
Outcomes of Transracial Adoption

Arnold R. Silverman

Abstract

In the United States, the first transracial adoption placements in substantial numbers were of Japanese and Chinese children following World War II. During the 1950s, after the Korean War, Korean children were adopted by American families in large numbers. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, more than 10,000 African-American children were adopted by white parents. Subsequently, however, this practice decreased dramatically in response to strong condemnation by many African-American social workers and others.

Research on transracial adoption indicates that most minority children in transracial placement adjust very well to their mixed-race environments. Delay in placement and preplacement physical and emotional problems have a negative impact on the development and adjustment of these children. Most transracial adoptees have a sense of identity with their racial heritage, but the strength of this identity depends, to a large degree, on the commitment of the adoptive parents to foster it.

In view of the growing number of minority children in need of permanent homes, it is urged that transracial adoption be retained as one viable alternative.

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The term transracial adoption means the joining of racially different parents and children together in adoptive families. While this term is sometimes reserved for the adoption of black children by white families, here it is understood to include also the adoption of Native American, Asian, and Hispanic children by white families.

Transracial adoption is a fairly recent event. The first large numbers of transracial placements occurred as American soldiers and their families adopted children from the war ravaged countries of Asia. Weil has reported that nearly 3,000 Japanese children were adopted by Americans between 1948 and 1962, and that 840 Chinese children were adopted, mostly by white American families, during this same period.¹ However, because of international relief efforts and indigenous economic and social developments, the number of such adoptions gradually decreased and had become very small by the 1960s.

The Korean War (1950-1953) created renewed interest in transracial placements. Harry Holt, an American farmer, sought homes for children dislocated by the Korean War. His efforts resulted in the creation of the largest international adoption program. Today the Holt program places children not only in the United States but throughout the developed world. More than 38,000 adoptions of Korean children in America took place between 1953 and 1981.¹ Since 1974, Korea has introduced legislation to reduce the intercountry adoption of Korean children and to promote adoption within Korea.² Nevertheless, between 1,000 and 2,000

Korean children are adopted in the United States each year, usually by white Americans.

The Vietnam War added to the numbers of Asian transracial adoptions. American involvement in the war and in relief efforts fostered the placement of many refugee children in white American homes; but as American military involvement in Vietnam concluded, the number of adoptions of Vietnamese children by U.S. citizens decreased to very small numbers.

Hispanic children from parts of Central and South America have slowly and steadily contributed to the numbers of foreign-born, nonwhite children adopted by white Americans. Rising from a mere handful in the 1950s and 1960s, these adoptions now number nearly 1,000 annually and primarily involve children who come from Colombia, El Salvador, and Mexico.^{1,3}

In the late 1950s, the Indian Adoption Project sponsored by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Child Welfare League of America supported efforts to find inracial and transracial homes for displaced Indian children.⁴ Close to 400 children were placed, mostly transracially, before Native American opposition and passage of the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 finally led to the abandonment of these efforts.

A major part of transracial adoption has involved the placement of black children in white homes. Evidence suggests that there were few such adoptions during the 1940s and 1950s,⁵ but in the early 1960s there began an increase in the number of black-white transracial placements which continued until the early 1970s. Sparked by citizen advocacy groups in Montreal, Canada (Parents to Adopt Minority Youngsters) and in rural Minnesota (the Open Door Society), interest in transracial placements spread throughout the country.⁴ Social service agencies became increasingly involved in making such placements, which rose steadily through the 1960s and peaked in 1971 with more

than 2,500 black-white transracial adoptions that year.⁶ Between 1960 and 1976, more than 12,000 of these adoptions were recorded.⁷

When the interest in transracial placement began to widen, adoption policy-makers felt obliged to reevaluate earlier adoption standards which discouraged this practice. Well aware of the negative social and psychological impacts of childhood institutionalization and foster care, agency leaders saw transracial placement

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as one way to avoid these problems. The Child Welfare League of America explicitly stated in the 1968 edition of *Standards for Adoption Service*⁸ that "racial background in itself should not determine the selection of a home for a child." At that time many policymakers supported transracial adoption as a means of achieving permanency for children with disrupted family lives.

Controversy Over Transracial Adoption

As the number of black-white transracial placements rose sharply, however, black social workers began to question whether sufficient efforts were being made to find homes for black children within the black community and whether transracial adoption was diminishing and destroying the integrity of that community. In 1972, at its first annual convention, the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) passed a resolution vehemently opposing transracial adoption. The vigor with which this position was advanced can be seen from the statement of the 1972 resolution:

Black children should be placed only with black families whether in foster care or adoption. Black children belong physically, psychologically and culturally in black families in order that they receive the total sense of themselves and develop a sound projection of their future Black children in white homes are cut off from the healthy development of themselves as black people We have committed ourselves to go back to our communities and work to end this particular form of genocide.⁹

Responding to the criticisms of the NABSW, members of the social service establishment began to reevaluate their positions on transracial placement. In the 1973 revision of the *Standards for Adoption Service*,¹⁰ the Child Welfare League of America stated, "In today's climate, children placed in adoptive families with simi-

transracial placement. The 1988 edition of *Standards for Adoption Service* observes:

Children in need of adoption have a right to be placed into a family that reflects their ethnic or cultural heritage. Children should not have their adoptions denied or significantly delayed, however, when adoptive parents of other ethnic or cultural groups are available.¹¹

A presidential task force, comprised of government officials selected from a variety of social agencies, took a similar position by stating, "While it is preferable to place a child in a family with a similar racial background, transracial adoption should be a permissible method of providing a loving permanent home."¹²

The National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) has not changed its position of opposition to transracial placement. In both 1977 and 1985, the presidents of the NABSW reaffirmed the association's 1972 position.¹³ Beyond the position of the NABSW, a number of writers have also expressed strong opposition to transracial placement.¹⁴⁻¹⁶ However, the minority community has not been uniformly opposed to transracial adoptions. One study conducted in a midwestern black community found a majority (57%) generally receptive to the idea, while only 7% were totally opposed.¹⁷ Another study of black child care professionals found a similar division of opinion on transracial adoption among workers with varying exposure to the practice. Those who had direct experience with transracial adoption tended to evaluate it more favorably, while those who had no experience with it were much more critical.¹⁸

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lar racial characteristics can become more easily integrated into the average family and community." Thereafter transracial placements declined sharply. By 1976, black-white placements had dropped to 1,076.⁶ In 1987, black-white transracial adoptions were estimated to be 1,169, while adoptions of children of other races—mainly Asian and Hispanic—were estimated to be 5,850. (See the article by Stolley in this journal issue.)

At the present time, one cannot determine with certainty either the total number of adoptions in general or the total number of transracial placements in particular.

Transracial adoption remains controversial. On the supporting side, one finds groups like the North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC), representing more than 400 child advocacy organizations in the United States and Canada, who have long expressed their commitment to transracial placement. The Child Welfare League of America now assumes a position of qualified support for

Studies on the Outcomes of Transracial Adoption

The Adoption of Native American Children

Fanshel studied the adjustment of a group of Native American children who had been adopted by white families between 1958 and 1967.¹⁹ During this time the Indian Adoption Project placed 395 children, of whom 97 were adopted by white families and became the subject of Fanshel's investigation.

Most of the children in Fanshel's study were under 21 months of age at the time of placement, and the parents were interviewed on three separate occasions over a

five-year period. Parental impressions were converted into an Overall Child Adjustment Rating, which served as the measure of each child's adjustment. However, the children were not evaluated directly at any time. Fanshel presented the results of his studies in a book titled *Far From the Reservation*. He concluded that the level of parental satisfaction was high and that the children were secure and generally well adjusted. He stated, "My overall impression is that the children are doing remarkably well as a group. From a physical growth and developmental standpoint, they appear to be thriving In the realm of personality and behavior patterns there are more incipient signs of difficulty than in other areas, but this is true of only 30% of the children and most of these are seen to have moderate rather than serious problems."¹⁹

Most of the adoptions of Native American children were by white families. In 1967 a national survey disclosed that, of 696 Native American children who had been adopted, 84% (584) had been adopted by white families.¹³ As mentioned earlier, knowledge of increasing adoption of Native American children by white families prompted vigorous opposition from tribal leaders across the country and ultimately contributed to the passage of the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978. This act placed responsibility for child custody matters, including adoption, under the jurisdiction of the child's tribe. Adoption of Native American children by white families dropped sharply and remains very low. There have been no systematic follow-up studies to Fanshel's original report.

The Adoption of Korean Children

By far the most frequent form of transracial adoption in the United States is the adoption of Korean-born children by white American parents. Perhaps the most extensive study of these adoptions was conducted by Dong Soo Kim in 1975 and 1976.²⁰ Kim's study involved adolescent Korean children and their adoptive parents. His sample was drawn from the records of Holt International Children's Services, the agency that had made the largest number of Korean placements in the United States. Kim's sample included two groups of adolescent adoptees: an "early" group of Koreans who were adopted before their first birthday and a "later" group who had been adopted after their sixth birthday. Both groups had been

in their adopted homes for at least one year at the time of the study. Questionnaires were sent to both parents and children; of 451 families, a total of 406 responses were received from both.

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Kim employed the Tennessee Self-concept Scale, given to the children, as the principle outcome measure. This scale provides measures of self-esteem, personality integration, and adjustment. Overall, Kim found no significant difference between the self-esteem scores of his adopted subjects and those of other American teenagers. However, adolescents who were placed "early" and had been in their adoptive homes longer had higher levels of self-esteem, personality integration, and adjustment than did those placed "later." Adoptees in the "early" group seemed to do as well in school as their American age peers, while those in the "later" group lagged behind their age peers by a grade or two. Kim suggested that these differences reflected initial language difficul-

ties, which disappeared over time. The adoptees' responses indicated general contentment with their lives, and these responses were matched by those of their parents.

Racial hostility seems to have been a very minor element in the lives of Korean adoptees and their families. Some parents encouraged their children to embrace American culture and minimize their Korean background, while other parents celebrated the child's Korean qualities. In either event, Kim reports, most of the Korean children largely thought of themselves as Americans and reflected little of Korean culture in their daily lives.

Kim's findings were typical of those reported by other studies of transracially adopted Korean children.²¹⁻²³ None of these studies reported serious problems in adjustment, opposition of family and friends, or frequent encounters with racial hostility.

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D.S. Kim regarded the adoption of Korean children by white American parents as generally successful in meeting the needs of the adoptees and as a program that should be encouraged. Although the question of the adoptees' minority identification is one that may reemerge in adulthood, Kim did not expect it to be a serious obstacle in their lives.

The Adoption of African-American Children

Outcome in Early and Middle Childhood

Among the earliest studies of the transracial adoption of African-American children was that conducted by Grow and Shapiro.²⁴ These investigators studied 125 families, recruited from seven metropolitan areas in six different states and in Canada. The 125 children selected for study were at least 6 years of age by January 1, 1972, and had been in their adoptive homes for at least three years. Of the group of children, 43% were under 1 year of age at the time of placement, 64% were

under 18 months, and 84% were under 3 years of age. Only 16%, therefore, were older than 3 years of age at the time of placement.

The investigators assessed the adjustment of the children directly through use of the California Test of Personality. The greater part of the study, however, depended upon interviews with the parents and the use of questionnaires, which related to a variety of assessments of the children and were completed by the parents, interviewers, and teachers. All in all, a set of 15 different measures was developed for each child. These related to areas of the child's adjustment, symptoms, adult evaluations, teachers' evaluations, parental satisfaction, peer relations, and the child's attitudes toward race. Scores on each of the 15 measures were combined into a single score to determine "overall success." Analysis of the data permitted the authors to conclude that 77% of the adoptions were "successful" and, moreover, that the level of success was "approximately the same as that obtained in other adoption studies, both traditional white inracial infant adoptions and nontraditional adoptions involving racial mixtures and older children."²⁵

The 29 cases (23% of the total) that were considered "unsuccessful" were those in which the investigators agreed that the child and the family were having serious difficulties. In 13 of these, it was concluded that racial identity did not contribute to the problems and that the causative factors—such as health problems, physical and intellectual handicaps, family catastrophes—could just as easily have caused serious problems among white adoptees and in biological children.

In 16 cases, however (13% of the total), the authors concluded that "there was evidence that problems concerning race were at least part of the total problem and, in some instances, the central problems. . . . In nine cases, there was evidence that the child was in some conflict about his racial identity and his parents were having difficulty in dealing with it. In five cases, the parents showed a strong tendency to deny the child's racial background by minimizing its importance or passively ignoring it."²⁶

Writing in 1983, Feigelman and Silverman reviewed research literature about transracial adoption and concluded that "nearly a dozen studies consistently indi-

cate that approximately 75% of transracially adopted preadolescent and younger children adjust well in their adoptive homes In studies that refer directly to the adjustment of black children in white homes, similar trends are evident.²⁷

Outcome in Adolescence

As discussed earlier, the National Association of Black Social Workers in 1972 strongly opposed transracial adoption of black children because of their concern that such children would be ill-equipped to face the realities of the racist society in which they would eventually have to live. Thirteen years later the then president of the NABSW, testifying before the Senate Committee of Labor and Human Resources, included the following in his statement:

- Black children who have grown up in white families suffer severe identity problems. On the one hand, the white community has not fully accepted them; on the other hand, they have no significant contact with black people.
- Black children adopted transracially do not develop coping mechanisms necessary to function in a society that is inherently racist against African Americans.¹³

Given these views of the NABSW and other respected professionals, it is important to review those studies which look at the outcome for transracially placed adoptees who have reached adolescence and young adulthood. This is not an easy task because many studies differ considerably in size, derivation, and composition of the study sample; age at placement of the adoptees; techniques employed for measuring outcome (for example, questionnaires, interviews, objective tests); age of adoptees at time of study; and the size and composition of a comparison group of adolescents, if any.

The studies reviewed here have the following characteristics in common: (1) they were published within the past 10 years; (2) their subjects were placed for adoption at an early age; (3) these studies assessed the family integration, self-esteem, school performance, racial identity, and overall adjustment of the transracial adoptees; and (4) they included a comparison group.

The first of the studies was reported by McRoy and Zurcher in 1983.² This investigation compared 30 white families who had adopted black children with 30 black

families who had adopted black children. The two groups of families, described as residing in the southwestern, midwestern, and upper midwestern regions of the United States, are characterized as "a purposive sample,"²⁸ identified through adoption agencies and adoptive family groups. The families studied met the following criteria: (1) each had a black adopted child who was at least 10 years of age and who had been in the adoptive home for at least one year; (2) at least one of the adopted child's birthparents had to have been black; and (3) both adoptive parents had to be of the same race.²

The studies consisted of interviews with the parents together and with the children alone. In the parent groups a 90-item interview schedule was employed; in the children groups a 95-item interview schedule was used. In addition, the parents were administered the Tennessee Self-concept Scale and the Family Adaptability and Cohesiveness Scale, and the children were given the Tennessee Self-concept Scale and the Twenty Statements Test (Who Am I?).²⁹ The mean age of the transracial adoptees at the time of study was 13.5 years, while that of the inracial adoptees was 14.1 years.

With regard to family integration, both transracial and inracial parents are described as enjoying their children thoroughly and as considering their decision to adopt to have been a good one. Strong bonds between the parents and adoptees developed in both groups.

It is important to review those studies which look at the outcome for transracially placed adoptees who have reached adolescence and young adulthood.

With regard to the children, the transracially adopted children were much more likely to attend predominantly white schools, where they rarely encountered either black peers, black teachers, or black role models. In contrast, only 17% of the inracial group attended predominantly white schools, while 43% attended schools that were more than 60% black. Nevertheless, both groups of parents reported that their children were progressing satisfacto-

rily in school and having few academic problems.

On the basis of the Tennessee Self-concept Scale and the Twenty-Statement Test scores, the authors found no differences in self-concept and self-esteem between the transracially and inracially adopted adolescents who, additionally, were not different in these characteristics from other normative groups. It was in the area of racial identity that the differences between the transracially and inracially adopted children were most pronounced. In terms of self-identification, 17 (56%) of the transracially adopted children referred to themselves as "either mixed, part-white, black-white, human or American; nine (30%) referred to themselves as black; three (10%) stated that their racial background was white, and one Mexican."³⁰ In contrast, inracial adoptees typically referred to themselves as black. Incidentally, of the 18 transracial adoptees who perceived themselves as mixed, two-thirds stated that the majority of society perceived them as black.

The transracial families in this study fell into three groups. Eighteen families (60%) lived in predominantly white communities, and their children attended predominantly white schools. Racial differences were rarely discussed at home, and the children felt that they had little in common with blacks and had no desire to

associate with them. At dating age, these children usually dated whites. Six families (20%) were described as acknowledging their children's racial identity and the need to provide them with black role models. Accordingly, the families moved to neighborhoods in proximity to the black community or to an integrated neighborhood, enrolled their children in integrated schools, and often became members of a church in the black community. In contrast with children in the first group, the children in this second group expressed interest in contact with other blacks and frequently discussed racial identity issues with parents and peers. Nevertheless, parents in this group still believed that their children should be viewed as mixed, not black, and the children tended to identify themselves as such. In the final group, six families (20%) considered their family structure to be interracial, enrolled their children in integrated schools, and encouraged them to emphasize their black heritage. Contacts with blacks were common, and the children were exposed to many black role models. The adoptees had both black and white friends and felt equally accepted by both.

The inracial adopting black families tended to live in predominantly black communities (70%) and assumed that their children, through kinships and association with black peers, would have no problem with identity. Of interest is the fact that the five black families in this group whose children were of mixed racial heritage emphasized to them that society would view them as black.

McRoy and Zurcher's studies indicated that a significant percentage of the transracial adoptees in their sample are uncertain about their identity and that this is determined by how their parents wish to view them. Of concern is the fact that these children are inclined to devalue their black heritage, to "act as similar as possible to their white peers and white family members and to renounce any similarities or allegiances to blacks. These children were also likely to refer to themselves as part white."³¹

The authors were deeply concerned about the children whose problems with race identity has been described above, and they believed that the white parents whose attitudes encourage this are, indeed, failing to respond "to the necessity of equipping the child to become bi-

cultural and to realistically perceive the historical and cultural black-white relations in American society."³² Accordingly, they recommended, as policy, (1) that black children may be placed with white families only after attempts to find suitable black families have been exhausted; (2) that first preference should be given to white families "who are able to demonstrate their ability to understand racial dynamics through a history of sustained social relations with blacks in the community, school, church and other institutional settings . . ." Also, as an additional requirement for first preference, McRoy and Zurcher recommended that the adoptive family reside in a mixed or black area, that their birthchildren be attending racially integrated schools, and that the family have close associations with both blacks and whites; (3) that second preference should be given to families "who are willing to move to a racially integrated area, place their child in a racially integrated school and develop social relationships with blacks." Other recommendations include focused home visits to explore the families' awareness of "their own racial or ethnic paternalistic attitudes," and pre- and post-adoptive counseling.³³

Other studies have not disclosed problems in identity formation to the degree presented by McRoy and Zurcher.

In 1988, Shireman reported the outcome results of a group of adopted black children who had been followed over a period of 13 years and who, at the time of study, were in their early teen years.³⁴ The investigation began in the early 1970s and involved 118 children who had been placed for adoption by two agencies in Chicago. All of the children were black and under 2 years of age at time of placement. At the onset of the study, 31 children were placed with a single parent, 45 were placed with black couples, and 42 were placed transracially, with white couples. Preplacement data were obtained from case records, and the parents and children were interviewed at four-year intervals (at 4, 8, and 13 years of age). Objective indices to measure intelligence, identity, and social adjustment were utilized to supplement the interviews. In the 1988 study, focusing on early adolescence, greater emphasis was placed upon specific behavior of the adolescents (as an index of overall adjustment) and on the scores of objective tests than was true of the four- and eight-year studies. By the time the

children had reached 13 years of age, attrition had reduced the number available for direct interviews and testing to 12 placed with a single parent, 17 placed with a black couple, and 21 placed transracially. Additional families were located for telephone interviews only, thus raising the interview numbers to 15 single-parent adoptive families, 19 families adopting inracially, and 36 families adopting transracially. Finally, at this point the investigators added a comparison group of 19 black birthchildren raised by single black parents and 19 raised by black couples, all of comparable ages to the adoptees and from families of similar socioeconomic stations. Because this article is concerned with transracial adoption, the comparisons will be limited to the parent and child outcomes reported for transracial adoptees, inracial adoptees, and birthchildren reared in two-parent families.

With regard to serious problems in family relationships, as reported by the parents, there was no difference between the percentage reported for the inracially adopted group and that reported for the transracially adopted group.

With regard to serious problems in family relationships, as reported by the parents, there was no difference between the percentage reported for the inracially adopted group (10.5%) and that reported for the transracially adopted group (11%). Interestingly, the percentage for the two-parent birth group was twice as high (21%).

Concerning school performance, parents reported serious academic or behavior problems in 33% of the transracial group, 21% of the inracial group, and in only 5% of the two-parent birth group. This was the only area in which the transracial group was significantly different from the other two. The authors noted that most of this difference related to a disproportionate number of learning difficulties reported in the boys in the transracial group. The authors postulate that this could have resulted from medical difficulties in this group or from overidentification or "easy labeling" in the predominantly white

schools that the children attended. It will be recalled that excess school problems were not found in the transracial group studied by McRoy and Zurcher.

Self-esteem in the children was measured by a test called the Piers Harris Self-esteem Scale.³⁵ Scores on this test indicated no difference in self-esteem among all three groups—transracial, inracial, and two-parent birth. Moreover, the scores of each of these subgroups were no different from the normative mean scores which had been reported by those who originally developed the test.

Various measures “seem to give some assurance that these transracially adopted adolescents have developed pride in being black and are comfortable in interaction with both black and white races.”

Racial identity and racial performance were measured in the adolescents by two objective tests, (the Semantic Differential Test and the Social Distance Inventory),³⁶ by analyses of specific statements in the interview, and by overall assessments of racial identity by the interviewers and the parents. In earlier studies by Shireman and her colleagues, it was found that at 8 years of age, 73% of the transracially adopted and 80% of the inracially adopted children identified themselves as black. At 13 years of age, all of the children did so.

With regard to racial preference, the mean black preference score of the transracially adopted children did not differ from that of the comparison groups. The social distance scores suggested that the transracially adopted children were more comfortable with both black and white Americans than were the other groups.

Shireman concluded that the various measures “seem to give some assurance that these transracially adopted adolescents have developed pride in being black and are comfortable in interaction with both black and white races.”³⁷

Finally, using the specific measures described above, Shireman assessed overall adjustment in the three groups and concluded that there were no significant dif-

ferences among them; approximately 70% of each group was considered to be problem free.

Perhaps the most comprehensive studies of transracial adoption to date have been those of Simon and Altstein, who conducted a longitudinal study over a 12-year period.^{4,38,39} The study began in 1972 with 204 families, living in five midwestern cities, who had adopted transracially. These families had 366 children of whom 157 were transracially adopted, 167 were white birthchildren, and 42 were white adopted. Of the transracially adopted children, 76% were black and 24% were Native American, Asian, and Mexican. Of the first adoptees in these families, 69% were under 1 year of age at time of placement and 80% were under 2 years of age; 80% of the second adoptees were under 1 year of age and 90% under 2 years. Only 16% and 9%, respectively, were older than 3 years when adopted. Simon and Altstein’s studies were conducted in three different years—1972, 1979, and 1984—and were reported in 1977,⁴ 1981,³⁸ and 1987,³⁹ respectively. Because the majority of the transracially adopted children was black, the studies emphasized this group. Of significance is the fact that in all of the studies a comparison with the white siblings—birth and adopted—was used.

In the 1972 studies, conducted when the children were 3 to 8 years of age, information was collected through an extensive interview with the parents and the children separately. The major purpose was “to explore the racial identity, awareness and attitudes of the adopted and non-adopted children” as well as the perceptions, attitudes, and expectations of the families.⁴

Seven years later, 71% of the original families (143) were located, and 93% of these (133) completed an extensive questionnaire by mail. The children were not involved. This questionnaire “focused on their relations with their adopted child(ren), on the children born to them, on the children’s relations with each other, on what they perceived their children’s racial identity to be, or on the ties that both the adopted and the non-adopted children had to their larger family units . . . their schools and their communities.”³⁸

In 1984, when the majority of the children were well into adolescence and some were already in early adulthood, the

authors returned to the research design of 1972, utilizing comprehensive interviews with parents and children, independently and privately.³⁹

Ninety-six families of the original group and 218 children were interviewed. Of the children, 111 were transracially adopted, and of these, 80% were designated as black. The other 20% had small numbers each of Korean, Native American, Vietnamese, and Eskimo children. From the adolescent transracial adoptees, the authors sought information "about their sense of belonging in the family, the sibling's ties to each other, how they described themselves racially and socially, their scholastic and career goals, and, most of all, their feeling about having been transracially adopted."

As indicated earlier and in common with the studies presented above, the results in family integration, school, self-esteem, and racial identity in the adolescent group will be addressed. At the time of study, the median age of the transracial adoptees was 14.9 years, that of the birthchildren was 16.8 years, and that of the white adoptees was 16.9 years.

Concerning family integration, Simon and Altstein evaluated closeness to parents, siblings, grandparents, and other relatives and concluded that the transracial adoptees were as integrated into their families as were the children who had been born into them. The parents' evaluation of their relations with their children was very high for all of the comparison groups.

All but four of the transracial adoptees were attending school. Thirty-two percent were in the seventh or eighth grade, 58% were in high school, and 7% were in college. Of the birthchildren, 15% were in the seventh or eighth grade, 55% were in high school, and 29% were in college. Calculating their last year's average grades as reported by the children, only slight differences were noted among the groups. The average grade for the birth and white adoptee children was B; that for all of the transracial adoptees was B minus, as it was for the black transracially adopted children alone. Seventy-five percent of the transracial adoptees planned to go on to college as did 94% of the birthchildren. No particular academic or behavioral difficulties were noted in the Simon and Altstein report.

Self-esteem was scored from the responses to ten specific questions incorporated in the interviews (the Rosenberg and Simmons Self-esteem Scale).⁴⁰ There were no significant differences in self-esteem among any of the comparison groups. When the black transracial adoptees were separated from the entire transracially adopted group, their score was identical to that of the birthchildren. All of the groups scored well in terms of self-esteem. With a score of 10 indicating the highest self-esteem and 40 the lowest, the mean score in all groups was between 18.0 and 18.5.

Simon and Altstein did not employ an overall measure of adoption outcome, but they noted that 18 of the 96 families interviewed were experiencing serious problems. In seven of these cases the authors traced the problems to serious mental, physical, or emotional handicaps present at the time of placement. All of these children were at least 4 years old when adopted and had been placed in foster homes and institutions prior to adoption. In the remaining 11 cases, both difficulties in the parents' relationships and learning disabilities and developmental delays in the children were cited as causing the serious problems these families experienced. In only one of the 18 cases did parents view the problems faced by the family as being race related.

When the black transracial adoptees were separated from the entire transracially adopted group, their score was identical to that of the birthchildren. All of the groups scored well in terms of self-esteem.

For the remaining 78 families (81% of the 1983-84 respondents), the authors concluded that, at a time when many of the transracial adoptees had completed college, married, and were raising families of their own, they seemed firmly committed to their adopted parents. As they described it:

For the children . . . their adoptive parents are the only family they have and the only set of parents they want. Some of the family relationships have been rocky, accusative and angry—and some remain

so—yet they are a family and they are fully committed to one another.⁴¹

The perspective of adopting parents is similar. Despite family relationships that were sometimes troubled, most parents expressed considerable satisfaction with transracial adoption and were prepared to recommend this experience to others.

Concerning racial identity and preferences, the authors reported that 66% of the black transracial adoptees stated that they were proud to be black or brown, 6% stated that they were proud to be of “mixed background,” 17% said that they did not mind what color they were, and 11% professed that they would prefer to be white. Among the 22 nonblack transracial adoptees, 82% answered that they were proud of their racial heritage, 9% responded that they did not mind what color they were, and 9% declared that they would prefer to be white. The birthchildren’s responses were almost identical to those of the nonblack transracial adoptees, except that 7% stated that they would prefer to be black, Hispanic, Native American, or “different.” About one-third of the transracial adoptees stated that they were embarrassed when they had to introduce their parents to new friends or when they were the only nonwhite in a group.

Seventy-three percent of black transracial adoptees indicated “white” as their choice of friends, similar to the choice of the nonblack transracial adoptees. White children were chosen as friends by 89% of

the birthchildren and by 69% of the white adoptees. All of the groups, however, had black friends. Sixty percent of the transracial adoptees dated whites exclusively, 11% dated blacks exclusively, and 27% dated both blacks and whites. Among birthchildren, 78% dated whites exclusively, 6% dated blacks exclusively, and 10% dated both blacks and whites. The authors attributed the white predominance in friendships and dating to the predominantly white neighborhoods in which a high proportion of the transracial adoptees lived and the predominantly white schools they attended.

The Adjustment of Different Racial Groups

Most studies of transracial adoption have focused on children from a single racial or ethnic group or have combined minority children from a variety of backgrounds into a single category. A study by Feigelman and Silverman sought to compare black and Asian transracial adoptions.³ These investigators initiated their research on transracial placement in 1975 with a sample of 737 families who had adopted, black, Korean, Vietnamese, and Latin American children, as well as white children. Data were collected by mail questionnaires in 1975 and again in 1981.

The children were entering or were already in adolescence, and the overall research results were consistent with those discussed above in that approximately 75%

of the children in both groups were adjusting very well, while about 25% were reported to be having frequent adjustment problems. Feigelman and Silverman attempted to identify the factors causing these problems and developed an index of maladjustment using parental responses to questions about overall adjustment, emotional problems, and developmental problems. Cross-tabulation indicated that older children, children adopted after 2 years of age, African-American children, and adoptees who experienced hostility from family and friends were more likely to have moderate to high scores (worse) on the maladjustment index. However, statistical analysis of each of these variables independently, while controlling for the others, demonstrated that, among the white, black, and Korean adoptees, age at the time of adoption had the most significant impact on maladjustment. In general, older age at placement was associated with a greater degree of maladjustment. Although racial hostility also had a negative impact on adjustment, delay in placement had a far greater effect.

The authors state that the deleterious consequences of delayed placement are far more serious than those of transracial placement itself. They conclude that "the findings imply that when a choice must be made between transracial placement and continued foster and institutional care, transracial placement is clearly the option more conducive to the welfare of the child."⁴²

Most of the adoptees were subject to some ethnic hostility which, however, was not a principle source of difficulties for the great majority of them. The degree of bigotry experienced by the black children was greater than that experienced by the Korean children (and least for the Latin-American children).

If black transracial adoptees faced more hostility than other transracial adoptees, they were also more closely tied to their racial identities than the other groups. This might, in part, have resulted from the hostility itself, but it probably also reflected the greater commitment that the white parents of black transracial adoptees had toward their children's African-American background, a commitment which was transmitted to the children. Feigelman and Silverman reported that 70% of the black transracial adoptees sometimes or often expressed pride in

their African-American heritage, while only 57% of the Korean transracial adoptees expressed similar feelings.

The authors state that the deleterious consequences of delayed placement are far more serious than those of transracial placement itself.

Families who adopted black children were generally open to their children's interest in their birthparents. This was true of all families who adopted transracially, but the support given to black transracial adoptees was most pronounced. Seventy-five percent of the white fathers of black adopted children opposed the sealing of adoption records, while 51% of the fathers of Korean adoptees had similar feelings. Only 28% of the fathers of white inracial adoptees opposed the practice of sealed records. Again, family attitudes were reflected in the behavior of their adoptees, with 63% of the African Americans but only 39% of the Koreans expressing interest in knowing more about their birthparents. Thirty-nine percent of the black adoptees but only 21% of white inrace adoptees were considered likely to search for their birthparents. The data in the authors' study were very similar to those obtained by Simon and Altstein, who reported that 38% of the black transracial adoptees in their study tried or definitely intended to try to locate their birthparents.⁴³

The Transracial Adoption of Children with Special Needs

In this journal issue, McKenzie emphasizes that the numbers of children with special needs will increase dramatically in the coming years and that the number of children in need of permanent homes will increase as well. Because a high proportion of these children will be children of color, it is appropriate in this review to address the outcome of transracial adoption of children with special needs, especially in comparison with the outcome of their inracial adoption by minority families.

Recently, Rosenthal, Groze, and colleagues reported on the outcome of

transracially placed special needs children and, most important, compared these children with both inracially placed minority children and inracially placed white children, all with special needs.^{44,45}

The study focuses on the adoptive outcomes of 760 children with special needs who had been placed by three public and one private agency in Oklahoma, Kansas, and Illinois. Of these, 293 were minority or mixed-race children, 78% (230) of whom were placed inracially and 22% (63) of whom were placed transracially in white families. A total of 460 placements were of white children placed inracially with white parents. Data were collected by means of a mailed survey sent to the adoptive parents.

Transracial adoptees do not deny their racial identification nor, for the most part, do their adoptive parents.

As expected, the average age at placement was higher than in the groups discussed before: 5.0 years in the transracial group, 4.6 years in the minority inracial group, and 6.0 years in the white inracial group. The ages at survey were 10.5 years, 11.4 years, and 10.6 years, respectively. Also, there were significant differences in the ethnic mix of the transracial group and of the minority inracial group of children. In the latter group, 73% of the children were black and 10% were biracial. In the transracial group, 10% were black and 35% were biracial.

Rosenthal, Groze, and colleagues employed two measures of adoption outcome: the parent's level of satisfaction and the measurement of family cohesion (parent-child relationships) as scored from a five-point scale assessing trust, communications, respect by the child, closeness of relationship, and "getting along."⁴⁶ The adoption's impact on the parents was rated as "very positive" in 58% of the minority inracial group and in 53% of the transracial group, a difference that was not considered significant. The parent-child relationship scores revealed that family cohesion was greater in the minority inracial group than in the transracial group and that the difference was statistically significant. In analyzing the basis for the differ-

ences shown in the parent-child relationship, the investigators emphasized that the children in the transracial and inracial groups differed with regard to several important characteristics. Of the children in the transracial group, 39% were disabled as compared with 14% in the minority inracial group; 23% of the transracial group had been in group homes or psychiatric placement prior to adoption in contrast to 7% in the minority, inracial group; 33% of the transracial group had experienced sexual abuse prior to adoption in contrast to 15% in the minority inracial group. All of the differences listed are statistically significant. In addition the transracial group had more behavior problems than the minority inracial group, but only minimally so.

When the analysis of the two groups was controlled for the above factors, differences virtually disappeared.⁴¹ It is of interest that the parents in the white inracial group scored lowest in satisfaction, with only 41% reporting "very positive," a significant difference from the other two groups. The parent-child relationship score was the same as that found in the transracial group, and both were significantly less than that for the minority inracial group. It is important to note that children in the white inracial group had the highest incidence of behavioral problems (47%) and the highest incidence of sexual abuse prior to adoption (43%).

Rosenthal and colleagues' analysis of various factors related to parent-child relationships revealed an important correlation between family cohesion and the age of the child at time of survey. In the minority inracial group, the high score for family cohesion remained virtually constant in the periods 0 to 5 years, 6 to 11 years, and 12 to 17 years. In contrast, the scores for the transracial group fell progressively and significantly in each period. The investigators believe that the results speak to the remarkable resiliency of the minority adoptive families. However, this could as well indicate that the trauma suffered by the transracial group of children in the preadoption period continued to have an effect throughout adolescence.

Rosenthal and colleagues emphasize, quite properly, that the very positive results for minority inracial placements argue for enhanced recruitment of minority families. However, the fact that the results for transracial placement of special needs

children are almost as favorable, despite the very significant “damage” that had been experienced by the children, also speaks to the wisdom of retaining this opportunity for permanent homes for a significant number of children.

Finally, it is appropriate to ask why so low an incidence of behavior problems, disabilities, prior group home or psychiatric placement, and sexual abuse were found in the minority inracial group of children in contrast to the transracial and white inracial groups? Rosenthal and colleagues offer the following explanation: “The large numbers of minority children among those waiting for adoption provide minority applicants greater opportunity to adopt a younger child or one with minimal handicaps. Thus the older or handicapped minority child loses in the supply-demand market and may face delay in adoption or the possibility of not being adopted at all.”⁴⁷

Conclusion

The research that has been done to date suggests that transracial adoption is a viable means of providing stable homes for waiting children. It appears to produce children whose self-esteem is at least as high as that of nonadopted children and whose adjustment is highly satisfactory.

Racial hostility still occurs in the lives of transracially adopting families, but the research reviewed here suggests that it is sporadic. Furthermore, studies indicate that problems in the preadoptive history and delays in permanent placement account for a much more substantial portion of the adoptee’s postplacement difficulties than does racial antagonism.

For the most part, nonwhite children raised in white homes identify with both white and nonwhite communities. Though transracial adoptees are troubled with some degree of doubt and discomfort, there is strong evidence that most of them evaluate their nonwhite backgrounds and appearance positively. Transracial adoptees do not deny their racial identification nor, for the most part, do their adoptive parents.

Transracial placement is no panacea for the problems of family deterioration among nonwhite minorities in the United States, but its success suggests that it may be a useful resource. The highly desirable efforts to expand inracial placement for minority children do not require the cessation of transracial placements. Moreover, so long as the number of minority children needing permanent homes exceeds the number of minority families able to accept them, transracial placement is a resource that should not be ignored.

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