

WHEN TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION GOES IN ANOTHER DIRECTION

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By

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Abstract

This study aims to understand the experience of a non-White family trying to adopt a transracial child. ‘Transracial adoption’ is defined as a family adopting a child from a different race than theirs. My overarching focus is on how society comes to understand transracial adoption as a one-way transfer of minority children into White families, however, when the roles are reversed there is a lack of acceptance for minority families adopting transracially – specifically, when the adoptive child is White.

The purpose of my study is to share my mine and mother’s life experience of fostering, social workers, child welfare and adoption so that minorities who are looking to adopt transracially may use mine and/or my mother’s life experience to help guide their adoption process if they feel they are being discriminated against. This study will also explore motivations, values, ethics and possible biases regarding transracial adoptions. Highlighting the contradictions that exist in transracial adoption practices I will use my own research as a platform for awareness of how social work practice can influence the lives of minorities who would like to adopt transracially, and for the need at both a macro and micro to create clearer transracial adoption policies for minority and White families.

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bi-smi llāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm

"In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful"

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To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to you in regard to being denied as an adoption family for our foster daughter based on the argument of not being from the Catholic religion, being a single parent that has no “stability” and lastly, because my husband is not in the country, so the adoption worker said they could not assess him as part of the homestudy.

The adoption worker had attended A’s plan of care on Wednesday 7th February 2018 unexpectedly without letting me or my family worker know she was going to be part of the plan of care. She went on to say that because I was a single mother and I was only making income off being a foster parent I wasn’t eligible to be considered for A’s adoption. The adoption worker also stated that because my 3 daughters were from my ex-husband and my son was from my current husband, we didn’t have stability as a family either. The adoption worker had just assumed my daughters had no relationship with my husband and did not care to ask how their relationship was and never gave me the chance to voice about the relationship.

I had spoken to my agency, who decided to have a telephone conference call on Monday 26th February 2018 with CCAS about the reasons that were presented to me, my family worker and A’s youth worker on the day of the plan of care. In that phone call, the CCAS stated that the main issues and reasons of rejection to my adoption request was because my family does not practice the Catholic religion and my husband was not in the country, so they could not do a homestudy this late in the process of A’s adoption, which we had found out two weeks after they already had put the request in for A’s adoption. I and my family have several times voiced our intent to adopt A to CCAS and if they had known my husband was not in the country they should have advised and guided us through the homestudy process instead of leaving it for last minute and denying my request.

A has been living in our care since February 14th, 2017. When A first came into our care at the age of 8 months, she was developmentally delayed. With the continued support, confidence and love from our family A has become independent enough to speak several words, walk, eat by herself and sing her favourite nursery rhyme head, shoulders, knees and toes.

A is a true blessing to my children and I, not is she only emotionally attached to myself, whom she refers to as 'mama', but has an amazing connection and attachment with my children and also my husband who is currently in India.

Emotional attachment has been one of the key aspects in helping raise A who is truly a happy and confident little child. She has a warm bond and a connected relationship with my family in a healthy way. A is safe, secured and protected at all levels – physical, mental and emotional with our family.

In the best interest of A, we have always wished to adopt her as she is extremely emotionally attached to us and we would not like to create a traumatic experience for her again if she were to be moved from our home. I know we have been turned down due to our religion, but when we had our plan of care several times we have mentioned that A, just as my own children will have the right to freedom of religion in our home and will be allowing to practice Catholicism and explore any religion she may like when she grows up to understand.

In regard to me being a single mother with no stability, I have raised and continue to thrive to raise 5 beautiful children including A and provide a loving stable home to them all. I would love to continue to provide a loving and stable home for A, if we were given the option to adopt her, which has been our wishes as a family from the day we received her. Furthermore, I moral but continues to create a discrimination against single parent family's homes, a stereotype I have been trying to dismantle throughout my 10 years of being a single mother.

Lastly, my husband, whom A refers to as 'papa' has and continues to cherish and love A, over bonding through facetime calls, sending birthday, Christmas and Eid gifts throughout her time in our home. My husband and I have also mentioned to my agency that we are willing to be part of the homestudy through skype, facetime calls or having an international social work services agency interview my husband in India, which can be accessible through us if needed to be provided.

To conclude, I would like to let you know that if my appeal for refusal of adoption would be rejected, which I believe would be ethically and morally wrong based on the reasonings given to me and my family, I as A's foster mother will continue to do what's best for A's best interest through supporting and loving her to create a successful transitional process into her new adopted home.

I would like to thank you for giving me the chance of hearing and allowing me to voice my concerns regarding A. I hope the decision that is made for A is in the best interest for her. If you have any questions.

What you have just read is a slightly edited version of the letter my mother and I had written to the Child Family Services Review Board (CFSRB) upon learning that our family's request to adopt A had been denied. I have written an autoethnographic thesis in order to share mine and my mother's experiences of how we were (initially) denied the right to adopt my sister. I have used our experiences to look closely at some of the underlying factors, such as financial status, marital status, family stability, race, and religion. This study aims to understand the experience of a non-White family trying to adopt a transracial child. 'Transracial adoption' is defined as a family adopting a child from a different race than theirs. My overarching focus is on how society comes to understand transracial adoption as a one-way transfer of minority children

into White families. When the roles are, however, reversed there is a lack of acceptance for minority families adopting transracially – specifically, when the adoptive child is White.

Our Personal Background

February 14th, 2017 – the day A came into our care. February 7th, 2018 – the day we were denied in our request to adopt A. I wasn't home when my mom had received the news about the denial. My mom has been fostering children for seven years. She is affiliated with a small independent fostering agency which employs, and trains foster carers. This agency has a partnership with larger child welfare agencies that place children in its foster homes. There are often workers in our home from both agencies, particularly for a foster child's plan of care meetings. I always like to ask my mom how the plan of care meetings proceed because I like to make sure my mother is supported by the child welfare workers and that she is keeping the social workers in the loop about the child in our care. On February 9th, 2018, my mom and her agency worker met with my siblings and I, to tell us we had been denied the right to A's adoption due to concerns about our religion, family stability, status of a single parent and my stepfather not being in the country. My mom said she could not tell us by herself because she knew how much A meant to us. Fostering brings with it many benefits for the child in care. You are providing a home, safety, and love to a child who was denied it through life's harsh circumstances. Every child deserves a place that they can call 'home'. It is a human right. But when it comes to fostering, I believe many do not understand the emotional aspect of what a foster family goes through. The emotional connection you experience when becoming attached to a child, in my experience, is one of the most difficult things as families involved in fostering are not really taught how to handle a loss of their foster child. We are so happy as a family when a foster child in our care has either been a part of family reunification or has been adopted by another family,

but it is still hard to let go of a child who has been in our care for months and sometimes even years. Every time a child comes into our care, I am initially so reluctant to attach myself to that child due to the repeated pain of getting hurt after becoming attached. This attachment is, however, inevitable. Each is a child who deserves that love and care. Every human does.

When I heard about A's denial I was primarily hurt, but I was also angry. I felt, as someone who at the time was studying social work, that the system should not be allowed to do this to us. All that critical social work that I had been learning, all of the emphasis on social work and social justice, was just a lie. I remember it was only a few days after my mom told me about the denial, that the child welfare worker for A came to our house for a meeting and was sitting in our living room acting as if nothing had happened. I remember being upset and expressing to her you can deny us all you want... but I didn't spend \$40,000 in school to study social work, so I can let your agency be unjust to us. If a minority doesn't speak up, we will continue to stay the minority. Not on my watch will I allow the oppressive system to win.

At that moment I felt the need to speak to the worker that way because she needed to know I was going to do everything in my ability to fight for my sister. Cathartically, I believe that she was silently agreeing with me. I thought I could see it in her expression towards me.

I contacted The Office of the Children's Lawyer and the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth but learned that A would not need a lawyer because she was very young and this was a child welfare situation. I had an amazing professor at York University whose class I was taking at the time and, after hearing the news, I asked for her help in this situation. The professor, and a few of my classmates, provided guidance by advising me to contact the Child Family Services Review Board (CFSRB). My professor assisted in drafting a

letter outlining how our request to adopt A was denied. She told me that, as per their policy, within seven days I would get a response from CFRSB.

While these conversations with my professor and my search for information were occurring, my mom had also requested a meeting with her agency to see what we needed to do to appeal this decision. From my perspective, her agency ‘sat on the fence’ – they would not agree to support my family to appeal the decision, and the worker seemed to be trying to persuade our family not to go up against the CAS. It was her unmovable opinion that we could not ‘win’. In my opinion, I felt much of her reluctance had to do with my mom’s agency being dependent upon CAS and needing CAS to purchase a service from the agency. This leads to the obvious question: What is the first rule in business? Make sure the customer is always happy. There could be consequences for the agency if they were to go up against the CAS. The focus of their argument was that we could not fight them, and that most adoption appeals do not have a good success rate. My mom’s agency did, however, promise my mom that they would arrange a conference call with the CAS agency, and they followed through. This proved to be very interesting because in that meeting, the CAS workers had informed our agency that our request to adopt A would not go through because of religion: our family is Muslim, and A was Catholic. This was the first we had heard that religion was a factor. They also shared that the conversation included reference to race, to our being of South Asian descent while my sister was White, and concerns raised as to whether our adoption of A would be accepted by the larger society. The phrasing they used was that “we didn’t fit under the same umbrella.”

My mom’s agency told us that they fought the CAS a little bit here and there, with no success, and then they gave up. At this point my mom was ready to give up, and we as a family had begun to accept the loss because I remember we had started to make my sister’s life book of

the time she was with us. That being said, with or without the agency, I was going to appeal the CAS decision. Subsequently, I wrote a letter to the CFSRB on behalf of my mother. Then I waited. Seven long days I waited. The next step according to the CFSRB is that we would get a telephone conference call, which was scheduled shortly after. In the meantime, I had found out that CAS is mandated to give a written denial, which they had not provided us. With this I knew we had a good chance of getting the adoption stopped. My mom and the CAS had a telephone conference call with a CFSRB representative. In that call, the CFSRB had stated that until the CAS performed a homestudy on my family, A's adoption could not proceed forward. To hear this was such a relief and the best news we had received in a long time. For the homestudy, I had stated to my mom it was best for her to request another worker because the one assigned (the CAS worker we had been dealing with) was, in my mind, already biased and I felt it would leave us at a disadvantage.

After this minor victory, everything seemed to fall into place. We got another CAS worker assigned who performed a homestudy on us which included a financial record check and an evaluation of family stability. In addition, a social worker in India was secured to meet with my stepfather as part of the homestudy. After all of this, the CAS adoption worker came to our home and told my mom she felt that there were no reasons for us to be denied as A's adoptive family. It was quite clear to her she could see how much we loved and cherished A. In layman's terms, we were approved! All the work, tears, and late nights were worth the fight.

While the adoption process was going through, I decided I wanted to apply for my Master of Social Work (MSW) to test my luck with higher education. In my thesis application I had spoken about the adoption process and how I felt the system had been unjust to us and that it made me think about all of the families who did not have the same opportunity we did.

Eventually, I was accepted into the Master of Social Work program at McMaster University. Once I had started to explore my topic of transracial adoption more in depth, I had realized that there was a history behind transracial adoption which I had not been aware of. This also led me to the ideas of race and how it can affect a transracial adoption. Research shows that the adoption system was designed for the White middle class and upper-income families with childless homes (McRoy & IijimaHall, 1996), whereas minority families are more often understood to be in need of being adopted out from their biological families, often into White homes (Papke, 2013).

My mother had already known that I wanted to focus my MSW research in regard to our personal experience and from day one my mother was on board about supporting me through my MSW research experience. I always had thought obtaining approval from the research ethics board would be a major concern because conducting research on my family's experience might have been seen as a conflict of interest, and because the identities of my family were not being protected. This was, however, something I wanted to pursue. I wanted to write our story for others to hear, for others to be inspired by, and to act. The ethics board and my supervisor, Ann, were super supportive of my decision. I had several meetings with them and together we worked on my application to make sure it was concrete and would allow me to proceed with my research.

The research focus for this study was to highlight what factors were involved in the attempts of a non-White family to adopt a White foster child. The purpose of my study is to share my mine and my mother's life experience of fostering, social worker behaviour, child welfare, and adoption so that minorities who are looking to adopt transracially may use mine and/or my mother's life experience to help guide their adoption process if they feel they are being discriminated against. This study will also explore motivations, values, ethics, and possible

biases regarding transracial adoptions. Highlighting the contradictions that exist in transracial adoption practices, I will use my own research as a platform for awareness of how social work practice can influence the lives of minorities who would like to adopt transracially, and for the need at both a macro and micro to create clearer transracial adoption policies for minority and White families.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory

The following section will focus on how my qualitative research project has undertaken a Critical Race Theory perspective which guided my research process and its analysis. Through the lens of an autoethnography and critical race theory value for storytelling, this theory has allowed me to rewrite our story through our experience and voice.

As a theory, Critical Race Theory (CRT) envisions race as the central aspect of the political and social organizations around us. CRT uses race and racialized identities to differentiate between conflicting factions. CRT scholars argue that there is a lack of attention for the universal nature of racism which has resulted in the application of policies and practice which have created unequal situations in the workplace and society.

Critical Race Theory was developed in the 1970s in response to the delayed progress on the civil rights movement in 1960s. While CRT is part of a much longer research tradition investigating race and racism, it includes key figures of the critical race theory movement scholarship such as Derrick Bell, Charles Lawrence, Lani Guinier, Richard Delgado, Angela Davis, Mari Matsuda, Patricia Williams, and Kimberle Crenshaw.

CRT views White supremacy as an unchallengeable fact of the neocolonial state, as well as a practice for changing it. La Garza et al (2016) states what divides CRT from the other forms

of racial critiques is that compared to the other “earlier racial theories, critical race theory doesn’t treat race as an independent variable, but rather it treats race as a site of struggle” (p.1). The authors go on to state that Derrick Bell had argued that people of colour have to abandon the ideas of equality as it is impossible to attain within the United States. Alternatively, people of colour need to confront their victimizers and acknowledge that the fight itself is “... a manifestation of our humanity which survives and grows stronger through resistance to oppression, even if that oppression is never overcome” (p.1).

While CRT recognizes that race is central, it also acknowledges that other forms of oppression can intersect and have the power to work together to subjugate an individual. Hence, CRT supports the intersectional critique. Class, gender, sexuality, ability, and other forms of -isms can be communally evident and intersect with race and function interactively. Additionally, CRT embraces that perspectives and perceptions of honesty, equality, and justice all reflect on the experience of the knower (La Garza & Ono, 2016, Taylor, 1998). CRT views the world through the lens of highlighting the real-world effects of race and racism. CRT challenges racist discourse and is significantly mindful of the way race and racism influence the bodies, individualities, and experiences of people of colour. Thus, it explains that racism is a social condition that goes beyond the individual racist acts and needs to be recognized at the institutional, social, economic, political, and historical levels (La Garza & Ono, 2016).

CRT embraces that perspectives and perceptions of honesty, equality, and justice all reflect on the experience of the knower (La Garza & Ono, 2016, p.2, Edward, 1998, p 2). One of the ways to challenge the dominant mindset of society is through sharing stereotypes, beliefs, and understandings such as storytelling. Stories not only challenge the existing state but also help shape agreement and create space for shared and collective understanding. CRT scholars have

worked to make changes by sharing stories by people of colour to inform their work. These stories help with disrupting the normative culture and the existing stereotypical stories of people of colour that support their marginalization (Taylor, 1998, La Garza & Ono, 2016). Giving to the world the stories of people of colour is a way of validating their first-hand knowledge or lived experience, to create a resistance against organized investment in supporting the colour-blind cover-up, and an ideology that claims not to see race as a risk which ignores discrimination (La Garza & Ono, 2016).

One of the key tenets of CRT is that racism is ordinary and widespread. The normality of racism means that those who hold power and privilege do not acknowledge their views or actions as racists, but normal, typical, and part of the existing conditions. The existing conditions are reinforced by the best interest of the "White elites" and working-class people. This status quo is supported by agreement by working together (Bowman et al, 2009). Bowman et al state that the interest upholds that Whites are only willing to change the power distinction when it is the best interest of Whites. The power held by White elites results in the power and control over resources and capital, and thus power over non-Whites (Bowman et al 2009).

CRT scholarship critiques the boarder history of Western scholarship, revealing that this scholarship is scattered with academics who have exploited, misrepresented, or ignored the voices of people of colour they have studied. This is why research conducted through CRT analysis encourages the de-privileging of mainstream discourse while concurrently allowing for the voices, stories, and experiences to come to the forefront (DeCuir and Dixson, 2004). Furthermore, the use of CRT storytelling is of specific significance for social work because the narrative inquiry is a mutual path for workers and researcher participants.

Literature Review

The following section provides a critical review of the literature. This includes sections which look at racial disproportionality of certain racial or ethnic groups in the child welfare system, a brief history of the adoption systems in the United States (U.S.) and Canada, including racialized families in the adoption system and racism in transracial adoptions.

Racial disparities within North American remain widespread and resilient. Notwithstanding the continuous efforts of scholars such as Bell, Crenshaw, Delgado, Matsuda to decrease overt racism and discrimination, there is still overt, covert, and organized racism that remains to be rooted within the social institutions that systematically reproduce and construct racial inequality (Koliboski et al, 2014). Anti-oppressive practices in social work have increasingly championed liberal and reformist social justice responses as a means to eradicate racial inequalities (Pon et al, 2011).

Racial Disproportionality in the Child Welfare System

Racial disproportionality in the child welfare system is signified by the overrepresentation of children from certain racial or ethnic groups in the child welfare system (Dettlaff & Ryecraft, 2010). The Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS), which represents over 40 Children's Aid Societies, stated in their infographic that Black people in Ontario represent 4% of the population in the province and 8% of the Toronto population. However, Black children are overrepresented in child welfare, making up 41% of all children and youth in the care of the Toronto Children's Aid Society (Sekharan, 2016). Overall, the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission have established that Black and Indigenous children are over-represented in admissions into care in

30% of cases. These findings represent the research Ontario, Canada, and the U.S. (Ontario Human Right Commission, 2018).

The association of Black Children in the child welfare system today has been interconnected to the history of racism against African Canadians, starting with slavery in Canada. Similarly, as Canadian institutions, child welfare agencies have adopted and progressed throughout a historical context of White supremacy, colonialism, and anti-Black racism, all of which have been intertwined within the roots of child welfare policies and practices. This has led to the establishment of disparities and disproportionalities for Blacks and Indigenous communities (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018). Due to the vulnerability to socio-economic conditions, the Black population is over monitored and are often subjects of pervasive stereotypes, with the history of separation and removal of children from their homes and placing them into White adoptive homes and residential schools (Morgan, 2016, One Vision One Voice, 2016).

The ongoing impact of anti-Black racism and discrimination faced by Blacks in Canada has put them in a disadvantaged position within our society. Racism, in systems such as employment, education and the criminal justice system, has historically and concurrently discriminated against Black families and contributed to the high levels of poverty among Black children and families in Canada (United Nations General Assembly, 2017, Ontario Human Right Commission, 2018). Experiences of poverty and oppression surveillance disproportionately for Black families, and this can increase the likelihood of their involvement with the child welfare system (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018). Poverty is racialized and therefore reinforces racial disproportionality and disparities in child welfare. Some of the over-represented communities include African Canadian and Indigenous communities, which experience

increased rates of poverty due to structural barriers and oppressive policies which are an outcome of colonization and racism (Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, 2018). Furthermore, these disparities have been linked to the lack of support available for minority families.

Additionally, racial bias within child welfare agencies has been framed as a contributing factor to the overrepresentation of minorities within the child welfare system (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018).

The disparate representation of minority children in the child welfare system has caused the differential treatment of children, families, and communities based on race – this is also referred to as racial bias and discrimination. Advocates of this theory believe this differential treatment can be external or internal to the child welfare agency. Practices by service providers who function outside of child welfare, such as hospitals, law enforcement or education, can contribute to the greater numbers of children of colour placed in the child welfare system (Fluke et al, 2010). Acts of racial biases within child welfare agencies can be considered as those policies and practices which may lead to the discriminatory treatment of families of colour. Furthermore, racial biases can lead some child welfare staff to have preconceptions regarding minority families, which can influence every judgement made by the child welfare worker (Fluke et al). However, discriminatory practice is not only and always determined intentionally by the child welfare workers. It can be a fact of institutional racism, which is defined as those policies and practices built into the organization that are allocated to serve the vulnerable population, such as racialized children and families. Policies and practices have been theorized to contribute more to the racial disparities and disproportionality that thereby contribute to the increased involvement of children and families in the child welfare system (Fluke et al, 2010).

History of Adoption System Canada & U.S.

Adoption is an important phenomenon in Canada. According to the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, as of 2018-2019, on a monthly average there are almost 10,000 children and youth in care in the province of Ontario. Furthermore, in 2014-2015, more than 36% of adoptions of children in care were by the foster family the child had been living with (Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, 2018). In 2016-2017, 767 adoptions were completed through Ontario Children's Aid Societies. However, according to the OACAS, the number of children available to adopt has decreased steadily in the last five years due to the Children Aid's Society's increased focus on keeping children living safely with their families or in kinship care (Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, 2018).

In North America, the first adoption laws were passed in 1851 in the U.S. Canada chose not to follow the U.S. until 1921 when it created provincial laws to supervise the welfare of its children. By the 1930s, most western countries were dedicated to legalizing and regulating placement processes for adoptees. During this time adopted children were commonly thought of as being of a lower class or status (Crook, 2016). Social service professionals who operated in adoption services, such as social workers, policymakers and psychologists, typically held the belief that for the best interests of everyone involved, it would be best to keep the adopted child's origins a secret. Social workers were in charge of screening both the birth parents' and adoptive parents' information (Crook, 2016). The purpose of keeping the secrecy of the child's adopted status was due to the notion that adoptive children were from a lower social class as this opinion was linked to the stigma that illegitimate children were only born in a lower-class household, thus adoption implied illegitimacy, despite the conflicting evidence (Crook, 2016).

Before the 1960s, the derogatory term “Negro” was used to refer to adoption indicated to the permanent placement of Black children or mixed-race children. Few individuals reflected on transracial adoption due to the ideas of secrecy of a child's identity. Adoption services were stretched for children of colour, as they were segregated and race matching mattered. For most of the 20th century, Black birth parents and children were denied adoption services by agencies due to religion, race or both. Black children were frequently unplaced before 1945. In the U.S. in states such as Florida and Louisiana, for many years and as late as the 1940s, not a single Black child was placed for adoption by agencies. Discriminated against and reluctant to create their own organization, the Black population relied on each other and informal adoption to take care of their own (Herman, 2012). By the middle of the twentieth century, there were an estimated 50,000 Black children in the U.S. who were in need of permanent homes.

When the race of children who needed homes first started to be reported in the U.S. (in 1948 and 1950), several adoption programs around the country began to recruit non-White parents to adopt non-White children. After World War II, adoption for Black children was considered part of a revolution in adoption – ‘special needs’ adoptions. Adoption services would publish a monthly listing of children and families waiting to find a home (Herman, 2012). By the late 1960s, these exchanges were widely used to place children identified as “hard-to-place”. At the same time, in the U.S. civil rights movement, there was an increase in awareness of racial inequality mainly for Black people and the resentment of inequality against adoption policies. Civil rights activists and child welfare professionals started to come together to promote the development of culturally sensitive policies, integrate agency staff, and promote outreach into Black and other non-White communities as a means to recruit non-White parents to allow for racially matched adoptions (Herman, 2012, Crook, 2016).

Racialized Families and the Adoption System

While focusing on the history of Canada and the U.S., we need to remember that these countries were formed on the history of White supremacy, racism and Western imperialism (Pon, et al, 2011). Historically, North Americans have created policies which have led to such horrible practices. For example, racist policies (such as Canada's Indian Act) that led to the residential school system, the 60s Scoop, and cultural genocide of Indigenous People have prevented the permanent placement of children in their family homes and communities. Lasting until the 1980s, they have caused generational trauma and marginalized generations of Indigenous Peoples (Pon, Gosine & Phillips, 2011; Tomasso & Finney, 2015).

Racism & Transracial Adoption

What is a family? Perhaps it is having genes shared by a biological form of kinship. Many people have this conception that a 'real' family involves a mother giving birth to a baby through the sexual unification with the child's father. This example is referred to as a traditional birth family. However, some families differ from the definition of a traditional birth family, such as an adoptive family (Katz & Doyle, 2013). Adoptive families are formed through the legal transfer of the child from the birth parents to the adoptive parents. However, due to adoptive families being formed through legality and not birth, adoptive families are still sometimes perceived as being less natural and less legitimate (Katz & Doyle, 2013).

Race-matching policies in the adoption system refers to policies in which children are given to adoptive parents of the same race. The reason behind this practice is that it creates less stigmatization for the adoptive child, as they are similar in race to their adoptive families (Bahl, 1996). This creates an idea that promotes the concept of constructing a perfect nuclear family just as society perceives it should be from birth. However, when children have a dis-similar

appearance from their adoptive parents, society may understand them as a family created legally, not by birth (Katz & Doyle, 2013). This is one of the reasons transracial adoption may be undervalued in comparison to same-race adoptions families. Research shows that adoptive families in general experience social stigmatization in their everyday lives. Weger (2000) discussed in their paper that over two-thirds of the adoptees in their study believed that adoptive families are viewed as being different and inferior to biological families, although they – as adoptees – felt no such disparity.

Racism in all forms may affect reactions towards transracial adoptions. Negative feelings towards racial minorities can lead to negative judgements and negative emotions, and less favourable attitudes about the child, the adoptive family and the practice of adoption. In their research with children from Latin America and Asia adopted by White families, Katz and Doyle (2013) reported that children had received many comments about looking different from their White American parents.

Papke (2013) acknowledges that the most evident feature of transracial adoption in the U.S. is that transracial adoption is predominantly dominated by White people as they exercise the most control in the adoption process. In most instances of transracial adoption, Asians, Native Americans and Blacks almost always serve as the biological parent or the adoptive child. Minorities have less control over the adoption process than Whites do.

Racial dominance and subordination, in which Whites hold a superior position to minority groups, exists within the adoption process. Likewise, there are methods in which different minority groups are situated vis-à-vis each other. Papke (2013) states:

Hierarchies of preference, race-based as nation-based, clearly influence which children parents are willing to adopt. Most Whites prefer healthy White infants, and after they discover

that such babies are in short supply, they are more likely to adopt children of Columbian, Korean, and American Indian ancestry than to adopt African American children (p.1042).

Furthermore, policymakers and judges also need to recognize the laws and rules which are in favour and best interests of Whites, which can be politically troubling (Papke, 2013). Current laws, legal institutions and legal proceedings shouldn't undervalue the socio-legal phenomenon of transracial adoptions and how the law, legal institutions, and proceedings have overall been on the sides of Whites. While the system does not explicitly protect White privilege, American law has played out from an implicit written meaning to an explicit action in which the framework is built around White privilege. Although this is not transcribed, legal disputes adopt a property interest in Whiteness (Papke, 2013).

As the system has embedded laws to help White people adopt, this seemingly leaves out minority families who would like to adopt as well. Due to the intergenerational trauma of minorities families being always overrepresented as the adoptees in the adoption system, this may disadvantage coloured adopters as the system looks to screen them in several ways such as financial stability, home visits, background checks, or emotional stability. Alongside these parameters, from a lens of White supremacy, minority families might not fare so well as White families.

After a review of the literature, and reflecting on my family's experience, I strongly believe the system has created this domino effect which has produced barriers for minorities who would like to adopt White children to divert them away from the adoption system. Thus, allowing them to think adopting is not right for them. Statistics on African American parents adopting White babies or children are surprisingly rare. With what little could be uncovered, studies have shown that 8% of White children in foster care are adopted by Black or interracial

families and 2% of adoptions in general were of Black parents adopting White children (Davenport, 2015).

Methodology

In this section I included the methodological approach that I applied to my research. I used an autoethnography approach to help me in exploring my central questions, to critically reflect and critically examine my mother's and my own personal experience of adoption through the child welfare system as people of colour.

Stories are the ways humans make sense of their worlds. Stories are fundamental to human understanding and are not exceptional to autoethnography. They are the focus of many oral traditions, narrative analysis, and fairy tales (Chavez, 2016). In its use of stories, the autoethnography approach is not only seen as personal but also political and allows one to retrace their journey (Orelus, 2013). Autoethnography includes research writing and methods that associate the autobiographical and personal to the social and cultural. All the while, it assists in challenging the “negation of the unrecognized account of the postcolonial subject” (Orelus, 2013). In addition to this, autoethnography can help marginalized groups bring forth their genuine voices and stories, which frequently go unrecognized in mainstream discourse.

By grounding my autoethnography within CRT, I looked to weave theory with mine and my mother's narratives together, to create knowledge and understanding around how minorities are affected in transracial adoption of White children. Without the use of these narratives, without the power of using these first-person accounts, and the role of bearing witness to injustice in the child welfare system, my ability to challenge the public dominant perception of transracial adoption would be limited. Chavez (2016) argues that we need to voice narrative as a way to “situate knowledge” (p.344) distinctively to gain from the perspective of the oppressed.

These narratives developed for me desire for social justice, power, and the need to improve child welfare policies and practices for minorities who are looking to adopt transracially.

By marrying both the CRT and an autoethnography approach I am drawing on storytelling in order to provide a more critical understanding of the particular experience of our family and how race affected our transracial adoption of my younger sister A. Storytelling is a fundamental tenant of autoethnography that is a part of one of the components of CRT. As stated above, without the inclusion of minority, the adoption policy and practice in the child welfare system would be limited to the personal experience and perspective of White transracial adopters. How I chose to think and write about these stories as a researcher, as a family member, a researcher and also as a participant in this research is worth noting. Critical Race Theory and autoethnography influence the way which I view the world and the ways I would like to describe my family's experience.

Autoethnography is a methodological approach which turns towards interpretive, qualitative, narrative, and critical inquiry (Dhoest, 2015). Reflexive writing is used to locate yourself as a part of the data you have generated and to explore your role and perspective within the process of the collection and interpretation of the data. Mason (2002) states that both naturally and inseparably the researcher will see themselves in the data generation and interpretation process and will seek to read the data which expresses those relationships. I understand autoethnography as a place where researchers' personal and professional characteristics are developing and continuously interrelating in the research process. In the research space, as a contributor to the research data I will allow my personal self to acknowledge my insider location and knowledge and to reflect on the complexity of our family experience of

transracial adoption. As a researcher, I will also turn the reflexive lens on and welcome my professional self to use an autoethnographic approach to write about my lived experience.

To collect data for my autoethnography, I used reflective journaling of my own experiences and both semi-structured and more informal interviews with my mother. My mother's story was shared through one formal interview between my mother and I; however, it was also shared through a number of informal conversations that happened due to the nature of our relationship and the fact that I was living with my mother and family while completing my research. The range of questions (view Appendix B) I focused on when talking with my mother included her thought processes from when my foster sister came into our care till the day, we adopted her, including the denial process. The conversations reflected her personal timeline of the events, her own accounts and stories about the experience of discrimination against our family, as a minority family seeking to adopt transracially.

With my mother's permission, I audio-recorded our formal, semi-structured interview using my mobile phone. The interview spanned about 45 minutes in length. I had three subsequent informal interviews with my mother in which we spoke more in-depth about transracial adoption and other examples of our time fostering. The informal conversations were more comfortable for both of us due to the nature of our relationship. A more authoritative setting was created in the formal interview. I believe that the question and answer format from the formal interview impacted the setting atmosphere. This seemed to make it more intimidating for my mother because she aimed to maintain a professional decorum in the interview. I noticed that she tried to use larger words that are not part of her day-to-day vocabulary. Additionally, I found her to be rambling at times, in what seemed to be an attempt to give me a more detailed answer. At home, we do not converse in this manner which added an element of awkwardness.

The informal conversations that took place subsequent to the interview, happened while we were cooking, cleaning, or driving home from an outing. This was when the conversations about our adoption experience were more likely to occur. These conversations were often spontaneously triggered in response to some current events related to A's life, and they lasted up to an hour in length at times. I did not draw on my research question during these conversations, as they were naturally answered throughout the informal conversations and allowed the conversation to go with the flow. As a researcher, I found greater value was derived from the informal interviews, as they seemed to carry a more honest response. In addition, both the formal and informal interviews were audio recorded and I personally transcribed them word-for-word to apply it to my thematic analysis.

Finally, my own journal writing insights allowed me to express my emotions and understanding of our adoption experience. Journaling is an established personal habit, which paid dividends with this process. I typically journal through difficult or novel periods of my life. The journal entries were heavier during the duration of my master's program, originally utilized as a stress coping mechanism. This eventually evolved into a primary source of data for my research. The process for journaling during my research was for me to analyze, reflect on and question my experience with the collective memory that I have of my family's adoption experience. I would journal usually after my mother's interviews so I could recall my personal memories of how I was affected by the adoption and, in my perspective, what I did to support my mother through the adoption process. Sometimes I would recollect memories while playing with my sister, A, or when having a conversation with my biological sisters and I would journal about it in the night. In my own personal ways, I was observing how similar my memories were to my mother's but from my own perspective of how I experienced it. I believe my own reflections were adding to

my mother's story because we were from the same household and shared the same adoption journey, but the experience was from a different lens. I have a strong appreciation for the journaling in that it was candid – my writing was informal but also gave me the chance to re-live and learn more from my understanding since starting my thesis journey.

Thematic Analysis is a valuable method for studying different research perspectives, highlighting the similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights (Nowell et al, 2017). After gathering my mother's and my own stories, I used qualitative analysis tools and techniques for data analysis, drawing on thematic analysis, which involves identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting on salient themes found within the data. In this case, the themes that emerged from my mother's interview, our conversations, and my reflective journals (Nowell et al, 2017). I opted to first analyze the interview and conversations with my mother to focus on her point of view. I first analyzed the themes that developed from these interviews before analyzing themes from my journal readings. The themes from the formal and informal conversations with my mother were similar, although much clearer with the informal conversations.

Once the analysis of my mother's interview and our conversations was completed, I moved on to my journal entries. These first required additional sifting of irrelevant details and emotional context. I decided to focus my analysis of my own journaling on themes related to power, fostering and child welfare as they were the prominent themes which were displayed in my mother's formal and informal conversations. My thematic analysis of my journaling was also guided by the current literature of transracial adoption, fostering and child welfare. I am indebted to my supervisor Ann for helping me read between the lines and notice patterns in a sea of text. Some of the themes that developed were foster parents' expectations of social workers, social

worker's expectations of foster parents, power imbalance, decision-making power and best interests of a child. The themes I chose to focus on were a result of their prominence in the interview and conversation data, my journal notes, and the research literature.

How I integrated Critical Race Theory and an autoethnography approach into my analysis is by using my mother's personal narrative to connect it to the wider issues of racism, xenophobia, and classism. Central to Critical Race Theory is the use of storytelling and challenging the ideas and assumptions of the status quo in our case transracial adoption.

Locating Myself Within My Own Research

In that I am the researcher, a family member, and a participant in this study, locating myself – and these multiple positions – in the research processes in a necessary step. As researchers, the practice of reflexivity throughout the research process highlights the importance of proclaiming and taking responsibility for our location in the research. Researchers' positions in their research will vary based on the focus of the particular research project and which of the many research methodologies is applied. For example, ethnographies, case studies, grounded theory, narrative and phenomenology focus primarily on the participants' culture, experience, narratives and understanding (Creswell, 2006). In each different instance, a researcher may or may not choose to explore and understand their own positionality, although, with most narrative research, it is common for researchers to share their own stories (Taber, 2012). In an autoethnography project, researchers' accounts are focused on themselves, and may sometimes include that of others (Taber, 2012). Many researchers choose not to publish their own reflection as this can leave them vulnerable and could lead them to be criticized by other scholars and colleagues. Other researchers believe that being overtly self-reflective can help acknowledge that they are not objective outsiders but are allied to the contexts and participants of their research

(Taber, 2012). Taber (2012) states that with an effort to be collectively open-minded, we can unintentionally disregard our own conceptual and theoretical understanding which can resurface through our data analysis. I am not comfortable with this. I am also aware that reflexivity is considered to be one of the tenets of CRT. To acknowledge who I am as a scholar, I am better able to reflexively analyze my own interactions with the research and the data.

I believe my location as a family member and research participant did hold a bias. When it came to data collection, I already knew I had a head start because I did not have to look for participants and my mother was already in agreement to participate. The only limitation I thought I may have was due to the nature of our relationship, it would have been a conflict of interest. Furthermore, it was extremely different when coding my data because I could not separate myself from what I already knew and how I felt about our family experience. To combat the subjectivity of these themes I am personally immersed in, I rely on accepted tenets of theories and research as anchoring points.

Findings

The following section will present the key findings emerging from my thematic analysis. These themes, and my writing about them, incorporate both stories shared by my mother in my interview and conversations with her, and my reflective insights into my own personal experiences in my journaling, as well as my efforts to locate myself within the research. The three main themes are: What Does it Mean to be a Foster Family, Power of what Workers Know Best and, lastly, Society's Perception of Transracial Adoption and the Notion of a "Perfect Family". These findings are presented in more of an informal writing structure, an autoethnographic storytelling, as I wanted to share the findings as the continuation of the story shared at the beginning of this thesis.

What Does It Mean to be a Foster Family?

What I learned from the whole experience of both my family's adoption of A, and my research into this experience, is what "fostering" means can be vastly different depending on the role one plays within the fostering system. Members of the foster family, the birth family, the foster child, the social workers, and the child welfare organization will not all see fostering in the same way. From my perspective, I have come to understand that social workers have their own particular idea of what it means to be a part of a foster family versus what being a foster family means to those who are a part of the foster family itself.

For my mother and I, being part of a foster family can be stressful, but it is extremely rewarding. It allows us to open our home to children who deserve the same loving, stable home I grew up in. In our conversations, my mother described fostering as challenging: you are taking care of somebody else's child, you have to work with the kinds of situation they were in before coming into your home, and with where they are now that they have arrived. Often the children are living with the trauma of physical, mental, emotional, and sexual abuse. This teaches you to be more careful about the way you are undertaking parenting due to the greater responsibility of being a foster to a child who is having to live with these experiences. The responsibility is also different if the foster child is a Crown ward. My mom told me "...you have the responsibility for their child [foster child], the child's parents, the responsibility to the worker, the agency. You have so many things to deal with." Additionally, being micromanaged on every move from the agency makes it harder for foster parents to be able to parent unreservedly. My mother feels that when it comes to responsibility, she understands the child welfare is legally responsible for the child, but she also feels there are so many rules behind everything that a foster parent can and cannot do. As a mother of five children, she has much experience of being a parent – she does

not feel the need to be micromanaged for her every move. There are greater responsibilities and accountabilities for foster parents. “Like, everything we do we have to notify the agency but sometimes we can forget because the foster child becomes a part of your family, so you assume what you do for your [own] child, you do for the foster child.” My mom recalled that when she had felt it necessary to give Tylenol to a foster child who had a fever, she had to get the social worker’s permission. This was after-hours and the on-call social worker did not pick up the phone, resulting in an anxious wait. She kept calling with no answer and, in the end, she chose to administer the medicine because the fever was getting worse. She explained that if it were her own child, she would not have had to ask around for permission, especially for something this miniscule.

Sharing another example, my mom talked about how one of the responsibilities foster parents have, is to support visits with the birth families. She described that this can be difficult when child has two to three visits a week, and they are located in downtown Toronto (which is roughly 30 km from our home). Adding to this stress, the foster family is responsible for coordinating the visits and drop off of the child, waiting until the visits are done, and bringing the child home. All this runs in parallel with attending to home errands and the responsibility of your own and other foster children who may be in your care. My mother acknowledges that it is part of the responsibility of the foster parent, but it can be draining for not only her but also for the foster children. This is especially true for the young ones, and we can often see negative behavioural differences after visits. At times we may leave the home at 12:00 noon and do not return home until 5:30 that evening with traffic. Smaller agencies sometimes do not have the resources to have volunteer drivers, or sometimes my mother’s supports are not available to help.

My mother feels foster parents are not given the credit they deserve for work they are required to fulfill. She feels that this might be because people feel they are get “paid” for fostering.

My mother and I had many conversations about how sufficient recognition and appreciation are not given to foster parents which is where it needs to be given. We both feel that foster parents need to be more appreciated and paid more because they are overworked and underpaid for the amount of work they do. The agency pays my mother the basic daily allowance, but all of the other baby items such as diapers, wipes, baby clothing, have to come out of her pocket. For my mother, it is not just about the monetary remuneration, it is also about recognizing that they are working hard – as hard as someone who goes out to work. A foster parent carries responsibility for caring for and meeting the needs of the child in addition to having responsibility to the child's parents and to the worker. Foster parents are required to meet the needs of both the child's child welfare agency and the foster parent's agency. There are many unwritten and unexpected elements one must deal with.

Knowing that it is not about just the remuneration, but also about the mental and physical stress that comes with parenting, my mother believes foster parents expect from workers and CAS agencies appreciation and support. It is imperative for the work they do to be recognized and valued. She does not think it is right for workers to make them feel that just because they are getting paid what they do does not count as “genuine parenting.”

When talking more with my mom about how supported she felt by the agency and her workers, she stated that she has had many different experiences. Some workers can be helpful while some workers are not as prominent in the child's life. My mom stated that: “Maybe because they have too many cases, some social workers they wouldn't even call to check on the child or they wouldn't even come for a home visit where they're due to visit every month.” She

went on to explain how this can cause a snowball effect as when the workers are not supported, they cannot support the child and families. My mom also felt that when workers favour birth families over foster families, this can cause more stress for foster parents. As foster parents are trying to help the child and the birth parents, they have to deal with the worker who is not mediating the situation in the best interests of the child. My mom's understanding is that the workers support birth parents to, "keep them happy so they can have less work as they know the foster parent will cooperate with the worker as we are employees of the agencies."

I think that some of these points back to the ideas of the power that the larger child welfare agencies have over the smaller foster parent agencies that they place children in. My mother's foster care agency is a small independent agency which provides fostering services and placement for children in child welfare care and, as such, has a partnership with larger child welfare agencies. I think the limited support my family received from the foster care agency was because the larger child welfare agency is my mother's agency's source of funding. Standing up against a bigger institution that holds a lot of power over you may be challenging – as I wrote about earlier in this thesis, it did not seem that my mother's agency could afford to fight back. They knew who held the power and funds in their own ways and could not risk being stifled that relationship.

My mom felt her agency's hands were tied as they were in the middle of the legal battle between my mother and the child welfare agency, and because of their financial dependence on the CAS. They could not (or perhaps would not) help with our appeal of the denial for our adopted sister. The agency was willing to help by only committing to the bare minimum of setting up the telephone conference call to speak to them about the CAS's denial of our request to adopt A. In the phone call they did not offer a rebuttal to my sister's agency about the

adoption denial, and from our perspective, immediately took a step back when we stated we were going to file an appeal with the Child Family Services Review Board (CFRSB). I remember when the worker from my mother's agency came to speak to my siblings and I about the denial. I had a list of reasons as to why they could not deny us, and all the agency worker responded with was, "we didn't have a chance at beating the bigger agency." But that was not going to stop me or my family from fighting back. I could observe how my sister's agency workers knew what they were doing was wrong. I recall an instance in which I spoke to my sister's foster worker and telling her that what the CAS agency was doing was wrong and that they could not deny our adoption based on their own judgment without a letter of denial or a homestudy. As I shared earlier, observing her facial expression, it felt to me like she had silently agreed.

My mother and I also discussed that, overall, we cannot always talk about the negatives of fostering or the lack of support from workers, in part because it is known that social workers themselves are overworked. My mom acknowledged that she has at times had amazing social workers who have supported us as a family through our fostering experience – including a worker who supported us in the adoption process for A. While I am certain that some of the workers could not speak out due to the fear of losing their jobs, when they would come for visits, these workers would also push me or my mom in directions in which we could succeed in our adoption.

In respect to our own adoption, my sister has grown to be a beautiful, kind, and loving being. We would not hesitate to fight to have her be a part of our family, and run through the legal process again, if necessary. Fostering has allowed us to be a part of many children's lives and to be able to see them grow developmentally physically, mentally, and emotionally. A, who came into our family at age seven months still learning how to crawl, has now started her first year of

Kindergarten. Fostering has opened our eyes to many different situations, and we have met some great children and families. It also has allowed us to educate and spread the word to others about the importance of fostering and adoption.

Power of the “Workers Know Best”

When it comes to the understanding of the idea that “workers know best”, I believe that because we are social workers, we have both the knowledge and power necessary for decision-making in clients’ lives. Social workers may believe that because they have the knowledge of policy and practice, and because they have been granted power as social workers, that they are able and/or required to influence the decisions made. Thus, not only affecting decisions surrounding the child’s life, but that of the foster parents’ lives too. This can result in the subjugation of those who have less power - the foster parents and foster children.

My mom said that sometimes as a foster parent, she feels like she gets the ‘short end of the stick’. As noted, she feels that the lack of support foster parents have from workers is because birth parents are more favoured over foster parents in the system. She explained that while foster parents are trying to help both the child and their biological parents, there is much more to deal with behind the scenes - they are also dealing with all of the different workers and families if they have more than one child at a time, which is prevalent in most cases. When I asked her why she felt she was not being supported, she said she felt that the workers were supporting the parents to keep them happy so they (social workers) have less work to do. The workers know that foster parents, as employees of the agency, are more likely to cooperate leaving them most times with the short end of the stick. This demonstrates the power hierarchy that exists in child welfare systems.

Workers also holds the power to make decisions in regard to who is and is not involved with making the decisions for the foster child's life. When my mom had the plan of care meeting for A, an adoption worker came to the meeting and told us the plan that had already been made for my sister's adoption. My mom did not have a say in it despite being her primary caregiver and administrator of the care plan. She even said she did not know an adoption plan had been made, that the adoption plan was going to be finalized that day, or that the adoption worker was even coming to the meeting.

My mother asked the worker why they did not tell her about the adoption plan prior to this meeting, and why they had not approached her first about the adoption since she had already let them know our family was interested in adopting A. The questions have, to this day, gone unanswered. Instead, they started to probe her with questions such as, "why do you want to adopt A?" My mom explained that we felt that it was in the best interests of my sister, and the healthy attachment she shared with our family, for us to adopt her. It was at this point that the workers started to question my mother's ability to raise children, focusing on how she was a single mother at that time. At that moment my mom felt like the workers did not given her a suitable platform or chance to challenge the workers for their judgment of her. She also realized that before they had entered our home that day, they had their minds made up that my mother was not fit enough to adopt A. As a foster family, I believe many foster families agree upon the notion workers sometimes seem to forget that they typically only see the child once a month, for maybe 2-3 hours at a time (sometimes less). Yet the workers believe with firm conviction they know what is best for the child – that these infrequent contacts are all that is needed to make the best decisions for the child. Foster families live and grow with the child for the time they are in our care – they are with them every day, getting to know them, forming relationships with them,

collecting and understanding their daily habits or likes and dislikes, nurturing them by supporting them as the foster parent would do for their own children. Despite this, my mother was not allowed to be part of the decision-making when the workers came forward with my sister's adoption plan. Our family strongly felt that what was in the best interests for my sister would be to live in our care, due in large part to the strong and healthy attachment we had built with her.

While the meeting went on the workers continued to use their decision-making power to silence and devalue my mother's voice and opinions. They made assumptions that, because my mother's husband – my stepfather – was not in Canada, A did not have a relationship with him even though this was not true. They assumed this and did not even give my mother a chance to speak up against this accusation. It was not until the second conference call my mom had with the child welfare agency that we had actually found out that the adoption worker had already found a family for my sister and had told the family about her. Within four weeks of the first plan of care meeting, my sister was supposed to be adopted by that family, and we did not know it. This information was intentionally withheld from my family. From our perspective, this practice of excluding foster parents from decision-making, and not sharing such important information about a foster child's planning, happens because the child welfare social workers feel that they are solely responsible for decision-making. This example reiterates the power imbalance, and the way that some workers seem to define the role of foster parent. The knowledge that comes from the foster relationship and living with the child may not always be recognized or valued which can devalue the foster parents' knowledge and contribution.

What became clear to us in all of this, was that in this situation, power was being misused. This was confirmed for us when we involved the CFSRB – they shared with us that the agency had violated mandatory adoption protocols by not respecting our family's initial request

to be considered as an adoptive family, failing to complete a homestudy, and not keeping us informed of decisions being made. The Child, Youth and Family Services Act (2017) indicates in Section 192 (2) (2), that “The society or licensee who makes a decision referred to in subsection (1) shall, (a) give at least 10 days’ notice in writing of the decision to the person who applied to adopt the child or with whom the child had been placed for adoption”. We had not been told of the plan, had not been considered as an adoptive family, and had never received a written decision related to our request to adopt A. My mom was simply told at the plan of care meeting, and later in a phone call with the child welfare agency, that they had decided not to consider us at all. The adoption agency tried to use their power to withhold the rights we have as a prospective adoptive family

A scenario like this suggests that we must not be the first family this may have happened to. If it was not for my social work professor at York University (to my dearest C.P., I will never be able to repay you for your help), I would not have known what our rights were when trying to appeal our adoption decision. I believe that, without the knowledge and connections to other social workers that I am privileged to have as a social work student, my family would have simply given up.

This power imbalance, in this situation and in foster care more generally, can create a constant struggle between the foster parent, the worker, and the agency. For the worker and agency, the power scales seem to be tipped heavily in their favour. This is connected to the development of laws and policies that grant child welfare certain powers but what we learned is that foster parents can be left powerless when they lack knowledge and clarity on these laws. The power differential is further exacerbated with the inherent authority given (or perhaps assumed) by the agency to make decisions without consultation.

Society's perception of transracial adoption and the notions of a "perfect family"

I did not have exposure to the ideas of transracial adoption until we adopted A. I knew that when we fostered, we were publicly viewed differently. I offer this example shared by mom in our interview:

I've had many foster children in my care who didn't identify as the same race as me. Once, we went to the doctor's office and there was me and my foster children at the time, which includes my daughter, A. A was with me and so was my other foster child who identified as Black, and there were my biological children with me as well. We were all sitting together and another patient in the doctor's office said to their partner in my language, Gujarati, "Oh, I wonder how many baby fathers she has?" And she referred to the different ethnic children I had. At that moment I felt hurt, that people still thought like that and have a lack of knowledge of adoption or fostering, and I think that's what promotes me to continue to foster as a Muslim woman, because there is a lack of knowledge and understanding about fostering and adoption in my community.

I remember myself at that moment – I looked at my mother when the patient questioned our family status and said back to the patient, "Please I'm sure you have heard of fostering – no? – and to what extent does how many fathers my mother's children have been a concern for you?" Through my perception, it was upsetting because there is a lack of knowledge about transracial families, but also a lack of knowledge regarding fostering and adoption in South Asian community and, like my mom, I believe that this drives me to become a social worker – to help educate our community.

According to my mom, one of the main reasons given by the adoption worker as to why

we were rejected as a potential foster family for A was that because “Three daughters and my son are from two different fathers, my daughters being from my previous marriage and my son being from my current marriage, we were not a stable family.” To add to this, the adoption worker questioned my mother as to how she would be taking care of A since my mother was a single mother (as noted earlier, my stepfather was in India at the time this was all taking place). My mother acknowledged that she had been a single mother for ten years, however she has raised four kids, giving them a decent, stable life and she had hopes to do the same for my sister. In that moment the worker went even further, stating my mother was not fit to adopt, not only because she was a single mother but also because her income was solely what she earned as a foster parent. In doing so, it felt me like this worker had reinforced the ideas – and the valuation – of a traditional, normative family and the ideas of what constitutes such as a nuclear family, a married couple with both parents present. She was stressing too the importance of a particular level of income. These factors seem to be the ideology that makes a family stable, and this is what is seen to be in the best interest of the child. However, because we were not a ‘stable family’ in the eyes of the adoption worker, it was best for the child *not* to stay with us.

When it comes to the ideas of stigmatization of a single parent family home, my mom felt that the personal impact was that these biases about single mothers still exist throughout the social work sector. My mother said this:

Why isn't there hope around this child receiving a good loving family regardless of these things? I am a single mother who is open to learning about my daughter's religion or ethnicity, and all I wanted to do is continue to prove/provide? the loving safe home for my daughter. I had been an independent single mother for ten years prior to my husband arriving in the

country and I was financially stable then and I still am. Why is it that a society thinks single mothers aren't financially stable or have a chance to prosper?

The questions related to income and my mother being a single parent occurred in an early interaction with the adoption worker. In the subsequent conference call, the adoption worker and the agency manager had stated the reason for rejecting my mother's adoption request was because my family was not Catholic, and we were Muslim. My mom felt hurt as they kept giving her more and more excuses as to why she could not adopt my sister, but my mom always felt that at the end of the day, they were mainly denying her due to race and religion. We could see how racism and islamophobia were emerging and would turn out to be the main reasons we were denied. I find it ironic that when we had a foster brother in our care who was Muslim, the agency allowed a White Catholic family to adopt him.

My mom recalled that incident:

You know I had another boy in our care, and he was Muslim and Brown, same thing – he's grown an attachment, the mom also had asked us to adopt him or to become his kin as she had no one. But one day his kin, after two years after not wanting any contact with the child, comes into his life and says, "we want to adopt him". She identified as White and Catholic. Nobody said anything to them. I know and understand 'kinship over everything' and I'm happy he's united with his family, but I used to advocate to the agency to make sure the kin had some knowledge about the Muslim religion because, like I said, everyone cares about their faith [the child's faith], but no one advocates. Nobody even had a problem with difference of race. The quicker he was out the system the better it was for the agency. The kin used to say all sorts of discriminative things to me about the Islamic faith. I never once said anything to the family, nor did anyone in any of the agencies do anything about it. But I

was open to learn about my little one's [A] religion, I was even there to support her mom through the first communion [A's]. In moment like this I feel that the system isn't in favour of minority families.

Thus, my question to the child welfare agency is: why is there a privilege for a White family to adopt minority child, but a minority family cannot adopt a White child?

My sister's agency had made further comments in terms of race, making comments about us being brown and my sister identifying as White, and expressing concern as to whether or not society at large would accept this. They were worried that people could see the difference in our skin tone and would automatically know she was adopted and that that would cause self-esteem issues or even stigmatization for A, and this was their way of protecting her. One must ask then, why is it that they do not appear to have these concerns when a minority child is adopted by a White family? Why they do not seem as worried that this can also cause self-esteem issues for the adopted Brown or Black child? Why they do not seem to consider that the best interest of the child is for that child to stay within the same culture and race? The agency had said that we, as a potential family for A, 'didn't fit under the same umbrella' which, in their terms, meant that what the worker and the agency valued and accepted as a suitable, appropriate family for A was a White and Catholic nuclear family.

My mom recalled:

Every time I had asked the agency to adopt my little one the response was more on the lines that me and my little one weren't under the same umbrella and the [birth] mom's wishes was for the little one to be adopted by a Catholic family and we weren't Catholic, and that me and A weren't the right match.

During the second telephone conference call between my mother's agency and my sister's agency, the child welfare agency had emphasized the matter of religion as they were afraid that because we practice the Islamic faith at home this would influence my sister to practice Islam too. To my mom and the rest of our family religion did not matter, it was about the healthy attachment we already had established and that she was doing well in our home. My mom said, "I didn't want to take that away from her. We reach so many milestones together. But again, at the time, religion wasn't my main priority because she was very little, and I recognize that I would support as she grew up to learn about the Catholic faith and to make her own decisions as to which faith to follow."

I asked my mom if at the time of deciding to adopt, did we consider this adoption from a transracial perspective? And from my mom's perspective she believes that she didn't focus on how our race was different:

I acknowledge we would be from different races, however my main focus was the best interest of A. I saw her as my own daughter who I wanted to adopt because I wanted to continue to provide for her a loving home and maintain a stable healthy relationship. I have thought they were going to be supportive of my decision because they already knew we really wanted to adopt her and had such a great relationship with the little one and they knew that. They saw that when they came to do the plan of care or the monthly check ups. They also saw how involved and determined I was to provide the best for her and the healthy relationship and bond we had altogether.

It is imperative to note my mother also acknowledges that race is an important subject and that we cannot ignore someone's race or ethnicity as it is a part of their identity. She admits that

as a family we continue to work together to learn about others experience of transracial adoption and how we can best support A, as a transracial adoptee.

Complicated Nature of Transracial Adoption and What We as Social Workers Can do to Improve

I want to use this space to acknowledge the complicated nature and emotionally distressing history of transracial adoption. What I have learned from the literature is that most transracial adoption involves non-White children being adopted into White families.

One of the primary reasons transracial adoption was critiqued was due to the one-way nature of transracial adoptions in which White families were adopting non-White children – it was far less prevalent for transracial adoptions to go in the other direction. It was more prevalent for Black families to serve as foster parents to White children but more challenging for them to adopt White children. This is reminiscent of the common practices of slavery where Black women were seen as wet nurses and mammies to their masters' children (Hawkins-Leon & Bradley, 2002). The one-way transfer did not only affect adoptions of White children by Black parents, but also by other parents of colors, and even by multiracial couples. At this time, discussions about mixed-raced adoptions occurred only in a one-way direction, such as a discussion about whether Whites should adopt children of color. However, adoptions of White children by people of color is so uncommon that it was not even being discussed. This demonstrates that child welfare race policies have more to do with racial hierarchy than concern for racial matching (Hawkins-Leon & Bradley, 2002).

With the growing interest in transracial adoption in 1960 through to the 1970s, adoption policy makers felt the need to reassess adoption standards that would promote encourage this practice. This was connected to emerging evidence that showed that there were negative social

and psychological effects of childhood institutionalization and foster care. Agency management viewed transracial adoptions as the only way to avoid these issues (Silverman, 1993). The Child Welfare League of America stated in their 1986 publication of the Standards for Adoption Services, that a child's placement could not be solely selected based on racial background. Policymakers supported transracial adoption policy because it meant achieving a permanent home for a child (Silverman, 1993).

However, at the same time the civil rights movement was highlighting ethnic pride, which led many racial and cultural minority groups to question transracial adoptions (Feigelman & Silverman, 2015). The National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) had issued a statement that looked to ban transracial adoptions. This ban was during the peak of the Black power movement and this one was one of the ways for Black separatism (Bartholet, 1995). The organization's position was that a Black family needed to raise a Black child in order to support a Black child to foster a positive racial identity. The association believed that only Black parents could demonstrate to Black children how to navigate and live within a racist society. Furthermore, the NABSW stated that transracial adoption threatens the Black culture and the Black community and was a deliberate form of cultural genocide (Bahl, 1993).

Indigenous communities had also articulated their concerns regarding the large number of Indigenous children placed in White families (Silverman, 1993). Child welfare agencies were alleged of enacting culturally insensitive practices. Indigenous groups viewed the practice of transracial adoption as a symbol of subjugation and mistreatment (Newman-Lipscombe, 1998).

In addition, Howard (1984) argued that transracially placed children – in particular, non-White children in White homes - may face stress, for example, due to the likeliness of their being the only non-White child in their neighborhood or possibly being rejected by their peers or the

society around them. The main concern is that transracial adoption is in itself damaging to the affected child (Howard, 1984). Furthermore, Howard stated that transracial adoption have led to emotional and psychological instability. On the other hand, external factors can destroy the racial and cultural identities of a child. Either way, if the transracial placement harms a child then the placement should, not be considered successful and should not occur.

Other research data shows transracially adopted children become well-adjusted just as in-racial adopted children. While in-race placements have advantages as they avoid problems of cultural identity and emotional adjustments and also provide the benefits of matching placements in a stable family environment (Howard, 1984), the only downside to this argument is that there are not enough in-race placement homes available. Furthermore, Howard states that the only alternatives to transracial adoptions for a child who not adopted by a same-race family, are non-adoption options, such as continued institutional or staying in foster care (Howard, 1984). However, the important and valid question here is how does this option serve the betterment of the child?

In comparison to the research on which the case is made for transracial adoptions, the case against transracial adoptions is argued to be primarily built on ideology (Bahl, 1996). Racial-matching policies can postpone placement permanence for a child. It also denies foster parents seeking to adopt a racially different child, even though they may know the child well as they have raised them and built a healthy emotional relationship with the child (Bahl, 1996). Evidence has indicated that children may suffer irrevocable harm from growing up with the permanence that can be provided by consistent parents. Almost 30% of children who grow up in insecure situations, including foster care, have reported outcomes such as involvement with crime, alcoholism or both (Hawkins-Leon & Bradley, 2002).

Furthermore, most of the support for transracial adoption comes from the use of statistics related to race in the foster care and adoption system. Black children represent approximately 67% of the children in the foster care system, while 46% of children available for adoption are Black children. Meanwhile, 76% of American families who are waiting to adopt are White families. Many of the White families have also indicated willingness to adopt transracially, however domestic transracial adoptions include less than 1% of all accomplished adoptions. Moreover, the ratio of potential adoptees to the ratio of potential adopters have been predictable at approximately 35 to 1. The number of Black children in foster care is higher than the number of White children available for adoption. Black children also remained in foster care 33% longer than the nationwide median (Hawkins-Leon & Bradley, 2002). As stated by Bahl (1996), many agencies have policies in place which prohibit transracial placements, even though there is a great number of White parents waiting to adopt and non-white children waiting to be adopted. While months and years go by, children are pushed into “hard-to-place” categories, which become more damaging to the experiences of the child in foster care and impacts their outcomes following care.

In Britain (a Western democracy similar to Canada in values), it is believed that it is better for a child to be in a transracial adoption or a transracial foster home than spending long periods in residential care. Research also confirms that adoption has better results for a child than being institutionalized or in residential care (Bahl, 1996). Furthermore, it is suggested that agency policies that keep children in institutions, or with foster families, or move them from home to home just to avoid transracial adoptions are damaging to the children and cannot be supported (Bahl, 1996). Rather than moving from place to place, it is important that children

receive love, attention, and stability and that they do not suffer in foster care (Hawkins-Leon & Bradley, 2002).

In reality, not all adoptions are successful; nonetheless, the failure percentage is not clearly related to adoptions across racial lines. Over 75% of transracial adoptions are reflected to be successful – which is a number equivalent to same-race adoptions (Hawkins-Leon & Bradley, 2002).

Identity is admittedly a complicated topic; however, social and cultural attitudes are learned, not hereditary (Hawkins-Leon & Bradley, 2002). People are not born knowing who they are, but they develop their self-awareness through social interactions. Self-concept is a representation made by the grouping of the aspect of oneself that they feel that is most important to them. Studies have shown that most transracial adoptees do have the capability of a positive sense of self (Hawkins-Leon & Bradley, 2002).

Kupenda (2006) raises the question as to why non-White families are not considered as potential adoptive families for white children. Kupenda (2006) argues that because our society is predominantly dominated by White people, Black people consequently have a greater understanding of the White culture because they have lived and work within the White-dominated society, compared to White folks who would have less knowledge of the Black culture (2006). Therefore, Black folks should be considered more qualified to be adoptive parents for White children than White parents should be considered as qualified adoptive parents for Black babies (Kupenda, 2006). However, Kupenda (2006) goes on to discuss that policies have shifted so that, on paper, Black families have the same rights to apply to become adoptive parents. However, the requirements (in terms of financial means, employment, etc.) do not consider the economic marginalization of Black people as compared to White people. Being

measured against a normative White standard has often resulted in the Black folks suffering under the same laws which were intended to protect them.

In the Canadian context, the Ontario Child and Family Services Act (CFSA) made changes in the field of adoption in 1984, in which point the Act specified that the ‘best interests’ of the child, family preservation and support services, permanency for the child, and respecting the culture, religious and regional difference were to be prioritized. They also highlighted the importance of trying to keep the birth family together (Newman-Lipscombe, 1998). During this time, adoption workers were encouraged to make placement plans for Indigenous children only in the context of Indigenous homes. In practice, this meant that no matter how many generations back the child’s Native ancestry was, the child would live in foster care until an Indigenous home was found (Newman-Lipscombe, 1998). Newman-Lipscombe (1998) also found it typically took anywhere from six months to two years to locate an Indigenous family. While the policies excluded the placement of minority children in White adoptive homes, in many cases, when a child had been in a White foster home for an extended period, their foster parents were supported to adopt this child in recognition of attachment and the need for permanency.

The child’s best interest is meant to be the main concern of all parties in the adoption placement. The individual child is the one who is directly affected by the decision that is made for the transracial placement or whatever alternative decisions that are made for them. Given the importance of a family to a child’s emotional development, one of the main interests is to place a child in a home that is stable and has a permanent family setting. However, the possible consequences of a transracial placement for an individual child should be weighed against the benefits of the stable family that transracial adoption placement would provide to a child (Howard, 1984).

However, author Bahl (1996) argues that the best interest standard often has been criticized as unclear and unsatisfactory. It does not encourage a “well-intentioned” judge to be understanding of his own possible biases or assumptions which can influence his decision-making process. Additionally, Bahl argues that what is destructive behind all of this is the hidden agenda that is unrevealed and the social and political policies, which will be far from the best interest of a child. Advocates of racial matching policies often word their political intentions in psychological terms; as “need” for a child to develop an ethnic identity is thought to be a psychological need. For example, neither the organizational interest of a child’s placement agencies, or the concerns of a minority group who are seeking to protect their ethnic and cultural integrity, should distract the adoption process from serving the child’s best interest.

Furthermore, Bahl (1996) argues that despite race matching, racial matching policies can delay the placement of children. As mentioned before, studies show that delay in placement is far more harmful than any transracial placement. The argument made is that the benefits of a permanent stable home regardless of race are undeniable. Therefore, the ‘best interests’ compared to racial matching policies need to be questioned. To secure a perfect racial match, a child may wait in a group home or be moved from foster home to foster home, which can disrupt any bonds that have been formed. These are the types of practices that can encourage the ideas of the child’s best interests (Bahl, 1996).

The reality is that unless the disadvantages created by racism and existing child welfare adoption policies and practices for non-White families wishing to adopt are eliminated, it will remain a fact that there are not enough Black, Indigenous, and minority families to address the need for same-race adoptions for the great number of non-White children who are in child welfare care. Racial-matching policies in this context complicate the idea of ‘best interests’ for

each child. It means that social workers may feel they can better balance out the best interests of the child if they have a prospective adoption placement from a racially neutral standpoint. (Bahl, 1996). Bahl (1996) argues that this approach would help in serving the overall well-being of children and avoid focusing only on the child's ethnicity. Additionally, there is no assurance that a delay in the process may happen, however, this will allow the adoptive parents or foster families to support and nurture the child's ethnicity (Bahl, 1996).

The needs of minority children in the foster care system should be examined further. Newman-Lipscombe (1998) suggest that more cooperation between adoption agencies and minority communities, to build a more open approach to adoption, can help the child learn about becoming part of a community. They also suggest that creating a time guideline to search for a Native family could make the placement process faster. These guidelines can also develop flexibility in addressing the child's multiple needs (Newman-Lipscombe, 1998). Although, this may result in quicker adoptions, once again, it does not speak to the systematic racism in the child welfare system if these timelines mean fewer Indigenous children are adopted into Indigenous families.

Furthermore, more clarification around the issues of what is meant by 'the best interests of the child' is needed, including how this can be different according to age groups and development stages. For example, when an older child who has been living in a foster home for several years and the foster parents may want to adopt the child, adoption might secure the child's emotional attachment and for the child to know they are already in a safe, secured protected healthy home – physically, mentally, and emotionally. It is also important to explore how the child feels about being moved from foster families to same-race homes, especially for older children (Newman-Lipscombe, 1998.)

Research can also look to more fully explore the practice of open adoptions, which may allow the child to keep in contact with their biological families while being legally adopted and this contact also may continue thereafter, as a way to preserve culture. Unfortunately, there has not been a systematic documentation of specific, current racial-matching policies in the Canadian context and how these policies have affected Canadian children in terms of delay or denial of permanent homes (Newman-Lipscombe, 1998). I had a difficult time looking for Canadian studies that report on transracial adoption for Canadian children in the foster care system, or if there is a 'best interest' model here in Canada. There was also notable difficulty looking for transracial policies in the Canadian context, which is why most of the data used in my paper comes from an American or British context.

In an ideal world, government intervention in a family would not be necessary. In an ideal adoption, the adoptive family would meet all the needs of the child such as race, religion and emotional needs. However, we do not live in an ideal world, as there are gaps within the system and a scarcity of adoptive families within the child welfare to meet the immediate needs of the children in the foster care system waiting to be adopted. Each child's situation should be assessed on an individual basis and should look more fully at the child's needs. Lipscombe (1998) notes that the race of a child is important, however, it plays an equal factor to other factors (Newman-Lipscombe, 1998).

Furthermore, foster parents who have fostered minority children for a long period should also have the right to adopt a child if the child becomes open for adoption, rather than having to go through a legal battle to be able to adopt the child as my family did. One would assume that if a parent is suitable to foster a child then they should be suitable for the child to be adopted by them (Newman-Lipscombe, 1998). I believe that promoting the child's racial identity, creating

racial awareness, attending training sessions and using agency support systems can help support a child to thrive a transracial adoption. If a child is placed in a White home, then both the minority communities and the White communities must cooperate and assist the adoptive family. Often families benefit from joining groups with others that have shared experiences. We can learn more about how to help children transition successfully into transracial adoption families through families that have experienced it (Newman-Lipscombe, 1998).

As social workers, we see an influx of minority children coming into care and waiting in the foster care system, greatly in need of a place that they can call home. The child needs help to develop a secure attachment and should be able to feel the self-confidence to develop a positive identity (Newman-Lipscombe, 1998). From my own experience, I think it is important that a family who is happy to provide a child with a safe, secure, stable and loving home should be considered to be the adoptive family for a child who needs a home, if these families are also willing to attend racial and religious awareness training or support groups, or are willing to seek help from people throughout the community so they can help the child learn about their own identity can help a transracial adoption thrive.

Despite the literature demonstrating the need for and importance of same-race adoptions for minority groups, child welfare practices can actively work against the needs of the minority child. These outcomes can be understood through the intersectionality of child welfare, racism and the colonization that is reflected in historical and current day foster care and adoption policies. These structures discriminate against racialized families, foster families and potential adoptive families from Black, Indigenous and other minority communities in numerous ways. This includes those who do not meet the normative adoption requirements (in terms of financial means, employment, religious requirements, etc.), for example single parent family homes or

those who are less economically well off (Kupenda, 2006). When there are not enough same-race adoptive homes available, the prevention of transnational adoption can disadvantage racialized and Indigenous children. When same-race policies and practices are in place for adoption, but are not in place for foster care, then the requirement for same-race adoptions may disadvantage children who have established bonds with foster families of a different race who are not then permitted to adopt them. My family's experience of trying to adopt A is one example in which the adoption policies and practices of child welfare opposed our request to adopt A on factors of religion, skin colour, socioeconomic status, and marital status. What is interesting is that these factors were not barrier for my sister A to receive foster care from my family prior to adoption, but somehow became deal breakers when applying for the same level of care permanently – through adoption.

In reflection, it is important to say that this thesis is not an endorsement of transracial adoptions, but a presentation of the current power structures in child welfare that actively work to disenfranchise certain groups and, ultimately, to disadvantage some children. It is important to acknowledge the risks and dangers of endorsing White families adopting non-White children in the context of White privilege, colonialism and racism. However, there may be some circumstances, such as demonstrated by my family's experience and addressed in some of the literature, in which transracial adoption in either direction could be considered.

Gaps in Literature

I believe there are several gaps in the literature for transracial adoption. There is a lack of literature reflecting personal experience of how minority families face barriers connected to same-race and transracial adoption policies and practices and how the system, rooted in White privilege, is covertly discriminating against them. Furthermore, when analyzing the data and

literature, all perspectives are from the viewpoint of how Whites adopt transracially or how the adoption system is created to appeal to them. When reading the literature what I have learnt is that minorities are seen to be at the short end of the adoptee stick, not viewed as the adopter.

Furthermore, literature regarding transracial adoption is currently outdated while most transracial adoption emphasizes the history of transracial adoption in the 1900s, but nothing in relation to the current need to focus on the barriers minority families face when trying to adopt, why fewer minority families are adopting in general in Canada, and how the system can help them overcome these racial barriers.

Additionally, I believe there is a need to have more literature on Canadian policies and practices with transracial adoption. While Canadian policies and practices focus on the history of transracial adoption, I had a difficult time finding recent policies for transracial adoptions in Canada. Mainly, the literature is focused on the American context. Moreover, there are also outdated statistics in Canada regarding the child welfare system and the adoption system/rates of minorities being adopted.

The literature review has allowed me to expand and build on the literature of how racism in the child welfare system has historically and continues to unequally treat minorities whether it be through policies, practices or the legal system. The legal institution may have created anti-racism policies to tackle racism, however, the beliefs and actions of racism continues to be covertly embedded within our system, policies and practices in the adoption system through disparities of minority children and the lack of minority families adopting a child in the child welfare system.

Implications & Conclusion

While working on my thesis I realized how much more complex, more organizational, the global phenomenon transracial adoption is and that my autoethnography and critical reflection are only the beginning of addressing the complex nature of this topic. Furthermore, policymaking can be difficult around transracial adoption when there can be many different stances to recognize. I hope that reading my thesis can provide knowledge for organizations to change the policy, practice and social work education around transracial adoption in North America. The child welfare system needs to create tangible change by acknowledging and actively working to demolish systemic racism. For example, addressing the structural barriers to why there are fewer minorities families adopting and how to implement more inclusive policies and practices.

In my own terms, the reason I choose autoethnography approach was in hopes that it could encourage a more personal understanding of how society perceives transracial adoption to be this one-way transfer of minorities into white family homes and that when the roles are reversed there is a lack of acceptance of transracial adoption. I hope my project is the one small step in addressing the larger issue.

To conclude, I am left making a bold and controversial statement. The current state of transracial adoption in Canada is abysmally one-sided and feeds the hegemony of White privilege. With this autoethnography research, I hope that mine and my mother's experience has shed some light on the challenges faced by minority families in society who are trying to adopt – both same-race adoptions and transracial adoptions – and the racism that is prevalent within the child welfare system. The literature review provided evidence of this unbalanced system and the downstream consequences of upholding existing power structures. There is some evidence of

change throughout history towards minority families trying to adopt transracially, but it is slow and likely expected to be gradual, and such decisions should be carefully considered. But, in reality, what needs to happen is for the child welfare system to sort itself out by addressing the systematic racism and its impacts on the adoption system – both same-race adoption and transracial adoptions – and to determine what is meant by the ‘best interests’ of the child.

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Appendix A

LETTER OF INFORMATION / CONSENT FOR FAMILY MEMBERS USING AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODS

A Study About Factors Involved in Attempts of a Non-White Family Trying to Adopt Transracially.

Purpose of the Study:

This study aims to understand our family's experience of transracial adoption. I want to focus on how the Child Welfare system responded to our attempts as a non-white family to adopt a white child whom we had been fostering, and the factors that were involved. I would like to share the story of my own and our family's, experience of these various factors. This will include your experience as I will be sharing our family experience, so I am asking your permission to include you in my research.

What will happen during the study?

In my research, I would like to focus on your experience of the process of the adoption. To do this, we will first have an interview. In this interview I will ask you a number of questions about your experience of the adoption process and your understanding of the different factors that were involved. I will ask you questions such as:

- Tell me about your experience with fostering?
- Tell me about your agencies and your social workers' responses to your request to adopt?
- What factors do you believe impacted the adoption process?

There may be other moments when we have fewer formal conversations about the adoption process. These conversations might include sharing information about my experiences, your experiences or those of other family members. We might also be chatting about feelings, or about the impacts of the experience of each of us and other family members.

In both the interview and any other conversations that we have, you do not need to answer any questions or share any information you are not comfortable sharing. In addition, you can choose to take a break, or stop the interview or the conversations at any time. You can also choose to withdraw from the study completely. There will be no consequences for you if you decide to do so.

With your permission, I will audio-record our formal, semi-structured interview using my phone. I am the only one with access to my phone. Upon completing the interview, I will transfer the audio file to my computer which will be placed into a password protected file. The audio-recording will then be deleted from my phone. I will then personally transcribe the interview. The interview will last approximately 45mins to an hour.

Potential Harms, Risks or Discomforts:

There is a risk created by this study that I will not be able to guarantee your anonymity. My name will be on this thesis and people who know me, you or our family and who read my thesis will be able to identify you. It is your choice as to what information you decide to share with me. I will not be using your name in the thesis. In its place I will be referring to you by your relationship to me – "mother".

Another consideration is that recounting your own experiences and/or those of family members may create feelings of discomfort or upset for you. As I mentioned, if this happens you can choose to take a break, stop the interview or conversation, or stop taking part in the study. Withdrawing from the study is possible up until the point at which I submit my thesis to my supervisor and second reader.

Are there any benefits to doing this study?

This study will not directly benefit you in any way. You may find it beneficial and helpful to reflect and talk about your experience of the adoption process. It is my hope that by sharing your experience I can help to generate some awareness about transracial adoption that is not about white families adopting non-white children, but about non-white families adopting white children. I hope to also raise awareness of how social work practices in these contexts can impact families attempting to adopt transracially and to inform social work practice going forward.

Who will know what I said or did in the study?

Every effort will be made to protect your confidentiality and privacy to the extent that this is possible. As I mentioned, I will not use your name (I will instead refer to you as “mother”) in the thesis but I cannot guarantee that your identify will be protected. Anyone who knows me and reads the thesis will know who I am referring to. The information/data you share with me in the interview and our conversations will be kept in on my personal computer, which is password protected. On my computer, it will be in a special file which is also password protected. Once the study is complete, I am seeking your permission to keep the data for two years so that I might write a paper for publication in an academic journal.

What if I change my mind about being in the study?

Your participation in this study is voluntary - it is your choice to be part of the study or not. If you decide to be part of the study, you can stop (withdraw), for whatever reason, even after signing the consent form. This includes at any point in the study up until up until I submit my thesis to my supervisor and second reader. If you decide to withdraw, there will be no consequences to you. At this point, I will ask you if we could have a conversation about whether any data that you provided could remain in the thesis.

How do I find out what was learned in this study?

I expect to have this study completed by approximately early September 2020. If you would like a copy of my thesis, please let me know how you would like it sent to you. I also plan to write a short summary of thesis – if you prefer, you could have a copy of this.

Questions about the Study:

If you have questions or need more information about the study itself, please contact me or my supervisor at:

Habiba Patel
Email: pateh5@mcmaster.ca
Supervisor: Ann Fudges Schormans
Email: fschorm@mcmaster.ca

This study has been reviewed by the McMaster University Research Ethics Board and received ethics clearance. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, please contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Secretariat
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
C/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support
E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

CONSENT

- I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Habiba Patel of McMaster University.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested.
- I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time or up until I submit my thesis to my supervisor and second reader.
- I agree to participate in the study.
- I have been given a copy of this form.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name of Participant (Printed) _____

1. Yes, I would like to receive a summary of the study’s results.
 No, I do not want to receive a summary of the study’s results.

2. Yes, I agree to allow Habiba Patel to keep the data for two years to allow time to write a paper for publication.
 No, I do not give permission that allows my data to be kept for two years to allow time to write a paper for publication.
3. Yes, I agree that the interview can be audio recorded.
 No, I do not agree that the interview can be audio recorded.

Appendix B

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

When Transracial Adoption Goes in Another Direction

Habiba Patel, (Master of Social Work)

(Department of Social Work – McMaster University)

Information about these interview questions: In our interview, I will be asking you a number of questions to learn more about your experiences related to your family's experiences of adopting your foster daughter. This is a list of the questions that I will be asking you. In the interview itself, the exact wording of the questions may change a little. Sometimes I may use other questions to make sure I am understanding what you tell me or if I need more information. I might, for example, use this type of question to be sure I have understood you: "*So, you are saying that ...?*" To get more information I may ask: "*Please tell me more?*". To learn what you think or feel about something I might ask: "*Why do you think that is...?*"

1) Tell me about your experience with fostering?

- What were your reasons for becoming a foster parent?
- How many years have you been fostering?
- How many children have you fostered?
- Overall, how would you describe your experience with fostering?
- What's your experience working with social workers? And with birth families?
- Is there anything you would have done differently in terms of fostering?

2) What were your reasons for choosing to adopt your foster child?

- How did you come to the decision that you wanted to adopt?
- Who was part of this decision-making?
- How did the different members of your family respond to this decision?

3) When you were starting the adoption process, what were your views on transracial adoption and whether it was right for your family?

- At the time of deciding to adopt, did you, and if so how, consider this adoption from a transracial perspective?
- If so, what kind of response did you anticipate from the agency and the workers?

4) Tell me about your agencies and your social workers' responses to your request to adopt?

- What, if any, issues or concerns were expressed?
- Did they, and if so how, support your decision?
- If support was not provided, what, if any, barriers were put in place?
- How did you feel about the responses you received from the agency and social workers?
- Were you successful in your adoption process?

4) What factors do you believe impacted your adoption process?

- For example, what barriers did you face?
- What factors facilitated the adoption process?
- Where/from whom did you find support and assistance?

- What did this support and assistance look like?
- What, if any, personal resources did you draw on in this situation?

5) Can you tell me whether these factors had an impact on you and your family and, if so, what the impact was?

- How, if at all, were you personally impacted by these factors?
- How did you feel about these personal impacts?
- How, if at all, was your family impacted by these factors?
- How did you feel about these impacts on your family?

6) What, if anything, do you think should have been done differently?

7) Is there anything important we forgot? Is there anything else you think I need to know about your transracial adoption?

END

Appendix C

McMaster University Research Ethics Board (MREB)
c/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support
MREB Secretariat, GH-305
1280 Main St. W.
Hamilton, Ontario, L8W 4L8
email: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca
Phone: 905-525-9140 ext. 23142

CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS CLEARANCE TO INVOLVE HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH

Today's Date: May/12/2020

Supervisor: Dr Ann Fudge Schormans
Student Principal Investigator: Ms. Habiba Patel
Applicant: Habiba Patel
Project Title: When Transracial Adoption Goes in Another Direction.
MREB#: 3706

Dear Researcher(s)

The ethics application and supporting documents for MREB# 3706 entitled "When Transracial Adoption Goes in Another Direction. " have been reviewed and cleared by the MREB to ensure compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the McMaster Policies and Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants.

The application protocol is cleared as revised without questions or requests for modification. The above named study is to be conducted in accordance with the most recent approved versions of the application and supporting documents.

Ongoing clearance is contingent on completing the Annual Report in advance of the yearly anniversary of the original ethics clearance date: May/12/2021. If the Annual Report is not submitted, then ethics clearance will lapse on the expiry date and Research Finance will be notified that ethics clearance is no longer valid (TCPS, Art. 6.14).

An Amendment form must be submitted and cleared before any substantive alterations are made to the approved research protocol and documents (TCPS, Art. 6.16).

Researchers are required to report Adverse Events (i.e. an unanticipated negative consequence or result affecting participants) to the MREB secretariat and the MREB Chair as soon as possible, and no more than 3 days after the event occurs (TCPS, Art. 6.15). A privacy breach affecting participant information should also be reported to the MREB secretariat and the MREB Chair as soon as possible. The Reportable Events form is used to document adverse events, privacy breaches, protocol deviations and participant complaints.

Document Type	File Name	Date	Version
For Information Only	Letter of Support	Feb/25/2020	1
For Information Only	Professor James Gillet Email Approval	Mar/29/2020	1
Letters of Support	Counseling Services Info Sheet	Apr/07/2020	1
Interviews	Interview Guide	Apr/07/2020	1
Consent Forms	Letter of InformationConsent[mother]	May/08/2020	1
Consent Forms	Letter of InformationConsentStepfatherSisters	May/08/2020	1
Consent Forms	ParentalLetter of InformationConsentBrother	May/08/2020	1
Consent Forms	Letter of Assent Form (Brother)	May/08/2020	1

Dr. Violetta Ighneski



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