be exposed to Black culture and still choose to disregard it.

It is my contention that identifying as Black in the weaker sense, identifying as Black in the stronger sense, and identifying with Black culture, is what constitutes a Black racial identity within American society. The next question I want to answer is whether possessing a racial identity——any facet of it——is necessary for an African

American child to undergo a healthy development within American society. In order to answer this question, we need to answer the question of what will constitute a healthy development for an African American child within American society. There are three things that can be associated with a healthy development of African American children; the first is having a *Positive Racial Identity,* the second is having a *Strong Racial Identity*, and the third is having the above-mentioned *Developmental Needs* essential for Black children within American society. I have already explored the developmental needs in the previous section, and I have argued that said needs are essential for the healthy development of Black people. Now, I will examine what positive and strong racial identity is, and whether they are essential for the healthy development of Black people.

Given the barrage of negative stereotypes about African American people that exists in pop-culture (movies, television shows), the news media, amongst other places, an individual can be said to have a positive racial identity if they have a healthy self-esteem, a sense of self-worth, and positive imagery, both about being Black and about Black people within the American society. For instance, Goller-Sojourner could not have been said to have a positive racial identity growing up because he was afraid of Black people, and thus, associated being Black with something negative, something worth being afraid of. Given the prejudice and negative stereotypes that African Americans face within American society, having a positive racial identity is, I believe, essential for a healthy development. It is important for Black people to look to themselves, to their community, and realize that regardless of anything negative being said about them, that there is absolutely nothing wrong with being Black. In fact, when they look to the historical and political context of their society, and see the way that Black people have

been and continue to be treated, they can take a step back and identify this as something that is wrong with the systems and institutions in place within their society, and not with themselves as a people and as a race. As such, it is my contention that, together with having the developmental needs necessary to address racism within society, having a positive racial identity is essential for the healthy development of Black children.

The next question is what is a strong racial identity and is it essential for the healthy development of African American children within the American society. With regards to a strong racial identity,

> Another question regarding racial identity is the extent to which a positive racial identity requires a strong racial identity. A child with a strong racial identity is one who places a high priority on her race as a component of her self-image. Put simply, a Black child with a strong racial identity views her race as a more important aspect of her identity than most of her other personal attributes or characteristics. This issue is important because studies show that many trans-racially adopted Black children place less significance on their race than in-racially adopted Black children…As with a Black cultural identity, a strong racial identity may be more likely to result from having Black parents rather than White (Forde-Mazrui 949).

Many opponents of transracial adoption pick up on the fact that transracial adoptees are less likely to have a strong racial identity than in-racially adopted Black children or Black children who grow up with their biological family, and use this as a reason to oppose transracial adoption. They argue that a Black child needs a strong *and* positive racial identity in order to withstand racism and hostility towards Black people in America, and for a healthy development (Forde-Mazrui 950). I mean one can see why a positive racial identity will be needed to counter narratives of hostility and negativity towards Black people in America. As noted above, having a healthy self-esteem and sense of self-worth about being Black can allow you to disregard and actively counter negative narratives about you being Black. What is less clear to me is why a strong racial identity is

necessary to counter such narratives. A Black person does not need to place a great emphasis on their race to be aware of the myriad ways in which they will encounter racism in society and how to combat and navigate these circumstances. "A child's identity is multifaceted, with many attitudes, beliefs, and characteristics composing her self-image; it is unclear why the quality of a child's identity should depend on the emphasis placed on any particular trait" (Forde-Mazrui 950). Having a strong racial identity can be a good thing, but not having a strong racial identity is not necessarily detrimental to Black children. As I will explore in Chapter two of this project, identity is far too complex to dictate, and as such, we cannot insist that an individual ought to regard one part of their identity as being the part of their identity that they give a central focus to or that they place a high priority on. Thus, while I believe that a positive racial identity and possessing the developmental needs necessary to deal with racism is necessary for the healthy development of Black people, I do not think that having a strong racial identity is also necessary for the healthy development of Black people.

Now that I have explored what I believe is necessary for the healthy development of Black people——positive racial identity and developmental needs——is it necessarily the case that an African American child must come to possess a racial identity——identify as Black in the weak sense, identify as Black in the strong sense, or identify with Black culture——in order to experience a healthy development of themselves. If an individual does not identify as Black in the weaker sense, that is, if they do not understand that the colour of their skin will be regarded as Black, and that this comes with historical, political, and social implications, one of which is racism, then it is hard to see how said individual can be said to have developed the means and tools necessary for survival

within a racist society, such as America. Thus, it is my contention that in order for a Black child to undergo a healthy development, they need to possess a racial identity, which, at the very least, comprises of their identifying as Black in the weaker sense.

Identifying as Black in the stronger sense is very much related to a strong racial identity, wherein an individual places a high priority on being Black and takes it to be a central aspect of their identity. Again, I fail to see how not identifying as Black in the stronger sense will inhibit the development of a positive racial identity or one's developmental needs. I do not mean to sound dismissive; there are many advantages to identifying as Black in the stronger sense. An individual who identifies as Black in the stronger sense may be more likely to actively participate in the Black community and as such, they will have access to the resources that the Black community provides to its members, such as role models within the Black community, amongst other things. Furthermore, they may be more likely to——as noted above——identify with Black culture, and seek to value and preserve Black culture, and actively contribute to it. All of these aforementioned benefits of identifying as a Black person in the stronger sense may lead to the development of a positive racial identity with the capacity and tools necessary to survive as a Black person within the American society. I do not deny any of these. However, I do not see a necessary connection between identifying as Black in the stronger sense, and the development of a positive racial identity or the tools necessary to deal with racism. It could be that I am missing something, and I look forward to future researchers exploring this issue further.

The final question is whether an individual needs to identify with Black culture in order to develop a healthy racial identity. Again, I am not willing to go this far. Black

people have found solace within their culture and their communities, this is undeniable, and this is why I advocate for exposure to Black culture in order to alleviate feelings of physical, psychological, and cultural displacement. And, this is certainly beneficial for transracial adoptees that may be more likely to feel this displacement. However, identifying with and embracing Black culture does not follow from necessitating an exposure to it. Thus, it is not necessary that Black children identify with Black culture, all that is necessary is that their parents expose them to Black culture and allow them the choice of either deciding to embrace Black culture or not. I can see how Black culture can help facilitate a positive racial identity and the tools necessary to deal with racism within American society, but again, I do not see a necessary connection. Again, maybe I am missing something, and I look forward to future researchers picking up on this point.

Thus, I will argue that possessing a racial identity insofar as one identifies as being Black in the weaker sense is necessary for the healthy development of a positive racial identity and their developmental needs. As such, this is a good that can ground an opposition to transracial adoption if it is, indeed the case, that adoptive White parents will be unable to facilitate these goods. Furthermore, while I see the value to identifying as Black in the stronger sense, a strong racial identity, and identifying with Black culture, I am just not willing to go so far as to say that they are necessary for the healthy development of an African American child. In conclusion, the prospect for physical, psychological, and cultural displacement, the developmental needs of Black children, and the development of a healthy racial identity, are all important goods essential for African American children, and a White adoptive parents inability to provide for any of these goods, provide strong moral grounds to oppose transracial adoption.

Chapter Two

On the television show, Black*ish,* Andre Johnson is the patriarch of an upper-middle class Black family that lives in a predominantly White neighborhood. Andre believes that his wife—a biracial Black woman, Rainbow—and his children—Zoey, Junior, Diane, and Jack—are losing touch with their identities as Black people due to the family's wealth and residential status, and the show follows his humorous exploits when trying to engage with his children to ensure that they remember that they are Black, not Black*ish*, Black. On the third episode of the first season titled, *The Nod*, Andre tries to teach his son, Junior, about the nod.

'The Nod' is a way for Black people to acknowledge each other; it allows for an instant mutual recognition of community when Black people see one another, and the nod is a way to acknowledge this mutual recognition. The nod is especially useful in places and situations where there are so few Black people. The interesting thing about this episode was Andre's realization that his son, Junior, did not take being Black to be a salient part of his identity. Instead, Junior's identity was shaped more around being a nerd—especially in his school setting—than around being Black. Andre had to learn—after his persistent nagging, and even going out of his way to find his son Black friends—that identity is complex, and just because he takes being Black as being a salient part of his identity and expresses it in a certain way, does not necessarily mean that his son must also take being Black as being salient or express it in the same way.

One of the claims that the National Association of Black Social Workers make, is that White parents will be unable to ensure that their children develop a healthy Black racial identity——and, as I noted in the last chapter——this would ground a strong moral

opposition to transracial adoption. Through the works of Fogg-Davis and Appiah, I will explore the Black racial identity in more detail, and whether or not the NABSW's insistence on the transference of a Black racial identity from parent to child is morally and philosophically sound. Furthermore, as noted in the previous chapter, the developmental needs of Black children are another good that grounds a strong moral opposition to transracial adoption. The social and material needs of Black children are necessarily different than those of White children in the United States of America, given the highly racialized climate that exists in the country. Many opponents of transracial adoption argue that White parents will be unable to meet these needs because they cannot understand what it means to be Black in America in the same way that Black parents can. Through the work of Sally Haslanger, I will show the ways in which the identity of White parents can shift, in very important and substantial ways, and through this shift, how said parents can come to gain a sophisticated understanding of the social and political realities of African Americans, and thus, meet the aforesaid developmental needs of their adopted Black children. The final goods I referred to in the last chapter were African American children feeling as though they physically, psychologically, and culturally belonged in their homes. While this will be cursorily addressed in this chapter——especially the good of culturally belonging——the question of how White parents provide for these goods will not be addressed until the next chapter. Thus, in this chapter, I will argue that adoptive White parents can provide these essential goods to their African American children.

The Agency of Racial Navigation

In his book, Ta-Nehisi Coates writes, "You can no more be black like I am black than I could be black like your grandfather was" (39). This statement, in many ways,

summarizes Fogg-Davis's argument about the agency of racial navigation, in his book, *The Ethics of Transracial Adoption*. As Fogg-Davis notes, the aforementioned issues relating to identity, which serve as a significant part of some of the moral arguments against transracial adoption, as established by the National Association of Black Social workers and other opponents of TRA, is grounded in the idea of 'Racial solidity'. According to Fogg-Davis, "racial solidity…[is] the idea that children should acquire a preset racial identity from parents who share their racial ascription…racial solidity succumbs to a static notion of racial self-understanding" (53). Fogg-Davis notes something important in his book, he acknowledges the importance of race as an existential starting point in American society (16). Race has always been a central staple of American political life, and there is a long historical record——one that continues to this day——of the oppression of Black people within American society. Thus, when a Black child is born, they are born into a race-conscious society, one with a historical and political precedent that is going to define how they are seen, treated, and their interaction with the world. This race-consciousness within the United States of America grounds the need for Black people to come to identify as Black in the weaker sense. If an individual does not understand that the colour of their skin will be regarded as Black, and some of the historical and contemporaneous implications of that, they would be unable to cope within America. It is important to realize, though, as I am sure Fogg-Davis will argue, how an African American child comes to understand what being Black in America means to them, and the ways that they ultimately go about navigating their racial identity is ultimately up to them, and not their parents. In this way, Fogg-Davis takes a radically different view on identity than the National Association of Black Social Workers.

The NABSW's statement argues that Black children belong in Black families because they do not believe that White parents are able to teach black children what it means to be Black with all of its historical, political, and social contexts, and some of the critical ways to cope with the racism that will result from presumptions about the colour of their skin in a society as racially conscious and as racially discriminatory as the United States of America. Fogg-Davis is highly critical of this claim. Fogg-Davis's criticism of this argument against transracial adoption is that it treats Black children as objects upon whom their parents have a responsibility to impose racial categories rather than as active subjects that have more control over their own identity. Fogg-Davis understands that while individuals cannot control their racial classifications, they can play an active part in navigating what being Black means to them in a society that imposes negative stereotypes on them based on the colour of their skin (14). He argues,

> There is a strong assumption that we get our racial identity, along with a slew of other physical, mental, and emotional features, from our parents. In this respect, families represent critical transfer points for racial meanings, as children learn to see their own racial self-identification as the natural product of a genetic family tie. The idea of flexible racial self-understanding, one that is responsive to racial categories, challenges the assumption that we ought to acquire a prepackaged racial identity from a family. Instead of getting race from a family, individuals should cultivate their own self-concepts through conversation with family members, biological and adoptive, as well as through less intimate dialogue with people outside of one's family (20).

Unlike the 1972 statement released by the National Association of Black Social Workers, Fogg-Davis wants to dispute the claim that one gets their racial identity from their family alone. He argues, "Racial categories provide individuals with existential points of departure but do not capture their moral character. Racial self-understanding should not be grounded in the passive acquisition of race from a family. Instead, racial navigation is a dynamic process that actively cultivates a personalized racial self-concept through

familial conversation, as well as through critical dialogue with others" (32). The familial conversation is not one that has to take place solely within one's biological and/or Black family, but one that can happen within one's adoptive family as well. But more importantly for Fogg-Davis, is the fact that these conversations do not only take place within one's family. It is an interaction that happens in one's immediate community–such as their school, church, and camp—and in less intimate settings outside of their immediate community—such as with strangers and at political forums.

Fogg-Davis's point is an important one, the significance of which must not be minimized. If Fogg-Davis is right, then the developmental needs of Black children, at least in relation to the development of a *healthy racial identity*, does not necessitate their placement in a Black family. Fogg-Davis is right to question the NABSW's conception of identity that seems to hinge on a simplistic idea of racial solidity. However, for someone whose notion of identity is heavily dependent on Appiah's formulation of identity, Fogg-Davis seems to miss some of Appiah's more subtle points about identity, that speak to a part of the worry that guides the 1972 statement that the NABSW espouses against transracial adoption. While our identities are ours to determine, we do not always have control over how other people perceive us, the presumptions that ground their perceptions, and the actions that result from said presumptions. Again, this is what grounds the need for Black people to—at the very minimum—come to identify as Black in the weaker sense, and the need for certain developmental needs to be met in order to address the material and social realities that are necessitated within a race conscious society, such as America. As such, one's racial identity—whether it is one that they adopt or not, and whether it is an identity that they see as central to themselves or not—comes

with certain normative and descriptive expectations (Appiah 92). The National Association of Black Social Workers makes the argument that these expectations and how African Americans go about navigating them can be found in the intergenerational lessons that Black parents pass down to their children, significant insights fundamental to their survival, one that the NABSW does not think that White parents can possess. Thus, while Fogg-Davis addresses and refutes a significant part of their opposition to transracial adoption, he misses this subtle point, one that I will now explore.

The Personal Dimension of Identity and The Collective Dimension of Identity

In his book, *The Ethics of Identity*, Appiah argues, "the idea of identity already has built into it a recognition of the complex interdependence of self-creation and sociability" (17). As Appiah argues, an argument that we also saw in Fogg-Davis's conception of identity,

> Beginning in infancy, it is in dialogue with other people's understanding of who I am that I develop a conception of my own identity. We come into the world 'mewling and puking in the nurse's arms…capable of human individuality but only if we have the chance to develop it in interaction with others. An identity is always articulated through concepts (and practices) made available to you by religion, society, school, and the state, mediated by family, peers, friends…As a result, individuality presupposes sociability (20).

In his essay, *Race, Culture, Identity,* and in his aforementioned book, Appiah makes a distinction between *The Personal Dimension of Identity* and *The Collective Dimension of Identity*. *The Personal Dimension Of Identity*, according to Appiah, is shaped by traits that are constituted within us (21). An example of traits that may be said to constitute a personal dimension of one's identity is intelligence, wittiness, and cleverness. Appiah goes on to argue, "throughout our lives part of the material that we are responding to in shaping our selves is not within us but outside us, out there in the social world" (21). *The*

Collective Dimension Of Identity is formed through our response to the aforesaid materials that exist outside of us. Collective identities "are the product of histories, and our engagement with them invokes capacities that are not under our control. Yet they are social not just because they involve others, but because they are constituted in part by socially transmitted conceptions of how a person of the identity properly behaves" (Appiah 21). Some examples of portions of our identities that constitute collective identities include one's sexuality, gender, religion, and for the purposes of our discussion in this project, one's race. There are other features that may constitute the collective portion of one's identity that do not have as much power over the person as the aforesaid person's sexuality, gender, race, nationality, ethnicity, or religion might have over said person, such as being a hairdresser, a philosopher, a butler, amongst other things (Appiah 65). Furthermore, I do not mean to suggest that the features of one's identity that are constituted within the personal and collective dimension act independently of one another. As intersectional feminists have suggested, all these features act in concert to form a completely different identity. For instance, I am Black and I am a Woman, and while I may belong to the Black community and the community that women have created for themselves, if I so choose, I also belong to a separate community of Black women, with its own distinct identity and struggles.

These collective dimensions of identity have been labeled as kinds of persons, and individuals draw on the 'kinds of persons' available to them within their society, when formulating their identity (Appiah 21). Appiah relies on Ian Hacking's conceptions and insights about kinds of persons, "which are brought into being by the creation of labels for them" (65). Of course, the collective dimension of one's identity is not monolithic,

and there is not one way that a Black person, a gay person, and/or a woman behaves, a point that goes to the heart of Fogg-Davis and Appiah's conception of identity. However, "there are ideas around…how gay, straight, black, white, male, or female people ought to conduct themselves. These notions provide loose norms or models, which play a role in shaping our plans of life. Collective identities, in short, provide what we might call scripts: narratives that people can use in shaping their projects and in telling their life stories" (Appiah 21-22). The personal dimension of identity has logical but not social categories, as people who share these identities do not constitute a social group, their lives do not depend on scripts, they cannot be properly called 'kinds of persons', and they are not dependent on labeling, as someone can be intelligent whether or not there is a label for intelligence (Appiah 23). Thus, for the personal dimension of one's identity, we create a label to capture and articulate a characteristic that exists independent of that label. However, as we will soon see, collective identities such as race, gender, and sexuality, amongst other forms of collective identity, depend on a social construction of said identity, one that only comes into existence after a label is created for it. Thus, we create a label for the collective dimension of one's identity not to capture or articulate characteristics that exist in the world independent of those labels, but to impose those characteristics on people that we assign these aforesaid collective identities to. It is this inevitable external imposition of characteristics on collective identities that lead people of different races to have different social and material developmental needs. This feature of collective identities also necessitates an understanding of this external imposition, and ways that one can go about navigating and coping with it. For the NABSW, this can only occur through the intergenerational lessons that are passed down in Black families.

Even within collective identities, as illustrated above, some might have more power over us than others. For instance, our racial identity might be said to have more power over us than our identity as a butler, though Fogg-Davis and Appiah allow for the flexibility to shape the parts of one's identity that said individual will like to take as central to themselves. I am not talking about someone coming to embody a strong racial identity, and thus, intentionally choosing to take their racial identity as a central part of their identity. However, due to certain features of various parts of one's collective identity, some of these identities may, unintentionally, come to be the central way that people orient themselves and their identities within society. This could, however, lead said persons to ultimately choose to, intentionally, make said collective identities a central part of their identity. As Appiah argues, the difference between one's racial identity, on one hand, and their identity as a butler, on the other hand, is that,

> The idea of the butler lacks the sorts of theoretical commitments that are trailed by many of our social identities: black and white, gay and straight, man and woman. So it makes no sense to ask of someone who is employed as a butler whether that is what he really is. Because we have expectations of the butler, it is a recognizable identity. Those expectations are, however, about the performance of the role; they depend on our assumption of intentional conformity to the expectations. But with other identities—and here the familiar collectives of race, ethnicity, gender, and the rest come back into view––the expectations we have are not based simply on the idea that those who have these identities are playing out a role. Rightly or wrongly, we do not think of the expectations we have of men or of women as being simply the result of the fact that there are conventions about how men and women behave. Once labels are applied to people, ideas about people who fit the label come to have social and psychological effects (66).

As Jonathan Inda notes, Judith Butler has already critiqued the idea of the gendered body as a pre-linguistic given, and has proposed that the gendered body is discursively constructed (74). As Appiah notes, we expect people of a certain race or gender to act in a certain way, not simply because we believe that they are conforming to a certain role, but because we believe they possess certain biological and natural antecedent properties

(79). However, both he and Butler dispute this claim. Through repetition and recitation, through citationality and iterability, Butler argues that the discourse that we produce on gender gains conventional authority (Inda 87). As such, in the end, even though we take gender to be this natural and biological fact that exists in the world, it is really just an expectation that the gendered body perform a role created and repeated through discourse. Following Butler's claims about gender, Inda argues that race also does not exist as a biological fact,[7] but as an effect of the discourse that society produces about race (88). In other words, what we take as racial essence is really just the expectation of racial performativity that constitutes the racial body (88). In the end, while the identity of the butler and that of race both constitute the performance of a role, Appiah's point is that, with respect to the former identity, we know, expect, and understand that the butler is intentionally conforming to a role. However, with respect to the latter, even though race is grounded in a socially constructed role, there isn't that awareness of an intentional conformity or intentional resistance to the roles we have created, but rather a belief that our discourse on racial identity constitutes the essence of that racial identity, a biological and natural truth. But, as Gutmann notes, group identities such as race and gender are historically contingent rather than biologically essential (174-175).

For Appiah, the collective dimension of identity has a tripartite structure. "First, it requires the availability of terms in public discourse that are used to pick out the bearers

[7] According to Appiah, Gutmann, and other influential race theorists, the idea of race as a biological truth, one that presupposes different human races, permeates our historical and political discourse. It has created expectations about the essence of Black people, how they are, how they act, and the moral value that ought to be accorded to them. However, this notion of race as a biological truth is one that has been criticized extensively. Race has come to be accepted for what it is, a social construction created to subjugate a whole class of people.

of the identity by way of criteria of ascription, so that some people are recognized as members of the group…The availability of these terms in public discourse requires both that it be mutually known amongst most members of the society that the labels exist and that there be some degree of consensus on how to identify those to whom they should be applied" (Appiah 66-67). The degree of consensus is usually organized around stereotypes about people within these groups, how they behave, and the beliefs that they hold, however true or false said stereotypes are. For African Americans, the consensus can be organized around something as immediate, inescapable, and physically present, as the colour of their skin, with extrapolations about the behavioral, intellectual, moral, and social implications of what the colour of their skin entails. Thus, African Americans need to understand that the colour of their skin connotes their racial identity, that in some sense, they will always be identified as Black. Of course, such social conceptions are not universally defined, and the stereotypes that people hold about other collective identities or even about people who share their collective identity may vary amongst different persons, communities, and group identities. The content of these identities are determined by the person who holds the identity, people who share their identity, dialogues that they have within society, but even by others who have not been asked to weigh in on what they take to be the social conception of said person's identity.

"A second element of a social identity is the internalization of those labels as parts of the individual identities of at least some of those who bear the label" (Appiah 68). By the internalization of those labels, Appiah means identification with the social identity and not necessarily a blind adoption of the stereotypes, whether positive, negative, or neutral, that accompanies said social identity. As Appiah argues, identification with a

social identity can shape your feelings—for example an African American responding with pride to the accomplishment of other African Americans—they can shape one's action so that someone who identifies as an African American can sometimes do something as an African American—such as show up to a *Black Lives Matter* protest in order to support their community—or said person, in this case an African American, may restrain their public conduct so as not to reflect badly on other African Americans or during interactions with the police, so as not to be seen as belligerent given their knowledge about the presumption of aggressiveness that some people within the American society attach to Black people (Appiah 68). This identification with the aforesaid social identity, which for purposes of this project is one's racial identity can take the form on an identification with being Black in the weak sense or in the strong sense, and an identification with Black culture. Of course, as I have reiterated, a healthy development of one's racial identity calls for—at the very minimum—an African American individual identifying as Black in the weak sense. However, the internalization of these labels and social identities could, very well, lead to identifying as Black in the strong sense and/or identifying with Black culture.

"The final element of a social identity is the existence of patterns of behavior towards Ls [assuming L is defined as a typical label for a group], such that Ls are sometimes treated as Ls…To treat someone as an L is to do something to her in part, at least, because she is an L" (Appiah 68). It is not the case that the ways in which certain social identities are treated as bearers of that identity are always negative or morally troublesome, but the treatment of said social groups that we usually focus on within public and social discourse is usually these aforesaid negative and morally troublesome

behaviors that act as a way to discriminate against certain social groups (Appiah 68-69). These treatments that people with certain collective social identities can expect, is what informs the second condition of identifying as Black in the weaker sense, which necessitates an understanding of the implications of these aforesaid treatments. Furthermore, trying to navigate these treatments, and figuring out ways to respond to and cope with them is what informs the developmental needs of African American children. As Appiah so aptly stated, race, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity as social identities have been profoundly and significantly shaped by racism, sexism, homophobia, and the ethnic prejudices that said groups face. People who adopt these collective identities usually do so as an oppositional response to these prejudices, as a way to create a culture that celebrates these social identities, and as a way to create a community of people and resources that offer support, solidarity, and ways to navigate these prejudices.

The question is, why is this distinction between the personal dimension of identity and the collective dimension of identity important, and what subtle points was Appiah making here that Fogg-Davis missed in his criticism of the National Association of Black Social Workers. What I hope has become clear from my philosophical exposition on collective identities—the focus of which is race—is that race is a social construction brought about through the labels that we create and assign to people within society, identities that are formed, in part, through self-identification, but that also gain power through the involuntary assignment of the label to other people, and in treating them as though they possess some antecedent properties that we have attached to the label. Appiah is very sympathetic to Fogg-Davis's conception of identity, in fact, as I stated above, Fogg-Davis's work is very much inspired by Appiah's work. Appiah believes that

individuals can choose how central their racial identification is to their identity as a whole, how they choose to organize their life around this racial identification, and whether they even want to adopt this racial identification in the first place (80). As Appiah notes, racial identity is not monolithic, there is not one way of being Black, and the notion that we can teach someone to be Black is underdeveloped and misinformed; as such, he wants us to avoid replacing the tyranny of racism with the tyranny of racial expectations (99). In a passage central to his view on identity, Appiah notes,

> In policing this imperialism of identity—an imperialism as visible in racial identities as anywhere else—it is crucial to remember always that we are not simply black or white or yellow or brown, gay or straight or bisexual, Jewish, Christian, Moslem, Buddhist, or Confucian but that we are also brothers and sisters; parents and children; liberal, conservatives, and leftists; teachers and lawyers and auto-makers and gardeners; fans of the Padres and the Bruins; amateurs of grunge rock and lovers of Wagner; movie buffs; MTV-holics; mystery-readers; surfers and singers; poets and pet-lovers; students and teachers; friends and lovers. Racial identity can be the basis of resistance to racism; but even as we struggle against racism—and though we have made great progress, we have further still to go–let us not let our racial identities subject us to new tyrannies (103-104).

So, he does share Fogg-Davis's views on identity to a certain extent. However, unlike Fogg-Davis, Appiah realizes that the internalization and identification that comes with collective identities, such as race, is not always voluntary.

As Appiah notes in his aforementioned essay, "I don't recall ever choosing to identify as a male; but being a male has shaped many of my plans and actions. In fact, where my ascriptive identity is one of which almost all my fellow citizens agree, I am likely to have little sense of choice about whether the identity is mine" (80). Following Appiah's line of reasoning, Gutmann further argues, "Colour consciousness…imposes on us a group identity, whether or not we appreciate the identity attributed to us. Whether I like it or not, regardless of what I think or do or who I am in some meaningful sense, I will be identified as white in this society. And other individuals will be identified as

Black…We can neither reflectively choose our colour identity or downplay its social significance simply by willing it to be unimportant" (168). This is something that the NABSW, Gutmann, and Appiah emphasize that Fogg-Davis seems to downplay—It is also something I emphasize by arguing that, at a minimum, the racial identity of Black people needs to comprise an identification as Black in the weaker sense. Appiah states that, "As I pointed out, racial identification is hard to resist in part because racial ascription by others is so insistent; and its effects—especially, but by no means exclusively, the racist ones—are so hard to escape" (82). As Appiah has argued, Fogg-Davis is right to afford people a significant degree of control over their own identity. But, as Appiah, Gutmann, and the NABSW have realized, no matter who we are or who we want to be, our racial identification is not always something that we can control, and as a matter of fact, the third part of the structure of one's collective identity is that they will be treated as though they hold that identity by others within society, whether they choose that identity for themselves or not. Thus, no matter how an African American child perceives themselves, they would be seen as Black in America, with all of its historical and contemporaneous implications—–whether positive, neutral, and negative. As a result of this phenomenon, there are certain *sociological behaviors*[8] that one must learn in order

[8] As Appiah notes, part of the collective dimension of identity depends on the imposition of stereotypes on the group identity and individuals within the group. With respect to the stereotypes imposed on African Americans, stereotypes that are somehow taken as essential to their race, these stereotypes have been historically negative and prejudicial. Given the physical immediacy and visibility of race, these stereotypes, racial experiences and micro-aggressions are inevitable and inescapable. According to Sue, Capodilupo, and Holder, in their article *Racial Microaggressions in the Life Experience of Black Americans*, these incidents of racism can be verbal, non-verbal or behavioral, and environmental, they have a lot to do with the perception of the person who the racial incident is directed towards, the subjects react to and interpret the racial incident and there are usually physical, psychological, political, and social consequences of these

to deal with and navigate the prejudicial stereotypes and institutional hurdles that their racial identification—voluntary or otherwise—will force them to face within the American society. The NABSW asserts that White parents cannot teach Black children said behaviors, they cannot provide for the resulting developmental needs of their Black children and they cannot help said children understand what it means to be Black in America. In this regard, Fogg-Davis's criticism falls short of answering their aforesaid contentions. Thus, while Fogg-Davis responds to parts of the NABSW's claims that seem to call for racial solidity, he does not provide an adequate response to collective identities, significant sociological behaviors that encompass tools for survival, and the socialization process that occurs within Black families, where these said sociological behaviors are taught. Thus, while the National Association of Black Social Workers is wrong to believe that racial identity can be taught or passed down to children, they are not wrong in their presupposition that a Black child's racial identification will necessitate the passing down of inter-generational lessons pertinent to their survival. The question

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racial incidents. According to Sue, Nadal, Lin, Torino, and Rivera, in their article, *Racial Microaggressions Against Black Americans: Implications for Counseling,* some of the racial micro-aggressions that Black Americans face are an assumption of intellectual inferiority, an assumption of second-class citizenship, an assumption of criminality, an assumption of inferior status, assumed universality of the Black American experience, assumed superiority of white cultural values and communication styles, amongst other prejudicial assumptions. Take the assumption of criminality that Black Americans are more likely to face, this inspires discussions in Black homes about how Black children ought to act when stopped by the police. The brutality and violence directed towards the Black community by the police and other public institutions as a result of this assumption is, in my mind, undeniable. Black Americans may choose not to base their identity on being Black, but they need to be aware that society will see them as Black and attach presumptions of some kind to their imposed racial identity. This awareness has inspired discussions within the Black community, and carefully honed sociologically behaviors passed down from one generation of the Black family and the Black community to the next, about how to navigate these racial incidents and the institutional discriminations that will arise as a result of this. This process of racial socialization is the subtle point that Fogg-Davis misses.

remains, whether an adoptive White family can serve this traditional role that Black families usually serve for Black children. However, before I answer this question, it is imperative that I briefly address another weakness in Fogg-Davis's argument.

The Vulnerability of Children

Apart from addressing racial identity without addressing racial socialization, Fogg-Davis also underestimates the vulnerability of children. In his book, Fogg-Davis argues, "Racial navigation should begin in childhood and is a response to the imposition of racial categories" (15). Black children are not immune to racism in America, and so from a young age they are going to have to start navigating their race, and racism, within their respective communities. However, many Black children are too young and unexposed to navigate racism by themselves. Thus, as the National Association of Black Social Workers has argued, their parents are going to play a very important role in this. Furthermore, as has been emphasized in this paper, Fogg-Davis has still not posited a positive argument that responds directly to whether White parents and White families who adopt Black children can act as adequate substitutes for the role of Black parents within Black families. Fogg-Davis argues, "even if children are not capable of self-determination in the fullest sense, they are nonetheless on the road to and thus in the process of fashioning their self-concepts. This seemingly obvious point–that children are potential adults–is routinely overlooked in the debate about the morality of transracial adoption, as both sides focus on initial placement decisions" (60).

It is hard to dispute his claim that children are potential adults who have the capacity for self-determination and will ultimately be able to wield this power to actively and adequately navigate their race in society. The crucial question becomes, what about

their childhood years when they are extremely vulnerable and susceptible to the racial categories imposed on them, and yet are largely influenced by these early childhood encounters even through to adulthood when they become capable of full self-determination and active navigation. In a more recent article, *The Political Geography of Whites Adopting Black Children in the United States*, Fogg-Davis concedes this very criticism. He states, "My earlier work [in reference to his book] overestimated the navigational agency of children. I bypassed, or moved too quickly over childhood, the time when we can no more racially navigate on our own than make other critical decisions tied to the acquisition of life experience, and the development of the brain's prefrontal cortex" (225). This is where the issue of racial socialization comes into play, with respect to their parents teaching them and helping them navigate the climate of racism in America; and slowly, overtime, allowing them to have a more active role in their own racial navigation, as they grow. While I fully agree with Fogg-Davis's treatment of children as active agents instead of passive receptacles, I also argue that Fogg-Davis has not fully addressed the issue that African American children need African American parents to help them through the racial socialization process in America. Since children ultimately become active navigators of their racial identity when they reach adulthood, they presumably will have the capacity to deal with racism. However, they need to be protected during their vulnerable years, and their parents are morally responsible for imparting to them the resources necessary to develop the resilience and capacity that will enable them to navigate racism in society, in order to meet their racial developmental needs, and with helping them develop a healthy racial identity and a positive conception of their racial self.

The Phenomenological Account on the Empathetic Extension of Body Awareness

The last few sections have left, unanswered, several questions, the most prominent of which is the question of whether African American children need African American parents to help them through the racial socialization process in America; a process by which they come to understand that they are Black, what that implies within America's historical and contemporaneous context, and through which their developmental needs are met, so that they come to gain highly sophisticated tools for dealing with racism. Haslanger directly addresses this question in her article, *You Mixed: Racial Identity without Racial Biology*. In the article, *The Unique Value Of Adoption*, Tina Rulli argues that during the process of adoption, a parent can "integrate an other into her own personal, partial perspective; [and] her own perspective and self conception can also be importantly altered" (125). In order to illustrate how this alteration of one's own perspective and self-conception can occur, she presents Haslanger's phenomenological argument on the empathetic extension of body awareness. Haslanger states,

> Begin with the body. Although adoptive parents do not have a biological connection to the bodies of their children, like most (at least female) parents, adoptive parents of infants are intimately involved in the physical being of their baby. Parents learn to read the needs and desires of the baby from cries, facial expressions, body language, and in some cases it is as if the patterns of the child's hunger and fatigue are programmed into your body. You know when to expect hunger; and when they are a little older, you know when to suggest that they use the potty or take a nap. In the case of older adoptees from other countries, the same may happen in the early phases of trying to parent across language barriers. This empathetic extension of body awareness, this attentiveness to the minute signals of another's body, does not in any metaphysically real sense make the other body part of your own. But taking on the needs and desires of another body as if your own, perhaps especially if the other's body is marked as different, alters your own body sense (278-279).

Haslanger argues that the bodily closeness shared between a parent and a child engenders an attuned awareness to the needs of the child. In this way, and overtime, White adoptive

parents of Black children can even come to inhabit the body of their child, and by extension, can become more attuned to their experiences, the oppression, and the micro-aggressions that their Black child will be forced to face within society. Haslanger argues that said parents can find several changes in their physical presence, feeling more comfortable around African Americans; the parent's conception of beauty may change, disrupting the 'aesthetics of racism' which sees White bodies as more beautiful and desirable than Black bodies; the adoptive parents may, sometimes, become drawn to the 'cultural rituals concerning the body' of the race of their child through the caring of Black hair and skin, important staples of 'Black culture' in America; and one's sense of community may drastically change, feeling more comfortable in racially diverse communities that are predominantly Black than they feel in predominantly White communities; they are also more aware of the 'social and material realities' of the race of their child (Haslanger 279-282). If this were indeed the case, it would seem that the NABSW is wrong to insist that only Black parents can attend to the social and material needs of their child; White adoptive parents seem to possess this capacity as well.

Haslanger argues that the racial identity of White parents who adopt Black children is altered through their experience of parenting their child. This is referred to as a transracial identity or a mixed race identity.[9] She states,

> There is at least one sense of identity in which my racial identity has changed tremendously through the experience of parenting Black children. It would be wrong, I think, to say that I am Black, or that I see myself as Black, or that I intend sometimes to act "as a Black person"; I don't even think it is correct to say in a much weaker sense that I have a Black identity. But I do think that my map for navigating the social and material

[9] This description of a mixed race identity ought to be distinguished from a biracial identity where a person has biological parents from two different races, or from people who are referred to as mixed race because they have biological parents with two or more racial identities.

realities of race has adjusted so that I'm now navigating much more often as if my social and material realities are determined as being "marked" as of African descent. As I've emphasized, I am not marked as of African descent. But as a parent of children who are, my day-to-day life is filled with their physical being and social reality, and by extension, the reality of their extended family and their racial community. And their realities have in an important sense become mine (Haslanger 285).

This description of transracial identity by Haslanger is one that is informed by her experiences with raising two adopted Black children. There is a certain way in which Black people have to navigate their race and the accompanying racism within society.[10] This point is the crux of the claim that grounds the arguments made by the National Association of Black Social Workers in 1972. Conversely, it stands to reason that White people—given the radically different history that they have experienced in America—navigate the world in a different way. Haslanger wants to argue that when White parents adopt Black children, the bodily closeness that engenders a heightened awareness of the needs of the child, both material and social, can allow them to develop a transracial identity, one that will enable them to navigate the world, not simply as their own race but also as the race that their child embodies. Thus, a transracial identity is a heightened state of awareness, wherein anyone who possesses said identity——in this case, we are concerned with White adoptive parents of Black children——develops a highly attuned way of seeing, navigating, and responding to the world, not just simply as someone who embodies their race from birth, but as someone with a highly sophisticated understanding of the experiences of another race. For instance, a parent who does not have a transracial identity might see an individual touching their Black child's hair without the child's

[10] By society, it is always important to remember that I am only talking about the United States of America. The meaning and significance of my claims will, of course, change when contextualized within a different society, with a different history towards Black people.

permission and think nothing of it. But, a parent with a transracial identity will observe this same incident, and see it for what it is, a racial micro-aggression that seeks to highlight and marginalize their child's difference, in a way that is uncomfortable and prejudicial in its mannerisms.[11] There is never going to be a distinct metaphysical moment wherein one can say that they have gone from someone who does not possess a transracial identity to someone who does possess a transracial identity. Rather, over time, through self-education and the experiences of their children, a White adoptive parent will come to see that they navigate the world in a different way, that they now have access to a sophisticated mode of understanding with respect to the Black experience in America. In fact, they will be able to make observations about the different ways in which they viewed the experiences of African Americans within society both before and after the development of a transracial identity. A White parent who develops a transracial identity and comes to possess a sophisticated understanding of the myriad historical and contemporary ways in which African Americans are treated within the American society and the ways in which the Black body inevitably comes into contact with individual and institutional instances of racism within the American society can then, presumably, teach their children about the aforesaid historical and contemporary experiences that Black people face in America, that the aforesaid negative experiences do not speak to the substance of their racial identity, and some of the coping skills necessary to deal with and navigate these experiences within society.

[11] I certainly don't mean to suggest that only people who have developed a transracial identity will be able to make this observation. This is just one example, in a series of examples and observations, that highlights the ways in which their views of society and the African American experience within said society is importantly altered as a result of the development of a transracial identity.

While analyzing Haslanger's argument on the development of a transracial identity, there are some immediate problems that stand out, which need to be addressed. Firstly, Haslanger's argument seems to rest on the claim that the bodily closeness that a parent shares with a child will make them more attuned to the material needs and social realities of the child. However, I think that Haslanger overestimates the power of the phenomenon of body closeness and the body awareness and empathy that accompanies said phenomenon, especially with respect to understanding what she calls the social realities and needs of the child. Sure enough, it is easy to state that a parent comes to understand the material needs of one's child. The parent is readily aware, through caring for the child, when the child is hungry, when the child has to sleep, when you have to change the child's diapers, amongst other things. It is even logical to extend this to the emotional needs of the child, such as when the child is happy or sad, and exactly what this entails, for both the child, and how the parent can respond to the child. However, the social realities and needs of a child are quite different, especially when the parent is White and the child is Black and they live in a society as racialized as America.

The Black experience is not monolithic and it is very important to understand this point in that context. However, there is a certain way in which a Black person navigates race in America, uniquely different from how White people navigate race in the country. There are countless racial encounters and micro-aggressions that they have to deal with. If they have Black parents, then presumably their parents will be very aware of these racial encounters and micro-aggressions and they can teach them certain ways to cope with racism in their society. However, even when a White parent is highly aware of their child's needs and body, it is not always the case that they will understand what they

observe. For example, there was an episode of the television show, *Scandal,* which addresses an instance of this particular issue. In the episode, the media was targeting Olivia Pope, a Black woman, and it allowed the show to explore the concept of *Dog Whistle Politics.* As was explained in the show, Dog Whistle politics "is bigotry—[for the purposes of this example and this paper, prejudice in the form of racism]—in the form of a language, so coded, that only the person it is targeting is insulted by it, like a dog whistle" (Mark Fish *Scandal*). So, when a Black child comes face to face with coded racism of this form, one that is very prevalent in contemporary American society, many White people, and people of other races might miss it. For instance, Olivia Pope was described as lucky, sassy, ambitious, well-spoken, well-mannered, articulate, shrill, calculating, overconfident, secretive, urban, hot-blooded, known to use thug politics, arrogant. According to one of the characters, "words like this mean nothing to the general public…but when women of colour…hear that kind of coded language, they know exactly what you are getting at" (Mark Fish *Scandal*). These are individual instances of micro-aggressions that have larger institutional implications in the lives of Black Americans, especially when having to navigate these myriad presumptions about their disposition, within society.

So, as I have hopefully illustrated, there are certain situations that are obviously racist to Black people but it isn't always so obvious to White people. So, the parents may be aware of their child's experiences, but they may not always be aware of whether the child is experiencing racism. As such, body closeness and awareness does not always result in an understanding of the unique social realities that one's child experiences. Thus, you may be close to your child and this closeness might change what you see, but it

will not necessarily change how you see it. Furthermore, even if the parent is able to observe and understand the unique racial experiences that their child has to face, it does not necessarily follow that they would be able to understand how to cope with or navigate those experiences. And, this is not a skill or knowledge that one will be able to gain from bodily closeness alone. The further limitation is that the adoptive White parent, even with a transracial identity, can escape the social coding any time they are alone in a social environment. As stated above, race is a collective identity, and part of the reason why this is the case, is because of the external imposition of racial identities on individuals. Whether they like it or not, Black people will always be seen as Black, and they do not have any control over this external imposition of a racial identity, the assumptions that people attach to this externally imposed racial identity, and the varied ways that they are treated because of said racial identity. This inevitable external identification that comes with a collective identity, such as race, is what informs a deeper understanding of our race, and how to navigate said race within society. However, the adoptive White parent is White, they will always be seen as White, and they will be treated as though they are White, even if they come to possess a transracial identity. Thus, their transracial identity constitutes a personal rather than a collective identity, as it is a response to materials within—rather than external—to them. This means that while they may possess a transracial identity, they have the privilege of being seen as White. As such, they are not personally exposed to the external experiences that Black people are exposed to on a daily basis, one that informs how they understand and navigate their race within society. This singular privilege may inhibit the adoptive White parent from coming to possess a fully heightened understanding of the Black racial identity and the Black experience, and

the ways in which their children can navigate these experiences. Consequently, they may be unable to fully meet the developmental needs of their child.

A second problem with Haslanger's argument, one that she actually notes in her paper, is that the development of a transracial identity is not uni-directional. If parents can map onto the experiences of their children, it follows that there is a possibility of the Black children mapping onto the experiences of their White parents, navigating some of their social realities with reference to the way a White person navigates their social realities in America. Recall the previously mentioned example of Goller-Sojourner, the transracial adoptee that was afraid of Black people and Black culture, imposing negative stereotypes on black people without himself knowing that he was black or understanding why people saw him as Black. However anecdotal his case may seem, it does illustrate a larger point, which is that, the transracial identity that Black children develop can be epistemically confusing. In some cases, their identity may not be transracial; so much as it is one that embodies a lack of awareness of their race and the societal implications that arise out of this. The question becomes, does the possibility that the adopted Black child will map onto the racial identity of their White parents present a problem in itself, and is this a basis, then, for ethically opposing transracial adoption.

Haslanger certainly doesn't think so. Firstly, she argues that there is no such thing as a pure Black identity, a point that Fogg-Davis argues for. There are many Black people who could presumably develop this mixed racial identity such as middle-class Black people living in predominantly White neighborhoods—indeed, this is the basis of the show Black*ish,* and the reason that the protagonist believes that his children are losing touch with Black culture——and biracial children who have one White biological parent

could also develop a transracial identity and map onto the experiences of their White biological parent. This identity does not necessarily preclude the child from developing a healthy racial identity nor does it prevent them from being able to adequately recognize, navigate, and cope with racism in America.[12] Secondly, Haslanger argues, race is not the sole way in which individuals, families, and communities are organized, or at the very least, should be organized. While she recognizes the profound importance that race can have in communities, she argues that there are other values around which one can organize their life. As has been stated multiple times in this project, racial identity is not monolithic, and the expression of a transracial identity compounded with other values, or an identity that goes on to reinforce the complexity of race might be an important way of disrupting powerful racial hierarchies that depend on the representation of simplistic stereotypes about the Black identity. Thus, as long as the children, unlike Goller-Sojourner, are aware that they are Black and the social implications of this in America, then developing a transracial identity is not inherently dangerous. I agree with Haslanger on this point. The truth is, as I hope has become abundantly clear from this project, identity is much too complex to dictate. It is true, as has been previously stated, that Black children adopted by White parents are less likely to have a strong racial identity—as previously defined. However, there is no guarantee—although it is certainly more likely—that a Black child growing up in a Black home will develop a strong racial identity. My point is that, it does not do anyone any good to regulate an individual's identity or define what is allowable for certain people. But, their adoptive White parents

[12] Of course, there are certain moral responsibilities that parents must undertake in order to ensure this. These said moral responsibilities would be discussed in chapter three of this project.

do have a responsibility to impart to them some awareness that their skin colour holds important implications for how they will be treated within society, and some of the ways to navigate these prejudices. Beyond that, there is nothing inherently bad about a Black child developing a transracial identity. In fact, if their parents carry out their moral responsibilities well, it will expand the child's world view and empathy, by allowing them access to the experiences of both White and Black people.

In his article, *Real Brothers, Real Sisters: Learning From the White Siblings of Transracial Adoptees,* John Raible presents his research on the non-adopted white siblings of adopted Black Children. Through his research, Raible found that a majority of the non-adopted white siblings of adopted black children did not achieve this transracial identity. He reports, "an important observation (although hardly surprising) was that the majority of the non-adopted siblings interviewed did not seem overly concerned about anti-racist struggles or invested in understanding diversity issues" (95). However, his report found that most non-adopted white siblings showed affection for and compassion towards their adopted black sibling (95). Only very few non-adopted white siblings in his research came to show an "unusually sophisticated understanding of racial and cultural issues" and came to express a transracial identity (96). I am, in no way, positing that the relationship between siblings and parents is sufficiently similar or analogous. However, I am positing that, even though parents' awareness of their child's body is more attuned than is the case of siblings' awareness of their brother or sisters' body, the ways in which siblings fail to attain a transracial identity in Raible's research may also represent many of the ways that most parents fail to attain this mixed identity in Haslanger's account as well. Thus, White adoptive parents of Black children can learn a lot from Raible's

research. In fact, Raible's research findings were reinforced by Darron Terry Smith and Brenda Juarez in their more recently published article, *Race Lessons in Black and White: How White Adoptive Parents Socialize Black Adoptees in Predominantly White communities.*[13] Their findings indicated that a majority of White adoptive parents will never develop this transracial identity and will never develop the sophisticated understanding of racism that will enable them to impart lessons and resources to their children, one that will enable them develop healthy racial identities, and the techniques necessary to cope with racism in society.

The question ultimately becomes, whether Raible, Smith, and Juarez's findings discredit Haslanger's larger point about the morality of transracial adoption. What Raible's findings showed was that the siblings that went on to achieve the transracial identity went out of their way to research and learn about racism in America, they went on to forge relationships with Black people outside of their family, they forged long-term relationships with people of colour in their schools, churches, and youth groups, and through these means they came to "develop more nuanced and sophisticated understandings of the dynamics of race in our society, and a deeper appreciation for struggles against racism, both in history and in the lives of their adopted siblings, and ultimately in their own lives" (Raible 95). Thus, even though Raible's research complicates Haslager's seemingly idealized picture of mixed racial identities, it shows that white adoptive parents can achieve a transracial identity if they take the extra steps that the non-adopted white siblings who possessed a transracial identity took. In fact, this

[13] In this article, Darron Terry Smith and Brenda Juarez talk about some of the ways in which White parents in pre-dominantly White communities poorly socialize their Black kids. Some of their arguments will figure into the moral responsibilities that said parents ultimately have to their children, as will be enumerated in chapter three of this project.

paper posits that the adoptive White parents of adopted Black children have a moral responsibility to take these extra steps and aspire towards the development of a transracial identity. Haslanger, who is the mother of two adopted Black children, took these aforementioned extra steps. Haslanger and her family moved to a Black neighborhood, they sent their children to integrated schools, they went to Black churches and Black hair salons, their family opened their homes to many Black friends and extended family, and in fact, Haslanger also opted for an open adoption so that she and her kids can have access to their Black biological family, in order to help teach them about what being Black entails in their society. In this way, Haslanager argues, "it is almost certain that they [her children] will have resources for developing strong and healthy Black identities" (288). Thus, Haslanger was, in a way, always aware that her bodily closeness to and her love for her children, however strong, was not enough. If she was to attain a transracial identity, and raise children who developed healthy identities and were equipped with the resources necessary to navigate their race and racism within society, she had a moral responsibility to take extra steps, to educate herself, and to open her children up to a community whose resources are necessary for their survival. Haslanger's conception of a transracial identity, while not easy to attain, does allow for the possibility that White adoptive parents gain and continue to develop a sophisticated enough understanding of racism within American society, lessons that they can teach their children, thus fulfilling the traditional role of the Black family. White parents who take these extra steps will provide the environment necessary for their child to understand that they are Black with all of its historical and contemporaneous implications; this will enable their children to come to identify as Black, at least in the weaker sense. The child

may even come to develop a strong racial identity and identify strongly with Black culture. Furthermore, said parents would be able to help foster a positive racial identity in their children and help provide for their children's developmental needs by teaching them ways to cope with and navigate their race within society; in this way, their child will undergo a healthy development of their racial self. By combining the force of Fogg-Davis's and Haslanger's moral arguments, together with Appiah's philosophical deliberations on the implications of collective identities within society, I hope that I have been able to sufficiently answer the NABSW's—and other opponents—arguments against transracial adoption, arguments that are grounded in issues of identity and issues relating to the racial socialization of Black children, respectively.

The Lexical Priority of Black Homes Over White Homes for Transracial Adoptees

I am very sympathetic to the arguments that the National Association of Black Social Workers levied against transracial adoption. The NABSW was able to frame the traditional role of Black families in America given the historical and contemporary realities of racism in the country. The NABSW goes on to argue that White adoptive parents cannot act as a suitable replacement to the Black family for Black children because they will be unable to carry out these traditional roles. This is where the NABSW and I disagree. I hope what has become clear is that I do believe that a White family is able to act as a suitable replacement for a Black family—in chapter three, I am going to enumerate certain moral responsibilities that I believe adoptive White parents have towards Black children, responsibilities that when carried out, will enable them to answer many of the criticisms that the NABSW has against transracial adoption. White adoptive families can provide the goods—as mentioned in Chapter one—that their children need.

However—and I see this a lot in the literature on transracial adoption—many proponents of transracial adoption still believe that a White adoptive family should be a last resort. They argue that while there is nothing morally problematic with transracial adoption, and while White families can act as a suitable replacement for Black families, when a Black child is put up for adoption, precedence must be given to a Black adoptive family. Morrison—whose work we have referred to several times in this project, and who has a Black adoptive brother—states, "I have strong personal beliefs regarding TRA. I believe that the advantages of TRA far outweigh the disadvantages. While I do not believe that TRA should be favored over same-race adoptions, I also do not think TRA should be discouraged" (165). Myriam Zreczny, another proponent of transracial adoption, argues that "same-race parenting would likely be optimal from a social and psychological standpoint…Most people would concede that an African-American family is inherently better equipped to preserve an African-American child's heritage" (1122-1124). These kinds of arguments can be found all over the literature on transracial adoption. However, the argument always stops there, there is never any further philosophical deliberation on the issue. It is simply taken as self-evident to many proponents of transracial adoption that Black children should always go to Black families, and should only go to White families as a last resort.[14] However, this point is

[14] Many proponents of transracial adoption see White families as a practical necessity rather than as the morally ideal or the morally optimal option. This is due to the high number of Black children in the foster care system, the almost universal acceptance that adoption is a preferable option to foster care, and the belief that there are not as many prospective Black adoptive families to meet the sheer number of Black children waiting to be adopted. Although we should remember from the previous chapter the reasons why said amount of Black children exist in the foster care system and the ways in which the standards set out by the adoptive system necessarily exclude many Black families looking

not self-evident to me, and so I thought it would be helpful to, very briefly, explore this issue a bit more.

As I have stated previously in this section, I believe that a White adoptive family can act as a suitable replacement to a Black family, and that said family can meet the material, social, and political needs that have traditionally—and for good reason—defined the duties that Black families have towards their Black children. The question becomes whether there is something distinctively different about Black families and White families, regardless of the aforesaid point, that necessitates prioritizing a Black family over a White family. It is not clear to me that there is. If they can both meet the distinct needs of Black children within American society, then there does not appear to be a good moral reason for the prioritization.[15] There is one distinction that I see between a prospective Black adoptive family and a prospective White adoptive family and that is, while both can potentially, suitably, provide for the social and material needs of Black children, the Black family will have many of these needs ingrained in them through the intergenerational lessons that were passed on to them, while a White family will have to educate themselves on the many social and political needs of Black children in America, and how to meet said needs. Of course, there are no set lessons on the racial needs of Black children in America that Black people just possess, and these needs always change

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to adopt. But, even in an ideal system, it is conceivable that transracial adoption will still be this practical necessity that many proponents of transracial adoption perceive it to be.

[15] The argument cannot be one that acts solely to preserve racial homogeneity within the family because this borders on a segregationist argument that cannot be philosophically defended. It also ignores the rapidly shifting conceptions of a family, wherein many families within contemporary American society are not racially homogeneous. My point is that we cannot preserve racial homogeneity for its own sake. We can only argue for a prioritization of Black adoptive families over White adoptive ones when there is a relevant moral and philosophical distinction between these families that can be sufficiently articulated.

as society changes. However, unlike White people—even White people with an understanding of the historical and social issues plaguing the Black community—Black people may be better able to understand the contexts of the many social needs of Black people, how to address these issues, and thus, by extension, impart their adoptive Black children with the skills necessary to address these issues.

White parents can meet the material, social, and political needs of Black children, and as I will argue in Chapter three, they have a moral responsibility to meet these distinct needs. However, there is no way to enforce one's moral duties or to screen out people who are more likely to enforce these duties than others—and if there is, then I am not aware of them. Thus, there is no guarantee that White adoptive parents will perform their moral duties towards their adoptive Black children, or take the steps necessary to attain a transracial identity, or at the very least, a heightened enough understanding of the racial realities within America to fulfill their moral obligations to their child. While it is by no means clear that a Black adoptive family will meet their moral obligations to their Black children, at least with respect to meeting these material, social, and political needs, two things separate them from prospective White adoptive parents. Firstly, it is more likely that they will have been raised in a family where they were taught about the racial realities in America and how to cope with said realities, and by extension, it is more likely that they will raise their adoptive Black child in the same way. Secondly, while White adoptive parents will have to go out of their way to learn about the racial realities of Black people in America, Black people will already be aware of some of these racial realities through the intergenerational lessons that their families passed on to them and, undoubtedly, through personal experience. Consequently, we can be confident that they

already possess some of the basic knowledge necessary to raising their Black children in a morally permissible way, whether or not they eventually do so.

The question becomes whether these differences are a good enough reason, morally speaking, to prioritize prospective Black adoptive families over prospective White adoptive families where Black children are concerned—and, to only go to White adoptive families as a last resort. The truth is, I don't know, and I do not want to give a definite answer just for the sake of the semblance of some resolution. I can certainly understand why someone might take this to be a good enough reason for said prioritization. I think that it is important for social workers to educate adoptive White parents on their duties towards their Black children, and to urge them towards the path of meeting these moral duties. However, beyond my articulation of this philosophical distinction, I am uncertain as to whether these distinctions morally necessitate the aforementioned lexical prioritization, I leave it up to the readers to decide.[16]

[16] There are also interesting questions beyond the moral prioritization of Black families over White families, and that is whether these prioritizations—if we assume that they are morally sound—are legally and constitutionally acceptable in American society. Myriam Zreczny attempts to address these questions in her article, *Race-Conscious Child Placement: Deviating from a Policy against Racial Classification*. This is a question worth thinking about, especially for legal scholars, but it is not one that I will be addressing in this project. It is far too complex, and it is arguably a chapter of its own—if not an entire thesis.

Chapter Three

Parental Moral Responsibilities

In this chapter, I want to argue that White adoptive parents of Black children have some moral responsibilities towards their children——obligations that I believe will answer many of the worries that the National Association of Black Social Workers posit as being inherent to transracial adoption arrangements. I am going to frame these moral responsibilities within the larger context of the moral responsibilities that all parents have towards their children. Thus, in this chapter, I will explore some of the moral responsibilities that parents have towards their children. Furthermore, I will argue that given these general parental moral responsibilities, all adoptive parents have specific and distinct moral obligations that stem from these general parental responsibilities, in order to ensure that they meet said parental moral obligations. Finally, I will argue that given the general parental moral responsibilities that all parents have and the distinct moral responsibilities that adoptive parents have, White adoptive parents who adopt trans-racially have further moral obligations to their Black children, obligations that are responsive to the critiques laid out by the NABSW, and that ensure that said adoptive parents are meeting the moral obligations that parents have towards their children.

It will be impossible to explore all of the moral responsibilities that parents have towards their children——that would constitute a whole thesis project. I would like to explore some of these parental responsibilities though, those which seem to revolve around vulnerability, protection from harm, and raising children who will go on to be autonomous——and hopefully resilient— individuals. I want to begin this section by reiterating the taxonomy of vulnerability set out by Catriona Mackenzie, Wendy Rogers,

and Susan Dodds, in their article *What Is Vulnerability, and Why Does It Matter for Moral Theory*. In their article, they "propose a taxonomy of three different sources of vulnerability (i.e., inherent, situational, and pathogenic) and two different states of vulnerability (i.e., dispositional and occurrent)" (7).

For Mackenzie, Rogers, and Dodds, "inherent vulnerability refers to sources of vulnerability that are intrinsic to the human condition. These vulnerabilities arise from our corporeality, our neediness, our dependence on others, and our affective and social natures" (7). Inherent vulnerability is a source of vulnerability that is present in each and every one of us by virtue of our corporeality. However, inherent vulnerability is exacerbated by a range of factors such as health status, resilience, and for the purposes of our discussion, extremes of age. While we are all inherently vulnerable, children—and the elderly—are more vulnerable than most by virtue of their age. This exacerbated inherent vulnerability in children gives rise to certain moral responsibilities that their parents have, to respond to their vulnerability, and to provide added protection for.

For Mackenzie, Rogers, and Dodds, "a second source of vulnerability is situational, by which we mean vulnerability that is context specific. This may be caused or exacerbated by the personal, social, political, economic, or environmental situations of individuals or social groups. Situational vulnerability may be short term, intermittent, or enduring" (7). An example that the authors give is the case of a natural disaster—–an environmental factor—and how said natural disaster creates a situational vulnerability for those affected. However, if the natural disaster affects an affluent individual in a relatively affluent country who has various social nets such as home insurance, strong infrastructure, and good governance, then their situational vulnerability may be short

term or intermittent. This stands in contrast with a poor family in a relatively poor country, wherein the situational vulnerability in relation to being affected by the natural disaster is sure to be enduring. It is important to note that this idea of situational vulnerability is one that the National Association of Black Social Workers picks up on. Black children in the United States of America are inherently vulnerable in the way that all children are, but they are also situationally vulnerable in the sense that the social and political climate of America exacerbates their vulnerability due to the colour of their skin. As a result of the climate of racism that exists in the country, Black children are also vulnerable in a different way than White children, and while the NABSW does not doubt that White parents are able to respond to the inherent vulnerabilities of their Black children, they do not think said parents will be able to respond to the situational vulnerabilities of their children in morally appropriate ways. Thus, this situational vulnerability that Black children experience will give rise to separate moral responsibilities. Mackenzie, Rogers, and Dodds believe that inherent and situational vulnerabilities are conceptually but not, necessarily, categorically distinct, as they each feed on one another and influence one another in important ways.

The authors' "taxonomy identifies a subset of situational vulnerabilities that are particularly ethically troubling, which we refer to as pathogenic vulnerabilities. These may be generated by a variety of sources, including morally dysfunctional or abusive interpersonal and social relationships and sociopolitical oppression or injustice. Pathogenic vulnerabilities may also arise when a response intended to ameliorate vulnerability has the paradoxical effect of exacerbating existing vulnerabilities or generating new ones" (Mackenzie, Rogers, and Dodds 9). For example, children who are

abused or neglected by their parents experience pathogenic vulnerability. I will even go so far as to say that when White parents in America—knowingly or unknowingly—neglect the special moral responsibilities that they have towards their Black children, then that relationship ought to be categorized as a morally dysfunctional one, and as such, the aforesaid Black children may be said to experience a form of pathogenic vulnerability.

For Mackenzie, Rogers, and Dodds, "both inherent and situational vulnerability[17] may be dispositional or occurrent. While the inherent–situational distinction refers to sources of vulnerability, the dispositional–occurrent distinction refers to states of potential versus actual vulnerability…The dispositional–occurrent distinction serves to distinguish vulnerabilities that are not yet or not likely to become sources of harm from those that require immediate action to limit harm" (8). The example that the authors give to clarify this distinction is the idea that all women of childbearing age experience dispositional vulnerability with respect to complications that may occur during childbirth. However, whether or not the women are occurrently vulnerable to complications that may occur during childbirth depends on whether they are actually pregnant and "on a range of factors, both inherent and situational, such as her physical health, medical history, socioeconomic status, geographical location, access to health care, and cultural norms relating to pregnancy and childbirth" (Mackenzie, Rogers, and Dodds 8). Children are occurrently vulnerable in the sense that their age exacerbates their inherent vulnerability and this serves as an actual source of vulnerability that requires immediate action from their parents. However, children are also exposed to certain dispositional vulnerabilities by virtue of their inherent vulnerability, such as the potential to be

[17] Pathogenic vulnerability may also be dispositional or occurrent, though the authors did not include it in their direct quote

exploited or preyed on. Based on all of the discussions that I have had in this paper, this goes without saying, but I will say it anyway; the dispositional and occurrent vulnerabilities that Black children in America are more susceptible to are different than those of White children in America, and this will also give rise to certain moral responsibilities from their biological and adoptive parents alike.

I hope that it has become clear that I believe that the occurrent and dispositional inherent vulnerabilities that children experience, vulnerabilities which are exacerbated by their age and increase their susceptibility to harm, generate significant moral obligations on the part of their parents to protect them from said harm. According to Mianna Lotz, in her article *Parental Values and Children's Vulnerability*, the vulnerability of children stems from their dependence on their care givers for material sustenance, which she terms *Dependency For Survival* (244). A parent's first, their most immediate, and their most important moral responsibility is to provide their children with the means for material sustenance. According to Lotz, children's vulnerability also stems from their *Dependency For Flourishing* (244). Children do not simply need to survive, they need to flourish; children ought to be provided with the emotional, psychological, and moral support necessary to ensure that they live autonomous lives—to the best of their abilities——and that they have the resources, the resilience, and the capacity to address and temper their dependencies and vulnerabilities, as they grow older, and become adults. Children have the right to an open future——anticipatory autonomy rights——and their parents have a very strong moral obligation to preserve this open future and to provide the resources necessary for their children to flourish and to become morally, socially, and politically autonomous individuals within society (Lotz 253).

There are many ways in which parents can go about providing the resources necessary for their children to flourish and to become autonomous individuals. I am not going to go through all or even most of them because that is not the focus of this thesis. However, the one argument that I want to address is Lotz's argument of children's acquisition of values from their parents and the ways in which this can promote and inhibit autonomy. According to Lotz,

> The acquisition of values is widely recognized to be integral to the development of autonomy and self-governance as well as to identity formation, integrity, and moral agency. A person's values both inform and express her conception of the good. Tightly bound up with beliefs and desires, values guide actions via the mechanism of (more or less) reflective self-control. To the extent that we identify with and endorse our value-based reasons and can bring about action in line with those reasons, we are self-governing and reasons-responsive agents—we are, in other words, autonomous. The acquisition of values is in this way necessary for autonomy and moral agency (246).

The first and most important source for the acquisition of values, on the part of children, is through their parents. According to Lotz, parental value inculcation is an important parent-centered good. She argues that there are certain *goods* that parents achieve through value inculcation that also demand prima facie protection. Firstly, P*rivacy Goods* protect a parents' 'right' to pass on their values to their children in the sense that it illustrates "a protected realm of parental educational authority" (Lotz 252). Secondly, A*ttachment Goods* also protect a parents' 'right' to pass on their values to their children in the sense that "the possession of shared values bonds people together, creating solidarity and thereby aiding the development of empathic engagement. Thus, intimacy is enhanced" (Lotz 257). Thirdly, *Realization Goods* protect a parents' 'right' to pass on their values to their children in the sense that it "is the good of being able to pursue one's own conception of the good life—one's own freely chosen 'experiment in living'—not just within the purely self-regarding sphere of one's life but also, and perhaps especially,

within one's own family" (Lotz 258). Finally, *Integrity Goods* protects a parents' 'right' to pass on their values to the extent that

> An agent's inability to act in a way consistent with and expressive of her values poses a potentially significant threat to her integrity. It might be objected, accordingly, that in an activity as normatively laden as parenting, any requirement that we restrain ourselves from actively and wholeheartedly conveying our substantive commitments has considerable potential to threaten our sense of integrity, our sense of wholehearted commitment to our values, and our experience of what we might term moral and psychological unity…Indeed, asking parents to temper their explicit, wholehearted, and unqualified endorsement of their substantive values in raising their children, even while we allow them full expression of those in their interactions with other adults, may well necessitate a level of detachment or predispose a parent to a kind of moral schizophrenia or alienation (Lotz 258-259).

Thus, there are important privacy goods, attachment goods, realization goods, and integrity goods that protect a parents' 'right' to pass on their values to their children. Furthermore, parents have a moral responsibility to protect their children's right to an open future and to ensure that they become autonomous individuals, and as Lotz states, the acquisition of values is a necessary part of the development of one's autonomy.

However, Lotz argues that value inculcation must have a moral limit to the extent that certain forms of value inculcation may be inimical to the development of a child's autonomy. When referring to values that parents may need to refrain from passing on to their children, she is referring to S*ubstantive Values*, which are political, moral, religious, or metaphysical normative commitments that are not susceptible to varying interpretations within competing systems (Lotz 244-245). Some examples of substantive values might be 'All Muslims are terrorists', 'Black people are inferior to white people', or 'Women are inferior to men'. These values are strictly defined and are, seemingly, not open to interpretation. According to Lotz, these substantive values must be distinguished from *Thin Evaluative Judgments*. Thin evaluative judgments, such as 'Causing harm is

bad' or 'We should punish all evildoings" are normative commitments that "are sufficiently indeterminate to be neutral between competing value systems, requiring as they do further content specification by reference to more substantive accounts (e.g., of what counts as harm, under which circumstances a harm is unnecessary, and what constitutes evil)" (Lotz 245). For Lotz, it is okay for parents to pass on thin evaluative judgments but not substantive values. Lotz proposes a requirement of *Parental Substantive Values Pluralism* when parents are passing on their values to their children.

> What might be proposed is a requirement that while certain minimal and pluralist virtues are permissibly endorsed and taught by parents (e.g., toleration and respect for diversity), a parent's more substantive commitments, and certainly her comprehensive doctrines, must either be entirely withheld or, at most, presented as but one set amongst a reasonable plurality of others. In this vein…[I]…propose a requirement of explicitly acknowledged and communicated fallibilism or moral corrigibility…To clarify further, exclusionary forms of parental values inculcation are those that involve explicit and pejorative depiction of the parents' own values and value systems as the "best" or "only" available; the forced participation of children solely in activities that instruct in the parents' values; and parental refusal to allow children to participate in educational or social activities that inform them of alternative and possibly competing values. In these cases, parents are deploying highly directive and intentionally exclusionary means by which to influence their children to take up their own values. It is, therefore, the attempt to pejoratively exclude or preclude exposure to competing values that constitutes unacceptable parental values inculcation. By contrast, acceptable values inculcation would include such practices as non-exclusionary provision of opportunities to engage with parents' values via shared family and community activities; open disclosure of parents' values accompanied by discussion of competing values; and explicit and demonstrated tolerance of disagreement over values, both within and outside of the family. This, then, is the way I propose we ought to think about a requirement of parental substantive values pluralism: it is a requirement that imposes on parents a restraining obligation of non-exclusiveness in their intra-familial efforts at values inculcation (Lotz 251-256).

Lotz argues that while parents gain certain goods from value inculcation—as stated above—said value inculcation has the potential to harm children in the long term and to inhibit their development of autonomy and their rights to an open future; moral responsibilities to protect that I have argued parents have towards their children.

Furthermore, because parents have *priority privilege*—by "virtue of their caring role, parents are typically a child's first source of values, indirectly conveying by deed and word a set of world views and attitudes that are likely to be internalized by a child and to comprise the foundation on which she will develop her own views and values" (Lotz 260)—*proximity privilege*—"arising from the position that they are in to transmit their values more readily, frequently, and continuously to their child than are any others" (Lotz 260)—*authority privilege*—"in the sense that as the young child's principal conduit of general life information about the world, the child's place in that world, the necessary life skills that the child must learn to function successfully, any communication of values will be infused with the parents' authority in relation to other information they provide" (Lotz 260-261)—and *affect privilege*—"in that the values endorsed by parents are, from the perspective of a child, entirely bound up not only with other informational exchanges but also, importantly, with the emotional exchanges occurring within the parent–child relationship" (Lotz 261)—there is an inequality of power that exists in parent-child relationships such that the exclusive inculcation of substantive values constitutes *Domination,* which creates an inherently unjust and morally abusive interpersonal relationship that enhances the child's pathogenic vulnerability.

Lotz frames her argument within a liberal framework, and this may be problematic for people who do not accept liberalism as the best moral or political framework. However, I am neither here to defend nor to criticize Lotz's argument. Rather, I am here to acknowledge its articulation and to set it apart from what I am ultimately trying to do. In explicating the moral responsibilities that White parents have towards Black children in a subsequent section in this chapter, I will argue that parents

have a responsibility to educate Black children on their racial and cultural identity, but not as a means towards value inculcation, but as a way to educate the children on the historical and contemporaneous political and social contexts that inform race, and through this education, impart them with the resources necessary to cope with racism in society. The education is aimed at increasing their resilience and autonomy, not diminishing it in the way that Lotz argues exclusive substantive value inculcation does. However, my argument has seemed to some, in the past, like value inculcation, but that is not what I am arguing for. In the end, my argument regarding the moral responsibilities that parents have towards their children revolves around protecting them from the harm that is exacerbated by their occurrent and dispositional, inherent and situational vulnerabilities; not engaging in interpersonally abusive or morally problematic behavior that contributes to or exacerbates their pathogenic vulnerability; providing material sustenance in order to accommodate their dependency for survival; providing the moral, psychological and emotional support necessary to accommodate their dependency for flourishing; and preserving their rights to an open future by acting in such a way as to promote the development of their autonomy and refraining from acts that are inimical to their development as morally, socially and politically autonomous individuals.

Adoptive Parental Moral Obligations

At the most general and base level, all parents have the same moral obligations—some of which were outlined in the previous section. Parents and caretakers are all charged with responding to the material, emotional, psychological, moral, and social needs of their children. As Mianna Lotz argues, the obligations incurred by all parents are essentially the same, regardless of whether their parenthood is biologically, genetically,

or socially grounded (Lotz 200). However, while the fundamental needs of children are essentially the same and while the general obligations incurred by parents are also essentially the same, as was argued in the last section, some people——and by extension, children——are more vulnerable than others and this may raise other obligations for parents of said children. For example, a parent of a child with severe physical disability is not simply inherently vulnerable in the way that all children are, but the personal and social context of their disability also makes them situationally vulnerable, and pathogenically vulnerable——in the sense that they are more susceptible to exploitation and abuse by others. As such, while the parents of a child with the aforesaid severe physical disability may have the same base obligations towards their child as the parent of a child without severe physical disability, in order to meet those base obligations, they will have distinct, different, and added responsibilities towards their children by virtue of their heightened vulnerability. In the same vein, Lotz argues that "while the fundamental needs of adopted and non-adopted children are essentially the same, in the context of adoption particular vulnerabilities that all children may have are cast in a different light and may be intensified. It is for these reasons that distinct adoption-related parental obligations arise" (Lotz 201).

The vulnerabilities that adoptive children face are situational vulnerabilities, and as such, are not necessarily inherent to the adoption process in general, or the adopted child in particular (Lotz, 201). Their aforesaid situational vulnerability arises in and is informed by a social context of *Bionormativity*. As Charlotte Witt argues in *A Critique of the Bionormative Concept of the Family*, "families with children who are not genetically related to both their parents are not the gold standard or Platonic form of the family, even

though it is hard to pinpoint exactly what is wrong with them. I call this the bionormative conception of the family" (49).[18] As Lotz explains further, the bionormative conception of the family generates "norms that emphasize the primacy, strength, and permanence of biological connection and, by contrast…the second-class status of 'fictive' or legal kinship, which is assumed to be fragile and impermanent…They establish a context of bionormativity in which adoptees and their families must struggle for legitimacy" (201). Even though, within our contemporary society, there is a broader social and cultural acceptance of different and alternative conceptions of the family structure, the traditional conception of the biological family still figures very strongly in people's conception of the 'normal family', and it still seems to take precedence over other social conceptions of the family structure (Lotz 202). It is this bionormative conception of the family that informs the social conditions, which give rise to and ground the situational vulnerabilities that adopted children experience within society. Furthermore, it is these aforesaid situational vulnerabilities that give rise to distinct moral obligations for adoptive parents so that they may fulfill their general parental obligations towards their children. These obligations respond to and attempt to ease the situational vulnerabilities of adopted children. However, as Lotz so strongly states, "it will only be by the eradication of specific broader social conditions and factors…[the bionormative or biologistic biases towards family structures] …and the removal of adoption policies and practices built upon those, that the conditions will be created in which the needs of adopted children and their families can adequately be met" (200).

[18] In her aforesaid article, Witt puts forth philosophical arguments that call into question the legitimacy of the bionormative conception of the family. I will be unable to engage with her arguments in this project, as this is not the focus of my thesis. However, interested persons may refer to her work on the issue.

According to Lotz, her "focus is on the potential interconnected vulnerabilities that adopted children face in three specific developmental domains: identity development; development of a sense of familial belonging and security; and development of emotional independence" (201). The first situational vulnerability that I will explore is that of *Identity Development.* In a bionormative society, one's sense of self and identity is construed as being strongly connected to their biological and genetic ancestry. In the case of adopted children, they possess little to no information about their biological ancestry, and as a result, their historically based identity and the generational continuity that comes with that is severely curtailed, and this can affect their identity development (Lotz 203). However, "adoption theorists have also pointed to more widespread difficulties with the establishment and maintenance of a secure and stable sense of self, and with managing the multiple aspects and layers of self-knowledge and personal identity, even for adoptees who possess some knowledge of their adoption status and biological parentage" (Lotz 203). The need to come as close as possible to construing a biological, genetic, and generational continuity that does not exist in families that adopt has led to matching policies that go to considerable lengths to match parents with children that share their own attributes; the matching practice extends to physical attributes—such as height, eye colour, hair colour and race—social attributes——such as ethnicity, religion, educational background, and socio-economic class——and even for psychological attributes as well (Lotz 204). However, "the so-called "double-edged sword" of matching policy is well captured by Wegar (2000: 367) who comments that, although it might be thought that the practice of matching for physical resemblance could alleviate the difficulties of adoption by outwardly making adoption status less obvious,

the unintended effect is not as might be hoped, since in trying to recreate the biological family, adoption workers in fact only end up further emphasizing the importance of the genetic connection for family bonding…A commitment to resemblance-based "fit" has of course also facilitated denial of differences and secrecy, both within the adoptive family and in their dealings with others" (Lotz 204-205). This need for sameness, resemblance, and integration is a response to the bionormative conception of the family, and it is a strategy employed by adoptive families to establish sameness within this biologistic context (Lotz 205). However,

> In denying or downplaying real differences in favor of emphasis on, or construction of, intra-familial resemblance and similarity, an adoptee is susceptible to coming to regard her belonging within the adoptive family as conditional upon similarity to its members…Against a background of pervasive family-resemblance imperatives, such outward denial or suppression of adoption status has the potential to create difficulties for healthy identity development. It may give rise to a troubling internal bifurcation in which the adoptee suppresses elements of her self and personality for the sake of maintaining the endorsed "fictive" identity as a biologically related (and therefore more "real" or "true") family member. In the process, feelings of inadequacy, shame, insecurity, and anxiety may be provoked. A child may respond to such anxieties by accentuating, or striving to develop, certain "conforming" attributes or talents at the expense of others. Insofar as the notion makes sense, the achievement of "authentic" identity is likely to be significantly constrained as a result of the perceived imperative to "fit in" to the family by resembling it (Lotz 205-206).

The next situational vulnerability that I will explore——with respect to the vulnerabilities that adopted children are more susceptible to——is that of the *Development of a Sense of Familial Belonging and Security*. The adoptive process is an inherently transactional process——there is no getting around that (Lotz 206). This transactional process can be detrimental to an adopted child's development of a sense of familial belonging and security because the child may develop a perception of having been selected and accepted by their adoptive parents due to external conditions as opposed to being accepted in an unconditional way (Lotz 206). As we have seen above, this is not an

unfounded worry. Adoptive parents do, sometimes, select their children based on external characteristics. And, while they may come to love their adopted child unconditionally, it does not take away from the transactional nature of the child's selection. This can lead to a fear——whether real or imagined——on the part of adoptive children, of being rejected and returned should the children not continue to fulfill the external expectations or meet the criteria that they believe they were selected for——and this fear is not completely unfounded either as adopted children are sometimes returned (Lotz 206). As Lotz argues, "this feature of adoption may predispose adoptees to particular forms of concern and anxiety in regards to their need, and capacity, to fulfill expectations. The adoptee's sense of self-worth may be excessively structured around and dependent upon external validation. Any such anxiety will be compounded where the adoptee believes that her original relinquishment was due to some flaw or inadequacy within herself" (207). Children——whether they are adopted or not——are always going to seek a certain level of external validation from their parents, but the childhood anxieties that accompany this need for validation from your parents is going to be especially heightened in the case of adopted children, for the reasons outlined above (Lotz 207-208). These aforesaid fears and anxieties——whether real or perceived——may hinder the development of a sense of familial belonging or security on the part of adopted children.

The final situational vulnerability that I will explore is an adoptive child's *Development of Emotional Independence*. According to Lotz, "by emotional independence I mean, broadly speaking, the ability to express one's own emotions and needs without being unduly inhibited by sensitivity to those of others. The particular type of vulnerability I have in mind here relates to adoptees' susceptibility to assuming

excessive responsibility for the (real or perceived) emotional needs of adoptive parents" (208). This is tied to the second vulnerability, which asserts that adoptive children are more likely to be concerned with pleasing their parents, and as Lotz argues, adoptive children tend to be more concerned with and protective of their adoptive parents' emotions; this makes it difficult for said children to talk about adoption and their interests in finding and connecting with their biological family (208). According to Lotz, their potential lack of emotional independence is connected to the fact that adoptive children may come to think that talking about their adoption or reconnecting with their biological parents may appear to their adoptive parents as though their child is rejecting their adoptive family (209). There was an episode of the television show *This Is Us,* where their adopted son——this was a transracial adoption scenario, wherein the parents where White and the son was Black——wanted to connect with his adoptive parents. His mother knew who his adoptive father was and had even interacted with him before. However, she was afraid that her son would choose his biological father over his adoptive parents and so, she made the morally problematic choice of cutting off all ties with his biological father and refusing to let them connect with each other. Overtime, the son seemed to learn to curtail his desire to meet his biological family in order to protect his adoptive family. As Lotz argues, "to the extent that this occurs, the adoptee's capacity for emotional independence will likely be significantly curtailed" (209).

Adoptive children are more susceptible to the aforementioned situational vulnerabilities than children who live with their biological parents. The question becomes, what are the additional and distinct moral obligations that adoptive parents have in order to respond to these seemingly adoption-specific vulnerabilities in effective

ways. There are three *possible* moral responsibilities for adoptive parents that I would like to discuss; the first one is a *Strong Moral Responsibility,*[19] the second one is a *Weak Moral Responsibility*,[20] and the final one is a *Moral Suggestion*.[21] Firstly, the strong moral responsibility that adoptive parents have towards their children is what Lotz terms as 'Intra-familial Communicative Openness.' As Lotz argues, research has consistently shown that identity problems, a sense of belonging and security, and the wellbeing of adopted children are associated with specific forms of adoption-related communication openness (213). As Lotz states, while directly quoting Brodzinsky, intra-familial communicative openness is "a willingness of individuals to consider the meaning of adoption in their lives, to share that meaning with others, to explore adoption related issues in the context of family life, to acknowledge and support the child's dual connection to two families, and perhaps to facilitate contact between these two family systems in one form or another" (212). As Lotz argues, this openness ought not to simply stem from adoptive parents being responsive to questions raised by their adopted children, but it is an obligation that requires them to actively initiate adoption discussions (213). Furthermore, she argues that there should be a policy shift towards providing adoptive parents with the tools necessary to effectively and comfortably carry out these

[19] A strong moral responsibility is a non-negotiable moral obligation that an individual is expected to carry out. How one carries out their strong moral responsibilities may vary from person to person, but they must carry out these responsibilities and said responsibilities cannot be overridden by other considerations——moral or otherwise.

[20] A weak moral responsibility is a negotiable moral obligation. These responsibilities can be overridden by other pertinent obligations that an individual might have.

[21] A moral suggestion is not an obligation that we can morally demand from an individual in either the strong or the weak sense. However, given certain larger considerations, it is something that we can suggest that they consider carrying out. However, not carrying out these moral suggestions is not a moral failing on the part of the individual to whom the suggestion is made.

discussions with their children, through counseling services provided to said parents (Lotz 213). Intra-familial communicative openness with respect to adoption can be aimed at helping adoptive children develop a positive and healthy identity, with them knowing that it is okay to be themselves, through discussions that help alleviate their worries about not belonging within their families, and by ensuring that their children have positive associations with respect to the issue of adoption.

Secondly, the weak moral responsibility that adoptive parents have towards their children is what Lotz terms as 'Structural Openness.' Structural openness refers "to adoptions in which arrangements are in place for continued contact with the birth parent/family" (Lotz 212). Structural openness is categorized as a weak moral responsibility for many reasons, part of which is "that communicative openness is more important for determining adoptee outcomes than whether or not there is structural openness" (Lotz 213). Furthermore, the child may not want contact with their adoptive family——for whatever reason——and their interests must be considered as paramount to whether or not structural openness occurs. Finally, structural openness can justifiably be overridden in order to protect the children's welfare and to ensure that they are not put in harm's way (Lotz 214). In any case, the adoptive parents can initiate structural openness through open adoption arrangements, or it can be initiated as a response to a child's interest in wanting to get to know their biological family. Structural openness also demands that parents must be willing to——to the best of their ability——talk to their children about their biological family and initiate contact with their biological family if this is what the children want. This will help to alleviate concerns with regards to the development of emotional independence on the part of the adoptive children. Finally, the

moral suggestion that Lotz put forwards for consideration by adoptive parents is what she terms 'Extra-Familial Disclosure of their Child's Adoptive Status'. As the term implies, this involves the disclosure of their child's adoptive status to people outside their immediate family. As Lotz argues, "to be sure, adoption does present special opportunities to disrupt those paradigms and challenge the unfounded, restrictive, and distorting imperatives and norms of biological relatedness. Given those opportunities, it might be thought reasonable to suggest that adoptive parents incur more activist obligations of extra-familial adoption disclosure" (216). However, issues of privacy, the interests and desires of the adoptive child—even though Lotz notes that families where intra-familial communicative openness is effectively carried out will tend to raise children who have no desire in hiding their adoption status—, and the stigma surrounding the adoption process–as mandated by the traditional, bionormative conception of the family—prevent this suggestion from being classified as a strong, or even a weak moral obligation. It is simply a suggestion that Lotz makes because, the more open families are about adoption and the more they celebrate the familial differences rather than hide them, the more likely it is for them to ameliorate the stigma surrounding adoption within their families and their communities. These aforementioned moral obligations and suggestions that Lotz articulates in her work, *Adoptee Vulnerability and Post-Adoptive Parental Obligation,* will be able to appropriately and effectively respond to the occurrent and dispositional situational vulnerabilities that adopted children are more susceptible to, and will, thus, allow said children to flourish within society.

Adoptive Parental Moral Obligations in the Context of Transracial Adoptions

As is the case with parents in general, adoptive parents also have the same general

moral obligations. However, in cases of transracial adoption——where White parents adopt Black children that are not related to them; the focus of this thesis——an extra layer of vulnerability is added. Thus, while the aforesaid adoptive parents who engage in transracial adoption have the same general obligations as the adoptive parents who do not engage in transracial adoption, there need to be distinct obligations added to respond to this extra layer of vulnerability. For one thing, in the case of transracial adoptions, the issue of whether the family should engage in extra-familial disclosure of their child's adoptive status is one that is taken off the table, as it is obvious that the child is adopted; thus, the child and their adoptive family have no control over that narrative. The physical dissimilarities between the parents and their child based on their race, one that could lead to the physical displacement that said child feels is what takes the issue of extra-familial disclosure off the table. Furthermore, there is an added level of situational vulnerability for the transracial adoptee, not only because said adoptees are Black in a country as racialized and as ridden with racism as America, but also because the intergenerational continuity that adoption necessarily severs also severs said children from a family that is traditionally responsible for teaching them how to navigate the racialized climate in America, and cope with its inevitably accompanying racism. The question becomes, what further moral obligations do the adoptive parents have within the context of transracial adoption to ensure that they are able to adequately respond to their children's occurrent and dispositional situational vulnerabilities in a responsible way, and to ensure that said children are able to materially, emotionally, psychologically, socially, and morally flourish within society as autonomous individuals——thus fulfilling the general moral obligations that all parents have towards their children.

In the previous section, I argued that adoptive parents have a strong moral responsibility to engage in intra-familial communicative openness with their children. This is a moral obligation that adoptive parents within a transracial context have towards their children, but the ways in which they execute it will be different. For one thing, in the case of transracial adoption, the differences between the children and the parents are expressed in the immediacy of the colour of their skin. This, as the National Association of Black Social Workers argued, can cause a Black child to feel physically and psychologically displaced within their family. Thus, their adoptive parents have a responsibility to address these discomforts during their intra-familial conversations about adoption, to celebrate rather than marginalize this difference without making the child feel too out of place. Furthermore, the intra-familial communications that adoptive parents have with their children will involve more than just actively addressing the adoption process with their children, but it will also involve having conversations about race in America, with the children——a staple within the Black family. The importance of this is highlighted in the excerpt of an interview that John Raible conducted with a transracial adoptee. In the interview, the transracial adoptee noted,

> It was painful because while I perceived racism all around me, I didn't have people around me to talk to who had experienced what I was experiencing, and who could therefore validate and share my perceptions…I sensed it at school, in the Eurocentric curriculum that excluded a multicultural perspective. I sensed it among my peers. I felt it from the fathers of the White girls I was interested in. I sensed it from prospective employers when I was job-hunting, and from security guards in shopping mall stores, and from police who watched me and sometimes stopped me on the streets. I detected it in the comments and jokes that went unchallenged among friends, and even among members of my family (quoted in Smith, Juarez, and Jacobson, 2).

In another excerpt from a statement by President Barack Obama——who was not adopted, but was raised by his White mother and his White grandparents——he notes,

> Away from my mother, away from my grandparents, I was engaged in a fitful interior struggle. I was trying to raise myself to be a Black man in America, and beyond the given of my appearance, no one around me seemed to know exactly what that meant (quoted in Smith, Juarez, and Jacobson, 3).

I hope that both of these excerpts show why it is important for adoptive White parents to include lessons on race and racism, as it relates to their Black children, in the intra-familial conversations that they have with said children. In order to fulfill this obligation, White parents will need to educate themselves on the history of race and racism in America. They will also need to educate themselves on the contemporaneous social and political climate of race in America, the struggles against racism, and the ways in which the Black Community responds to this. Finally, it is important that White parents educate themselves on the African American culture, and the Black cultural identity that stems from this——in this way, they can also address the cultural displacement that the NABSW cautions against. Thus, these intra-familial discussions will serve as an avenue to address and alleviate the physical, psychological, and cultural displacement that their children will likely feel through means of recognizing, acknowledging, and celebrating the differences between parent and child, not shying away from them.

These self-educative lessons on race that White parents are going to have to engage in, in order to fulfill their intra-familial communicative obligations are by no means easy——and, I hope that my account does not suggest otherwise. It is important that adoption agencies, counselors, and social workers are trained and well-equipped to provide the White parents with the resources that they need in order to best fulfill these moral obligations. This process of educating themselves on the historical, political, social, and cultural context of race in America is also an important process that said parents must engage in if they hope to attain a heightened understanding of race in

America, in the form of a transracial identity. The intra-familial communicative openness process will involve the parents not simply educating themselves on these aforesaid issues, but it will involve them educating their children as well. The first adoptee that was quoted above referred to the 'Eurocentric curriculum that excluded a multicultural perspective' at his school. This is a very important point because people look to their schools to educate them on the experiences of all people within their society from as many perspectives as can be accommodated, and not simply from a single point of view. However, more often than not, this is not found in the education system. However, this paper is not here to argue for this point or for a policy change with respect to this issue, though this is certainly something another researcher can take up. The important point here is that it is not enough for the White parents of Black adopted children to simply educate themselves on this issue; it is their responsibility to educate their child as well. Smith and Juarez argue that White parents ought to read books by Black authors, both fiction and non-fiction, to and with their kids. This way, their black children can understand the long history of racism that Black people have faced in America and how they have engaged with White America on this front (135). This will help educate the children and the parents on the issue of racism in America. This will also help to augment their children's educational experience since American schools are saturated with a Eurocentric curriculum (Smith & Juarez, 135). As such, "these parents can teach their children about the contributions made by Black Americans who paid a heavy price for their freedoms, freedoms that they earned and were not given to them by suddenly enlightened white people" (Smith & Juarez, 135). In this way, the educational experience that the parents engage in can be an interactional one. Thus, the parents can fulfill their

strong moral responsibility to educate themselves on race and racism in America, but it will also allow them fulfill an inevitably corresponding responsibility to educate their children as well. By educating their children on these issues, the children can come to see how socially salient race is within the American society. In this way, the children will surely come away with an understanding of being Black with all of the historical and contemporaneous implications that this entails, such as racism. This educative process will likely lead them to identify as Black, at least in the weak sense. However, it could extend beyond that. The aforesaid adoptive children may come away with a strong racial identity and with the willingness to participate in Black culture. At the very least, the morally mandated educational experience with their parents will leave them with a knowledge of Black culture in America, in which they may choose to participate.

In educating their children, adoptive parents should engage in the tripartite process of *Enculturation*, *Racial Inculcation,* and the *Child's Choice*, one that I advocate for and I am able to articulate because of the discussions that Richard Lee has in his article, *The Transracial Adoption Paradox*. The process of Enculturation involves White adoptive parents acknowledging the differences within the family and teaching their children about their cultural heritage (Lee 8). This process of enculturation need not be restricted to teaching the children about their biological cultural heritage; the adoptive parents are free to engage in a process of educating their children about their adoptive parents' cultural heritage as well. This will allow the child to develop a more flexible understanding of society through the eyes of different cultural perspectives (Lee 8). This will also allow the child to come to appreciate the physical differences between said child and their parents, and it will help to alleviate any feelings of psychological alienation and

cultural displacement. Through this process of enculturation, the parents can also ensure that their children see their race as something positive, and allow them to develop a sense of worth and esteem around their racial identity, rather than developing negative connotations around their racial identity. Secondly, the process of Racial Inculcation involves teaching the children about the political, historical, and social climate of race and racism in America, teaching their children the coping skills necessary to effectively deal with racism, and thus imparting to them the resources that will enable said children to navigate their race and its implications within society (Lee 8). This will help shape the child's racial identity, and will ultimately allow them to understand the collective nature of their racial identity, and choose how prominent they want their racial and cultural heritage to be, in shaping their lives. In any case, this stage will allow them to acquire the skills necessary to survive as a Black child in America. The final process which involves an emphasis on the Child's Choice involves parents providing their children with cultural opportunities,[22] engaging in enculturation and racial inculcation, but as the child grows older[23] and is able to articulate and understand their interests and desires, the parents slowly allowing the child to play a more active role in deciding the activities they engage in, the things they choose to learn, and ultimately the identity they want to come to have (Lee 9). This will ensure that Fogg-Davis's worry is addressed, and the child is treated, not as a passive receptacle to these learning processes and lessons, but as an active subject, one who is capable of shaping their own lives, and thus advancing their autonomy. In these ways, adoptive parents acting within the context of transracial

[22] I will get to what this entails very soon.

[23] I am unable to determine what the appropriate age for this is. All I can say is that every child is different, and some are able to clearly articulate and understand their desires and interests earlier than others.

adoption can bolster their intra-familial communicative obligations in a way that appropriately responds to the situational vulnerabilities of their Black children. It is very important to note, at this point, that the lessons that I want White adoptive parents to pass on to their children——lessons that they will otherwise receive through the intergenerational wisdom passed on to children in Black homes——do not include the exclusive substantive values that Lotz worries about, values that she believes impede the child's autonomy. All I am arguing for is an educational process that positions the child to better understand themselves and their experiences. If anything, my account promotes rather than impedes a child's autonomy. Firstly, it gives them a greater say over the educational process, as they grow older. Furthermore, it imparts them with the skill and resources necessary to understand themselves, develop a healthy racial identity, and cope with racism within society.

The next moral obligation I want to propose is a strong moral responsibility to provide their adopted children with *cultural opportunities,* as it relates to the Black community. In order to provide said opportunities, parents can engage in daily activities with their children that are important components of the Black culture and Black identity such as hair care, skin care, taking them to black hair salons and black churches (pillars of the black community), amongst other activities that may seem trivial but are actually significant staples of the Black community. Black hair and skin is necessarily different from White hair and skin, and it requires different rituals of care. The differences can heighten the physical, psychological, and cultural displacement that a child feels within their White adoptive homes. But, by learning how to take care of Black hair and skin, and by engaging in these activities with their children, parents both celebrate these

differences while lessening the gap that these differences may cause Black children to feel as existing between them and their parents. Furthermore, by taking their children to Black churches, Black hair salons, and other permanent staples of the Black community, parents can provide their children with the opportunity to make friends within the Black community, it can allow their parents to form important relationships with members of the Black community, and it will allow their children to engage with a community of people like them——with shared histories, understandings, and experiences. Furthermore, the cultural opportunities that parents provide for their children can occur within the context of their moral obligations to educate their children, and this can involve taking their children to cities, institutes, and museums that teach them about the historical and contemporaneous experiences of Black people in America. By engaging in these activities with their children and providing these cultural opportunities, parents can learn more about the Black community, and can also ensure that both they and their child form relationships with people within the Black community. Of course, as I argued above, as the children get older, their parents ought to give them more of say over which cultural opportunities they would like to be exposed to and which ones they would like to disregard——always being there to provide guidance through this process. Finally, I am not positing that parents have a strong moral responsibility to expose their children to every single cultural opportunity mentioned above and more, but rather to expose them to some of these cultural opportunities——opportunities that are sufficient enough to expose their children to Black culture in America, and the Black community.

On an episode of the television show, *This is Us,* Randall——the Black child adopted by a White family with White siblings——suggested that his family should go to

a community swimming pool. His parents oblige his seemingly innocuous request. Half way through their outing, Randall goes missing, and his mother goes around the pool and frantically searches for him. She finally finds him on the other side of the pool playing with a bunch of Black children. As the episode goes on, the viewers find out that the reason he suggested going to this particular pool was because he knew that he could meet Black children that he could play with. Randall loves his parents and siblings, and his parents love him immensely. But, they live in an all-White neighborhood and he attended an all-White school, and as such, he was going through his whole life, not meeting anyone who looked like him. It made him feel like an outsider in a home he loved; it psychologically alienated him from his family and his neighborhood. This was also one of the reasons——as previously mentioned above——that he wanted to meet his biological family. But, on that particular day, Randall just wanted to meet and form friendships with people who looked like him; he wanted to not feel so alone. Here are four, real, accounts of Black children who grew up in predominantly White neighborhoods, just to paint a clearer, more personal picture of what is at stake in this debate:

> If we lived in a different neighborhood, I'd feel more comfortable. People wouldn't ask so many questions or call me names. I feel a little more comfortable around people who are my same colour because I know they won't call me names (quoted Smith, Juarez, and Jacobson 2).

> White parents that definitively espouse, "Love is enough" are doing a huge disservice to their black children. Research shows that black adoptees experience a high degree of uncertainty in deciphering the onslaught of race based information (particularly with regards to self-image) they inevitably encounter in predominately white communities where they are raised; the adoptees often experience daily racial micro-aggressions that are typically "unseen" or misinterpreted by the white parent, thus leaving them exposed without developing effective coping strategies in a life-long battle for their racial identity. The concern is not that these white parents are willing to love and raise a child of a different colour, but that they are typically resistant to openly examining our nation's racial history and identifying their role as benefactors in a system of white privilege where white people receive a multitude of unearned, hassle-free benefits (Smith *The*

Huffington Post)

I grew up in a place where most of my life I was the only person of colour. Not just the only black person, but also the only person of colour. It was…painful. Crazy, racist things happened to me. Not only verbal racism but physical, sexual violence, all kinds of things (Belton *The Roots*; as stated by interviewee Lisa Marie Rollins)

One of the most damaging experiences for me personally as a transracial, inter-country adoptee was growing up completely isolated within a predominantly White community. All my parents' friends were White. All my White siblings' friends were White. The neighborhoods we lived in were White. The schools we attended were majority White (with a few token minorities here and there)…Rather full assimilation within the Whiteness was what was thought to be best (Blur *Lost Daughters*)

This marginalization might create a stronger imperative for White adoptive parents of Black children to try to create structural openness within their family unit such that their children have contact with members of their biological family—a structural openness that Haslanger facilitated for her adopted children. However, I am not here to re-argue this point. Rather, I want to posit another weak moral obligation that White adoptive parents who live in pre-dominantly White neighborhoods have a moral responsibility to move to pre-dominantly Black neighborhoods or to more diverse neighborhoods with a strong Black community/presence. The truth is, while the aforesaid cultural opportunities will be able to bridge the child's gap into the Black community, having a constant presence within their community will be better for the aforesaid child.

In their article, *White on Black: Can White Parents Teach Black Adoptive Children How to Understand and Cope With Racism*, Darron T. Smith, Brenda G. Juarez, and Cardell K. Jacobson argue that "despite efforts by the White parents of transracially adopted African American children, or TRAs, to teach their adopted children about race, White adoptive parents and Black adoptees experience race differently…Most TRAs are adopted by middle-class or upper-class Whites who rear their adopted children in

predominantly White neighborhoods and communities…While racism is typically concrete and central in the lives of the TRAs, it is usually not in the lives of the White adoptive parents" (2). The adoption process takes a lot of time and resources, and as a result of this, majorities of the people who are able to expend the required amount of resources to adopt tend to fall within the middle-class. Furthermore, given the history of racism and segregation in the country, and the ways in which adoption agencies have actively prevented people of colour from adopting, in the past, it is more likely that a Black child will end up being adopted by a White couple in America, and if this happens, then they will more likely than not end up in a predominantly White community. Living within a pre-dominantly White community has the potential to amplify the child's feelings of otherness and marginalization, and I believe that this creates a weak moral obligation on the parts of their parents to move to more diverse neighborhoods.

In an article titled 'Political Geography of Whites Adopting Black Children in the United States,' Fogg-Davis argues

> The adoption of black children by white parents in the United States takes place in a geographical context that is marked by high levels of residential segregation between whites and blacks. The public debate over these adoptions has focused on the moment of adoptive placement—the policy question of whether whites should be permitted to adopt black children. Thus, the future oriented question of where these biracial families will reside has often receded from explicit scrutiny. From a law and public policy perspective, this is justified, given that a core tenet of all constitutional democracies is that neither the government nor other individuals may dictate where someone lives. But legal questions are not the only relevant questions to consider in adoption (222).

However, Fogg-Davis goes on to frame his argument not as a specific moral obligation that White adoptive parents have to move to pre-dominantly White neighborhoods, but rather as a general moral responsibility that Americans have to make residential choices that do not perpetuate segregation (Fogg-Davis 222). He argues that since White people

have greater power—given the history of racism in the country, one that has empowered them and disempowered people of colour——they have a greater responsibility to power this move towards residential integration, and by extension, racial integration. Fogg-Davis's argument is an interesting one, and it will certainly benefit from a greater articulation of the moral duty that he posits, its benefits, and its burdens. However, the moral obligation that I am arguing for is not set within a context as general as the one that Fogg-Davis's argument is set in. Rather, I am arguing that based on the accounts of the transracial adoptees above and the physical, emotional, and psychological alienation that Black children adopted by White parents living in predominantly White communities will inevitably feel, White parents have a moral obligation to move to pre-dominantly Black neighborhoods or more diverse neighborhoods with a strong Black community. Growing up in a strong and present Black community will allow their children a permanent access to resources that will enable them to develop a healthy racial identity and alleviate their feelings of physical, psychological, and cultural alienation.

Richard Lee argues, transracial adoptees are "more likely to show racial pride when adoptive parents emphasized the children's racial backgrounds, encouraged ethnic participation, *lived in racially integrated communities*, and were highly involved in these activities with their children" (Lee 8). As John noted in his research, one of the ways in which the white siblings of Black children formed a transracial identity was through forging long lasting relationships with Black people and the Black community. Furthermore, as Smith and Juarez argue, "in order for White parents to disrupt stereotypes about Black people, research on racial stereotyping suggests that white Americans must have significant interactions with people of colour of equal status"

(135). One of the ways the parents can do this, as argued above, is by moving to Black or more diverse communities. This way, their children can grow up around diversity and see themselves as being a fundamental part of society. While I believe this to be a very compelling moral obligation, I am positing it as a weak moral obligation because there are many morally relevant factors that may deter White adoptive parents from making this move; some of these morally relevant factors may include living in safe neighborhoods with better schools, better economic opportunities, amongst other factors. Through moral deliberation, White adoptive parents are going to have to balance these other morally relevant factors against the decision to move to Black or more diverse neighborhoods. Ultimately, the moral factors that the parents deem salient within this moral deliberation, how much weight they accord each of these factors, and which moral duty overrides the other in the end, is entirely within the parent's discretion. I do not wish to dictate this balance——all I can do is emphasize how important I think it is for White parents to make this residential move for the sake of their adopted African American child.[24] To the extent that White adoptive parents undertake these above mentioned moral responsibilities——both strong and weak, they will be able to accomplish two very important things. Firstly, these moral obligations directly respond to the National Association of Black Social Workers aforementioned worries. Finally, it will allow said White adoptive parents fulfill their parental moral obligations, by giving their children the resources necessary to flourish and thrive within society.

[24] Perhaps there is another researcher out there who believes that there is a clear balancing test that should guide the parents' moral deliberation, a test that tells us the moral weight that we can properly demand that parents attach to each of these salient factors, a test that tells us what factors can be considered salient within this moral deliberation and what factors cannot be considered at all; I will not make this moral argument, but I will be very interested in reading accounts by philosophers who do.

Conclusion

The issue of transracial adoption remains a very contentious issue in the United States of America. Throughout this project, I have put forth arguments that posit a moral defense of a specific form of transracial adoptive placements——the placements wherein White American parents domestically adopt Black American children.

In Chapter one of this thesis project, I argue that given the highly racialized political and social climate that exists in America, and give some of the historical and contemporaneous implications of this racialized climate—my focus of which was racism and prejudice—African American children need certain goods in order to undergo a healthy development within American society. As I noted in my taxonomy of these goods, they include physical, psychological, and cultural belonging; the developmental needs and resources necessary to address racism in America; and the healthy development of a Black racial identity.

In Chapter two, I went further to explore the issue of identity development and the ways in which identity development in both African American children and their adoptive Caucasian American parents support the notion that said parents can provide the goods that their children need in order to undergo a healthy development.

In the final chapter of my thesis I argue, that given the inherent vulnerability that exists in all children and the situational vulnerabilities found in all adoptive placements in general, and in transracial adoptive placements in particular, there are certain moral responsibilities that parents who adopt trans-racially have towards their adopted African American children. In the chapter, I go on to expound on some of these strong moral responsibilities, weak moral responsibilities, and moral suggestions.

Before finally concluding this thesis, I would like to posit some recommendations that I have for interested and concerned parties in this debate. I would also like to address some questions left unanswered in my project that future researchers may like to take up. Firstly, the National Association of Black Social Workers had good reasons to oppose transracial adoption. One thing that I was unable to address in this project was the ways in which the NABSW's opposition to transracial adoptions stemmed from a genuine belief that the extremity of their statement was the only way that they could protect Black single mothers—who were losing their children at alarming rates—Black children, and the Black community in general. As Laura Briggs noted in her book, *Somebody's Children: The Politics of Transracial and Transnational Adoption*,

> The [NABSW's] resolution was not based on racial hatred or bigotry, nor was it an attack on White parents. The resolution was not based on any belief that White families could not love Black children, nor did we want African-American children to languish in foster care rather than be placed in White adoptive homes. Our resolution, and the position paper that followed, was directed at the child welfare system that has systematically separated Black children from their birth families. Child welfare workers have historically undertaken little effort to rehabilitate African-American parents, to work with extended families, or to reunite children in foster care with their families (28)

In her book, Briggs does a masterful job of chronicling the history of the birth of the contemporary foster care system, and the ways in which the policies that underlie its birth were used as punitive measures against African American families. The NABSW tried to protect Black single mothers when nobody else would. Thus, while I hope that I have been able to posit arguments that address many of the NABSW's worries and that will enable them to re-examine their policies on transracial adoption. There needs to be an honest examination of the punitive policies and legislations that underlie the contemporary foster care system and the crux of the NABSW's discomfort with transracial adoptive placements, if there is going to be any real progress.

Secondly, in my thesis project, I was only able to address the moral issues concerning transracial adoptive placements. However, there are certain important judicial issues and constitutional questions that the practice of transracial adoption raises. In the case of *Palmore v. Sidoti* the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously ruled that in situations relating to the placements of children, the best interest of the child must be protected (Forde-Mazrui 931). They argue that "there is a risk that a child living with a stepparent of a different race may be subject to a variety of pressures and stresses not present if the child were living with parents of the same racial or ethnic origin" (Forde-Mazrui 931). However, as Forde-Mazrui notes, the court's ruling that race may not be the sole factor in a decision to remove a child did not answer the question of whether it could be a factor to remove a child, and how central of a factor it could be (932). Although as Forde-Mazrui notes, many courts permit the considerations of race (932). Furthermore, legislations such as MEPA-IEP were designed to make it easier for foster children to get adopted by eliminating race matching policies (Briggs 116). My point is that case law and legislative policies surrounding transracial adoptive placements is messy at best, and inconsistent and undefined at worst. There are so many questions left answered by the *Best interest Standard* set out by the courts, and many researchers have tried to clarify this standard. I was unable to address any of these questions within my project, partly because this will likely constitute a whole thesis project by itself. But, I hope that the moral arguments that I presented in my thesis could act as a conceptual resource for re-examining and re-defining many of the legal and constitutional issues that arise in the context of TRAs.

Thirdly, in Chapter Three of this project, I stated some of the moral responsibilities that I believe White parents who adopt Black children in American have.

Furthermore, it is my contention that it is possible to violate one's moral responsibilities whether we are aware of them or not. The truth is that many parents who adopt trans-racially are probably not aware of the moral responsibilities that they have towards their children. These moral responsibilities are vast, and without guidelines and guidance, they can be cumbersome. Consequently, my third recommendation is that social workers, adoption agencies, and counselors should use the arguments presented in my thesis as a jumping off point for creating guidelines for parents who adopt transracially. These guidelines can be used as an educative tool for parents, providing them with the resources necessary to meet their moral responsibilities towards their children.

Finally, there are so many questions that I left unanswered in my thesis project. Every time questions like this came up, I always noted the areas that I believe would benefit from further discussions. And, of course, there are probably many areas that will benefit from further research that I simply did not have the foresight to note within my thesis project, as well—such is usually the case with projects of this scope. One thing I would like to see, is a further exploration of the historical contexts that inform other forms of transracial adoptive placements and the corresponding moral responsibilities of these placements—such as in cases where Caucasian American parents adopt Native American children, Latino American children, Asian American children, and even in cases where minority groups adopt the children from other minority groups, such as in cases where African American parents adopt Latino American children. I have also been informed that my thesis leaves open the possibility for further questions concerning the moral responsibilities that parents have in biological mixed-raced families, and in situations where African American parents adopt Caucasian American children.

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