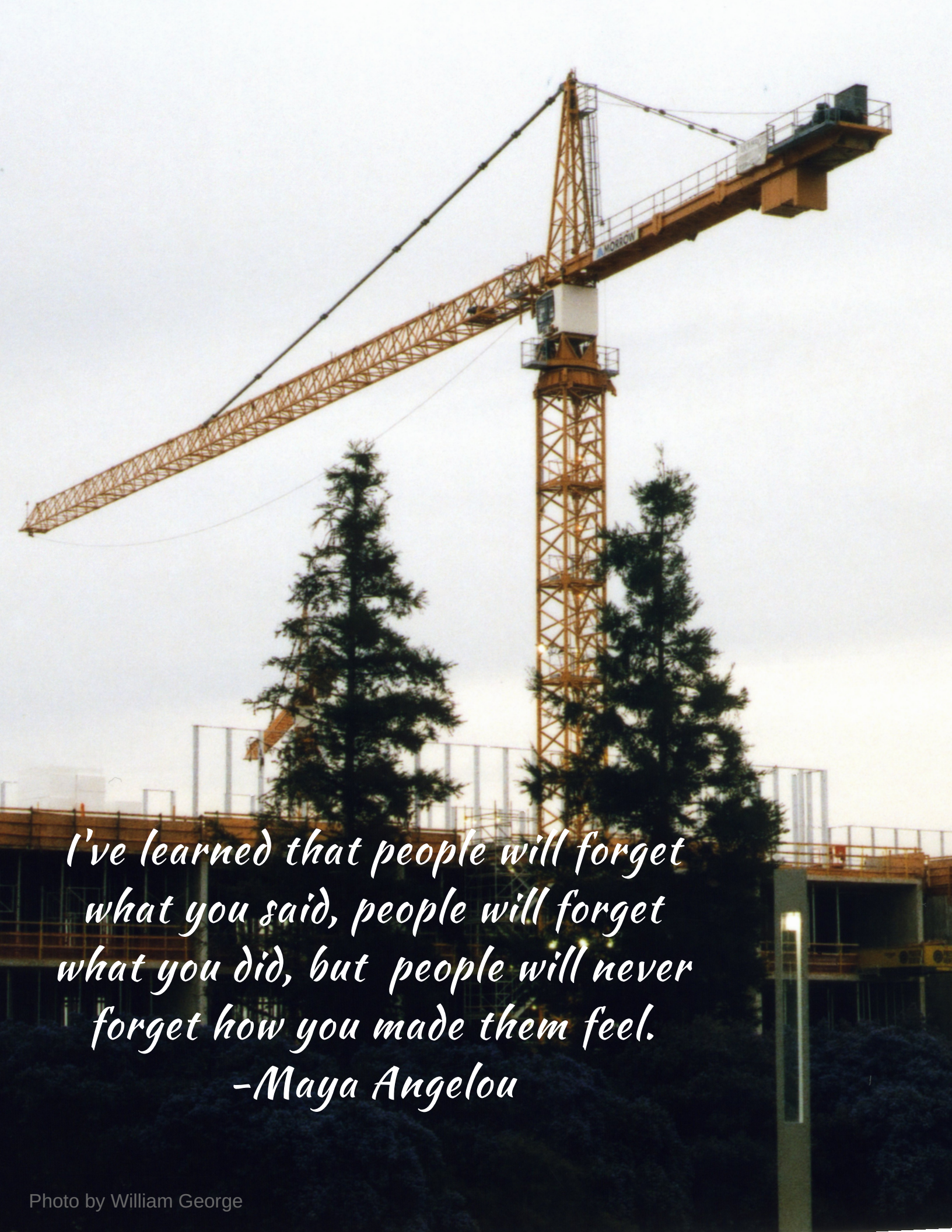

I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.
-Maya Angelou

Photo by William George

The Possible Causes and Effects of Racial and Cultural Socialization Among Transracial Adoptees

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Cultural Socialization, Racial Socialization, Transracial, Adoptees

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Abstract

This literature review focuses on the effects of racial and social cultural socialization among transracially adopted children. This review is finding evidence in pre-existing articles of research from the past ten years and evaluating their findings to further enhance our understanding of socialization among those who have been transracially adopted and may or may not see any of their own culture in their upbringing. Transracial adoptees are adopted children (mainly international) that are adopted into a different culture/race other than their own, thus, making them bicultural. Because of this, adoptees can feel insecure and suffer from low self-esteem because they feel they don't belong or indulge in conversations with their parents who are of different ethnicity/culture of their own. This review found that although the sample numbers are low, the findings are monumental. Parents have a bigger impact on their children than originally thought, and they help guide their adopted children to socialization. Children can attempt to socialize on their own but without the added guidance; it makes the process slower and does not yield the best results. Researchers' focus can to continue to be on the parents but needs to have more integration of adoptees in studies.

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Introduction

International adoption is becoming an increasingly popular means to form a family in the United States. Since 1971, over 330,000 children have been adopted from other countries. (U.S. Department of State, 2005). Research has generally shown that some family dimensions have a positive effect on identity processes (e.g., Manzi, Vignoles, Regalia, & Scabini, 2006; Scabini & Manzi, 2011), whereas in the adoption literature, there is a very small amount of research exploring the impact of family relationships on adoptees' identity definition and the relational aspects of identity development. By expanding our research, we can promote more cultural awareness among parents seeking to adopt a child that may be of a different race than they are. The present literature review specifically analyses 8 articles from the past 10 years that explain the various causes to an adoptees' socialization, and the consequences (positive and negative) of those causes. The results of the studies showed that ethnic identity is positively related to parents' cultural socialization strategies. These results are consistent with a number of studies that demonstrate that adoptive parents' cultural socialization strategies positively affect children's ethnic identity.

Articles

Communication between parents and their child is crucial to the relationship that they hold. The more communication a parent has with their child, the more understanding the bond becomes. Hamilton, Samek, Keyes, Mcgue, and Iacono (2015) had the research question about

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whether there is a difference between transracial adoptees and same race adoptees regarding communication about race and ethnicity was interesting because it directly compared same race and transracial adoptees. (Hamilton, Samek, Keyes, Mcgue, & Iacono 2015) Their hypothesis was that same race (primarily white) adoptees would have more communication regarding race and ethnicity. There were 692 adoptees from families that participated in this self-report questionnaire. The results showed that mothers and fathers of transracial adoptees had more communication than same race, and the adoptees agreed in their questionnaires as well. The results help us understand how adoptive families create and maintain a transracial environment.

This research demonstrates how communication that is initiated in the home connects to an adopted child's racial socialization. Hamilton et al. directly asks the adopted children alongside the parents about their feelings of communication regarding their own race and culture. Communication that happens in the family regarding race and culture affects the socialization of the child, which as we will soon learn from Ferrari (Rosnati 2015) can affect their self-esteem.

With transracial adoptees it can be difficult to determine if there is a difference in their upbringing compared to other adoptees. The research done by Vonk, Lee, Crolley-Simic (2010) answered the question of whether there was a difference between cultural socialization practices reported by parents of both domestic transracial (DTR) and international transracially (ITR) adopted children. This study was a cross-sectional and included 802 adoptees that were then split into two groups (DTR and ITR). This research experiment examined cultural socialization practices reported by parents of both ITR and DTR adopted children. Specifically, Vonk, Lee,

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Crolley-Simic (2010) compared the use of 9 cultural socialization practices among the two groups of adopted children and explored the relationship of the cultural socialization practices with demographic, child, and adoption-related variables among the two groups. The results indicated that families with adopted children in the ITR group, more frequently than those in the DTR group celebrated holidays, read books, participated in ethnic groups, and prepared foods related to their children's birth culture. The findings reveal that both groups of transracially adoptive parents still rely primarily on socialization practices that require little to no contact with people of the child's race/ethnicity. This can pose a potential problem later on when the child tries to indulge in racial socialization, when they have never encountered a person of their own race/ethnicity. The differences found between these two groups of adoptees are different, and it makes sense as to the cause of why that may be. What is unclear however is why the adopted children, no matter what type of adoptee they were, rarely engaged in activities with a person of their own race/ethnicity. The effects of not socializing with people that are not of the same race /ethnicity of the adopted child have not been studied yet. This may possibly be a coincidence our parental preference, it's difficult to understand without testing for it ourselves. While this article tests for differences in practices of cultural socialization, it does not test for the level of support and how that may affect a child.

Which brings us to our next article, Mohanty, Keoske, and Sales' (2008) research question was will international adoptees receive more parental support for cultural socialization and will they have a greater sense of belonging, which is interesting because its relating

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socialization to self-esteem and the factors that surround it. The researchers' (Mohanty et al 2008) hypothesis was that high parental support for cultural socialization will be related to higher self –esteem in international adoptees. In this study, the participants completed a questionnaire regarding self-esteem, belonging, and cultural socialization. Mohanty et al. results showed that there was a high correlation between parental supports for cultural socialization and self-esteem. Adoptees with higher ethnic identity are likely to develop more positive feelings about themselves and the opposite is true as well. To the authors know ledge this is the first study to use a web survey to study adult adoptees, so it was the first kind of research done in this way. Parents who better support their child's cultural socialization coincides with the either the positive or negative effects of the child's self-esteem and ethnic identity. If we apply this to Vonk's (2010) research, since the children only have experiences with different races this could be construed as not enough parental support for that diversity. If the children feel that there isn't enough support coming from their parental figures it may lead to lower self-esteem and lower sense of ethnic identity.

There are different ways that parents can show their support to their adoptive children even inadvertently, and it can assist with conversations about topics that would be otherwise uncomfortable or even avoided. Crolley and Vonks' (2008) research question was about how white parents describe their role in the racial socialization of their transracially adopted children and how it affects conversations about race. Crolley and Vonk hypothesized that the mothers' perception of their role in racial socialization practices will help to better understand a parent's

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choices in the racial socialization of their children. This study had only 8 participants who were white mothers (ages 39-54) who completed an in-depth interview ranging from 1¼ to 2¼ hours; the follow-up interview lasted 1 to 2 hours. Each interview opened with general demographic questions and then moved on to the participants' decision to adopt a child, followed by a discussion about the racial and cultural aspect of their decision to adopt. The findings reported in this study are the actions parents described related to the racial socialization of their children. In this study, parents described their racial socialization practices with their children, and the descriptions varied in terms of the degree in which other cultures were incorporated into family life, beyond the white dominant culture. Analysis of the participant's descriptions provided a spectrum where parents depart from their white culture and integrate with other cultures in various degrees and in their own ways. Crolley-Simic and Vonk (2008) developed four subthemes that vary by the amount of cultural diversity to which these parents exposed their children: families like ours, visiting culture, invested in culture, and diverse life.

Parents described their racial socialization practices in terms that illustrated the degree to which their families were involved in the actual birth culture of the child. This experiment had separate categories the researchers divided the answers into; it helped to better understand the possible reasoning and different ways that parents can integrate racial socialization in everyday life. The effect of these different integration techniques is the possibility for: more frequent and easier conversations revolving around race, developing a sense of cultural pride, and empowering the child. These different categories Crolley and Vonk (2008) devised assist in

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deciding what possible ways to interact successfully in a transracial adoptees racial socialization. These different ways can help a parent become more supportive of their child's different race and culture. This research wasn't oriented around "color-blindness", but rather parents embracing the differences their child had and trying to incorporate those differences positively into their daily lives.

Assessing the other side of that, Lee, Grotevant, Hellerstedt, and Gunner (2006) developed a research question of whether international adoptive parents that seem to be "color blind" engage more with enculturation and racialization when it comes to their children is interesting because parental "color blindness" is rarely ever looked at in research when regarding transracial adoption. There were 1116 Minnesota families that returned IAP surveys. Lee et al. (2006) had results that showed parents who had low mean scores on color blind racial attitudes and high means on enculturation and had high racialization parenting beliefs. This contrasts with earlier research stating that parents who had colorblind attitudes were more ambivalent towards enculturation and racialization. Racial awareness leads parents to examine their beliefs of enculturation and racialization. The experimental research done by Lee et al. shows how parents' behaviors and attitudes affect their child's own racial and cultural socialization and thus also affect the child's sense of self and ethnic identity (Mohanty et al. 2008). Unlike some of the other research articles the sample size used in this experiment was exponentially larger making their findings less refutable. By either embracing colorblindness parental practices or actively engaging in Racial and cultural socialization practices (Crolley- Simic & Vonk 2008), both have

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different aspects of the same affect. They can both be beneficial to the child, as these studies have explained.

Direct involvement from the parent, regarding cultural socialization can also harness its own benefits, such as helping with the construction of the adoptees' ethnic identity. Ferrari, Ranieri, Barni, and Rosnati developed research question of how transracial adoptees cope with the construction of their ethnic identity is interesting because there aren't many studies conducted on the way the coping process unfolds within adoptive families. Ferrari et al. (2015) developed a hypothesis that the association between a mother's cultural socialization and adoptees' ethnic identity affects the adoptees' self-esteem. There were 254 participants (Italian mothers and their adopted children) that completed a self-report questionnaire. Ferrari et al. found that mothers' enculturation promoted ethnic identity which was associated with the adoptees' ethnic identity affirmation. The results highlight the crucial role played by maternal enculturation in supporting adoptees ethnic identity exploration. This study expands the understanding of ethnic identity among transracial adoptees and its link to their self-esteem.

The findings of this particular study show how parents' support and cultural socialization affects that of their adopted child. A parent's direct involvement of cultural socialization on their child directly affects the child's own cultural socialization and ethnic identity, the effects of this can either be positive or negative self–esteem, depending in the amount of involvement the parent decides to participate in. This relates also to the amount of parent involvement and support a child may or may not feel the parent is giving.

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Since the transracial adoptees are bicultural they may feel an additional pressure to fully embody both cultures. In the study conducted by Ferrari, Rosnati, Manzi, and Benet-Martinez (2015) their research question focuses on the identity process that transracial adoptees go through and what is the association between their ethnic identity, national identity, bicultural identity integration (BII), and psychological well-being. Ferrari et al. (2015) thought that the relationship between ethnic identity and adoptees psychological well-being could be clarified by examining whether BII would mediate the link between ethnic and national identity. There were 79 transracial adoptee participants (ages 15-25) and their parents that completed a questionnaire. The questionnaire asked questions regarding ethnic and national identity, BII, and psychological well-being. The results show that adoptees report a medium to high level of both ethnic and national identity. This indicates that adoptees generally feel more comfortable with their own ethnic background and can find a sense of belonging to that group.

Parents should to introduce their children to their birth heritage, where they come from, the people that are like them. By doing so creates a better environment for the child to grow and develop their own ethnic identity. When adoptees feel connected to a group especially one that is their own, it promotes socialization and identity exploration. It can also improve their psychological state as the next article suggests.

A positive psychological state in transracial adoptees can be achieved. The research question developed by Basow, Lilley, Bookwala, and Mcgillicuddy (2008), about what transracial Korean adoptees need to experience to have a positive psychological state was

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interesting because it focuses on the aspects that surround a positive psychological state in transracial adoptees. Basow et al. (2008) thought that greater cultural socialization experiences and strong ethnic identity would be related to better psychological adjustment and well-being. This study was a questionnaire regarding psychological well-being, ethnic identity, adjustment to adoption, and cultural socialization. The results showed that higher levels of ethnic identity and a more positive adjustment to adoption were associated with greater psychological well-being. Adoptees will have a more positive psychological adjustment when they encounter more cultural socialization. By showing that the more comfortable adoptees feel in their own cultural socialization the effect is that they have a sense of their own ethnic identity and thus have better psychological states. To help adoptees have a greater sense of their ethnic identity, parents can introduce socialization early in their child's development, and help promote an overall positive psychological state in their child.

Evaluation and Concluding Ideas

Many of these studies have small number of participants on average, because of intercountry adoption it's only around 5500 cases a year, so only a minimal percentage of the population can take part in the surveys and studies; although, you don't need to adopt from another country to be considered transracial. With each study done in various places in the world, it creates programmatic research. Separated, the research is fundamentally there but with minimal backing. Together, the research fills the gaps that some of the initial research had,

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making a tapestry of answers. Future studies should focus on the effects of open adoption agreement among transracial adoptive parent and same race birth parents, to assess if their connections are affected by same race parental even though they are barely in the adoptees life.

If adoption agencies and social workers are not aware of the importance of integrative cultural socialization, they are not likely to adequately prepare parents for this aspect of parenting. Parents must both be made aware of its cultural importance and become educated with resources to know where to begin, such as with different conversations to have or events to become involved in. Parents must give conscious thought to whether they want to engage in cultural socialization with their children. These cultural socialization experiences have been found to contribute to ethnic identity and well-being. Also, social workers should be aware of culture camps as a resource for families and make the families aware of their existence. However, they should also caution that camps are not a one-stop resolution to racial and cultural socialization issues. Some parents may rely exclusively on camps for socialization, and not move beyond this approach as a way to socialize their children.

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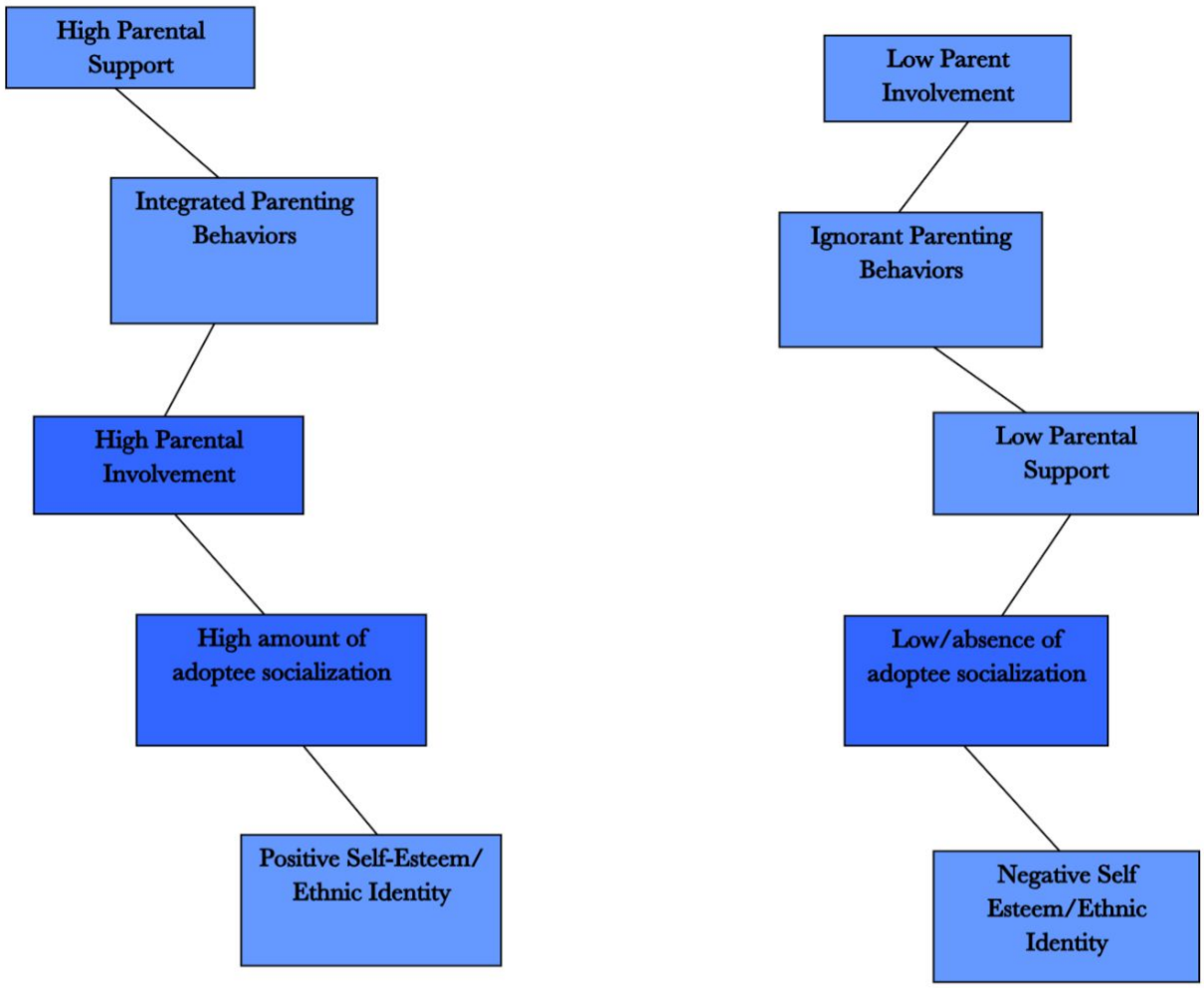

Figure 1: Correlations between various aspects of socialization

Figure 1 clearly exemplifies the cause and effects of racial and cultural socialization of transracial adoptees. Parents have the opportunity to help better their children in regard to their socialization. The responsibility is not all on the parents, adoptees can explore for themselves and develop a sense of their own ethnic identity; it may just be more difficult without the added

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guidance. The result of positive involvement and support, integration of parenting behaviors, and an abundance of socializing activities (and conversations) can positively impact an adoptees' psychological state, further define their ethnic identity, and promote the adoptees solo socialization.

Parents must support their children in acquiring knowledge of their birth culture giving value to their ethnicity. Being bicultural can have positive benefits for the individual who could select features of the two cultures, seemingly allowing for a "psychological flexibility" that can enhance the adoptees' adaptability in different situations. How adoptees combine the two different cultural backgrounds is an important element in identity development, but in most cases, adoptees have limited access to their birth culture. They have to learn it as a "second" culture while being immersed in the mainstream culture or are forced to choose the mainstream culture. As a result, they may find difficulty "fitting in" and have a more negative psychological state.

Since parent's impact children in many different ways it is easy to understand why research has focused mainly on parents and how they integrate racial and cultural socialization into their child's life. The focus of research needs to continue to be on the parents but needs to have more integration of adoptees in the studies. We need to have more information on them and how the cope with being of a different race/ethnicity as their parents. In-depth interviews, I

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believe, would be very beneficial to this problem. We can find specifically what needs to be done in the eyes of an adoptee and help them develop their own sense of racial and cultural identity.

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