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Racial/cultural identity development in foster children placed in transracial foster homes

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**RACIAL/CULTURAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT IN FOSTER CHILDREN
PLACED IN TRANSRACIAL FOSTER HOMES**

by

VANESSA BROOKS HERD

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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Major: Curriculum and Instruction

Advisor	Date
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“Work as if everything depends on you, and pray as if everything depends on God.”

PREFACE

The use of the term “transracial” instead of the term “cross racial” foster care is intentional and designed to further distinguish transracial foster care from the concept of cross racial adoption. The temporary parenting of children racially different from the parent (foster care) is transracial foster care. Permanently parenting children who are racially different from the parent is commonly referred to as cross racial adoption. Although foster care and adoption are regularly joined as fraternal twins, the focus in this study is on transracial foster care only.

An abbreviated list of synonyms for the noun “cross” includes “misfortune,” “mongrel,” and “affliction.” Similarly, synonyms for “cross,” when used as a verb, include “go over,” “intersect,” and “extend across.” These words do not convey the tone of this research, which involves race and foster care. Describing two families of differing races being joined in a temporary situation, such as foster care, as “misfortunate” or as a “tribulation” is a disservice. However, the prefix “trans” speaks to the philosophy of this researcher. The prefix “trans” is defined as meaning “beyond, through, or on the other side.” “Transracial foster care” is the preferred term (not “cross racial”), as it focuses on parenting beyond race and parenting through race. Thus, this study addresses foster parenting when race is evident but not with race as an affliction.

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Problem

Foster parents begin their lives of fostering propelled by a fundamental love for children and a sincere desire to provide a stable and nurturing home for children who have experienced loss and pain. Children are usually removed from their homes without advance notice and “placed on an emergency basis” in a family foster care situation (Parent Resources for Information, Development, and Education, 2003, p. 279 [PRIDEbook]). Displacement from the birth family and placement in the home of strangers is a traumatic experience. Law enforcement officers in uniform and in marked police cars escort the child welfare workers during the child’s removal. Both the child and the biological parent may shout, cry, and protest during the process of separation. Despite physical or medical neglect, there is often resistance to removal from both the child and the biological parents. Even in cases of abuse, emotional or sexual, a loyalty dilemma ensues for the child. Huber and Wolfson (1996) have suggested that the entrance of foster parents is a relief as the biological family functioning dissolves. “Foster parents take over when a family falls apart” (Huber & Wolfson, 1996, p. vii). Fundamentally, foster parents are expected to respond to the immediate needs of children who are forced to enter the child welfare system, irrespective of the race, creed, or culture of the child.

Historically, fostering across racial lines has had little acceptance. Keeping the races separate has been a long-standing belief not only of those who have held political power but also of those who have influenced the child welfare system. Abraham Lincoln was outspoken on this issue and remarked in the fourth presidential debate with

Stephen Douglass in 1858 that “there is a physical difference between the White and black races which I believe will forever forbid the two races living together on terms of social and political equality...” (Basler, 1953, p. 145). This mantra of “separate but equal” was operational practice in America for much of the history of the United States. Further, Jim Crow laws are evidence that *de jure* discrimination has prevailed through modern times (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2010, p. 219).

This history of racial tension and racial prejudice in American society has contaminated the foster care system. The societal belief that races were best kept separate fueled the belief that only a White foster family should parent White children and only an African American foster family should parent African American children. Embracing this concept in totality has led social workers to subjugate the needs of foster children exclusively to maintain a system of racial segregation (Auld, 1992). Social workers, by their professional values, are advocates for children. Thus, the logical conclusion is that social workers seek to relocate children out of a high-risk situation and into a safe family environment as soon as possible, regardless of race. Kennedy (2004) has made this point, stating that children in need of homes should be placed as quickly as possible, “regardless of perceived racial differences” (p. 402). Further, Kennedy (2004) has described racial matching as a tragedy and a destructive practice.

Carter-Black (2002) noted that in 1999, there were 239,500 African American foster children living in the U.S. Carter-Black, citing the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2000), also has noted that of these foster children, 187,000 remained in the foster care system for three to five years or more. Given the median length of stay in

foster care, an emphasis on racial identity development cannot remain the primary focus while a same-race foster family is located. Rather, foster parents must assume this responsibility by creating a safe environment for foster children that nurtures their self-esteem and allows them to develop their full potential.

The controversy of racial separation has persisted in the foster care and adoption community for several decades. Cameron (2002) has chronicled the 19 years she spent in foster care, from her birth in 1954 until her high school graduation in 1973. In her memoir, she comments on one of her numerous relocations. One such move was from a Catholic group foster home to yet another foster family. Cameron, “a black girl,” expressed skepticism when she learned the location of the foster home and that the foster family was Italian-American. She commented, “I was suspicious about making this move. I thought black children were only supposed to live with black families” (p.177). For Cameron, the practice of racial matching was supported by all of the stakeholders in the child welfare system. Several moves later, Cameron’s temporary placement with her single, White school teacher was falling apart. Cameron recalled her foster mother asking, “...don’t you think you’d be happier living with your own kind?” (p. 199). Again, racial matching was viewed as necessary and preferred. Over the nearly two decades Cameron was in the foster care system, she grew increasingly frustrated and wrote, “I was disgusted with a system that stubbornly clung to the notion I could only be happy with another black family” (p. 200). She expressed dismay when a relative of a Catholic nun offered Cameron a home but “was turned down because she was white” (p. 200).

Rowell (2007) wrote in her memoir of the traumatic separation, via law and policy, from her foster family during the early 1960s. Rowell, biracial, was placed with a White family from birth. She recounts her experience when the family faced opposition to their desire to adopt her: "A prolonged but failed effort to adopt me left a confusing shadow over my childhood" (p. 18). Although the official reason given for the denial was that the foster mother was too old, when other family friends intervened, they too were denied. Finally, an outspoken family member appealed to the child welfare worker on behalf of Rowell. The nature of the plea indicated Rowell was totally loved and cared for and that no one else could express the same depth of affection for her, "regardless of faith, color or age" (p. 35). The child welfare worker responded that the concern was for the child's future and the need to preempt potential problems resulting from "living in a totally white community" (p. 35). Racial matching at that time was the preferred practice in child welfare and was considered to be in the best interest of the child. Rowell's thwarted adoption experience represents the typical life circumstances for biracial children and children of color prior to the 1970s.

During the 1970s, politicians and childcare professionals debated the significance of race in foster care placement equally. Cameron (2002) recalled pondering the irony that during the 1970s, businesses had affirmative action policies; White business owners were banned from discriminating, but "social service agencies almost always refused to permit black children to live with white families" (p. 202). As a product of the foster care system, Cameron failed to understand this perplexed dichotomy. Further, she rejected this superficial rationale and advanced the hypothesis

that the policy served the “adults who enforced it” while simultaneously it “deprived black children the chance to find stability” (p. 202).

Cameron’s testimony, and others like it, spurred the racial battle for transracial fostering that was fought across the nation and ended in Washington, D.C., with Senator Howard Metzenbuaum’s legislation. Many professional organizations and community groups assumed ideological positions and joined the pro and con argument. In 1972, the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) issued a position paper opposing transracial adoption and compared the practice to cultural genocide (Campbell, 2001; Carter-Black, 2002; Askeland, 2006; Kennedy, 2004). NABSW’s stand on this issue propelled that professional organization to the forefront of advocacy and social justice activism. NABSW believed that White people were ill equipped to impart survival skills to children of color. Such essential skills, NABSW felt, would serve as armor in a racist society. Although NABSW acknowledged that White foster parents could love and nurture children of color, NABSW (1972) did not believe White parents could raise healthy, well-adjusted children who could cope with an often hostile and non-nurturing society. For NABSW, love would not be enough.

Subsequently, during the 1980s, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) advocated for White parents, who at that time were not allowed to adopt across racial lines (Campbell, 2001). This legal action by the ACLU resulted in NABSW’s modification of its position. In 1994, NABSW conceded that transracial adoption should be allowed in documented cases where same-race placements were attempted but not successful (Campbell, 2001).

Later, in 1994, Senator Howard Metzenbaum introduced the Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA). Metzenbaum's idea "to limit racial matching was quite controversial" (Brooks, Barth, Bussiere, & Patterson, 1999) and departed from historical precedent. The intent of Metzenbaum's Act was to force an examination of racial matching policies in foster care and adoption placement and explore the relationship of these policies to the "delay in placing children of color in adoptive homes" (Brooks et al., 1999, p. 169). During the fact-finding stage for MEPA, Congress heard testimony regarding long-term foster home placements, such as Rowell's, being disrupted while attempting to achieve a racial match. These families were denied the opportunity to adopt children of color while communities of color expressed feelings of exclusion from the process of adoption. After MEPA, the use of "race categorically or presumptively to delay or deny adoptive or foster care placements" was prohibited (Brooks et al., 1999, p. 167). MEPA established a race-neutral policy for both adoption and foster care. Traditionally, adoption and foster care policies have been intertwined and nearly inseparable; therefore, MEPA addressed both. One expected outcome of the law was the "increased adoption of foster children, particularly children of color" (Brooks et al., 1999, p. 167). As the placements of African American children were made, with little regard to racial matching, another contentious debate brewed. Was America ready to legally and socially sanction raising the next generation in transracial homes?

Issues of race matching may be responsible, at least in part, for burdening the foster care system with unplaced children of color. African American, non-Hispanic children represent the largest non-dominant group in foster care at 30% (Department of Health and Human Services Adoption Foster Care Analysis Reporting System

[AFCARS], FY 2009). Not only is this disproportionate to their representation in the general population at 15%, but African American, non-Hispanic children also represent 30% of the children waiting for permanent placement (AFCARS, FY 2009). African American foster homes are woefully underrepresented (Campbell, 2001). Combine this disproportionality with the fact that 53% of foster children languish in the system from one to five years or more, and a formula for tragedy brews (AFCARS, FY 2009).

One attempt to move children through the foster care system involved a shift away from political considerations. The new emphasis focused on the best interest of the child. Under this philosophy, children were placed in the foster home best suited to meet their needs without regard to race or cultural identity. However, such a decision was the nucleus of the aforementioned tempestuous debate. Using the phrase “in the best interest of the child” as a guidepost generated within the professional community accusations of institutional racism. The role of race in foster care placement was at the heart of the aforementioned debate both for proponents and opponents. Those who believed race should be a factor advocated that racial considerations should be primary. Those who opposed race as an element of placement believed that the child welfare system should be color blind. Rowell (2007) quotes from a letter dated February 25, 1961, written to a social worker. This correspondence was in support of the adoption of a biracial child (Vickie) by White parents: “It would be easy for us to leave Vicki in a home where we know she is loved and well cared for and to close our eyes and minds to what life would hold for her in ten and fifteen years hence. But in thinking of the future we must remember that being brought up in a foster home is difficult enough without adding the problems of racial difference...” (p. 35).

Families, either foster or biological, must address specific issues in a child's development. One such specific issue is healthy psychological and social development. Erikson (1959) authored perhaps the most prominent theory of psychosocial development. Progression through the lifespan is predicated on resolution of the developmental crises experienced in each of eight stages. These eight stages are linked to physical development throughout the lifespan, beginning at birth and continuing through old age and death. Erikson's fifth stage addresses the concept of identity development and focuses on answering the question, "Who am I?" It is during this stage that childhood ends and youth begins. Struggles, solutions, and social issues characterize this fifth stage, which spans from adolescence through young adulthood. Erikson has labeled this stage "identity versus role confusion."

For children in foster care, this identity struggle begins earlier and is amplified. Forced separation from one's family of origin and all that is familiar precipitates a questioning of one's place in the world. For children who are in a non-dominant group, the identity struggle is intensified. The conflict Erickson labeled "identity versus role confusion" is anything but simple. Self-esteem and self-concept are markers of identity development. The struggle for identity is accentuated by the tenuousness of foster care. The impact of racial identity development for youth is further compounded first by family and then by the larger society. For children in foster care, the question is which family should assume this responsibility. Is it the role of the foster family to nurture racial identity? Let's suppose the family members are not culturally competent. Does this responsibility then return to the family of origin by default? If so, since the family of

origin has already demonstrated their inability to fulfill the very basic expected obligations, should more be added?

Another crucial function of families is socialization. When families transfer the knowledge of what is socially appropriate behavior, the behavior is framed within a cultural and racial context. Within this context, the understanding of cultural and racial norms is internalized and is passed from generation to generation. The social-cognitive model of ethnic identity (Knight et al., 1963, as cited by Appleby, Colon, & Hamilton, 2011) embraces acculturation ideology reflected within an historical context of melting pot theory and concepts of cultural pluralism. Acculturation in this context refers to the “process of socialization into an ethnic group other than one’s own” (Appleby et al., 2011, p. 44). Children in transracial foster home placements are socialized and thereby influenced by the racial values of the foster family. Bernal et al. (1993) proposed a direct implication of this process for transracial foster care. As children unravel the meaning of their complex social environments, knowledge about their membership in a racial group unfolds. This is the beginning process for racial/ethnic development. Appleby et al. (2011) have indicated that the initial stage “begins with children’s acquisition of information about their ethnicity and group membership based on learning experiences within their social world of family, school, friends, community, and the dominant society” (2007, p. 41). It is at the point where ethnic membership meets family that the necessity of culturally competent foster families becomes essential. Diller (2007) has agreed with this view (as cited in Lincoln, 1945) of culture as “learned, shared, and transmitted from one generation to the next” (p. 62). Both personal experiences of the foster family and professional training lead to this end.

Culture is conceived as “patterns of communication, values, beliefs, and behaviors transmitted over time by a social group” (Robbins, Chatterjee, & Canda, 2006, p. 130). The family, whether nuclear, extended, or foster, represents such a social group. This is critically important in social and psychological development. Without such a transmission, there is a lack of grounding and a disconnection between an individual and her or his self-concept. Transracial placement in foster homes that lack cultural competence can underscore this void. Diller (2007) has articulated the relationship between family and culture more aggressively. Diller has described the transmission of cultural as a natural byproduct of “growing up in a family and community” (p. 62). If families can teach only what they know, then foster families involved in transracial placement must also become culturally competent in more cultures than their own. Culture, having been shaped by one’s family and community, provides a framework for the development of one’s view of the world. Such view is often defined as one’s paradigm. Different families and different cultures create different paradigms (Diller, 2007). Diller has summarized this argument in the following highly provocative terms: “From this perspective, it is easy to understand why the imposition of a Northern European cultural paradigm onto the lives of People of Color, who possess and live by very different cultural paradigms, is experienced so negatively” (p. 62). This concept at the very minimum challenges the notion of a successful transracial placement.

Robbins et al. (2006) have suggested that culture is as pervasive as the “air we breathe” (p. 130) and that a lack thereof is like suffocating:

And, like cutting off air, if we were suddenly removed from our culture of origin and introduced into another culture, the limitations of our cultural knowledge would immediately become obvious. We would not know how to speak, act, or think in ways that make sense and enable us to accomplish our goals within the new cultural context. (p. 130)

Reflecting on Robbins et al.'s (2006) statement could provoke a reexamination of long-term transracial placement of temporary foster children. These placements are intended as short term and have been defined as lasting from 24 hours to one weekend to 30 days. In some extreme situations, "temporary" has been defined as the length of time between court hearings, which can be up to 90 days. However, the reality is that only 19% of children remain in foster care six months or less (AFCARS, FY 2009). This extended stay in a racially unmatched foster home, while supplying basic physical needs, may not address the essential components of psychological care and well being. This loss of positive racial identity development can have long-range detrimental effects on foster children and the community. If the foster children do not know who they are, they cannot reach their full potential in their communities, nor can they achieve self-actualization.

Families are the conduits of positive self-regard. With 68% of African American children born out of wedlock (Joiner, 2003), this fact impacts not only the structure of African American families, but it also impacts the foster care system. To support single-parent households, the traditional extended family system in the African American community must rally. Grandparents often have been the first to accept this challenge. However, many of the 10 million African American children are disproportionately

represented in the foster care system (Joiner, 2003). African Americans comprise only 18% of the child population in Michigan but comprise more than half of the children in out-of-home placement (Michigan's Advisory Committee on the Overrepresentation of Children of Color [Equity Report], 2006).

For these African American children in foster care, racial matching is not always an option. Placement in a foster home that is racially similar is an ideal but not always practical. For White or other non African American foster children, racial matching is more easily achieved (Campbell, 2001). The prevalence of White foster families exceeds the demand for White foster children. This is not true for African Americans. Historically, there have been fewer foster homes for African American children than African American children who need them (Kennedy, 2004). The lack of a same-race, same-family reference group can impair the development of positive racial self-worth (Robbins et al., 2006).

Historically, society assumed the role of parenting in situations where the parental responsibilities were not satisfactorily met. Ideally, supportive services were provided for families and children in their own homes. When the circumstances warranted it, children were removed from the home, and the family worked cooperatively to resolve issues before the child was allowed to return. The child protection movement has operated from the paradigm that when families experience problems, such problems can be resolved, and the family can remain intact. Further, the child protective movement has maintained the perspective that since family pathology may result in child maltreatment, families are responsible as well for the child's protection (Crosson-Tower, 2010). Therefore, while intervention is being carried

out in the family system, children should remain with their biological families. When this is not possible, children first have been sent to extended family members and secondly to other families who are similar in race and culture. It is well documented that placement of foster children with families of other races was not historically considered a viable option (Auld, 1992; Brooks & Goldberg, 2001; John, 2002; Rowell, 2007).

Since the early 1600's, beginning with the Elizabethan Poor Laws, society has assumed responsibility for assisting parents with the care of children (Crosson-Tower, 2010). Early legislation focused on financial and social support of families who were unable to meet the needs of the children they biologically produced. In the early days of the United States as European immigrants were joined by African slaves, the care of children shifted from their families of origin to others (Askeland, 2006). Principally, plantation owners were responsible for slave children. The slave children were bought, worked, and used sexually at the discretion of the southern plantation owners. Siblings and parents were neither consulted nor advised. Not until 1822 were orphanages established for African children by the Quakers who were in Philadelphia.

These first orphanages and the early laws were forerunners for contemporary statutes and organizations designed to protect dependent children. A modern-day continuum of state and federal legislation has provided a scope of services for children whose parents are unable or incapable of fulfilling their parental roles. More recently, policy documents have framed the important issues of child protection, foster care, and adoption. State regulations have stipulated the proper environment that must be present for foster home placement. Additionally, the motivations for families to agree to foster have become a placement consideration. Martin (2000) has observed a broad

motivational continuum for providing foster care that covers an array of explanations. Basic biological inability to reproduce, altruistic desire to rescue children, and financial compensation are points on the spectrum (Crumbley, 1999; Kluger, Alexander, & Curtis, 2000; Rhodes, 1992).

1.2 Problem Statement and Research Questions

An historic controversy has raged since 1948, when the first transracial adoption placement occurred (Auld, 1992). The research literature and human service emphasis has remained on transracial adoption with few references to transracial foster care. Campbell (2001) has noted that there is a change in roles and expectations for foster parents and children when the issue shifts from transracial foster care to transracial adoption (Campbell, 2001). When the issue becomes transracial adoption, the child must accept that the foster family is now permanent rather than temporary.

A postmodern framework has been used to shape the following research goals and questions:

I. To uncover multiple perspectives that add meaning to the experiences of transracial foster families.

How do foster parents assign meaning to transracial foster care experiences?

How do foster children make sense of transracial foster care?

How do foster care workers address issues of transracial foster care?

II. To deconstruct the experiences of transracial foster families and the connection to the training curriculum.

How are foster parents prepared to address racial/cultural identity?

How is racial identity reinforced for foster children in transracial foster homes?

III. To conduct content analysis of foster parent training curricula.

How is curricula designed to train foster parents about racial/cultural identity?

How does the training address racial and cultural identity issues?

1.3 Significance of Study

Close examination of foster care and adoption literature is necessary for three reasons. First, most of the literature has focused on transracial adoption with only a brief mention of transracial foster care. Secondly, there is a scarcity of studies and articles that highlight transracial foster care (Brooks & Goldberg, 2001; Carter-Black, 2002; Campbell, 2001; Crumbley, 1999; Daughtery, 2001; Rhodes, 1992). Third, information about parental attitudes of foster parents is sparse as it relates to the roles of foster parents and their influence on the racial and cultural identity of their foster children. Transracial foster care is a largely unexplored concept. Most of the extant literature has focused on transracial adoption and included only a brief mention of transracial foster care. Few studies and some articles have highlighted transracial foster care and indicated that there is a strong need for further study in this area (Brooks, 2001; Campbell, 2001; Carter-Black, 2002; Rhodes, 1992). Campbell (2001) searched foster care research literature related to parental attitudes and racial identity development. Subsequently, Campbell concluded that “literature on the parental racial socialization practices of foster parents is virtually nonexistence” (p. 3). The importance of this research project is reflected in its singular purpose of spotlighting transracial foster care and racial and cultural identity.

One study of alumni from the foster care system cited the need to address “cultural identity and other personal identity issues” as a focus for new research

questions (Casey Family Programs, 2005, p. 53). This current study of foster parents and foster children in transracial families informs the social work profession regarding the support required to develop positive racial identity in children. Foster children in transracial families are displaced from their families of origin through the process of foster care. This study contributes to the body of knowledge regarding the need to train foster parents to understand more fully the intersection of foster care and racial identity development. Additionally, this study also contributes to the body of knowledge related to the need for foster children to maintain positive racial identity as they transition through numerous diverse families.

1.4 Overview of Methodology

Qualitative methodology is most appropriate for the study of transracial foster care. As foster parents recount their subjective experiences within the foster care system, a qualitative framework better captures the richness of these narratives. The complexity of human behavior makes experiences uniquely individualistic and not subject to objective measure (Robbins, 2006). The qualitative methodological framework strives to capture individual nuances. Informants were clustered in three configurations. First, foster parents, either single or couples, who are parenting a child racially different from themselves comprised one group. Secondly, foster children who are currently placed or previously have been placed in a transracial foster home comprised the second group. Members of both groups shared their thoughts and feelings by participating in a semi-structured interview for approximately one hour. Relaxed interviews were conducted in a neutral place. Locations included a public library, a church, and a cafe. At the request of the foster parents, such interviews were

also conducted in their homes. Third, the final group of informants is comprised of social workers who are employed by the foster care system and who are responsible for training foster parents. While 15 families with foster children is the targeted sample, no specific number of foster care staff is projected.

1.5 Overview of the Study

This research study consists of seven chapters. Chapter 1 places the need for substitute parents within an historical framework and charts the emergence of foster care as a service of the child welfare system. My experiences with foster children, as a foster parent in a transracial foster home and as a social worker for foster families, provided the impetus for this study. Chapter 2 provides an in-depth review of pertinent content articles and empirical research studies. A thorough review of the literature identified informational gaps and the need for this study. Philosophical frameworks and the research focus of articles produced within the last 15 years also provided further evidence of the need for this study. Doll's (1993) postmodern paradigm framed the exploration of existing research. Chapter 3 details the design and methodological framework for this qualitative study. This chapter also includes a discussion of qualitative methods as the preferred research option. Chapters 4 through 6 present results of the training curriculum analysis as well as an examination of foster parents, foster children, and foster care workers. Data regarding experiences reinforcing identity development of foster children who are placed temporarily in foster care provides the focus for these chapters. Finally, Chapter 7 presents a discussion of the findings and implication for research, training curriculum, and policy.

1.6 Descriptions of Terms

The following terms represent important concepts within this study and are defined as follows:

AFRICAN AMERICAN: used synonymously with the term “Black” to represent a person with African heritage but who was born in America and shares in the American cultural experience.

CULTURAL IDENTITY: the beliefs and mores one accepts as integral to his or her sense of personhood.

FAMILY FOSTER CARE: provision of routine activities of daily living (ADL) as well as emotional, medical, and educational services to foster children in a licensed residential home.

FOSTER CHILD: a person under the age of 18 who is a temporary or permanent ward of the court due to neglect or abuse.

FOSTER PARENT: a person serving in the role of a mother or father for a non-biological child as authorized by a licensed social services agency.

RACIAL IDENTITY: the belief one accepts as integral to his or her sense of personhood as a member of a group whose members share similar physical characteristics, including skin color.

TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION: legal parentage of a non-biological child of a race different from those of the persons assuming responsibility.

TRANSRACIAL FOSTER CARE: provision of care for non-blood-related children by person(s) of a race different from that of the children.

WHITE: used synonymously with the term “Caucasian” to refer to members of the majority of people in the United States with a European heritage.

CHAPTER 2 – A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

This literature review begins with an examination of research literature that supports the postmodern framework from which this study should be viewed. Historically, social work has warmly embraced systems theories, and systems theories have weathered the test of time in their relevant applications. However, Pozatej (1994) has indicated that the linear approach of cause and straightforward effect may better be explained by chaos theory. Like systems theory, chaos theory connects various components and structures a new frame of reference for “thinking about complex phenomena” (as cited in Bolland & Atherton, 1999, p. 367). Chaos in this theoretical context is not random disorder but a perspective that encompasses complicated, seemingly unconnected elements and examines their intrinsic structure.

Bolland and Atherton (1999) issue a call for social workers to consider, or rather re-consider, a modification of the standard theoretical systems framework. So strongly committed are Bolland and Atherton to this new approach that the title of their article speaks to the concept of chaos theory as an alternative approach: “Chaos Theory: An Alternative Approach to Social Work Practice and Research.” Although chaos theory was first applied to math and physics, the social sciences may well be advised to adopt this concept. Many social work issues are replete with unknowns and uncertainties. Central to the complexity of social work is the variations in human behavior. Using a fixed, linear model to explain and amplify the complexity of multiple dynamics involved in systems theory may be limiting interpretation of social dynamics. Indeed, chaos theory and the postmodern approach provide a goodness of fit for social work practice

issues.

Modern human beings, not unlike their ancient predecessors, desire order and organization to function well in the world. Early humankind sought to understand and create stability by pondering the phases of the moon and the seasons of the year. Today's human beings seek to achieve understanding and create order by pondering the behavior of family members, school personnel, and community members. The foster care workers, foster care parents, and foster care children comprise such a community. Understanding the dynamic interplay of human behavior within the foster care community requires close examination from a new perspective. A postmodern (Doll, 1993) perspective offers perhaps the most viable paradigm.

Doll (1993) elucidates a "multiple ways of knowing" view, which is designed to provide a lens for understanding human behavior. It is unsound to attempt an explanation of human interactions without accepting that each individual brings an individualized perspective to every issue. This, of course, reinforces the adage that "no two people think alike." Research on eyewitness accounts reveals that even when individuals see the same event unfolding at the same time, their accounts of this same event will vary and sometimes by a great deal (Loftus, 1996). The work of Doll (1993) and Loftus (1996) unquestionably anchor the necessity of having various perspectives when it comes to interpreting human behavior.

Other advocates for the postmodern paradigm (Bolland & Atherton, 1999; Doll, 1993; Hudson, 2000) also have embraced a chaos and complexity perspective with implications for social work research and practice. Bolland and Atherton (1999) "encourage social workers to think in terms of chaos theory" as an alternative to linear

processing of complex human behavior and “the uncertainty that characterizes many social work practice issues” (p. 367). However, it was Doll (1993) who laid the foundation for the creative application of this original scientific theory. Still other theorists have made unique contributions to the application of chaos theory as a means of understanding human behavior and will be highlighted later in this section.

The next collection of literature reviewed for this study included seminal research in the area of foster or transracial families and spanned more than 30 years (Hill & Peltzer, 1982; McRoy & Zurcher, 1983). Literature published during this time period combined both historical and contemporary research. Synthesizing, in this context, involves understanding and integrating “individual pieces of literature” about transracial foster care into a coherent new perspective (Pan, 2003, p. 1). The majority of existing research has been directed at issues related to transracial adoption, *not* transracial foster care. It was precisely this paucity of research data that was the genesis of Campbell’s (2001) research as well as this study. Campbell has suggested that there are “some fundamental differences between children placed in foster care and children in adoptive placements” (p. 3). Primarily emotional attachment and permanency are the essential defining characteristics found in Campbell’s study. The attachment bond between adopted children and their adopted parents creates a stronger connection than does the bond between foster children and foster parents. This psychological solidification forms a strong foundation for the development of children’s racial identity development. However, the strength of this attraction is absent in foster parent-foster child relationships.

Further, the foster care literature reviewed for this study can be divided into three

topics: 1) the foster care system, 2) racial identity formulation, and 3) perspectives of foster children. These focus of these categories shifts from children in the social environment to a focus on family foster care. The perspective tapers further when the formulation of racial identity is introduced as an essential component.

With this expanded focus and demarcation from transracial adoption, the literature emerges as highly specialized. Campbell (2001) has iterated this position in the problem statement of her exploratory study. Campbell explored racial socialization practices of foster parents in transracial placements. Although Campbell has acknowledged that “there are some fundamental differences between children placed in foster care and children in adoptive placements” (p. 3), research on transracial adoption is often the only available model for studying transracial foster care. The connection between parental attitudes and racial identity has been documented, but little research exists on foster parents’ “racial socialization practices” (p. 3).

2.1.1 William Doll

Doll (1993) shattered the modernism paradigm and left theorists and practitioners alike pondering his application of postmodern concepts. He rejected the “absolute truth” concept in favor of “multiple ways of knowing.” Multiple perspectives comprise his curricular lens. Doll’s postmodern perspective revolves around a concept of an open system, and it is here that social work practice theory and Doll (1993) find community.

Doll (1993) and social work practice theory requires that components of an open system function effectively. Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman (2010) have defined a system as an orderly set of related elements. This set of interrelated orderly elements can also be interdependent. Interpreting Doll’s open system concept, in my study, infers that

open relationships among foster parents, foster children, and foster care workers are essential. In social work, these elements of a system are conceptually labeled as input and subsystems. The people in the child welfare system form small, closely related units or subsystems, and their influence on these units is achieved through information and input. Social workers, supervisors, and court employees all provide information that affects the overall functioning within the open system. The merging of information from these varied sources is often misinterpreted as chaos. The influx of relevant information from multiple sources at various times can appear to the untrained observer as random and unordered when, in fact, it spirals within an arc and results in an effective resolution of a complex situation. Doll's four "R"s (1993) further refine this postmodern perspective. The first "R" stands for Recursion, which derives "from the Latin *recurrere* (to run back)" (p. 184) or to happen again, as in to recur. Recursion results in the extraction of deeper meaning from the subsystems. Doll's second and third concepts are Richness and Relationship. Richness is the layering of meaning such that the complexity of relationships develops as interactions are laid upon other interactions. This layering of interactions continues until a comprehensive arrangement forms. Rigor, the last concept, in this emerging complexity and thoroughness completes the scenario (see Figure 2.1). Rigor is then conceptualized as perhaps the key element of Doll's theory. Rigor requires indeterminacy and interpretation (1993). Indeterminacy establishes an ongoing search for meaning and understanding. Figure 2.1 illustrates Doll's postmodern application to the foster family. The foster family as a system functions in positive ways when the family system is open. An open family system allows input from the parental subsystem and the child subsystem. This input of open

communication involves attentive listening and appropriate responding.

An Interpretation of Doll

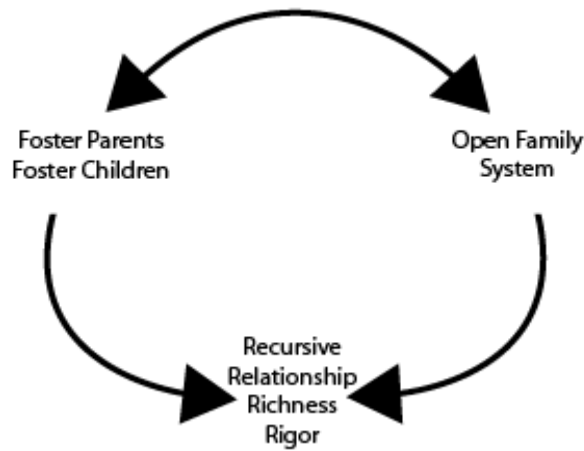


FIGURE 2.1

Such an open family network is essential to transracial foster families. An artistic mobile represents a system not unlike the family system. An artist erects a mobile structure with delicately balanced units connected by wire or other substance that are then suspended in the air. Even a slight tap moves all parts of the mobile, and each moving part fluctuates until a new balance has been achieved. Dysfunctionality in one part of the family affects all members of the family. The interdependence of family members is binding and necessary for the growth of all. Doll (1993) would approve of this relationship dynamic.

Doll's chaos theory, having a postmodern perspective, includes multiple ways of knowing as an essential defining element. It seems consistent with multiple sources for input that multiple ways of knowing would logically follow. Foster children view the child welfare system from a different vantage point than that of child welfare workers. Child welfare workers should maintain a macro perspective of the foster care system while the foster family should maintain a micro perspective. A diverse perspective emerges in

this fluid system.

2.1.2 Application for Social Work

Some innovative social workers (Bolland & Atherton, 1999; Hudson, 2000) have attempted to advance the theoretical framework for social work practice by promoting chaos theory. Bolland and Atherton (1999) have suggested chaos theory as an alternative approach and possible new paradigm for understanding the multiple facets of human behavior. Hudson (2000) has stated resolutely that the usual conceptual framework, i.e., a general systems approach, is outdated. Hudson (2000) suggested that the general systems theory and the ecological perspective, commonly used in social work practice, has hindered the advancement of “a unifying conceptual framework to guide practice” (p. 215). Hudson further has cited social work’s “growing insularity” (p. 215) as an explanation for the profession’s “reluctance to incorporate recent developments in allied fields” (p. 215).

Doll’s (1993) postmodern chaos theory facilitates the understanding of the individual, the relationships within the individual’s family system, and the relationships within the individual’s social environment. The traditional perspective of viewing the micro and mezzo systems as linear may not be efficient in responding to the varied situations that social workers encounter in today’s society. Every event has both a cause and a corresponding effect. Since it is hard to uncover a scientific explanation for numerous variances in the lives of human beings, seemingly random events may reveal a hidden order when they are examined more closely. Indeed, Doll’s (1993) postmodern paradigm gives social workers “a way of thinking about complex phenomena” (Bolland & Atherton, 1999, p. 367). Few, if any, situations are more

complex than human nature.

2.2 Foster Care System

Martin (2007) has described four basic types of foster care: kinship care (relative), family (non-relative), therapeutic, and residential (group). The care and nurturing of children who have been legally removed from their biological families and placed in the home of licensed caregivers constitutes family foster care for the purposes of this study. In these cases, children are temporarily removed from their biological families because of neglect, physical abuse, medical issues, emotional abuse, or sexual abuse (Huber & Wolfson, 1996; Downs, Costin, & McFadden, 1996; Rothschild & Ekas, 2004). As children transition from their family of origin, decisions regarding interim care are made. Removal of children from their homes provokes numerous questions—for example, Where is the best placement for the child? Kinship care is the first option when out-of-home placement is needed. Rothschild and Ekas (2004) have defined kinship care as the “placement of a child with a blood relative or fictive family member instead of placement with a stranger...” (p. 329).

Family dynamics have continued to change in American communities. Of special interest to the foster care community has been the change within the African American family structure. There has been a social movement away from marriage, and statistics indicate that 70% of African Americans are born to unmarried parents (Latimer, 2003). Although sociologists and social workers have not determined the exact cause of this high rate of single parenthood, it nevertheless results in a likely interaction with the child welfare system. Poverty rates have been estimated at 47% for Black children from single-parent households. Latimer (2003) has concluded that children who live with

their married parents, either biological or adoptive, are better performers in school. These children are also healthier and less likely to be involved in negative social behaviors.

Families often help single parents care for and nurture their children. This familial assistance typically occurs either while the child remains in the parents' home or when the child changes residence to the home of the caretaking relative. The current term for relatives caring for children who are biologically related and therefore "kinfolk" is "kinship care." The historic practice of informal adoption in the African American community was the forerunner of kinship care. Kinship care therefore has been more readily utilized as a viable alternative in the African American community. Yet, despite this legacy of family care, questions remain: Are relatives always better parental substitutes, or are licensed foster caregivers a preferred option? What skills and characteristics are required to be effective foster parents? Do foster parents need to share a common race/culture with their foster child? These questions position some of the challenges that must be addressed as children enter the child welfare system.

The Equity Report (2006) notes that of the children in kinship care as of September 30, 2002, approximately 60% were African American. According to Rothschild and Ekas (2004), "Kinship care placements tend to be more stable and longer lasting than nonrelated foster placements" (p. 329). Sadly, however, kinship care is sometimes not an option. Economic conditions and housing concerns are two primary mitigating factors that often prevent children from moving in with relatives and necessitate placement in a licensed foster home. In some situations, substance abuse or mental health issues also prevent placement within the extended family structure. As

a result, family foster care, a secondary solution, becomes the primary choice.

Historically, advocates for children deemed institutional care less desirable than a family setting (Martin, 2000). Therefore, family foster care became an integral component of the child welfare system. One of the early pioneers in this struggle, Charles Loring Brace (1826-1890), began “placing out” (1975, p. 1) children from New York with families in the Midwest. Nationally, non-relative foster home placement constituted 48% of out-of-home placements for children at the close of the 2009 fiscal year (AFCARS, FY 2009). Approximately 59% of the 423,773 children in foster care during this same timeframe remained in foster care from 1 to 23 months, while 11% remained in foster care 5 years or longer (2009). In the state of Michigan, African American children “were more likely to stay in care longer than white children” (Equity Report, 2006, p. 11). The extended length of stay in foster care underscores and reinforces the need for trained substitute caregivers who are culturally competent.

The overrepresentation of African American children in foster care has created specific challenges for the foster care system. The system traditionally has been underfunded; it is currently overburdened, and the risk factors for negative outcomes increase with the disproportional number of African American children (Hill, 2007). According to statistics across the United States, 46 states have reported African American children in foster care to be more than “two times the proportion of African American children in the state” (Equity, 2006, p. 9). Michigan’s rate of overrepresentation is 2.97 and above the national average of 2.43 (2006). This trend forced the State of Michigan to investigate practices of the child welfare system regarding incidences of child maltreatment, racial representation in foster care, and services for at-risk families. The resulting Equity

Report (2006) indicated that African American children comprise less than 18% of Michigan's population of children but "more than half of the children in out-of-home placement" (p. 3). This problem is enormous and must be attacked from both policy and practice vantage points.

The Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 (MEPA) was passed in part to address the disproportionate number of Black children in the child welfare system (Carter-Black, 2002). A supplemental legislative item, Interethnic Adoption Provision (IEP), linked with MEPA to create a broad umbrella that protects children from languishing in the child welfare system based only on race and cultural identity. Thousands of children entered the child welfare system, but the number of children exiting the system was less than satisfactory, and this discrepancy had reached record levels (Carter-Black, 2002). Although an exploration of the reason for the overrepresentation exceeds the scope of this study, the Department of Health and Human Services speculated that "somewhere in the child welfare decision-making process families of color are treated differently" (Equity, 2006, p. 4).

2.2.1 Foster Care Workers

Perhaps the linchpin in the system is the foster care worker (see Figure 2.2). The foster care worker links children who need temporary placement with foster homes and supportive services. Foster care workers are familiar with the characteristics of each foster home, the unique needs of the children who must be placed, and the mutual expectations of both parties. They must determine what is in the best interest of the children and balance this with the rights of the biological parents. The biological parents maintain an emotional connection to their children, and therefore this attachment must

be honored. However, Bogolub and Thomas (2005) have asserted that the role of the biological parents is more relevant if the focus on the research is related to the relationship between the birth parent and the child. The focus of this research study is the relationship between the foster child and the foster family, not the birth family.

Foster Family System

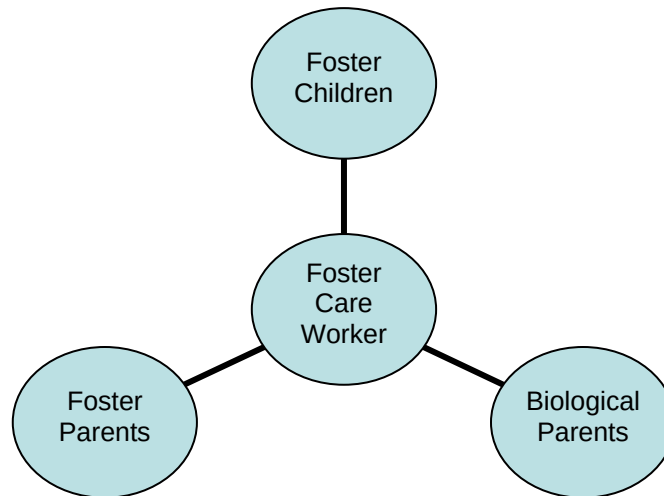


Figure 2.2

To this already complex situation, add the element of transracial placement, and the complexity increases exponentially. Carter-Black (2002) was particularly aware of the interplay between foster care worker attitude and effective service delivery. Carter-Black's (2002) ethnographic study of 10 child welfare workers explored their perceptions of transracial adoption and foster care placement of African American children with White families. A contentious debate of racial matching has raged for years and continues among foster care parents, foster care workers, and the general public—all expressing their opinions vehemently. The role of workers in the child welfare system is pivotal, not so much in racial matching but in matching the needs of the child with the

particular qualities of the family. Rhodes (1992) assumed a macro perspective in the examination of a child welfare foster care team at a department of human services office in London. The intent of Rhodes's study was to explore the process and practice of racial matching and foster care placement. The issues and concerns raised by Rhodes more than two decades ago have remained unresolved. As a result, the controversy surrounding racial matching has continued to influence current foster care and adoption practices.

2.2.2 Post-Modern Families

An expanded definition of the concept of "family" can provide a framework for examining the functionality of the foster family. The traditional biological family structure has been augmented by Shriver's (2011) expansion of family roles. Two of the primary functions of the family, that of nurturing and providing financial support, have been emotionally incorporated into Shriver's (2011) concept of "familiness." This postmodern concept of "familiness" expands the historical scope of families from just the birth parents and their blood-related children. Now, familiness has been redefined to include all members of the group who provide basic developmental support in the form of physical care, safety, psychological support, and social development. In the foster care system, the foster family assumes most these responsibilities. The concept of "familiness," for the purposes of this study, was divided into two subsets, and narration from both components is included here. Foster parents constituted one subset and foster children the other. The elements of Doll's (1993) postmodern perspective are mirrored in Shriver's (2011) expanded view of family structure. The historic nuclear family has gradually morphed into a plethora of possible combinations of adult parental

figures. In addition to heterosexual two-parent families, in this study there were several postmodern family groups, which are described in Chapter 3.

Foster parents are licensed by the state government and regulated by local departments of human services and selected private childcare agencies. Policies regulating foster parents must adhere to local, state, and federal regulations. The “major functions of family foster care include emergency protection, crisis intervention, assessment and case planning, reunification, preparation for adoption and preparation for independent living” (Pecora, Whittaker, Maluccio, Barth, & Plotnick, 2000, p. 303). Prevention of further maltreatment; maintenance of family, school, and other connections; minimizing movement from one home to another; stabilization of children’s emotional functioning; and meeting children’s immediate health care needs add to the duties and expectations of foster families.

Ensuring the well being of families and children has been the primary objective of successful foster care placement, and this wellbeing is among the basic requirements for all children as delineated by Hill and Peltzer (1982). However, when the basic objectives of foster care have been examined, racial and cultural identity often has not been recognized as an essential component of children’s wellbeing. Hill and Peltzer (1982) proposed an explanation. Their focus, sculpted from their experiences, focused on one White social worker and one Black family life educator, who shared a mutual concern “about black children who were being parented by whites” (p. 557). Their parenting categories included biological parents, foster parents, and adoptive parents. The common denominator was “a White parent” with a Black child. In their study, a discussion of racism and its insidious effects on all members of society was pivotal for

White parents to build positive self-esteem and pride in their Black children.

Successful outcomes for children in foster care hinge on the degree of safety they experience and the speediness of permanence planning (Pecora & Maluccio, 2002). Also linked to successful outcomes is the fact that foster care drift and long-term foster care placement create a climate where racial and cultural identities become significant issues. The length of time children remain in foster care has made it necessary to address racial and cultural identity rather than wait until children return home, are placed in a permanent foster home, or placed with an adoptive family. Legions of children remain in foster care during impressionable and vulnerable years; as a result, positive racial and cultural identification suffer. Foster parents and foster care workers who fail to acknowledge the importance of a cultural connection provide a disservice to foster children. Such denial may be based on lack of knowledge or personal discomfort.

Johnson and Grant (2005) have suggested that social workers should “be aware of their own cultural beliefs, ideas, and identities leading to cultural sensitivity” (p. 15). Likewise, foster parents must also demonstrate cultural self-awareness. This awareness bridges the cultural divide between foster parents and foster children and elevates its importance in individual identity development. Fong (2001) has suggested that culture is often viewed as “tangential” (as cited in Johnson & Grant, 2005). If Fong’s assertion is accurate, culture would erroneously serve as a supplement and therefore not be viewed as critical for positive identity development. Foster parents must move their focus beyond providing basic care for their foster children and ascend Maslow’s (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2010) hierarchy of needs toward self-actualization.

2.2.3. Foster Care and Adoption

At the close of the fiscal year 2009, more than 114,556 children in the United States were in foster care waiting for adoption. Thirty percent of these children were African American (AFCARS, FY 2009). Permanent families are often identified by searching within the foster care system for “forever families.” Foster care is a feeder system for the adoption of children, especially children from non-dominant groups. The intersection of surplus African American children in foster care (AFCARS, FY 2009) and the deficit of healthy White infants is where transracial foster care enters and becomes a funnel for transracial adoption. A review of the literature revealed scant information exclusively related to transracial foster care. Rather, transracial adoption and transracial foster care have been discussed conjointly within the literature base. This research study suggests a demarcation of these two issues and addresses the unique situation of transracial foster care.

To engage in the transracial adoption process is almost always a conscious decision frequently contemplated with considerable anguish and deliberation. Social, emotional, and familiar concerns challenge the desire to adopt across racial lines. Kennedy (2004) has written that White adoptive parents who adopt Black children are often viewed as “either neurotic or foolish” (p. 446). According to Kennedy, White people, based on their decision to adopt transracially, are then perceived as members of an ostracized minority group and experience prejudice, which is often internalized (p. 446). The literature does not support this same perception of foster parents who care for and provide a safe haven for children who are racially different. Foster parents are lauded for accepting foster children who have experienced severe health issues,

emotional deprivation, or are otherwise hard to place. Most similar requests for foster parents to accept a special-needs child are made with little or no prior warning or preparation. These emergency placements are usually made without regard to race (Auld, 1993). The race and cultural identity of foster parents and preparation required to receive a foster child of a different race and cultural identity receive less priority when a child's physical and emotional health are in jeopardy. Such placements are intended to be temporary, but children often "were often left there for years on end" (Barber & Delfabbro, 2003, p. 415). These children must grow and thrive in families where they are placed whether they are placed within a cultural group similar to their own or not.

2.2.4 Transracial Foster Care, Not Transracial Adoption

The scope of this literature review encompasses transracial adoption. However, information on transracial adoption is included only to the extent that it informs the discussion of transracial foster care and the correlation between the two related and often overlapping topics. Transracial foster care is defined, for the purposes of this study, as the temporary parenting of a child by adults of a different race. Transracial adoption, conversely, means that adoptive parents assume permanent legal and psychological responsibility for a child of a race different from their own. Social, emotional, and familial concerns have presented challenges to the desire to adopt across racial lines. The process of transracial adoption is a deliberate decision, and long-range consequences must be considered. Transracial foster care, however, is considered short term and temporary. Long-term consequences of a short-term process are not always relevant.

Disabled children and minority children have been included in the "hard to place"

category both for adoption and foster care. Monetary subsidies, offered as incentives, are available for families who accept hard-to-place children (Auld, 1993) for either foster care or adoption. Grotevant et al. (2000) have labeled children with a disability and minority children as “special needs.” This categorization is also frequently used based on age or sibling group. For example, a 13-year-old child is considered as “special needs” due to his or her age. An African American six year old would also be considered “special needs” because of his race. Two or more siblings wishing to be placed together would fall into this category as well. Each scenario requires extra attention and perhaps additional services. Such children are usually moved to foster homes that can provide for special-needs children. Race-based “special needs” placements typically have been made with little prior warning or preparation for either the child or the foster parents.

Transracial foster care is often the feeder system for transracial adoption (Auld, 1993; Brooks & Goldberg, 2001; Carter-Black, 2002). Brooks and Goldberg (2001) intentionally included foster parents in their sample “because many adopted children are placed initially in foster care with families that eventually adopt them” (p. 150). Transracial adoption by definition includes assumption of legal parentage of children who are racially different than their adopted parents. This “supply and demand” equation leads both White adoptive parents and childcare workers to seek a new market—the African American foster child. Rhodes (1992) has noted that “the supply of children was disproportionately from the Black community and the supply of substitute parents disproportionately from the White” (p. 2).

Black children have remained in the foster care system longer and were

therefore more readily available for both foster care and adoption (Auld, 1993; Crumbley, 1999; Kennedy, 2003; Martin, 2000). Carter-Black (2002) has noted that the median stay in care has been three years for foster children but “five years in the case of black children” (p. 338). Children who are moved from their biological families and reestablish quickly with foster families of the same race are considered easy to place. On the other hand, children who are removed from their biological families and remain in the foster care system without a same-race match for weeks, months, and years are considered difficult to place. Because of the historic shortage of licensed Black foster care homes, Black children subsequently have been categorized as hard to place (Barber & Delfabbro, 2003). As a result, these children must grow and thrive in families where they are placed, whether these families are similar in race or not.

2.3 Racial Identity

Rodriguez-Keyes (2007) has argued that although the term “race” is often used in literature synonymously to mean more than a set of physical characteristics, this is scientifically inaccurate. The biological configuration of eye shape, hair texture, and skin color are features used extensively to categorize people in the United States for political and social reasons. Diller (2007), in discussing the debate over race versus culture, has argued that the term “race” has been “so emotionally charged and politicized” that its scientific value has been diluted. I acknowledge the artificiality of these arbitrary divisions, but further argumentation is not within the scope of this study. Subsequently, the term “race” is used in this study to denote phenotype and social distinction.

The change in the social order of the 1960's ushered in radical changes for

American society and in particular Black people. Intellectuals and theorists attempted to deconstruct the process of “Negro or Black Identity” (Cross, 1991). It was clear that Black people were undergoing an identity change, but the “how” was not so clearly visible. Cross (1991) lists Bailey Jackson, Jake Milliones, and others with himself as those whose scholarly curiosity provoked empirical research on Black identity change. This group spawned development models that became known as models of nigrescence (Cross, 1991, p. x). The appropriateness of the term “nigrescence” is descriptive as these scholars developed models that analyzed “the process of becoming Black.” The models were derived after “clinical observations, case studies, and participant observations” (Cross, 1991, p. xi).

Cross, Parham, and Helms (1991) conducted a comparative analysis of approximately 11 process models of African American identity development. They recognized the multiple stages of each model but ultimately classified four stages common to all Nigrescence models. All of the nigrescent models chronicle the transformation of a positive self-identity borne of an evolutionary process that begins a rejection of “Negroness.” The models focus on the development of Black identity and the messages that articulate the emergence of Black self-awareness and positive identification with Black American culture. The common denominator of the models is an emphasis on transforming the identity of Black Americans.

Stage one is dominated by an individual’s denial of Negro culture and is described “as a deracinated person who views being Black as an obstacle...” (Cross et al., 1991, p. 322). A person moving through Stage I sees being Black as a stigma, is often defensive, and seeks to distance oneself from this cultural group. Cross et al.

(1991) cited a struggle with hair texture as an example of the dilemmas addressed by those in Stage I. Silky, straight hair (White hair) is preferred to short, kinky tresses (Black hair). This is a common struggle for many African Americans, especially girls.

In Stage II, an event triggers the awareness that a new identity is desirable. Although an individual is guarding his or her self-concept, this momentous event shatters the inner peace and predictability of response. Cross et al. (1991) have labeled Stage II as “pulling the rug from under one’s feet” (p.324). A person operating from a Negro identity paradigm is propelled to reexamine his or her worldview and concludes that a change is necessary. In addition, input from his or her social environment is compelling. The individual concludes that the old identity is undesirable and that a new identity is advantageous. With zeal, the journey to an increased Black consciousness continues.

The psychological stage is now set for the metamorphosis. This third stage is truly a crossroad (Cross et al., 1991). What is known and familiar is left behind and abandoned and what is ahead is uncomfortable and perhaps somewhat frightening. This can be the most challenging aspect of nigrescence models. The process of change involves struggle and some discomfort. Pushing through a metamorphosis can be painful and isolating. It is sometimes difficult to see the end product while in the process of changing. The individual in this stage has hope and an idea of what he or she is to become. Paradoxically, validation comes from the peer group. Cross et al. (1991) have categorized a stage-three individual as “anxious about how to demonstrate to others that he/she is becoming the right kind of black person” (p. 325).

Finally, in Stage IV, homeostasis is achieved by internalizing a new Black

identity. This is truly a gratifying phase. The individual emerges confident in the new identity, open to bi-racial experiences, and assertive in social situations. There is little, if any, need for hostility toward the dominant culture. In fact, the person in Stage IV recognizes the necessity to demonstrate bi-culturality and simultaneously function as an American and as an African American. Cross et al. 1991) have indicated that blending cultural perspectives is indeed the work of Stage IV. Further, they describe this stage as “coming to grips with the incontestability of one’s Americanness” (p. 327). Clearly, the duality of being Black in America must be reconciled with being American and Black. Once this twofold paradigm is accepted, the nigrescence process is complete.

Cross and Fhagen-Smith (1991) have noted that nearly all of the original nigrescence models were initially limited to adult experiences of Black American identity conversions. However, if Shriver’s (2010) views are juxtaposed with these traditional models, there is an opportunity for application for children as well as adults. Shriver’s (2010) labels for the stages are more readily transferable to broader lifespan application. His interpretation includes 1) acceptance of a “white normative standard” and rejection of Blackness, 2) discrimination because of skin color, 3) glorification of African Americans and denigration of White people, and 4) pluralism. African American children who are placed transracially in non-African American homes will experience an acceptance of whiteness by the foster family as the normal cultural standard. African American children who daily interact on an intimate level with all things White will internalize the values, attitudes, and behavior of the dominant society. This connection with the “White normative standard” may not necessarily lead to “rejection of Blackness,” but it is probable.

The White foster family cannot provide protection from all forms of discrimination based on the skin color of their foster child. Some discrimination may surface from the extended family members of the White foster family or the community at large and are consistent with Stage II (Shriver, 2010). As foster children experience this struggle for positive self-regard, particularly adolescent foster children, they also rebel against White standards, and an exaltation of all things Black ensues. This, of course, is Shriver's Stage III. Finally, both Shriver's (2010) model and the nigrescence models reviewed by Cross et al. (1991) conclude with the hopefulness of pluralism or coexistence.

Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001) also have explored identity development from yet another viewpoint. They rotate the identity paradigm from an adult conversion perspective to a lifespan perspective. In so doing, Cross and Fhagen (2001) establish three growth patterns identified as Nigrescence Pattern A, B, or C. The first pattern, Pattern A, covers infancy through late adolescence and is largely a consequence of the socialization process. Pattern B, identified as "identity conversion," remains true to the original intent of these theories. The crowning achieve of this alternative model is the final phase, Pattern C, which addresses "Black identity enhancement and modification" (p. 244). Interestingly, Cross et. al.'s (1991) five-stage Nigrescence model has evolved over time. As a result, Cross updated the language he has used to describe the Black American community. Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001) have labeled stages one through five as "pre-encounter," "encounter," "immersion-emersion," "internalization," and "internalization-commitment." The pre-encounter stage, characterized as a "staple identity," represents a near confrontation with Stage II, or the encounter stage. The encounter stage is appropriately named. This period of development is a confrontation

between “the event or series of events that challenge and destabilize the ongoing identity” (p. 244). Struggle in the encounter stage is illustrated by coping with a racial expletive. A virtual tug of war between a new challenge and old identity is set. This battle is contextualized in Stage III, immersion-emersion, as the new ideal seeks to replace the demands of the old identity. Actively researching African American history and sharing this new information happens in the immersion-emersion stage. Ultimately, the new order succeeds, and a “finalization of the new sense of self” triumphs (p. 244) in Stage IV, which is internalization. Wearing ethnic clothing and associating with cultural and social groups are examples of the final stage of internalization. After a positive Black image has been established, there is the drive to expand this newfound concept to a macro level, and the community is embraced.

Although Cross et al.’s (1991) as well as other nigrescence models address only adult cognitive experiences, there can be application to adolescents and children. Children during Stage II may express a desire for White features. For example, African American girls often feel the need to have long hair to feel pretty (Gibson, 1995). These girls pretend to have long, silky hair by tying the ends of a scarf around the nape of the head and letting it dangle down their back. Gibson vividly recalls a similar repressed childhood memory. Hair extensions also reflect a latent desire. There is a generation of African American women who cringe at the thought of swimming during high school gym. For the generation prior to permanents, stylish braids, and dreadlocks, wet hair during the school day represented not a small crisis. Although high school locker rooms may have had a blow dryer, there was no way to recapture the smooth, pressed look of African American hair before the gym class. Most African American hair required heat,

as in a pressing comb, to re-straighten the hair. Gibson (1995) even titled her book *Nappy*, a slang expression for natural, un-pressed African American hair. She has recounted the dilemma surrounding her decision to wear her hair short and natural and has described the peace of “finally being able to learn to swim” (p. 5). On a visit to Mombassa, Kenya, Gibson recalled her dismay while looking at the “beautiful Indian Ocean,” the “white sand,” and the aqua blue water (p. 6). Her feelings of frustration were generated by the economic reality that she could not “put out seventy-five dollars to get her hair re-done three times a week” (p. 6). Woefully, she concluded she would have to wait awhile until she could afford to have a permanent for her hair before learning to swim.

Sometimes those with a dominant life paradigm do not understand the hair issue. However, the issue of hair reoccurs many times in contemporary literature and song. India Arie, a contemporary singer and songwriter, has written about this historical battle in the female African American community with her song *I Am Not My Hair*. Arie (2007) added a melody to the narrative that describes the lifetime struggle of many African American women. For these African American women, judgment is based on the dominant standard of beautiful hair. Tragically, this ideal is not obtainable for most African American women, as the texture of the hair differs greatly from the traditional standard of American beauty. Arie has stated in her song that she is much more than a hairstyle. In fact, Arie wants to separate her personhood from her hair and cautions the listener not to see her hair and think they have seen her true personality because she is not her hair. Her hair is only one aspect of who she is.

Putman (1997) has interpreted the search for racial identity over the lifespan with

special emphasis on early childhood development. Putman's concept of race constancy has shed light on the issue of alleged early rejection of blackness by preschool age children. Preschoolers' incomplete understanding of the adult world racial structure has resulted in misclassification but "does not represent a denial of blackness" (p. 43). Putman has defined race constancy as an awareness that "one's racial group membership is fixed and will not change" (p. 43). Further, she has suggested that children do not understand such a complex concept until they are at least six years of age and in some cases not until they are seven years old. She has admitted that questions asked by children, such as "Do I have to be Black?" are, at minimum, "distressing to parents" (p. 43). However, Putman also has suggested to parents and other adults that such questions do not necessarily imply an "internalized negative self image" (p. 43). Putman concludes such questions may reflect children's burgeoning understanding of "White privilege conveyed via the media" (p. 43). According to Putnam, these children are perhaps expressing their desire to identify with the powerful and privileged group.

Conversely, Diller (2007) has placed the age of understanding racial differences "as early as three" (p. 109). The variation in this statistic for Diller is whether the child is one of color or a child from the majority group. Children of color are more aware, and earlier, of racial differences. Unfortunately, the differences that children become aware of result in "exhibited negative self-concepts and lower self-esteem" (p. 109). According to Diller, "African American youth formed stable integration of self-images earlier than did White youth" (p. 109).

It was precisely the quest for answers to development of racial identity in

children that motivated Daughtery. Daughtery's (2002) has examined the experiences of African American adolescent girls in foster care and their identity development. In Daughtery's study, the identity menu includes female, former foster child, and African American woman. In the executive summary, which prefaces the study, Daughtery lists the purpose as seeking to "understand the meaning and experience of identity development from those African American women who had experienced the phenomenon of foster care during adolescence" (preface).

Daughtery's study is an analysis of Erickson's psychosocial theory and its application to the lives of African American adolescent females in the child welfare system. Daughtery's methods included taped interviews with 10 women who were foster children during their adolescence. Through narratives, Daughtery found the struggle for identity encompassed broad socialization issues as well as racial and cultural concerns. Daughtery had a sociological reference base and included multiple facets of identity development. The respondents noted five themes revolving around an adult "connectedness to the child" (p. 99). This adult-child association was selected due to the nature of the adult/child relationship in the child welfare system. Lack of physical affection, lack of material things, problems with caseworkers, and the accountability of foster parents were the areas of concentration. In fact, the reference to bicultural competence is a footnote citation of Stevens's (2002) work.

In contrast, Hill and Peltzer's (1982) research specifically tackled racial identity development. Hill and Peltzer (1982) initially focused on the need to help White parents who adopted black children to develop "positive black identities" (p. 557). However, when recruiting for the fifth of thirteenth parenting groups, efforts were expanded to

include White foster parents as well. Hill and Peltzer (1892) concluded that cultural identity concerns of White adoptive parents intersected concerns of White foster parents.

An educational format dominated the 13 parenting groups that convened weekly from 1974-1981. The composition of the groups included a combination of foster parents, adoptive parents, single parents, and bi-racial couples. The emphasis was White parents with Black children, and the group leaders mirrored this pattern with Black/White co-leadership. As a result of the group dynamics, the White co-leader articulated feelings of “guilt over the racism inherent in a life experience as a white person” (p. 564). As significant, if not more, was the realization “that the white parent who is trying to raise a black child may experience similar feelings” (p. 564). The authors’ conclusions identify the need to develop awareness by White parents of their own racism and how their own racism affected how they treated their children (p. 565).

2.3.1 Identity Formation

Identity is like a prism, filtering and reflecting multiple dimensions of an individual’s self. The facets of identity, just as the facets of a prism, constitute a single self but reflect various manifestations of the whole. The light reflected through the prism reflects a distinctive range of colors; each is separate and unique but connects to and through the same source. Identity is also multi-faceted and is reflected in distinct but joined dimensions of the same self. This concept is similar to Grotevant et al.’s (2000) idea of adoptive “identity integration.” Identity integration is a coordination of an individual sense of being an adoptive person blended with other aspects of the individual’s life. With race and culture as two identity domains, questions related to

transracial foster care surface. How does the concept of identity integration influence the process of identity formulation of foster children? What meaning-making experiences highlight these phenomena for foster children?

The patriarch of identity development theory is generally accepted as Erik Erickson (1950, 1968, 1998). In discussions of identity development, Erickson has been cited in nearly every research document reviewed in this study. Erickson links chronological developmental tasks to eight stages of his identity development theory. He begins at birth and continues through old age and death. Of particular importance is Erickson's fifth stage of psychosocial development: "identity versus role confusion" (1950). Psychological and social developments are complex processes encompassing an array of emotions and cognitive stages. The biological changes and the beginning of sexual maturation during adolescence trigger new awareness of roles and responsibilities. The major identity questions are articulated during adolescents and result in exploration of a range of identities during this stage. This career and personal discovery by the end of Stage V ideally culminates in a firm career choice and lifestyle selection. The social expectations of identification of life goals, including career choices, coupled with parental and peer demands become the nucleus for "role confusion." Adolescents who are overwhelmed, and thus unable to select appropriate roles or identities, "run away" in one form or another. According to Erickson (1968), withdrawal can take the form of "dropping out of school," "leaving a job," "staying out all night," or erratic moods (p. 132). Erikson has described this phenomenon as a "physiological revolution within" while the youth face "tangible adult tasks" (1950, p. 261). Transforming from a child to an adult is all consuming, and individuals struggle to

resolve this necessary developmental crisis. Erikson (1950) has suggested that successful resolution of this crisis enables individuals to cope more successfully with future challenges. Adolescents must connect the pre-puberty identity with an emerging new sense of self.

This search for “identity crystallizes during adolescence” (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2010, p. 257) and is articulated by experimentation with styles of clothing; selection of music preferences; and association with civil, cultural, and ethnic organizations. The adolescent exploration of multiple self-identities can result in development of a positive ego state. However, Erikson (1950) has warned of the danger of “role confusion.” The inability of adolescents to explore the selected ego identity can result in disturbances and in extreme cases delinquent and psychotic episodes (Erikson, 1950). Further, Erikson has attributed this confusion to a lack of occupation focus.

Of particular significance for this study is Erikson’s comments on the adolescent behavioral trait of being “clannish” and cruel in their exclusion of all those who are “different in skin color or cultural background” (p. 262). If the patriarch of identity development, Erikson, is to be believed, then his statement has profound implications for transracial foster care placement. An adolescent foster child placed in a foster home that is racially different almost certainly will experience adjustment issues related to self-esteem and peer acceptance. Additionally, as Erikson explained, this is a logical stage of development since the adolescent ego reflection is based on responses from the peer group. The need for sameness guards against identity confusion, but it also tests allegiance to the peer group (p. 262).

All of this exploration has been conducted within the family and social environment. How is the “Who am I?” question answered when the family and social markers lack racial similarity with the questioning adolescent? If the reference group for the adolescent is in flux, on what basis does the identity form, and how is confusion resolved? Erickson’s theory of identity crisis, and necessary resolution, is often acutely experienced in adolescents who are members of the dominant group in American society. Such teens are not required to battle racism and oppression in route to successful resolution. Further, the context of a single-family group, rather than multiple foster families, provides a safe venue for testing identities as a part of the selection process. The family reference group fluctuates for the foster child and may include transracial dynamics. When the adolescent is a foster child, the challenges are intensified and the stakes higher. A combination of events contributes to raising the stakes, the most prominent of which is the racial identification of the foster family and foster child. Many in the Black community advocate for same-race foster care. This position is strongly expressed in communities of color, and it is generally believed that “White parents are not capable of providing Children of Color with either adequate exposure and connection with their cultures of birth...in how to deal with the racism they will eventually experience” (Diller, 2007, p. 108). Diller has explained the psychological disadvantage of the foster children in these situations, as they must love the foster parents while coping with oppression by people who look like the foster parents. Diller, referring to mental health issues, has pointed out that “several sources of evidence” indicate that “without sufficient and appropriate family and community support,” children of color are at risk for problems with “group identification and low self-concept as a

result of racism” (p. 113). It must be considered whether and which transracial families are sufficiently trained and confident to provide the necessary emotional support to sustain positive self-regard for foster children from a different racial group.

The use of Erikson’s theory on identity development as a universal benchmark has not occurred without debate. Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman (2010) have discussed the applicability of Erikson’s model to the identity development of adolescents who are members of non-dominant groups. In this discussion, Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman drew on existing research and cite six studies (Comer, 1998; Delgado, 1998a; Hendricks, 2005; Howard-Hamilton & Frazier, 2003; Phinney, 1989; Phinney, 1996; as cited in Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2010) that focus on the intersection of “race, culture, ethnicity and identity development” (p. 299). Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman presented a sampling of research studies but have not drawn conclusions regarding the balance of racial/cultural identity and the applicability of Erickson’s model to ethnic adolescents. Instead, the misconnection is implied and left to the reader to examine the primary documents, engage in critical thinking, and arrive at a personally informed position. Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman’s opinion lies just under the surface and is a classic example of Socratic questioning. While Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman presented data from these studies and hint at their importance, they do not commit to a position; rather, they prod the reader to critically examine the information.

2.3.2 Foster/Adopt Identity

The impact of identity development for youth of non-dominant groups is influenced first by family and then by the larger society. For children in foster care, which family assumes this responsibility? Is it the role of the foster care family to

nurture cultural identity? However, suppose the foster family is not culturally competent. Does this issue then return to the family of origin by default? If so, since the family of origin has already demonstrated their inability to fulfill expected responsibilities, should more be added?

Grotevant et al. (2000) have defined adoptive identity as “the sense of which one is as an adoptive person” (p. 379). Discovering a personal identity involves a lifetime of introspection and scrutiny of the social environment. The requirements are not necessarily any different for the adoptive person. This quest, under optimum circumstances, is resolved before the onset of middle adulthood. In some cases, the answer to the “Who am I?” question reaches a tentative conclusion during adolescence. When the unknown factors of the birth family’s influence are commingled with the foster/adoptive family’s characteristics, the process can be elongated. Grotevant et al.’s dissection of identity formulation of the adoptive person is within an historic and sociologic context. Several key issues are spotlighted, e.g., historical emphasis on adoption secrecy and society’s need to physically match adoptees with “look alike” families. The stigma of an unwed pregnancy and the desire to protect children from negative responses from society encouraged the parties in the adoption process to engage in limited discussion about adoption status. Further, at earlier times in American society, voluntary childlessness was not considered an option but an unfortunate circumstance. Today, childless couples form a unique category within family configurations. Grotevant et al. (2000) explored the prohibition against openness in the adoption process. Matching the child to the family reflected the wish of the adoptive families to look as if the families were biological. Thus, families had a desire to

match hair, eye, and skin color of the child with those of the adoptive parents. According to Grotevant et al. (2000), both secrecy and adoptive matching influence adoptive identity formulation. If neither the adoptee nor the community is informed about the adoption, then there may not be a processing of identity development or a need. Ascension up Maslow's hierarchy of needs to the precipice of self-actualization is almost impossible under these circumstances (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2010). This progress would lack critical thinking, personal exploration, and reflective contemplation. The process then would be stymied and stagnated.

As the pool of healthy White infants decreased, many of the remaining available children were considered special needs. This included not only those with physical and mental handicaps but also children who were in sibling groups and children who were members of racial minority groups. A foster child so identified may experience feelings of inadequacy or abandonment (Grotevant et al., 2000). These feelings of low self-esteem directly link to identity development.

The preponderance of research on transracial adoption and the brevity of research on transracial foster care have already been documented. The same equation exists between transracial adoption identity development and transracial foster care identity development. One of the core competences of the Casey Family Programs' mission is valuing diversity (Rodriguez, 2000). Consistent with this competence, a study of ethnic identity of foster children was conducted. With so few studies on this aspect of foster care, Rodriguez (2000) considered the interviews conducted with the Jim Casey Family Programs staff, families, and youth to be a "fresh contribution to the field" (p. 5). The study's purpose was to understand ethnic identity development for

foster children. With the “overrepresentation of youth of color” (p. 3) in foster care, a smooth transition to a healthy identity is necessary. Jim Casey Family Programs focus groups consisted of three parents and four children with diverse ethnicities. The second component was a Casey alumni focus group which consisted of five young women ranging in age from 18 to 22 years old. The first of two recommendations was a call for more research addressing ethnic identity and an understanding of “the stages of identity development for youth in the foster care system and how they are affected by multiple placements” (p. 56). There is clearly a need for additional research on this topic.

2.3.3 Racial Matching in Foster Home Placement

Issues of race matching may be responsible, at least in part, for the burdening of the foster care system. Brooks et al. (1999), reporting on the goals of the Stuart Foundation’s study on the influence of race and child welfare policies, concluded that African American children remained in “foster care longer than other children, perhaps as a consequence of racial matching policies and practices” (p. 168). Waiting for a same-race home can take longer than just waiting for the first good home. Dale (1987) has attacked this process of exclusivity:

For most Black and White people of reason and commonsense, a ‘good home’ has nothing to do with its racial make-up. Unfortunately, politicians and those with an escapist fascination for all-embracing ideologies do not necessarily consider common sense to be a reliable guide. (as cited in Rhodes, 1992, p.35)

The question of prioritizing “a good home” versus “a same race match” dichotomizes the issue. Should the first available home be the final choice? The 1980s provided the backdrop for this issue, which emerged as a concern within both the child

welfare system and political arena in America. However, the controversy was debated on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. Although racial matching practices existed here in the United States, Rhodes (1992) also conducted an examination of the child welfare system's participation in this practice in Great Britain. Using case study methodology, Rhodes (1992) followed a fostering team of child welfare workers in one department over a 10-year period. The intent was to focus on the process, not outcome, of race preference in foster homes, not adoption placement. It is precisely this narrow target that provides current relevance despite the decades that have passed since Rhodes's study was conducted. Rhodes first identified the misconception that because foster placements are short term, only issues of temporary importance need be addressed.

In their United Kingdom follow-up study of 61 older children in adoptive or foster homes, Quinton, Rushton, Dance and Mayes (1998) experienced difficulty recruiting families. Of the six reported common obstacles, "difficulty achieving appropriate matching, especially where the child has a dual cultural heritage," (p. 6), was second. The preference for race and cultural matching was used as a guiding principle by the authorities for permanency planning. The idea match was characterized as a placement for the child with same race and cultural background as the new family. The length of time allowed to locate an appropriate same-race family was extended to exhaust all possibilities before forming a transracial family. Although race theoretically was designed to be only one of many factors considered in placement, Quinton et al. found consideration of race to be the first and, by default, the single most important factor.

Rhodes (1992) and Quinton et al. (1998) recognized that many foster placements

were long term, as did the AFCARS report in FY 2009 and The Equity Report published in 2006. Rhodes's issues are contemporary. Equally as critical is Rhodes's supposition that foster children also suffer from identity crisis. Rhodes expressed his strong belief as follows: "Short-term placements and frequent moves between placement and between natural family and foster home may result in more acute identity confusion..." (p. 4).

The scope of the data collection techniques included document analysis, mailed surveys, participant observation, qualitative interviews, and a limited degree of action research. Rhodes's macro research centered on various implications of a "racial matching" policy in the recruitment of Black foster families and the subsequent placement of Black foster children in London. This focus necessitated inclusion of foster care workers referred to as "principal fostering officers" (p. 275). Rhodes's study was particularly significant, as it examined racially matched foster families rather than transracial placements.

Rhodes's findings reflected the belief that racial matching "redressed past injustice" of premature removal of Black children from their families and communities (p. xx). Further, opening opportunities for recruitment of Black foster parents was a clear advantage highlighted by Rhodes's research. Today, opportunities for recruitment of Black foster parents have drastically increased. However in America, shortages of these homes continue to exist, but there is no lack of children who need them.

The history of African American children in the child welfare system has been one of overrepresentation (Campbell, 2001; Equity Report, 2006; AFCARS, FY 2009). Consistently, African American children have been the largest non-dominant group in

foster care (Equity Report, 2006). In 46 states, there were twice as many African American children as non-African American. Not only is this disproportionate to the general population at 15%, but African American foster homes are woefully underrepresented. The fact that 28% of foster children languish in the system from two to five years is a formula for tragedy. One attempt to move children through the foster system was to place children in the foster home or adoptive home best suited to meet their needs without regard to race or ethnicity. Campbell (2001) found more African American foster children needed homes than were available. Campbell found that African American children were more likely than White children to be placed transracially and at an earlier age. As is routine, the literature primarily addressed race matching in adoptive situations rather than foster care.

Grotevant et al. (2000) have cited sources that both document and deny “positive outcomes for transracial adoptees” (p. 381). Both sides of this controversy have been discussed, but there is a clear assertion “that racial identity can be problematic” (p. 318). Discussion about race is often an uncomfortable topic for groups of people who represent different racial groups. This level of discomfort may or may not be modified by a transracial family environment. Jacobs (1991) has suggested that “race has become so toxic a topic in America that many of us are afraid to even touch it...” (p. 3). According to Jacobs, Americans should courageously learn “to explore racial matters because the alternative is to dodge racial shrapnel” (p. 193). In one study of foster children’s experiences, issues related to race surfaced only occasionally (Whiting & Lee, 2003). Children in the study who were placed in transracial foster homes reported being teased for having parents of another race. These children narrowed the foster

care adjustment issues to living with a family of a different race more than not living in their biological family setting. Conflict for these children and their families was experienced through the perceptions of those who indicated that “they don’t like that family because they’re not the same race” (Whiting & Lee, 2003, p. 291). One eleven-year-old boy reported his teasers saying, “It was because he was Black that he was in foster care” (p. 291). Children without a same-race match for foster care are invariably placed in foster homes of any family who will accept them. Ignoring racial consideration has often fueled the debate of racial matching in the selection of the foster family (Auld, 1993). Emergency placements are typically made without regard to race (Auld, 1993). Foster parents on an availability list are called first if their preferences match the situation of the children who need placement. Next, any foster parent with an opening for children are called, regardless of their stated preference. As soon as the Department of Health and Human Services worker gets a “yes” from the foster parents, the process is initiated. In my more than 10 years as a foster parent, the question of racial preference has not preceded the question, “Will you take this child”? Race is not an issue and is usually not discussed until agreement has been reached between the parties, if then.

Auld (1993) has described the plight of a White foster family who accepted a crack-addicted African American newborn boy for temporary foster care. From his placement in the White foster home at six days of age until he was five months old, the transracial foster family who wanted to adopt him nurtured Byron. When plans for permanency were being made, the county Department of Children and Youth Services decided to move him to a same-race family. This decision was based on the agency’s

policy of “matching minority children with same-race adoptive families (p. 447). This same policy was in effect at the time of Byron’s placement in foster care. However, since he needed an immediate placement, the issue of race was deemed less important. The White foster family was suitable for a special-needs Black foster child. Transracial foster care was a good match for the child and the family.

Auld (1993) documented experiences with racial matching 20 years after the National Association of Black Social Workers’ (NABSW) landmark position on transracial adoption. The discussion of racial matching reached its zenith in 1972, when transracial adoption temporarily “came to an abrupt halt” as a result of the opposition of NABSW (Auld, 1993, p. 449). The racial matching in placement discussions was at the heart of a tempestuous debate within the professional community that featured overtones of genocide and institutional racism. NABSW utilized talk shows, print media, local chapters, churches, and other community-based organizations as platforms for their position against transracial placement. Research studies were conducted, and testimony was presented at the state and national levels. Brooks, Barth, Bussiere, and Patterson (1999) found that “no empirical studies either support or refute the value of racial matching...” (p. 172).

The battle was fought from county office to state legislature and landed in the office of Senator Metzenbaum. His subsequent legislation, the Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) in 1994 and the Removal of Barriers to Interethnic Adoption (IEP) in 1996, drastically altered the landscape of transracial adoption and transracial foster care in the United States (Carter-Black, 2002). Consensus of opinion was that policies which considered race, color, and national origin hampered permanency planning. This Act,

therefore, established a race-neutral policy in adoption and foster care. Not only were the lives of Black foster children and foster families affected by MEPA, but so were the lives of Black childcare workers as well (Carter-Black).

Carter-Black chose to view the macro solution (i.e., MEPA) from a micro perspective (frontline child welfare workers). Carter-Black's "open-ended, semi structured, face-to-face interviews" with "ten black child welfare workers" represented both the private and public sectors. Their experiences ranged from 5 to 15 years in the field of child welfare. The ethnographic research found "three thematic concepts" as follows: (1) the child's needs should be first, (2) the child welfare system is not always responsive to these needs, and (3) there is the possibility that MEPA may harm, not help, African American children. Issues related to racial identity development, racial socialization, and cultural heritage were of concern to the informants. The results have informed both policy and practice.

2.4 Foster Children

Much of the research literature has focused more on the experiences of foster parents rather than on the experiences of foster children. Cameron (2002) introduced her memoir by stating that "very little has been written to convey what children experience and how they feel living among strangers" (p. ix). Cameron lived in upstate New York and grew up in the foster care system without a "forever family." Like most foster children, she has reported that her options were limited: "I had no choice with whom I lived or how long I would stay" (p. x). Cameron expressed a longing to raise her voice as a "long term foster child" (p. ix). Desetta (1996) has provided a venue for teens in foster care with an edited anthology. Whiting and Lee (2003) conducted interviews

with preadolescents in the foster care system. The significance of Desetta's work can be found in the rare perspective of people within the system who are able to articulate their experiences. Most of the preadolescents in the Whiting and Lee study (2003) were not able to clearly express their experiences. Therefore, the researchers intervened and conveyed the emotions of the foster children to the readers. Desetta (1996) provided the vehicle for literary reflection of the participants. They wrote, and he edited. These teen writers shared their first-person accounts from the heart (p. xiii), and this genuineness has been preserved.

Whiting and Lee (2003) have identified themes and given voice to foster children's expressions of their experiences in the foster care system. Interviews were transcribed and sorted by topics. Within an ecological framework, ethnographic interviews of 23 preadolescent foster children provided insight into life. These interviews inform the social welfare profession and provide practitioners a better sense of the experiences of foster children. Open-ended questions allowed for flexible responses to research questions. For example, the following is a question Whiting and Lee (2003) asked: "How did you come to be in foster care?" (p. 290). This question tunnels to the core of one adjustment issue identified previously by Kluger, Alexander, and Curtis (2000). The child's understanding of the reason for the placement in foster care is essential for satisfactory adjustment (Kluger et al., 2000). Similarly, Whiting and Lee's question, "What was your birth family like?" addresses two other adjustment issues (Whiting & Lee, 2003, p. 291). Strong identification with the birth family was positively correlated to adjustment in foster care (Kluger, 2000) as was reinforcement of expression of feelings regarding the biological family. In agency playrooms, the foster

children, ranging in age from 7-12 years old, used storyboards as a venue and spoke of confusion, anger, and loss (Whiting & Lee, 2003).

Desetta (1996) collected more than three dozens narratives from foster children ages 15 to 20 years old. These personal stories provided intimate reflections from inside the system. Their chronicles of pain and personal growth were poignantly documented in a variety of literary styles. Both Standard English and street vernacular were incorporated. Jonathan Kozol in the foreword described the group of authors as “stubbornly unique, diversely talented young writers who share only the common bond of living in foster care” (p. xi). Their testimonies provide a passport to a world created by society, social workers, and policy makers. Their views of foster care reflect a more subjective perspective. These teens offered an inside perspective, a virtual tour of their lives as foster children told in poetic prose.

In successful foster home placements, some of the adjustment issues (Kluger, Alexander & Curtis, 2000) are resolved by the teen years. Seven of the three dozen teen writers address issues related to family including abandonment, continued identification, and hope of reunification (Desetta, 1996). Some of the teens reflected on their experiences after a decade in the foster care system. One such teen writer is Hicks, whose essay was written from the vantage point of an 18 year old. Hicks reported that he entered “the system” as a frightened eight year old and begin a “ten-year journey” (p.).

2.4.1 Transitional Issues

Various factors can interfere with successful adjustment by both the foster child and foster parent. Children often bring a “poor self-image” and a “confused sense of

identity” to the foster home placement (Stone & Hunzeker, 1975, p. 32). These insecure feelings arise from the perceived rejection by their biological parents or other caregivers. Environmental conditions, which may have necessitated removal from their family of origin, are internalized. This expression finds form through behavior that exemplifies feelings of worthlessness. As children are forced to interact with the foster family, reasonable conflict, loyalty, and belonging issues must be addressed. The foster children who have related to their biological parents and have developed an understanding of that relationship no longer have that reference point. It becomes necessary “to integrate past, present, and future experience into a consistent ‘who I am’” (p. 32). Although visits with parents and siblings have been positively correlated with successful adjustment, these correlations required weekly visits to maintain the equilibrium.

The removal of children from their biological families is preceded by one or more disturbing conditions. There has been chronic neglect, chronic abuse, or a traumatic event. Biological parents or relatives may request intervention by the county child welfare agency when parents’ mental health, social conditions, or physical limitations impair the child’s growth and development (Martin, 2000). Although this is an unusual circumstance, children may be removed at the request of the parents. Poverty and death can also force children into the foster care system (Desetta, 1996). Dent (2005) wrote of her early years living with relatives and later in the foster care system when her “biological mother and father died” (p.5). Likewise, the death of Hick’s (2005) father when Hick’s was 15 ignited a series of events. This avalanche of events began with a rescue from homelessness by his father’s friends and ended with Hick moving to a

foster group home for boys two years later (p. 6). Each of these conditions portends fear and dependency for the children who are entering foster care. Children have little or no preparation for moving from family to strangers (Stone & Hunzeker, 1975). The child's history of abandonment may result in dysfunctional behavior or clinging to the foster parents as a security measure (Stone & Hunzeker, 1975).

Kluger, Alexander, and Curtis's (2000) review of literature and best practices related to family foster care referred to five "practices related to better adjustment for children" (p. 144). These authors reported that the factors which contribute to better adjustment (2000) are allowing foster children to share feelings; continuity with previous environment; identification with birth parents; understanding reasons for placement; and cordial working relationship with parents, placing agency, and foster parents. Foster parents who adhere to these suggestions may increase the probability that the foster home experience will be positive for all involved.

When foster children have conflict with biological children who already live in the foster home, or foster children who have separate placements from their siblings, adverse circumstances are created which affect successful placement. Another significant issue which may result in either a positive or a negative influence is race. Historically, child placement workers operated from the perspective and policy directive that trauma for children who were being removed from their parents could be minimized. The concept of matching the original environment of the child with the new environment of the foster family becomes a pivotal factor. The idea was that if the new environment was as similar to the old environment as possible, but without the negative conditions, then the adjustment would be easier. For example, the best option for rural children

was a rural placement, the best option for urban children was an urban placement, and the best match for children in general was a same-race foster home. This policy derived in part from societal racial tensions and historic segregation. Racism permeated the political, social, and family structure of American society. Foster home placement and adoption were not exempt.

2.5 Summary

Perhaps this poignant statement from the perspective of a foster child (Whiting & Lee, 2003) best describes ambling through the foster care system. Brian, 11 years old, White, and with five previous placements, said, “You have to keep moving, moving, and moving, until finally someone keeps you...that kind of sucks” (p. 288). The teen writers (Desetta, 1996) wrote that “the current state of foster care” (p. xii) is salvageable. There are positive nurturing caseworkers and foster parents who are striving to mitigate the pain for children who have suffered too much and too soon. The Desetta’s (1996) foster children concluded that that a stable foster home, irrespective of race, was desirable. However, transracial foster homes introduce additional challenges and adjustment issues (Whiting & Lee, 2003).

Nationally, nearly a half million children were in foster care in 2009, with Black foster children numbering 127,821, or 30% (AFCARS Report, 2009). Although national legislation (MEPA and IEP) was designed to accelerate adoption and foster home placement, the pool of prospective foster and adoptive parents has been inadequate to meet the needs of the foster care system (Brooks & Goldberg, 2001). The anticipated results from MEPA and IEP legislation were an increased number of transracial foster care and adoptive placements. The limited success in recruiting foster and adoptive

parents has made the need for alternatives evident. Building on a history of controversy, Brooks and Goldberg (2001) introduced the idea of combining two controversial ideas to meet the needs of children. They explored “another controversial but little researched option for finding ...homes for children” by placing “children with families in which a parent is gay or lesbian” (p. 148). African American children in foster care have been categorized as hard to place (Barbara et al., 2003). Children who are hard to place need creative solutions to resolve problems. Gays and lesbians who wish to become foster and adoptive parents face obstacles. Matching hard-to-place foster children with prospective parents who are often overlooked is an innovative solution. There are seemingly unjustified obstacles for gays and lesbians to become foster and adoptive parents. Brooks and Goldberg (2001) noted the following:

Despite the increase interest among gay men and lesbians in adoptive and foster parenting, social scientists have paid almost no attention to this potentially viable option for increasing the pool of prospective adoptive and foster parents. (p. 150)

Convenience sampling, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups produced data that does not support the claim that adoptive and foster parenting by gays and lesbians is likely to be detrimental to children’s adjustment (Brooks & Goldberg, 2001). Future research should explore the effect on foster children resulting from placement in a gay or lesbian family correlated with the effect on foster children in transracial homes.

It is interesting to note that although the third item on the list of the needs of foster children as delineated by Martin (2000, p. 38) is “maintain sense of personal, racial, and cultural identity,” there is no correlation on the foster parents’ list for maintaining racial and cultural identity. Indeed, the service needs, as provided by the

foster parent, fall on the lower rungs of Maslow's (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2010) hierarchy of needs. The first and foremost concern listed for foster parents is "adapting to a child's move into a foster home" (Martin, 2000, p. 38). The voices of the children in transracial foster homes must be heard. Society's view of racial equality influences the foster care system. Chad, an 11-year-old African American boy in foster care, shared his view: "I think [foster care] is harder for the Black kids...cause I don't believe that White people get along with Black" (Whiting & Lee, 2003, p. 291). If this is true, it must be changed. If this is not, it must be taught.

2.6 Conclusion

Doll (1993) clearly has been the visionary and spokesperson for new thinkers. The postmodern world has many dimensions and fluidity. It is not feasible to reduce human behavior to one way of knowing. The biological, psychological, and social systems impact individuals in numerous ways; thus, the human condition is multifaceted. To reduce the complexity of human behavior to one dimensionality is criminal. Foster parents should be reminded that in this postmodern (Doll, 1993) society there is more than one way to accomplish any task. Table 2.0 compares traditional social theory that has often guided social work practice with Doll's (1993) contemporary perspective. There are several junctures of commonality, and Doll's postmodern view runs parallel to the social theory perspective.

Table 2.0

Doll/Social Theory Comparison

DOLL POSTMODERN	SOCIAL THEORY
Multiple ways of knowing	Individualist interpretation of phenomena

Open system	Open system
Diverse perspective	Positive emphasis on race, class, and gender
Fluid	Interactive/transactional

There are multiple ways of knowing and understanding any phenomenon. "My mother does not make pancakes like that," a foster child may chant to the foster parent who is trying desperately to please. Understanding the truth of that statement and acknowledging the same is a way to embrace a postmodern perspective. An array of appropriate responses is available to the foster parent with a postmodern attitude. Accepting diversity and the influence of race and ethnicity should become a constant process for effective foster parenting.

The phenomenon of White foster families embracing Black children in crisis and showing genuine love and concern without a long-term commitment signals hope for the future of race relationships. On some levels, embracing children from other racial groups and including these children as members of the family, even if only temporarily, will begin to dissolve prejudice. People who care for children, and the children who are cared for, will each see that differences are not to be feared but in fact differences can be loved. Likewise, the converse scenario of Black foster families inviting White children who have experienced trauma to share positive family experiences is equally heartening. All foster parents, regardless of race, have agreed to provide a safe zone for children who are involuntarily separated from their families of origin. These children usually bring some residual abandonment and trust issues. That alone elevates foster parents to a level of selflessness. In our highly racialized American society, reaching

across racial lines to provide foster care may be a noble gesture, but it is not without overt consequences. The extended families both of the foster parents and foster children may object. One African American foster mother, who was fostering a child of a different race, shared a conversation between herself and her foster son. While driving her foster son to the grocery store, they passed a bowling alley, and he exclaimed that he had been invited to a birthday party there but was unable to go. He explained that his parents would not allow him to attend the party of his African American classmate “because they don’t like black people.” Shyly, he waited for his Black foster mom to respond. She continued to drive but did not speak. As he felt uncomfortable with the silence, he prompted her by asking if she had anything to say. She answered in a cheerful voice, “no.” Then he changed the subject, and they proceeded to the store. Living in a cleaner house, living in a home with groceries, living in a family without fear of a beating confused this foster child. The primary reason was that people of a race that he had been taught to mistrust and to dislike provided all of those aforementioned quality-of-life standards. His biological parents shared their individual racist perspectives with this child, who was forced from his home into a home with those whom he was forbidden to socialize. An already traumatic experience was made worse for the child by the selection of the foster family from another race. During this child’s stay in his transracial foster home, he thrived academically and socially. Upon his return to his biological parents, he attempted to manipulate the system so that he could return to the transracial foster home. He learned that the family who truly cared and sought life’s best for him were not the “bad” people he was taught they were.

Linking empirical evidence and practical wisdom is an intriguing prospect and

supports not only academic research but also wraps its arms around what we know actually works. The value of positive racial identity grows first from the family and then society. Families of color historically have buttressed the winds of segregation, discrimination, and oppression. Shelter from these storms has provided a safe haven for children of color to understand and cope with the irrationality of racism. Parks (1996), a White female who adopted a Guyanese child, has written about this and wonders how to reduce the effect of racism when so many messages come from the family. In her situation, not all communications were positive. Such intuitive parenting is transferred from generation to generation and forms the wisdom referred to herein. There has been considerable and ongoing debate within the professional community generated in part by the National Association of Black Social Workers. This controversial issue reached its zenith in 1972. During the last several decades, this controversial issue has abated, but the voices have not been quelled.

Any research concerned with the racial and cultural identity of foster children may be forced to find a place within the debate on transracial placement. The lines, etched in granite many years ago, have partially eroded with time. Perhaps by now, it is understood that transracial foster care placements will not be successful without external supports. It just may be time to take off the boxing gloves and come to the training.

CHAPTER 3 – DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Qualitative methodology is the most appropriate framework for this study of racial and cultural identity in foster children. Qualitative research seeks answers to questions others are not asking. Innovative projects and investigation of intriguing but unexplored subjects is the hallmark of qualitative methodology. Campbell's (2001) exploratory study targeted identity formation in foster children, not adopted children. Likewise, Daughtery's (2002) exploratory research targeted racial identity development of young women, previously in foster care, and their identity development under those marginalized conditions. This current study, like those of Campbell and Daughtery, concentrates on a unique research focus. Royce (1999) enumerates eight characteristics (see Table 3.0) and four methods for qualitative research.

Table 3.0
Royce (1999)
Characteristics of Qualitative Methodology

Royce (1999)	Brooks Herd (2009)
No intervention	X
Small sample size	X
Naturalistic	X
Participant observation	
Journalistic narrative	X
Value free	X
Limited use of measurement	X
No control group	X

This study employs the use of limited measurements as advocated by Royce (1999), Campbell (2001), and Daughtery (2002). Royce (1999) also dismissed the need for intervention. Both Campbell (2001) and Daughtery (2002) conducted semi-structured interviews with informants in a naturalistic environment. This current study

was guided by their examples of qualitative methodology. When responses are limited to measurable sound bites via other methods, the richness of experience that qualitative methodology seeks to capture is reduced. Narrative inquiry is preferred and layers of meaning are generated.

A theoretical perspective that encompassed constructionist and grounded theory was interpreted from a postmodern paradigm. The research methods employed build upon objectives, research questions, and outcomes as articulated in Chapter 1. Sources of data, data location sites, and stakeholders are detailed in this section. Rationale for these decisions is also discussed.

Predominantly, the research studies reviewed were qualitative and emphasized a narrative perspective. Much of the literature reviewed focused on the experiences of the foster parents (Campbell, 2001; Daughtery, 2005; DeBerry, Scarr, & Weinberg, 1996; Folaron, 1993; McRoy & Zurcher, 1983; Rhodes, 1992; Thoburn, Norford, & Rashid, 2000). However, other researchers (Bagley, 1993; Youth Communication, 2005; Whiting, 2003) gave voice to foster children's expression of their experiences within the foster care system. This current study placed the spotlight on foster parents and their perceptions of transracial fostering with other key stakeholders. One significant departure of this study from previous research is the shared emphasis on foster children. Perceptions of parents and the views of their foster children are presented in the same study. The exploration both of the foster parents' and the foster children's perspectives is intended to present a thorough point of view. If only one perspective is illustrated, the findings do not necessarily form a comprehensive landscape. The examination of multiple perspectives on the same subject is consistent

with the work of Doll (1993) and the postmodern paradigm. Further, this approach also serves as a source of triangulation. The inclusion of data from foster children creates an intersection with the data from their foster parents and provides a unique focal point. Finally, a content analysis of transracial training curriculum for foster parents incorporates the concept of transracial foster care.

3.2 Methodological Framework

Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) have offered a comprehensive description of research methods within an educational setting that are equally applicable to social science researchers. Other theorists included in this section also have advocated for compatibility when studying foster children's racial and cultural identity. Phenomenology is the appropriate research methodology for this study. Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) have stated that in such an approach, "participants describe their perceptions and reactions" to a "particular phenomenon" (p. 437). Stringer (2004) has described phenomenological research as revealing meaning and the connection of that meaning to real-life experiences. As foster parents and foster children share their views and experiences in transracial families, the full impact of those experiences will be shared, and the subjective "dimensions of [that] human experience" explored (Stringer, 2004, p. 25). The identification of commonalities of several individuals to a particular occurrence is the nucleus of phenomenology (Frankel & Wallen, 2003).

A fluid and open exchange with the participants was essential to obtain the desired data and the personal meaning assigned by them. Such perceptions introduced a phenomenological orientation and facilitated an understanding of the meaning of the data from the participants' perspectives. This represented a postmodern paradigm and

was characteristic of Doll's (1993) work. Doll's (1993) postmodern view anticipates multiple perceptions and rejects the viewpoint subscribing to "only one absolute truth" or reality. This paradigm captures the dimensionality of human experiences and individual interpretations of those phenomena. Human behavior essentially is subjective and can best be analyzed within a diverse context. Forcing an understanding of the human experience into predetermined slots can result only in misunderstanding and confusion. Here is where an open exchange underscores the collection of subjective data. As such, the experience of foster families is best understood from Doll's perspective of an open system with perceptions from multiple sources.

Applying the work of Fraenkel and Wallen (2003), a nonrandom sample was proposed for this study. Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) enumerate three categories of "nonrandom sampling methods" (p. 102). First, systematic sampling includes selection of individuals separated by intervals from a population list. The final sample in this method is a collection of individuals from the nonrandom list whose names appear at preset intervals. Second, consensus sampling is limited to the individuals immediately available. Selection of these individuals, although they are close at hand, will often result in bias as they represent a group with some pre-established interest. The third type of nonrandom sampling is purposive sampling and is the preferred method for this study. The researcher's previous knowledge of the population and the purpose of the study allowed the investigator to make a judgment about the sample selection. Unlike convenience sampling, in purposive sampling, the researcher does not study whoever is available but must make decisions about who can best speak for the population. Purposive sampling is in harmony with the qualitative paradigm and is preferred "over

random sampling” (Pan, 2003, p. 84). Stringer (2004) has asserted strongly that responsibility for selection of the participants is the researcher’s, that the selection process should be orchestrated to fulfill the purpose of the study, and that the selection process should not be random. Further, Stringer (2004) has explained that purposive sampling needs to represent the “variation of perspectives and experiences across all groups and subgroups that affect or are affected by the issue under investigation” (p. 50).

Although the researcher is designated to select the purposive sample, the researcher may not always know everyone who should be included in the sample. Under these circumstances, participants already identified may refer others who can provide relevant information. This technique is called “snowballing” (Stringer, 2004, p. 51) and is relevant for this transracial foster family study. Snowballing allows participants already engaged in the research process to recommend others and allows the study to be more inclusive. In this regard, the sample emerges from exploration of the research topic. Through this sampling method, foster care workers, foster parent educators, and administrative staff at private and public agencies identify other potential participants who meet the research criteria. Pan (2003) endorses this specific technique for qualitative researchers in order to seek and select “participants who are likely to provide useful information” (p. 84).

The historical context has revealed a preponderance of White foster parents with black foster children (Carter-Black, 2002; Rhodes, 1993). Black children are disproportionally represented in the child welfare system not only in America (AFCARS, 2009) but also in the United Kingdom (Rhodes, 1993). The historical focus of

transracial parenting almost exclusively has been on transracial adoption. However, transracial foster care, not transracial adoption, is the subject of this study. Daughtery (2002) has maintained that the dynamics of transracial adoption parallel but do not duplicate the concerns identified in research on transracial foster care.

The researcher of this study is not only a licensed foster parent but also a former therapist who specialized in the treatment of foster children as well as their biological parents. Conversations with biological parents regarding the race of the intended foster homes sometimes occurred during the counseling process. During this career segment, intervention with foster parents was a major component of my clinical practice. However, the time between those conversations and this research study has eliminated any concerns related to bias. In fact, the nucleus of this research study incubated longer than a decade. My professional experience was a magnificent foundation for exploring this crucial and sensitive area.

The narrative reflections and personal perspectives of 19 foster parents and 5 foster children engaged in transracial fostering for at least six months constitute this chapter. All of the foster families had foster children at the time of the interviews. However, several of the foster parents had adopted their previous foster children. Some foster parents adopted a foster child of the same race, but others had adopted transracially. In most of these families newly formed by adoption, the foster parents declined to have the children interviewed for this research study. These parents feared the issues of transracial fostering/adoption would be disturbing to their children and disruptive to the family's equilibrium. Each of the five foster children interviewed were in active foster care status rather than adoptive status. Profiles of the foster families and

excerpts from their interviews are included to highlight the major points discussed.

3.3 Context of Study

Examining the experiences of individuals who choose to become foster parents and their subsequent provision of a family environment for children of another race is the specific focus of this study. Five states, including Michigan, contain nearly half of the nation's foster care children (Pecora & Anthony, 2000). This fact is numerically significant and dynamically influences the care and scope of services for thousands of children across the nation. These children represent the next generation of professionals, political leaders, and citizens. If thousands of children are deprived of a nurturing family environment, a society of individuals will emerge without basic family grounding. The projected toll in loss of creativity and productivity is staggering. Additionally, the state of Michigan is one that has experienced "disproportionality," a new term coined to express the overrepresentation of children of color in the foster care system. Because there are statically so many children of color in the foster care system, the mental and physical health of so many foster children weighs heavily on the foster care system. Of great importance are foster parents who are pivotal in creating positive self-identity.

Foster parents receive foster children in several ways. Some foster parents specifically request children who are "hard to place" and may be rejected by even dedicated foster parents. Children with developmental delays are in this category. Other children labeled as "hard to place" are often members of a non-dominant group without a same-race foster home match. The lack of racial matching therefore is the criterion that has created the difficulty for placement in a foster home. At other times,

foster parents have been asked directly by the licensing agency to accept a child of a different race. How foster parents relate, adjust, support, reinforce or ignore the racial identity of their foster children is within the scope of this research.

This study contributes to the foster care system research on the meaning of cultural identity for foster parents. It also serves as a compass for identifying training needs of foster parents prior to accepting a child of another race in the family. A self-assessment by the foster parents of their ability to nurture a child who is racially different is explored here. As the experiences of the foster children in the study are translated into data, the effects of transracial foster care on those intended to benefit from the service are discerned.

3.4 Curriculum

The development of curriculum theory has evolved over the last century, and many men and women have helped to define the field. The contribution of Doll (1993) is unprecedented and has not only shaped curriculum theory but also has influenced social theory as well. Doll's (1993) theoretical ideas are fundamental to the study of foster families. Those who are within the experiences must create and articulate the meaning from these experiences. Doll's concepts of "rigor" and "recursive" staunchly support this position. Curriculum and social work practice are contextual, and importance evolves from the value attributed by those who are living within this context. This study informs the research on educating foster parents' about the responsibility of fostering. Additionally, this research examines pre-service training materials, through content analysis, designed to satisfy the state licensing requirements. The foster parent participants represent diversity in race, class, and gender. However, nationwide the

diversity of the foster parents does not numerically match the diversity of the foster children. This fact has already been established as causal for the placement of foster children in homes that are racial and culturally different. Campbell (2001) researched racial and cultural identity development in foster children placed transracially. Campbell (2001) found the prevalence of children of color in White homes was significantly higher than the reverse. This means that parents who are White are more likely to be providing care for foster children who are not White. The question now is, How prepared are these foster parents to support racial identity in their foster children? What supports, if any, are needed?

All foster parents need to develop cultural competency. Cultural competency is not just an auxiliary skill but a necessary one, especially when foster children who need immediate placement cannot wait for a racial match. The call for placement is urgent. When foster children are assigned to foster homes, attempts are usually made to match the needs of the child to the strengths of the foster home, but these attempts by no means are the only consideration. In the experience of this researcher, and many others who are licensed foster parents, it is chance that brings foster children to a foster home. It is a function of who is at home, who has a vacancy, and who is willing to accept the gender and age of the child needing placement. Herein is the chance factor.

These facts illustrate the need for all foster parents to be trained not only in managing behavior, coping with academic challenges, and understanding the biological family, but there is a need for foster parents to be trained regarding cultural issues as well. Every state requires foster parents to participate in a pre-service training program. This pre-training requirement ranges from a low of six hours in Michigan and Maine to a

high of 45 hours in several other states. Further, all states mandate additional in-service training hours for foster parents to maintain their licenses. Michigan's foster care license is renewed annually. A review of some states' mandatory foster care training programs and the curriculum of an online "Foster Care College" revealed that little attention has been given to this topic. Specific cultural training is often required only when families are designated to become a transracial foster home. One recommendation for further study by Rodriguez (2000) was the development of a "training curriculum or guidebook... to guide caseworkers working with youth of color" (p. 56). However, as already mentioned, most foster home placements are slightly more than random.

One of the many reoccurring issues raised by transracial foster parents at state and national training conferences is management of hair. It seems so basic, but children whose hair is unkempt appear uncared for. Gibson (1995) confirmed the importance of this concept by stating that "hair styling is a major aspect of our grooming..." (p. 7). Well-groomed hair can be a source of cultural pride. Cultural pride can lead to self-confidence and high self-imposed expectations. The reverse is also true. Poorly groomed hair can lead to teasing by other children. This can result in negative racial self-regard, which can lead to lower confidence.

This study identifies gaps in the preparation of foster families. Foster parents should engage in a review of their family practices as related to inclusion of a child who is racially different. The experiences of foster children are a central element in understanding the experiences of transracial fostering. This research is foundational for developing a training program that includes a transracial parenting component for all

foster parents. Including a unit devoted to the needs and concerns of transracial families provides a foundation for establishing cultural competence. The curriculum for required pre-service training hours should include a unit on nurturing culturally mixed families inclusive of both joys and sorrows. Since diverse foster family structuring is optional and can be selected or avoided by well-intended substitute parents, there may be less perceived need to include cultural competence in standard operational procedures. Disproportionality increases the probability that a White foster family will encounter a foster child who is African American.

3.5 Research Design

A private non-profit childcare agency headquartered in a large metropolitan area with regional offices throughout the state and a county public agency responsible for foster care services provided the research participants. The private agency estimated that there were 30 foster homes in the northern region of the state and more than twice that number in the metropolitan area of the large Midwestern city where the study was conducted. The public agency in the northern sector of the state estimated 70 foster homes. Both agencies are empowered by the state to license families for foster care services and were located approximately 100 miles apart. All of the foster parents for this study were licensed by the state child welfare public agency to provide homes for children who are temporary wards of the state. Married foster parents and single foster parents with at least one year of foster care experience were eligible to participate. Participants included both male and female parents. For this study, foster parents of any race who were temporarily raising a child of another race qualified as participants with the following noted exceptions. The research design allowed for foster parents with

transracial fostering experience as participants in the study even if they had transitioned to adoptive parents. This caveat permitted families with foster children who were at least six years of age *and* racially or culturally different to constitute the final sample.

Although all foster children were primary stakeholders, the developmental age of each child in the study is an equally important element in the research design. Eligible foster children in a transracial foster home who were at least six years of age and who have resided in the home for a period of 90 days were eligible to participate. The chronological age of six was selected because at this age the children usually have been exposed to an elementary school experience and are developing a broader frame of reference. Beginning the school experience helps children articulate facets of self-confidence and racial awareness. Foster children with mental health issues, or who were identified as emotionally fragile by the foster care workers or foster parents, were not interviewed. However, the foster parents of such children were considered to be appropriate participants.

3.6 Data Collection

A semi-structured interview with open-ended questions was the instrument used to collect data. All interviews were conducted between September and November 2008. Table 3.1 contains the interview schedule for the three groups of participants. The foster parent interviews occurred in their foster homes, at their foster care agency, or in another public venue. The original public spaces were identified as a church or a library. Although this menu of locations was offered to each foster parent, his or her own foster home was the preferred setting by both the researcher and the interviewees. Eleven of the foster parent interviews were conducted in the homes of the foster

parents. Two interviews were conducted in churches, and one interview was conducted in the workplace. Another interview was conducted in the foster care agency during a simultaneous therapy session for the foster parent's other foster children. Similarly, four of the five interviews with foster children were conducted in their foster homes. One hundred percent of the foster care worker interviews occurred at their workplace.

Table 3.1
Interview Schedule

Foster Parent	Location of Interviews	Interview Date
Mrs. Betts	Foster Home	Tues September 9, 2008
Mrs. Wright	Foster Home	Thur September 11, 2008
Mrs. Glad	Foster Care Agency	Mon September 15, 2008
Harvey & Alexander	Foster Home	Tue September 16, 2008
Mrs. Terrell	Foster Home	Fri September 19, 2008
Mr. Joseph	Foster Home	Sun September 21, 2008
Mrs. Ratcliff	Church	Sun September 21, 2008
Mr. and Mrs. Smith	Foster Home	Tue September 23, 2008
Jeb Jr.	Foster Home	Tue September 23, 2008
Ms. Patrick	Workplace	Tue September 23, 2008
Jeb Sr.	Foster Home	Tue September 23, 2008
Mrs. Lewis	Church	Tue September 23, 2008
Mr. Cooper	Foster Home	Thur November 6, 2008
Mrs. Oliver	Foster Home	Mon November 10, 2008
Mr. and Mrs. King	Foster Home	Mon November 17, 2008
Foster Care Worker	Location of Interviews	Interview Dates
Amy	Foster Care Agency	Tues September 30, 2008
Jackie	Foster Care Agency	Tues October 21, 2008
Carol	Foster Care Agency	Thur October 30, 2008
Lucie	Foster Care Agency	Fri November 7, 2008
Camelia	Foster Care Agency	Thur November 13, 2008
Kelly	Foster Care Agency	Thur November 13, 2008
Winston	Foster Care Agency	Tues November 25, 2008
Samuel	Foster Care Agency	Tues November 25, 2008
Foster Children	Location of Interviews	Interview Dates
Peter	Former Foster Home	Fri September 19, 2008
Ken	Foster Home	Tues September 23, 2008
Salma	Foster Care Agency	Mon November 17, 2008
Kay	Foster Home	Thur November 6, 2008
Anthony	Foster Care Agency	Tue November 25, 2008

One foster care supervisor at the public foster care agency identified all families from the master list of foster parents who were presently or previously transracially parenting. In another department, their foster care workers recommended parents. However, in other cases, the foster care parents were randomly selected by the researcher from a master list of foster parents who were engaged in transracial fostering and who were licensed by the Department of Human Services. All of the foster parents were receptive and willing to speak about their experiences in transracial foster families. A series of questions was posed to each foster family, but the questions were used only as conversational starters, and thus their comments were not limited to the predetermined questions.

The use of incentives for foster parents and foster children (Rice & Broome, 2004) was a part of the research design. In almost every case, the foster care worker, without the promise of an incentive, recruited the participants. Most foster parents committed to the interview based only on the request of their foster care worker. When a foster parent hesitated to schedule an interview, an incentive was not offered as an enticement. By not using an incentive, participant cooperation was not coerced. Dickert and Grady (1999) have warned that “incentives can influence vulnerable people to place themselves at greater risk because they need goods or services offered by an investigator” (as cited by Rice & Broome 2004, p. 168). Decisions made under these circumstances must be weighed against ethical concerns. One of Dickert and Grady’s (1999) models for research participants is the market model (as cited by Rice & Broome, 2004). The justification for using the market model was “child participants are specifically required” and were necessary to conduct this study (2004, p. 168). Dickert

and Grady also felt that the market model addressed circumstances in which children were required to participate but were not necessarily easy to recruit. Although this later became evident, this was not known at the onset of this research.

Rice and Broome (2004) included a survey of the research regarding types of incentives. Their abbreviated list includes money, gift certificates, t-shirts, and art supplies. The final selection of the incentive must include consideration of the child's biological age. For example, a toy may be more appropriate for a 4 year old than a 14 year old, whereas a concert ticket for a research participant who is 17 years old may be more appropriate than for a 7 year old. Dickert and Grady's (2004) market study model, as with the other two models, "indicate that monetary incentives are necessary" for participants.

Foster parents were given a \$25 gift card as an expression of appreciation for their time. One gift card per household was selected by the participants. A variety of pre-purchased cards that could be redeemed at national or regional department stores, national bookstore chains, or local restaurants was available. Giving participants a choice of gift cards was consistent with Doll's postmodern paradigm that emphasizes diversity. Families do not all have the same needs, so a gift card to a department store may well serve one family, but an evening out for dinner could be preferred by other families. One foster child, Peter, who was under 12 years of age, received a crisp, new \$5 bill. All other foster children, over the age of 12, received a \$10 bill. This form of cash appreciation given to the foster children was in keeping with the research by Rice and Broome (2004). Since foster care workers were granted time for the interviews during their workday by their supervisors, letters of appreciation were sent to workers

and copies to their managers acknowledging the cooperation of their respective staff members (see Appendix G).

A few interview questions were not open-ended but were designed to solicit demographic and other objective information. Semi-structured interviews provided focal points for the participants without hampering their freedom to define the foster care experience. Eliciting personal meaning of their experience was essential from a phenomenological perspective. If the participants initiated discussion that included these items, school photographs and family picture albums were included as sources of information. Some foster parents (Mrs. Terrell, Mrs. Ratcliff, Mr. Cooper, and Mrs. Oliver) were eager to share these artifacts and insisted that I see and comment on their photographs. Mrs. Ratcliff began the interview by proudly producing photos of her very first foster child and who, as it happened, was a transracial placement.

Comprehensive interviews of foster parents and foster children were conducted primarily in their foster homes. In some cases (Mrs. Lewis and Mrs. Glad), scheduling conflicts did not permit in-home interviews, and foster parents were interviewed at their service agency while services were simultaneously being provided for their foster child (see Table 3.1). Most often, this service consisted of counseling or a support group. One foster parent interview was conducted, without interruption, at the workplace of the foster parent (Mrs. Patrick) and one at the foster parent's church during Sunday morning service with ambient sounds (Mrs. Ratcliff). Participants included foster parents who were openly gay (Harvey and Alexander), a single mother (Mrs. Patrick), foster parents whose extended family was integrally involved (Mrs. Terrell, Jeb Jr., and Mrs. Oliver), and a widowed foster parent (Mrs. Ratcliff).

Foster children were interviewed either in their foster homes (Peter, Kay, and Ken) or at the foster care agency (Salma and Anthony). All foster parent and foster child interviews (with one exception, Anthony) were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. One benefit was that the residential locale assured comfort, ease in conversation, and a naturalistic environment. As noted, in cases where this was not feasible, such interviews occurred in other neutral locations as suggested by the foster parent. The second benefit of home interviews was observation of the foster parent/foster child interaction. The interactions and patterns of communication were observed between parent and child in the relaxed and familiar atmosphere of the foster home. Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) have labeled this “naturalistic observation” (p. 451).

The interviews, although scheduled for 45 to 60 minutes, averaged much less. Foster parent interviews lasted from 12 to 50 minutes and averaged 23 minutes. A semi-structured interview format allowed the researcher to ask uniform questions of each foster parent and also provided flexibility in design format. Following are the questions used to conduct interviews with foster parents:

1. How long have you been a foster parent?
2. Do you have biological children? What are the ages of your biological children?
3. Do they also live in the foster home?
4. What is the effect this foster child had/has on your family?
5. Approximately how many foster children have lived with you since you became a foster parent?
6. Please identify the race(s) of the foster child (ran) who has (have) lived with you.
7. What is the shortest amount of time a racially different foster child lived with you?

8. What is the longest amount of time a racially different foster child racially has lived with you?
9. Describe your experience parenting the foster children who were racially different from you, both joy and sorry, if any.
10. Tell me about the training that you received in preparing you to foster the child racially or culturally different.
11. Please identify what was helpful in the training and what was not.
12. Discuss what you do as a foster parent to help your foster child feel secure within his/her racial group.
13. Do you have any other comments you feel will be helpful to this research?

Interviews of foster children were informal and more like a conversation (Frankel & Wallen, 2003). Considering the subject and developmental levels of the children, these “conversations” were limited to 30 minutes. Following are the questions used to conduct interviews with foster children:

1. How old are you?
2. How long have you lived in this foster home?
3. What is it like to live here?
4. I noticed that your foster parents are different than you are. What are the differences in this placement?

In addition to interviews of the foster parents and foster children, several additional sources of information were consulted. Current membership with the National Foster Parents Association (NFPA) and Michigan Foster Parent Association (MFPA) provided both a state and national perspective. These organizations provide

information on best practices and consumer friendly information via a newsletter and organization-sponsored magazine.

Foster care workers, supervisors, and trainers in both the public and private child welfare systems were scheduled for interviews. This provided yet another perspective on the issue of transracial foster care. Workers functioning in the child welfare system with a minimum of six months work experience in foster care plus either a bachelor's degree or a master's degree were interviewed. The foster care workers were an essential component of this study. They are the social workers who create transracial families by placing children in foster homes whose race differs from that of the foster parents. Following are the questions used to conduct interviews with foster care workers:

1. How long have you been working in the area of foster care?
2. Describe your experience with placing foster children with foster parents of different racial groups.
3. Describe the process of placing a child in a foster home when the family is different racially and culturally.
4. Are additional services necessary for transracial foster homes? If so, please explain.
5. What other information do you think would be helpful to consider?

3.6.1 Foster Parents' Vignettes

It was vitally important to view the foster parents in context of their social environment, and such a social work perspective is required. This person-in-environment perspective distinguishes social work from other professional disciplines.

Attempts to view individual dynamics in isolation are inadequate for understanding the family and social dynamics involving the individual (Appleby, 2007; Billingsley & Giovanni, 1972; Dows et al., 1996; Shiver, 2004; Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2007). Therefore, contextual descriptions are included as data to help the reader understand the foster parents and provide interesting and helpful information.

All of the interviews with foster parents were conducted in the fall of 2008 between September and November. The names that appear in the narratives are pseudonyms, and other identifying information has been disguised to protect the anonymity of the participants. All other information is factual and reflects the observations of the researcher. The narrative descriptions of the participants are intended to reestablish the character of the interviews when they occurred. The environmental setting and nature of the conversation creates the context of the discussions.

Table 3.2
Foster Parent Profiles

Identifier	# of years as FP	Age Range	Race[^]	Income Range*
Mrs. Betts	6 months	40-50 years	White	\$40-50
Mrs. Wright	8 years	30-40 years	White	\$40-50
Mrs. Glad	30 years	50-60 years	White	\$40-50
Harvey	4 years	30-40 years	White	\$70+
Alexander	4 years	30-40 years	White	
Mrs. Terrell	3 years	50-60 years	White	Unknown
Heather	NA	20-30 years	White	
Mr. Joseph	13 years	50-60 years	African American	\$70+
Mrs. Ratcliff	46 years	60+ years	African American	\$10-20
Mr. Smith	2 years	40-60 years	White	\$40-50
Mrs. Smith		40-60 years	White	
Jeb Jr.	6 years	30-40 years	White	\$20-30
Mrs. Patrick	4 years	40-50 years	White	\$50-60
Jeb Sr.	4 years	50-60 years	White	\$10-20
Mrs. Lewis	14 ½ years	50-60 years	White	\$30-40
Mr. Cooper	6 years	30-40 years	White	\$40-50
Mrs. Oliver	23 years	60+ years	Black [^]	\$20-30

Mrs. King Mr. King	18 years	40-50 years 40-50 years	African American African American	\$20-30
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* Income range is in thousands

^ Racial term selected from a listed presented. However, the term “Black” as a racial descriptor was not on the list.

3.6.2 Mrs. Betts' Vignette

The foster mother, Mrs. Betts, was interviewed in her home situated in a middle-class neighborhood. Mrs. Betts is White, and her neighborhood is predominantly White, but African American and Mexican families have recently began to relocate to the area. The front of the house is narrow and does not appear to contain more than three bedrooms. Mrs. Betts mentioned that originally the house had only three bedrooms. However, over the years, the house was renovated to accommodate their ever-expanding family. She relayed that their one-story house has been expanded to include a large attic bedroom and sleeping space in the basement. The home also serves as a daycare center. This stay-at-home mother of five biological children explained she began providing daycare after she stopped providing foster care. Her home has also served as a “home stay” for foreign students who were unable to travel home during vacations and holiday periods.

Mrs. Betts described her experience with her young cousins who were placed with her as foster children after being abandoned by their mother. She stated she and her adult cousin, their mother, are White but that her adult cousin has two children, at least one of which was fathered by an African American man. The racial identity of the other father is unknown, but both children are mixed with similar coloring and features. The children's biological mother was involved in the drug trade and prostitution and prevented positive identification of either of the children's fathers. Mrs. Betts's young bi-

racial “foster” cousins were 19 months and 4 years old, respectively, when they arrived at her house more than 8 years ago.

3.6.3 Mrs. Wright’s Vignette

Mrs. Wright, a Caucasian foster mother, was home alone with three small children when the researcher arrived for our scheduled appointment. She stated her husband was temporarily not living with them. They both had been laid off earlier in the year, and he had since secured a job in their former state of residence. Mr. Wright was able to find temporary housing with relatives. Both of them had family there and decided to return. Mrs. Wright and her husband agreed she should remain in their current home pending its sale and Mr. Wright securing permanent housing for the family. She and the children would join him once both these goals were accomplished.

Mrs. Wright’s eldest daughter, Candy, was adopted after living in their foster home from 18 months to 4 years of age. Candy is White and has expressed recognition of differences between her and her sister, Summer, age 2, who is African American. This difference was attributed to the extra time spent combing and styling Summer’s hair. Summer was adopted through a private agency after the birth mother selected Mrs. Wright’s family as the adoptive family. The exact process the birth mother used was not discussed in this interview. As far as it is known, the birth mother and adoptive mother never met.

Summer was initially placed in a foster home after she was born and moved to Mrs. Wright’s home when she was six days old. Since the Wright family was licensed for foster care, the child was able to remain in their home while the adoption process was completed. The family has been fostering for eight years, three years in another

state and five in their current state. They have fostered a total of nine children. Currently licensed through the public agency, this was their first transracial placement.

The Wrights thought they could not conceive, and after fostering for a while, decided to consider adoption. They previously had infants, but in each case except one (Candy), the infants were returned to the birth family. These disappointments led them to consider adoption. First, Candy was adopted when she became available, then Summer. Mrs. Wright and her husband agreed to accept Summer based only on a telephone conversation and before they saw her. Weeks after the adoptions, Mrs. Wright discovered she was pregnant with her only son, Jacob, who was six months old at the time of the interview.

Mrs. Wright could not recall any specialized training for transracial fostering but remembered there were sessions available on hair and skin care for African American children. Summer had already been in the home for six months before the training took place. Mrs. Wright added that there might need to be a cultural component added to the foster care training. She had already begun to plan for Summer's cultural awareness. The family attended an African American community arts festival and there were children's books with African American content available in the home. As the family relocates, both their new home and school will be selected for inclusion of diversity, reported Mrs. Wright. She said she wants her daughter; Summer, to feel comfortable and welcomed when they relocate to a new neighborhood and a new school. Mrs. Wright further expressed the need for others, especially those in the community, to accept Summer. Mrs. Wright's extended family, especially Mrs. Wright's mother, have established a warm and caring relationship with Summer.

Mrs. Wright spoke in a cheerful tone and smiled broadly when referring to her children, especially Summer. Summer has demonstrated an early interest in music, and Mrs. Wright added that she and her husband would encourage this interest. She described herself and her husband as White college graduates.

3.6.4 Mrs. Glad's Vignette

Mrs. Glad, a White foster parent, was pleasant and relaxed, and she sat in the waiting room of the private agency while her foster children were in therapy. She spoke to another woman in the room while two of her foster sons played with other children as I approached. As Mrs. Glad and I met and shook hands, a young man with an apparent cognitive disability asked if I needed to speak with him also. His speech impediment made him difficult to understand, so Mrs. Glad intervened and told him that the researcher needed to speak only to her. He was one of Mrs. Glad's African American foster sons.

Although she and her husband do not have any biological children, they have adopted six children and have fostered approximately 140 children over the last 30 years. Their very first foster child was African American. He was 28 years old at the time of the interview. She explained that she and her husband decided to foster and adopt children who were similar to children who had been institutionalized years ago when she worked at an institution that housed developmentally delayed children. She said she has raised two groups of children—the older group, now in their late 20's, and the second current group, ranging in age from 10 to 21 years of age.

Mrs. Glad was enthusiastic and excited about her life's mission as she articulated it "to parents of those who had been mistreated." She embraced her life's work as if she

had a vision or a divine message from God. This commitment allowed her to accept each child presented to her by the foster care system without regard to race, ethnicity, disability status, or religion. This heartfelt dedication resonated throughout her conversation.

3.6.5 Harvey and Alexander's Vignette

This interview was conducted in the upper-middle-class home of a same-sex male couple, Harvey and Alexander. Both foster parents, self-described as White, hold doctoral degrees and are employed at separate universities in the mid-west. They live in a tri-level home with two thoroughbred dogs and two adopted sons. There were dozens of family photos and framed artwork on the walls. The furnishings were modern and new. One of their sons is African American, and the other members of the foster family are White. They do not have any biological children. Of the nearly dozen interviews with foster parents, they were the only ones who had prepared refreshments (coffee and bagels with cream cheese) for our discussion.

In the four years they have been foster parents, they reported that they have cared for two African American foster children who were brothers. When the brothers were released for adoption by their parents, the boys were allowed to participate in the decision about their future. One of the boys chose a kinship care arrangement, but the other brother decided to remain in the foster home. The couple decided to adopt but feared their alternative family configuration might hijack the process. Much to their surprise, transracial issues were dominant and assumed center stage. Their story unfolds in the interview.

3.6.6 Mrs. Terrell's Vignette

On a brilliant, sunny fall day in September 2008, I headed north in search of one of my transracial foster families. Mr. and Mrs. Terrell's foster home was located on a state highway just outside the city limits of a rural community. The directions from MapQuest appeared confusing as they ended by just listing the address on a state highway. I pondered whether that could be accurate. Could people live on a state highway? I found out that they can and do.

Despite slowing down to read the address numbers, I rolled past the house just as I recognized where I was supposed to go. I made a U-turn in my full-size van on the two-lane road and eased onto a driveway wide enough for three cars. The front of the house did not appear to be occupied, so I drove to the back of the driveway, where a full garage of miscellaneous items peeped from the open doors. Several cars and trucks were parked as if they had stopped temporarily before dashing off. The acreage was cluttered with various large pieces of play equipment, including an above-ground pool and at least three structures of climbing and swinging toys. There were two stacks of white plastic molded chairs alongside the outside wall. Additionally, the screened-in back porch was filled to the brim with discarded toy parts. Mrs. Terrell exited the house just as I locked my car door. A small yelping dog that accompanied her ran up to me and continued to bark. I spoke to the dog, telling it that I already had received approval from Mrs. Terrell to enter the house.

Two caged parakeets, an adult woman with an infant, and a toddler glanced up as I entered. Later, they were introduced as Mrs. Terrell's biological daughter and granddaughters. Mrs. Terrell's daughter, Heather, was active in the conversation and

moved with her infant closer and sat on a stool where we were talking and therefore closer to the tape recorder. Heather became an active participant in the interview, sometimes adding details her mother left out and sometimes contradicting, or rather clarifying, what her mother said.

One strong message that was communicated was the sense of familiness as related to the foster children, especially the two African American foster boys, who were then in the process of adoption. Mrs. Terrell expressed concern about adopting the boys given her age and was forming a plan for the boys' care if her health prevented her from seeing the boys to adulthood. Several extended family members were consulted about the adoption and then offered to adopt the boys if Mr. and Mrs. Terrell did not. It was in this regard that other family members stepped forward with offers to help.

Mrs. Terrell described in detail the close relationships between the boys and members of the extended family. Heather's father-in-law, his sister, and others kept the boys on weekends and exposed them to life on a farm. They detailed experiences of country life, such as watching a cow give birth, participating in a pig-chasing contest, and observing a muskrat being skinned.

Mrs. Terrell and Heather seemed committed to their foster children and were anxious to show all of their foster children what life was like in a large, extended family where love was present. Several shelves in the family room were adorned with 8 x 10 professional portraits both of biological and foster children. Mrs. Terrell served as a docent for the family gallery but also volunteered a tour of the house that included the bedrooms of all of the children.

3.6.7 Mr. Joseph's Vignette

The African American foster father, Mr. Joseph, participated in the interview alone. Both he and his wife hold graduate degrees, and he is a social worker for a local school district. This interview took place on a Sunday following a church service attended by the family. He appeared comfortable, relaxed, and was professional in his demeanor. His brick range-style home was decorated with modern and comfortable furniture. It was evident that the family lived in all of the rooms and that the atmosphere was relaxed. The neighborhood had customized homes with manicured lawns and attached garages. It was a middle-class community with mixed-race residents. He answered all of the questions and seemed to have strong opinions on most topics. His interview focused on the effect of foster children on his family, which consisted of one biological son, one former foster son (now adopted), and his wife. Mr. Joseph did not have any foster children at the time of the interview but had been fostering for more than 10 years.

3.6.8 Mrs. Ratcliff's Vignette

This African American foster parent was the most experienced in the sample with the longest number of years fostering. She was also the senior member of the sample and remained active in her commitment to fostering. Mrs. Ratcliff, although retired, maintained a schedule that was the most difficult to match in terms of availability for the interview. She finally agreed to a time on Sunday following her church service. The interview was conducted at her church during a second Sunday morning service. The church choir and scripture readings provided an acoustic background for the interview. Despite the ambient noise, the digital recorder captured Mrs. Ratcliff's words without

difficulty.

Mrs. Ratcliff spoke enthusiastically about “her children” and had obviously prepared for the interview. Mrs. Ratcliff and her husband began their extensive foster parenting experience in a transracial situation. Perhaps, during the earlier years of fostering, there was a different focus, or even a lack of focus, on race. Mrs. Ratcliff had been in the foster care business for 46 years. Although the interview was conducted at her church, she wanted to convey the importance of foster children to her and voluntarily brought framed photos of many of her earlier foster children. She spoke of the intergenerational fostering she had provided. She shared several examples of children for whom she had provided foster care and who later found their children in her foster care home. The experience of Mrs. Ratcliff allowed a longitudinal perspective on foster care and the foster children who were raised in her home.

3.6.9 Mr. and Mrs. Smith’s Vignette

The Smith family home was located in a rural community on a dirt road. Mr. and Mrs. Smith, both White, lived at the end of a winding two lane road that meandered through low-rolling hills and by small fishing lakes. It was unusually quiet, and there was evidence of discarded canoes and old cars. The “across-the-street neighbors” were densely grown tall pine trees that reached approximately 10 feet in the sky. All of the one-story framed houses on one side of the street were closely spaced to each other. There were also some trailers. Many of the homes were in some state of disrepair. The foster family’s relatives, who lived in the adjacent houses, also provided transracial fostering. This was perhaps the most cooperative foster family I interviewed, as they summoned their relatives at the conclusion of their interview to also participate in this

study. Consequently, the one scheduled interview morphed into three. Mrs. Smith called her brother, who lived next door, and he called their father, who lived in an adjacent house. Additionally, Mrs. Smith volunteered that her foster son (Ken) was also at home at the time of the interview. Since it was a school day, she explained that he was on a suspension from school and would probably sleep until noon. It was approximately 9:30 a.m., but she stated she would wake him up if I wanted to talk to him. I answered, "yes," and she went to arouse him from sleep. He had approximately 20 minutes to get up before we began talking. Neither he nor I knew the interview would take place prior to that moment.

3.6.10 Jeb Jr.'s Vignette

Although the interview with Jeb and the interview with his father, Jeb Sr., were short in duration (averaging 10 minutes each), the information nevertheless is vital to this study. These interviews were an unscheduled bonus. Perhaps the impromptu nature of the interview contributed to its brevity. The referring Smith family announced to them that it would not be a long interview. The Smith's interview lasted 18 minutes and 20 seconds. Just as the recorder was turned on for audio taping, both Jeb and Jeb Sr. asked individually if it would take long. Then I felt somewhat rushed but proceeded despite the nagging anxiety to hurry. The driving distance to these homes (approximately 90 minutes one way) and another later prescheduled interview for the researcher contributed to a need to manage time. Irrespective of this limitation, information about Jeb and Jeb Sr.'s experiences with transracial foster care was shared candidly and concisely.

The most significant information from Jeb Jr. was his parenting of the same

foster child (Ken) as Mrs. Smith. This was the same foster child who was available for an interview at Mrs. Smith's home.

3.6.11 Ms. Patrick's Vignette

This interview was conducted at a Midwest public university where this single, White foster parent, Ms. Patrick, is a member of the faculty and holds a doctoral degree. She has been employed for 10 years at the university, and during the interview, she was at ease and casually dressed. The setting was comfortable, and the interview was rich with detail and uninterrupted. She had prepared materials for the interview and offered to share her information and guide the interview or respond to the researcher's questions.

Ms. Patrick was previously a foster parent in another Midwestern state; she also had experience as a transracial foster parent in two states and had cross-racially adopted. She was exceptionally eager to offer her assistance but was not especially interested in having her children interviewed for the study. I respected her wishes.

3.6.12 Jeb Sr.'s Vignette

This foster parent, Jeb Sr., is the biological father of Jeb Jr., who lived next door. Jeb Sr. was unable to commit much time, and I was hesitant to conduct the interview. His daughter, Mrs. Smith, had a scheduled interview and suggested to me that her father, Jeb Sr., be included. I agreed without speaking to Jeb Sr. first. However, since there was agreement to interview prior to the time restriction being revealed, the interview proceeded.

It was a sunny, warm, fall day, and the interview was conducted standing up outside in the driveway while Jeb Sr. leaned on the hood of his truck. The wall of trees

reaching to the sky provided a backdrop. He was relaxed and eager to share his story of his experience with an African American teen. His former foster child had Down's syndrome. Jeb Sr. seemed eager to participate in the interview as did all of the other family members. Intuitively, it seemed the eagerness might have been driven by the incentive (\$25 gift card). The first of the family members interviewed was pleasantly surprised to learn about the incentive and quickly shared this news with the other two relative families who lived in adjacent homes, and in total three foster parent interviews and one interview with a foster child was conducted that same day.

3.6.13 Mrs. Lewis's Vignette

This White foster parent, Mrs. Lewis, was married, but her husband did not accompany her to the interview. The site of the interview was a church in a suburban community where her foster children were participating in a support group for foster children aging out of the foster care system. Mrs. Lewis was casually dressed for this after-work meeting. She suggested the date and time as a courtesy so that I would not have to drive to her home in a suburban community approximately 30 minutes away. The site of the interview was approximately half of that driving distance. She was quite easy to relate to and could be described as joyous during the interview. She was humorous, and both she and the researcher laughed appropriately several times during the interview. She was eager to cooperate, and both she and her foster care worker agreed to her foster son being included in this study. The interview with her foster son, Anthony, was conducted several weeks later at the office of the foster care worker (Kelly).

3.6.14 Mr. Cooper's Vignette

As this interview began, I was presented with a newspaper insert that featured the Cooper's family recognition by the county's foster care system. The Coopers, self-described as Caucasian, had fostered more than 30 children during a six-year period. Two of the foster children were of a different race. In addition, they had also adopted six foster children. This recognition included an all-expenses-paid trip to Washington, D.C., and an award by a local representative at the Capitol Building. Mr. and Mrs. Cooper received an award for their work with foster and adopted children. Mr. Cooper, understandably, was quite proud of this recognition. His wife, however, was not present for the interview since she had been away on business. He was also willing to showcase his house, which had been constructed as a group home. Mr. Cooper was pleased as he relayed to me that the house had never been occupied because zoning for the group home rendered it impossible to be used for its intended purpose. This meant that he and his wife were able to acquire the enormous house for under market value. The house provided bedrooms and bathrooms for his family of 11 children, including his foster children, adopted children, and his relatives. The age range of these children was from 8 months to 20 years.

The house was full with kids of all ages and the cacophony of children's conversation at the end of a school day. The chatter and unrestrained laughter nurtured a lively, relaxed atmosphere. Mr. Cooper readily agreed to include his foster daughter Mary in this study, and when she arrived home, she consented.

3.6.15 Mrs. Oliver's Vignette

Mrs. Oliver, African American, lived in a deceptively large house that appeared to

be a bungalow from the front porch. It was located in a low-income neighborhood with well-kept lawns and small neat houses. However, upon entering the house it was quite spacious with a magnificent spiral staircase and rooms extending from the back of the house. The furniture was covered in thick, custom-made plastic covers, and the rooms appeared as showrooms for guests.

Perhaps Mrs. Oliver was the most talkative of all of the foster parents interviewed. Mrs. Oliver seemed to be eager for an opportunity to share her contemplated thoughts and opinions on the subject of foster care and racial identity. She needed only to be prompted, and she talked continuously with only nonverbal attending behavior necessary for encouragement to continue. Mrs. Oliver mentioned that the public foster care system had acknowledged her outspokenness in the past. I felt Mrs. Oliver would be an excellent presenter for other foster parents and professionals regarding foster care issues. Mrs. Oliver commented several times that she “could write a book” and that if she were in a position to conduct research, she would talk to everyone, including (then) President Elect Obama.

3.6.16 Mr. and Mrs. King's Vignette

The Kings, an African American couple, lived on a busy one-way street in a well-kept, low-income area of the city. Their fenced yard separated the house and the screened-in porch from the traffic that moved rapidly toward the center of town. There was a secure lock on the screen door but no doorbell. After a few seconds of loud knocking, a casually dressed woman appeared at the door of the house and leaned out to open the screen door. A toddler accompanied her. The front door opened into a smallish room with large modern furniture. Both the size and the amount of the furniture

appeared to shrink the room, and it was unclear where the interview would take place.

Mrs. King extended her hand toward an adjacent room more sparsely furnished and motioned toward an empty wooden dining room table. The house was spotless. The researcher took the seat farthest from the doorway at the head of the table and closest to the windows. This left the closest seat to the hallway and kitchen vacant. Mrs. King sat to the left of the researcher, and Mr. King walked with difficulty to the end seat. Mrs. King explained during the interview that Mr. King was recovering from a stroke.

Mr. and Mrs. King both participated in the discussion and shared memories about their fostering experiences among themselves and with the researcher. Several times while speaking about foster children they joined in private memories and private laughter. Mr. and Mrs. King spoke in code several times about foster children using a word or phrase to prompt recollection of a child's entire history. For example, "the one with the yellow bus" (King, line 28) or "do you remember the dinosaur?" (King, line 38) when attempting to recall a specific child.

Although they were less articulate than other foster parents, the passion and concern for the children who entered their home was evident. They seemed to parent from the soul without regard to race, educational status, or socio-economic status.

3.7 Foster Children Vignettes

Five foster children were interviewed for this study; they were primarily adolescents and ranged in age from 10 to 17 years. Their racial classifications are listed in Table 5.2 below. Four of the foster children were non-White, but their four foster parents were. Most of the foster children had been in more than one foster home

and usually with foster parents of multiple races. They had information to share about their experiences.

Table 3.3
Foster Children Profiles

Identifier/Gender	Age	Race	Race of Foster Parent
Peter Male	10 years	White	African Am
Ken Male	15 years	African Am	White
Mary Female	17 years	Mixed*	White
Kay Female	15 years	Bi-racial(Wh/Bl)	White
Anthony Male	15 years	African Am	White

* Black, White, Chinese, Indian

3.7.1 Peter's Vignette

The interview with Peter, a 10-year-old child, took place in the foster home where he had lived for three months but was visiting for the weekend. He was returned to his biological mother, and there was a subsequent allegation of neglect but not removal. This child initiated the new charge in an attempt to be forcibly removed from his home and reunited with his foster family. Peter stated he was White, and the foster home to which he wished to return was African American. His foster father was also interviewed for this study (Mr. Joseph).

Peter appeared shy and uncertain during the interview. He was reluctant to speak about race during the interview, especially because his biological family “did not like Black people.” However, he had made this very statement on one occasion to the foster mother. His hesitation can be noted in Excerpt 3A:

Excerpt 3A

R: What race are you?

Peter: Race? What's race?

- R : Yeah. Like Black, White, Mexican
- Peter: I don't know. I think White.
- R: White, okay. And when you were in the foster home, were you with a White family, a Black family, or a Mexican family?
- Peter: I don't want to say it.
- R: Why not?
- Peter: Because it's mean.
- R: It's mean to say what?
- Peter: (whispers) Black.
- R: Mmm. Why do you think it's mean to say "Black"?
- Peter: Okay, I have a Black family, foster family.
- R: Okay, but you think you shouldn't say that?
- Peter: Yeah, 'cause it's mean.

Initially, Peter's foster care worker received a complaint from his biological mother. Peter's mother was concerned and unhappy about him being in the home of Black people. It is not known what circumstances permitted the biological mother to reverse her position on the racial question. However, she allowed Peter to visit his former African American foster home on weekends. Peter and his foster family re-established contact during a chance meeting at a community event. Consequently, he called and asked to visit overnight on the weekends and did so for a few weeks. When a member of the foster family was hospitalized, the regular visitation was interrupted and later resumed but without regularity.

3.7.2 Ken's Vignette

The interview with this 15-year-old foster child was spontaneous and occurred on the same day of the interview with his foster parents. He had been suspended from school for the day, and the foster parents mentioned during their interview that he was asleep in the other room. The interviews of the foster parent and their foster son were conducted in their home in a rural community in the Midwest. The area was comprised of low-income houses on one side of the street and woods with skyscraper trees on the other side. The community is approximately five miles from the nearest small town, and their home was located on a dirt road that began where the paved road ended. The families in this community were White, but each of the three related foster families interviewed have had an African American and/or a Mexican foster child.

The three relatives lived next door to each other, two in houses and one in a trailer. Each of these three families was also a foster family. Ken lived with one of the other family members before returning to the area to live with his present foster family. He was awakened by his foster mother and encouraged to "get up and talk with the lady," which he did. The researcher and the foster child moved to an area not unlike a foyer with a dining table and two chairs. The foster parents remained in the adjacent living room, where the television remained on as it had during their interview. His answers were monosyllabic and his demeanor disinterested. He seemed on the verge of falling asleep, and his speech was slow with a drawl. Almost immediately, the other relatives from next door knocked and entered. It seemed the original foster family summoned the other relatives for the interview. It was not clear if the motivation was the incentive (a \$25 gift card), curiosity, or just interest in a research study.

His previous home was in a large metropolitan city several hundred miles away. Although he was a definite minority in this new community, he did not register any dissatisfaction with his foster family. He, however, did report minor racial difficulties with other people in the community and at his school. Ken had lived with this foster family for nine months and with other relatives in the neighborhood for a few weeks on a prior occasion.

3.7.3 Mary's Vignette

Mary, an attractive teen, sat in the waiting room of a private child welfare agency looking relaxed and posed. She appeared to be just waiting calmly for a person she did not know who was planning to ask personal questions. Her foster parents apparently prepared her well for the research interview. Mary smiled broadly when her name was called and walked behind the researcher to the appointed room. She continued to smile and was eager to cooperate without a trace of anxiety. She was congenial and chatted with ease about her life. She had a caramel blush complexion and a very clear sense of cultural identity. Mary had been in her present foster home for two years and recounted in Excerpt 3B her thoughts about racial identity and her experiences living in foster homes:

Excerpt 3B

- R: I am interviewing kids who were placed in one home where they are of a different race. So can you tell me how you identify yourself in terms of race?
- Mary: I actually identify myself as just mixed.
- R: Okay, mixed. Okay, and what are you mixed with?
- Mary: Black, White, Indian, and Chinese.

- R: Oh, okay, that's really multiple?
- Mary: Yeah.
- R: Okay, and can you tell me the race or the culture of the people who are your foster family?
- Mary: They're Caucasian.
- R: Why do you say it like that—they're "Cau-cas-ian"? (very drawn out and deliberate pronunciation)
- Mary: I don't know, I just...I don't know.
- R: You don't.
- Mary: I just say it like that...
- R: Okay? (pause) Okay.

Attempts to decode the meaning behind this emphasis were unsuccessful. Perhaps Mary was going to reveal some matter that was troubling her. Maybe it was spoken in a tone of mockery. Yet, could it represent a generic racial category while she was so specific about her racial heritage? No information was shared which might have explained this issue that came to light as a result of her comment. Note her response when asked about her comment. She did not complete the sentence but just stopped talking and waited. I also waited, but after a short pause, without clarification by Mary, the interview resumed.

3.7.4 Kay's Vignette

The foster father granted permission for his foster child, Kay, to participate in the interview. She arrived home from school with two other children just as the interview with Mr. Cooper, her foster father, concluded. She was unaware of the interview but agreed seemingly without consternation and positioned herself in the same room where

the interview with her foster father occurred but at the other end of the sofa. She was introduced as “Kay,” the foster child who was in a transracial placement.

Kay was a light brown teenager with spiky hair who had leisurely crossed the lawn with two younger girls. The foster dad, but not the other children, busied himself in another part of the house during the brief interview. She had a pleasant demeanor and moved with ease into the house, pausing for a moment to greet me. She did not reappear (as did the two other girls) until her foster father called for her. She agreed to the interview without hesitation and came into the living room, where I was waiting with her foster father. He remained for a few minutes, seemingly either to participate in the process or to screen the questions. The researcher’s back was to him as a way to ensure that Kay’s voice would be captured on the recorder. His almost immediate exit may be accorded to the researcher’s body language. Kay chatted easily but did not seem to have very much to say. She described her cultural experience as White based on her relationship with her deceased mother (White) and brother (White). She had requested a White foster home and was happy because her request was honored.

This interview was conducted after school on the same day as the foster parent’s interview. Their foster home was a house built to accommodate an adult group home but did not received community approval and thus never opened as such. Therefore, it suited the needs of this large foster family because it contained numerous bedrooms and bathrooms. It was a two-story house that was considerably larger than it appeared from the street. The house had one step up onto a small porch, and the majority of the house was built deep into the property. A separate apartment to the left of the entryway had been converted into a suite for the foster parents. The interview was conducted in

the first room just inside the front door. Although it appeared as a living room, it also served as a hallway to the upstairs. Several older White teenagers were congregating in the attached garage, in the front yard, and in the driveway upon my arrival. The foster father was holding an infant who appeared to be between four and six months old. She was a pleasant baby and did not cry during the interview. At one point, the researcher held the baby, and the baby did not seem to mind. The teen boys remained outside for most of the interview and interrupted only a few times. One of the older teen boys, the biological son of the foster father, entered the house with a question about dinner and attempted to insert himself in the interview. He was bruised with dark blotches on his arms and face. He smiled and chatted with me and injected himself into the conversation on one occasion. He can be heard on the audiotape. He reported with some pride that he had been recently involved in a car/motorcycle accident.

The setting was not conducive to Kay's interview. More people arrived home with much movement in and out of the front door, which was immediately adjacent to the area where the interview was being conducted. Kay perched on the sofa near the researcher, and at least two other children joined her to listen. Her interview, though brief, was straightforward and nearly devoid of emotion. Kay spoke of her mother's death, her placement in a residential facility, and the brief stint with her brother as though she were just making a status report. She did, however, express some passion in response to the question about what foster care workers need to know when placing children in homes that may not be of the same culture or race as the foster children.

3.7.5 Anthony's Vignette

Anthony, 15 years old, is a medium-built African American teen with skin the

color of coffee *au lait*. His hair, if combed out, could be shaped into a low afro hairstyle. He was comfortable and did not seem stressed despite his being in the midst of moving. He was waiting for his foster care worker to return to the private agency and facilitate transferring him from his foster home, where he had lived for the prior 1.5 years, to a new foster home placement.

Although he had been in foster care since age 11, I asked him to reflect on his most recent placement. Subsequently, he spoke primarily about his experiences during the last 1.5 years living in a Caucasian foster home with other foster children who were of several races. This foster home was located in an almost exclusively White rural city. He spoke easily of his friendships and mentioned that during his time in this foster home, about six other teenage boys also had lived in the home at various times. He specifically mentioned two African American brothers who came from a small urban community and who were accustomed to much more freedom than allowed at the foster home where Anthony lived. These brothers assumed leadership of all of the foster children and gained their respect.

He shared an incident that involved him taking a beverage from the refrigerator. The White foster child had removed some juice and drank a glass. Immediately after, Anthony also poured a glass of the same juice and was reprimanded for getting the drink without asking. He said he was often grounded and casually commented to one of his foster brothers one day about their foster mom, "I don't think she likes Black people." He stated that the other foster children agreed with him. He said he finally thought, "I can't put up with it." In response to my question about what he meant, he responded, "Just tell my worker." He added that maybe it was just that his foster mother was bi-

polar. Although I was curious about this last statement, I decided not to pursue any further questions. Such pursuit, I felt, may have violated family confidentiality. He concluded that his foster mother lied to his foster care worker when his foster mother was asked about her own behavior regarding the juice incident.

Anthony recounted another story about life in a transracial placement. Anthony began washing his clothes one day and got in trouble with his foster mother. He responded to his foster mother, "Is it a crime to do my laundry?" She yelled at him. Later, another foster child used the same expression, "Is it a crime to watch television?" However, he was not yelled at. Another example involved going to play basketball. All of the boys left the foster home without permission and went to play basketball. Then they were yelled at. Anthony felt this was unfair. Sensing that the incidents Anthony reported may have been as much about parent-child miscommunication as about race relations, I initiated the following exchange:

R: What would you said to foster parents who were parenting foster children of another race?

Anthony: Treat everyone the same.

R: You were in a White foster home but felt you were not treated fairly, but you are moving to another White foster home. Do you think they will also treat you unfairly?

Anthony: No, I visited with this new family on weekends. Some White people are racists.

R: Why do you think racist White people take Black foster kids?

Anthony: For the money.

3.8 Foster Care Workers

The foster care workers are identified with pseudonyms and appear on Table 3.4.

All eight of the foster care workers met the minimum agency educational requirements for their position, which is a bachelor's degree in a human services discipline, such as social work, psychology, or counseling. Their foster care experience ranged from as few as 3 years to as many as 20 years of service with an average of 9.87 years (see Table 3.4). Racial classifications of the foster care workers are intentionally included. The question of racial identity is the focal point for this research, and the race of the foster care worker is sometimes relevant information as cultural and racial issues unfold. For example, in the interview Excerpt 6J (p. 238), Amy, a White foster care worker, candidly shares her lack of experience and training in hair care. Later, in the same interview excerpt, Amy relayed a discussion between herself and a foster parent also regarding hair care. Amy shared personal hair care tips with a foster parent struggling to cope with hair care in a transracial foster care placement. Amy's race and first-hand experience appeared to be the foundation for sharing with this foster mother. Likewise, Carol, an African American foster parent, recounted a conversation she had with a foster parent in the interview Excerpt 6K (p. 241).

Table 3.4
Foster Care Workers (FW) Profiles

FW Identities	Number of Years as FW	Private/Public Agency	Race of FW
Amy	11 years	Private	White
Jackie	4 years	Private	White
Carol	8 years	Public	African American
Lucie	3 years	Public	African American
Camelia	5 years	Private	White
Kellie	20 years	Private	White
Winston	10 years	Public	African American
Samuel	18 years	Public	White

3.9 Summary

A postmodern definition of family expands the traditional concept of nuclear family and includes same-sex parents, single parents, and two-parent foster family configurations. Profiles of each foster parent, a description of the homes or neighborhoods, and economic levels are included in this study to establish context. Nineteen foster parents involved in transracial fostering and five foster children with experience living within transracial foster homes shared their stories in this chapter. The 19 foster parents discussed a variety of topics, including challenges of hair care, acknowledgment of race, benefits of transracial families, and potentially negative effects of transracial fostering. The foster children shared their perspectives on race

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Although qualitative researchers understand the unique challenges children provide in the research process, complex ethical issues also emerge with the inclusion of minors. Inherent is the necessity “to protect their [children’s] rights, freedoms, safety, and dignity” (Mishna, Antle, & Regehr, 2004, p. 449). Mishna et al. have suggested that research involving children requires the same safeguards as working with any vulnerable group. However, Mishna et al. have also pointed out that the researcher-participant relationship, when combined with the “unstructured nature of qualitative research methods, add[s] a dimension of risk” (p. 449). This awareness provides a context for any special accommodations that must be made to adjust for the cognitive development of child participants. The power differential between children and the researcher must be addressed. Since adults often do not consider the opinions of children, the research venue provides an avenue for the typical adult-child

communication process to be reframed. The respect that the adult researcher demonstrates toward child subjects is the nucleus of a trusting relationship. The child, therefore, feels empowered as an individual and valued as a person. Children are capable of speaking for themselves and providing reliable information about their situations (Mishna, et al., 2004). This elevates the child to the status of an expert because, indeed, the child is most aware of his or her circumstances.

Children who are in foster care need all of the same special care and considerations as all other children who are research participants. Although children placed in foster care may bring an additional layer of mistrust to the adult-child relationship, it may paradoxically portend a positive relationship with adults. The placement of children in a family setting devoid of abuse and with a family where basic physical and emotional needs are met is often a relief for children. When children disclose abuse and neglect, such disclosure can be considered a form of asking for help. Subsequently, when children's pleas are heard, a trusting relationship can begin with adults. Bobolub and Thomas (2005) have identified a variety of roles filled by adults in the foster care experience, including birth parents, foster parents, and caseworkers. Bobolub and Thomas originally felt consent of the birth parents was necessary before the child could participant. However, Bobolub and Thomas found seeking the permission of the birth parents "slowed the research, and that some children who wanted to participate could not do so because the birth parents refused to speak with me [Bobolub & Thomas] to discuss content" (p. 274). Further complicating the birth parents' involvement for Bobolub and Thomas was the lack of telephones and the responsibility of the "overburdened caseworkers" for contact that resulted in

protracted communication (p. 274). Eventually, Bobolub and Thomas were faced with the new question, “Why assume that birth parents’ consent was an absolute requirement” (p. 275)? When Bobolub and Thomas again queried the Department of Social Services in New York State, which was responsible for foster care services, it was revealed that consent of the birth parents was not a legal requirement. Bobolub continued to search the literature and concluded the following: “Overall, the US literature suggests that a case can be built for bypassing birth parent consent in research with children in foster care” (p. 276).

In this study, the role of birth parents is divided between the State Department of Human Services (DHS), as the formal guardian, and the foster parents who have been appointed, as temporary guardians. The temporary guardians function in much the same way as custodial parents. Both the State DHS and the foster parents of the child consented to the child’s participation in this study. The oversight by the State Department of Human Services and the foster parents ensures another layer of protection from research risks for the child participants. The Institutional Review Board (IRB), prior to approval of this research proposal, required an additional written addendum which addressed the question of possible harm to underage participants.

Royce (1999) has delineated the possible risks from social work research as “psychological, physical, legal and economic” (p. 308). Psychological risks have been defined further as “procedures that cause research subjects to leave with lowered self-esteem” or procedures that awaken “long-dormant and painful memories” (p. 308). There were four primary precautionary measures for this study. First, all foster parents and foster care workers completed a signed consent form allowing the children to

participate. Secondly, the foster care workers or the foster parents could exclude any child who was identified as at-risk for an upsetting psychological experience. Third, the foster parents and foster care workers screened the interview questions prior to the interviews with the foster children. Any questions perceived as harmful were removed as long as the integrity of the study was maintained. Fourth, I, the researcher, am a licensed social worker with several decades of experience as a therapist with foster children. Finally, if any child participant appeared disturbed during the interview process, the interview was terminated instantly. I was available to provide crisis management immediately and a referral for long-term counseling as appropriate.

Among other ethical issues was the anonymity of subjects. The identities of the foster families and foster children were kept confidential as was the specific identity of the affiliate agency. I, as principal investigator and as previously stated, am a licensed social worker and licensed foster parent. The issue of confidentiality is central to both roles. This personal understanding reinforces my ethical responsibility to the foster children, foster parents, and foster care workers. The location of the participants was not revealed, and all demographic information was obscured.

Including children in the study certainly presented ethical and operational challenges. Is it ethical to ask deeply personal questions to minors who are vulnerable? Is there any danger of disturbing the equilibrium of the foster children as they settle in with foster families by forcing them to address issues that may be repressed? These were some of the risks and the measures to mitigate the issues that were potentially problematic in this study. These questions also reflect the ethical duty to “do no harm.” Protection from psychological injury is paramount to the success of the research. While

Mishna, Antle, and Regehr (2004) have addressed the value of children as a resource in qualitative research, the obligation to protect the rights of children has been equally emphasized. There has been a shift to value more explicitly the voice of children as stakeholders in their own destiny rather than “children as passive objects of study” (p. 451). Further, Mishna et al. (2004) have asserted that it is essential to view children as “providing reliable information about their own situation” (p. 451). The recent trend, as conveyed by Mishna et al., has been that children should be considered partners in the research process.

3.11 Data Analysis

The audio taped and transcribed interviews were analyzed for relevant statements. The participants’ statements were categorized and formed themes (Frankel & Wallen, 2003). Those themes that reoccurred in the comments of multiple participants were highlighted and the meaning assigned by those experiencing the phenomena noted. In this way, themes were identified from examining the series of interviews. Direct quotations from the participants—both foster parents and foster children—are included to illustrate key concepts. Data analysis includes rich descriptions of the participants’ experiences shared during the interviews. The inclusion of responses from the transracial foster children provides triangulation with the responses from foster parents and foster care workers. Frankel and Wallen (2003) have suggested that qualitative researchers utilize triangulation as a method of reinforcing validity. Children placed in foster homes that were racially and culturally different expressed their hopes, dreams, and challenges. Once explored, the concerns of the foster children may impact policy and practice. The children included in this study

were placed in the homes of the foster parents, who also participated in this study.

Relevant documents presented by the participants during the data collection phases constituted a portion of the information reviewed. The foster parent training curriculum from the private, non-profit agency and the county office of the State Department of Health and Human Services was subject to content analysis. This included primarily the pre-service training program with minimum exploration of in-service training options post licensure.

3.12 Reliability and Validity Issues

The phenomenological approach by definition is subjective and therefore limited in terms of its ability to replicate research results using subsequent samples. Although triangulation does not ensure validity, it does reduce “the risk of chance associations” and “systemic biases” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 93). Triangulation does not guarantee validity; however, “validity of the data is increased by using multiple sources” (Yanca, 2002, p. 69). Further, Yanca suggests that drawing on multiple sources increases the richness of the data. Interviewing foster parents and foster children within the same family reinforces their descriptions of the same phenomena. Frankel and Wallen (2003) have asserted that “discrepancies in descriptions *may* mean the data is invalid” (p. 463) or at the very least “a difference in perception” (p. 158).

Foster care workers were encouraged to refer foster families for inclusion in the study. Foster families were selected based on their having a foster child of a race different than the foster parents and the child having resided in the foster home for at least three months. Participant observation at foster parent training and support groups would have allowed the researcher to assist in identifying foster parents for this study.

However, although this was planned, neither foster parent training nor support groups were convened during the data-collection phase.

Another validity concern focused on the foster children participating in the study. It was feared these children might wish to portray their foster parents in the best possible way and phrase answers that would place the foster parents in the most favorable light. However, there was no evidence to support this concern. The children were assured that the information was not discussed directly with their foster parents or members of the child welfare placement agency. A positive, relaxing environment and natural approach provided an atmosphere of trust for the children. The researcher is a former therapist for foster children and has had experience establishing trust and rapport with children of all ages.

Assuring anonymity for foster parents and foster children facilitated an atmosphere where truth was valued. Conducting these anonymous, potentially rich interviews in a private and secure location helped to ensure validity.

CHAPTER 4 – TRAINING CURRICULUM FOR FOSTER PARENTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores how the foster parents' training curriculum supports the development of cultural identity in foster children. Training of foster parents serves myriad purposes. Since the life experiences of foster parents cover a broad spectrum, their common ground could be the training they receive. One essential component is mandated pre-service training for foster parents, known as Parent Resources for Information, Development, and Education (PRIDE). The PRIDE program is a collaborative project consisting of 14 state child welfare agencies; the Child Welfare League of America; private agencies; and several universities and colleges. This chapter will examine the PRIDE training curriculum and conduct both a manifest and latent content analysis to determine whether cultural identity is addressed and, if so, in what way.

Chapter 4 also reviews the rationale for training foster parents. Further, the curriculum is viewed through three theoretical lenses: Erikson's (1968) identity formation, Cross's (1991) specialized emphasis on Black identity development, and Doll's (1993) relevant postmodern perspective. Here, this theoretical trinity, introduced earlier in this study, submits to microscopic scrutiny so that the interaction between the foster parent training and foster child identity development may be highlighted and shortcomings made visible. Once these various perspectives have been articulated, the impact on this study comes into focus.

4.2 Preparing Foster Parents

A necessary component of foster parents' understanding of cultural development

and practice of cultural competence is the training they receive before becoming foster parents. Training for foster parents is mandated in all 50 states and designed to address the “unique task of parenting other people’s children” (Downs, Costin, & McFadden, 1996, p. 275). The training is provided by a variety of agencies that are authorized by each state to license foster homes and foster parents. The state’s Department of Human Service (DHS) is usually the largest licenser of foster parents, but other childcare agencies are allowed to select, train, and monitor foster parents as well. Examples of such agencies are private profit and non-profit childcare agencies. All agencies that train are required to provide a comprehensive series of training sessions that span several weeks. The common denominators for the lesson plans created by various agencies are developmental milestones, foster children with special concerns, and behavioral problems.

4.2.1 Developmental Milestones

While this research study does not target the natural progression of foster children through all physical, psychological, or emotional developmental tasks, it is relevant to review the foundational benchmarks of progress. These developmental points of reference serve as a compass for foster parents as they navigate other people’s children through the difficulties of childhood. Foster parents are charged with the responsibility of substituting for biological parents and must address any developmental needs neglected by the biological parents. Since foster children do not arrive with an instructional guide, foster parents must rely on pre-service and in-service training, other parents, child development books, and their own experiences. Children’s dependency on parents or other adults requires some understanding of child

development in order to properly assess children's needs and respond accordingly (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2010). Children have physical, social, and psychological needs that develop and evolve throughout their lifetime (Comer & Poussaint, 1992; Crosson-Tower, 2005; Dunlap, 2002; Elkind & Weiner, 1978; Feldman, 1998; Maslow 1968, 1971). The formidable task of equipping each foster parent with the necessary skills and specific child development knowledge is daunting.

Basic information about the physical, social, and psychological needs of children is foundational knowledge for all foster parents (PRIDEbook, 2003). Two of the 13 competencies from Session III of the PRIDE foster parenting training include 1) know the stages of normal human growth and development and 2) recognize developmental delays and respond appropriately (p. 69). Comer (1992), Dunlap (2002), and Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman (2010) have detailed the developmental milestones characteristic of healthy growth and well being of children from infancy through adolescence. Knowledge of these developmental indicators is essential for foster parents as they identify, assess, and address developmental delays in their foster children. Session III of the PRIDE foster parent training lists the following in-session learning objectives (among others) (p. 70):

- 1) Explain that development occurs in stages and that each stage is important for the next.
- 2) Describe the use of "developmental milestones" within a wide range of what is considered normal growth and development.
- 3) Describe how chronological age and appearance affect expectations of child behavior.

Human development reflects increasing capacity to perform tasks at specific junctions on the growth continuum. This idea that tasks are accomplished at developmental junctures in the lives of children implies that tasks are linked to their developmental age (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2010; Dunlap, 2002). Parents who are aware of these developmental markers are equipped with knowledge that is helpful in fostering their child's success. The PRIDE foster parent training manual addresses child development in this manner:

The developmental chart (included in session three) will be a useful tool for you (foster parent). You can think of the "milestones" as general guidelines about what a child at a given age should be able to do. Being a little behind is probably not of concern. Likewise, being behind in one area may simply reflect that development can be irregular. (p. 87)

This quotation sets parameters for foster parents to understand how the growth and development of children should proceed under usual circumstances. It further suggests to foster parents that developmental milestones are a guide and not a "must do list." This flexibility allows foster parents to accept a child who does not meet each developmental marker without anxiety. Healthy development in children occurs when "their basic needs are met, which include food, clean water and air, adequate shelter, personal space... clothing, basic health care, and sufficient rest and exercise" (Dunlap, 2002, p. 1).

Iwaniec and Sneddon (2004) have asserted that knowledge about parenting responsibilities is paramount even for supplying food, which is one of children's basic needs. Errors in feeding, if not corrected, can result in major physical and psychological damage, such as failure to thrive (FTT), which results when "general psychological development(s) are significantly below age-related norms" (Iwaniec & Sneddon, 2004,

p. 149). Another feeding error results when the parents do not supply a balanced diet. Childhood obesity exists in epidemic proportion in the United States—currently at a rate of 15.3% in 1999 and 2000 (Eliadis, 2006). Improper nutrition, either too much or too little healthy food, can negatively influence emotional, physical, and academic growth (Dunlap, 2002). Thus, foster parents must be aware of proper nutrition and provided with the necessary resources.

Foster parents with children from birth to five years old automatically receive governmental support from the Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) food program, which was created by the Child Nutrition Act of 1966. WIC's mission is to support low-income women and children up to the age of five who are at nutritional risk. Supplemental food supplies such as juice, iron-fortified cereal, eggs, cheese, milk, peanut butter, dried beans or peas, iron-fortified infant formula, tuna, and carrots are provided. However, the health and welfare of foster children is so important that the income requirement is waived for foster parents (www.fns.usda.gov/wic). Consequently, all foster parents are automatically eligible for these nutritional supplemental services and are encouraged to accept this benefit.

4.2.1.1 Social Development

Most of the biological milestones are predictable within a range of expected behaviors (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2007), and physical development usually proceeds on a somewhat steady path. Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman (2007) have detailed four major concepts “in understanding the process of human development” (p. 66): “growth as an orderly continuous orderly process,” “specific characteristics of different age levels,” “the importance of individual difference,” and the “effects of both heredity and

the social environment.” These provide the framework for parents to understand what is within the range of “normal or appropriate” physical, psychological, and social development (p. 66).

Some psychological and social development issues are subjected to more random environmental influences. Social development, however, is almost totally dependent on interactions between the child and others. Each of these systems—biological, psychological, and social—is relational and remains an open system that provides constant exchanges. Open systems allow interaction within the environment with boundaries that are permeable. Boundaries are understood as invisible lines sectioning and separating parts of the system. Feedback is input on performance, which serves to guide the system in its ongoing operation.

An example of this interrelationship within the foster care system entails close examination of foster children’s physical, emotional, and social development. If biological parents are overwhelmed by unemployment or other financial concerns, children may be at risk for neglect or abuse. Overlay a substance abuse problem in this context, and the at-risk meter for children in that environment registers higher. If this form of neglect is inadequate food or clothing, children’s physical health suffers. Failure to respond to children’s physical needs threatens their feelings of security and well being. Insecure children often manifest behavioral problems in school. Although this is only a hypothetical example, this scenario is real for far too many children in foster care. In this example, the physical system led to problems in the emotional system that, in turn, impacted the social system.

Viewing foster children, foster parents, and foster care workers as separate

systems provides an alternative application of systems theory. Boundaries exist between the foster parents, foster children, and the foster care workers. Although each is a component of the larger foster care system, each is also a smaller complete system. The responsibilities associated with the foster care workers create a special role that cannot be fulfilled by either of the other two systems. However, without the other two systems, the foster care worker system would not be functional. Foster children, likewise, depend on the other two systems for survival. If there are not foster children or foster workers, there is no need for the foster parent system. Each is interdependent and overlapping. Feedback is provided by each system to each of the other systems to improve functionality. By definition, this description is an open system.

The idea of an open and interactive system is consistent with Doll (1993). Doll's work on curriculum is important in viewing the foster care training curriculum. Understanding the integration of biological, psychological, and social development factors in the successful development of children is consistent with Doll's (1993) view of complexity theory. In fact, according to Hudson (2000), one of the most extensive applications of "chaos theory has been in the area of biological sciences" (p. 224). Complexity theory, or chaos theory in this context, is at an "intermediate point on the continuum which ranges from the completely periodic and predictable to the totally random" (Hudson, 2000, p. 219).

4.3 Parent Resources for Information, Development, and Education (PRIDE)

The core training material for foster parents is the Parent Resources for Information, Development, and Education (PRIDE) curriculum. The PRIDE training program is discussed at length in this section. In addition to the basic information

provided by PRIDE, each individual agency licensing foster homes is allowed to introduce supplemental materials. Such materials should assist the foster parents in their understanding of the particular group of foster children served by the agency. This specialized information is designed to be inserted in the training manual on formatted blank pages with topical headings and the following caption: "to be added by agency" (PRIDE, 2003, p. 266). For example, an agency that primarily places adolescents may have supplemental information on the psychological needs of teens and information about peer-group influences. However, an agency that places foster children with cognitive disabilities may include material about completing tasks associated with activities of daily living activities, i.e., grocery shopping and laundry. Likewise, an agency with placement responsibilities for foster children with physical developmental delays may include information about public accessibility and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Prior to 2003, agencies that licensed foster homes in Michigan were permitted to develop their own training curriculum for foster parents. Downs et al. (1996) has reported that curricula have been developed in several areas (including statewide interactive training in Kentucky). These have been the result of collaborative efforts among state universities and the public child welfare agency, such as the *Fostering Families* series developed at the School of Social Work at Colorado State University. Other efforts have included Eastern Michigan University's 17 course outlines and yearly training conferences sponsored by both the National Foster Parent Association and the Association of Treatment Homes.

In 2003, this mid-western state's Department of Human Service (DHS) agency

issued one manual to be utilized for all foster parent training programs. This manual was an attempt to standardize the training content, ensure a broad base of knowledge, and build a common skill set for all foster situations foster parents would likely encounter. PRIDE (2003) has included a sample of training topics for foster parents, including “handling lying, dishonesty, [and] destructive behavior” as well as “fostering sexually abused children, medically fragile children and religion in the foster home” (p. 83).

A sample of necessary core information to be included in the required training is information about grief and loss; information about non-violent discipline; and information about children’s safety, health, nutrition, and psychological well being. Other relevant core topics include anger management, academic concerns, and coping with the biological families. The result of the collaboration between DHS and the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) was the Parent Resources for Information Development and Education publication, also referred to as the PRIDE manual. The PRIDE manual developed by CWLA has now assumed the status of the official manual for training foster parents in many states. The PRIDE manual contains the standardized curriculum for nine three-hour sessions designed to equip foster parents to handle a variety of situations that may occur as a result of routine of daily living activities. These situations, for example, include guidelines for how foster parents should respond if the foster child wishes to contact his or her biological parent, if the foster child needs a haircut, if the foster child threatens to run away, or if the foster child needs medical care. More complex issues foster parents may face include theft in the home, sexually inappropriate behavior, or hoarding food.

4.3.1 Theoretical Framework for Curriculum Assessment

Doll (1993), Erikson (1968), and Cross (1991) have provided multiple curricula lenses through which the PRIDE foster parent training program can be viewed. All three viewpoints are vital in forming a complete theoretical framework for examining racial and cultural identity in foster children. This trifurcation is necessary to build a comprehensive platform for analysis of PRIDE. Erikson (1968) has outlined the basic developmental tasks that are essential for foster parents to have benchmarks. Theories of identity formulation have been built on the work of Erikson (1968). The complication emerges as Erikson's (1968) theory is superimposed upon children who are in the foster care system. Foster children by virtue of their tenuous status are in limbo about their roles within a family and within the broader society. Cultural identification is a multi-faceted concept that begins in infancy with the biological family, continues through early childhood, reaches its apex in adolescence, and is often refined throughout the lifespan (Cross, 1991; Erikson, 1968). Cross's (1991) contribution to this study is his nigrescence theory, which focuses on development of a positive Black identity.

4.3.1.1 Doll's Lens

Doll (1993) has provided a wide-angle lens with the postmodern perspective. Addressing the emotional needs of foster children necessitates an open mind and an open system. Doll's postmodern perspective by definition is an open system. Doll has provided the most relevant framework within which to undertake a critical examination of the foster care training curriculum. Although Cross (1991) and Erikson (1968) have provided theoretical focus for other segments of this study, only Doll, as a curriculum theorist, has provided the tools to undertake an examination of cultural and racial

identity as illustrated in the PRIDE curriculum. In 1993, Doll developed an approach to educational curriculum development that relied on the concept of an open system. His vision was reflective and emphasized a continual search “for the relations between ideas and meanings” (p. xi). He envisioned curricula as viable, vibrant, and interactive. There was a flow of ideas from the system of the learner to the system of the teacher. Parents have recognized that the needs of even two biological children may require different strategies. Maslow (1971) has written of his surprisingly different personal experiences when his children were born. He recalled that his first baby changed him as a psychologist and his philosophical paradigm. At the birth of his first child, his previous orientation as a behaviorist “look[ed] so foolish that [he] could not stomach it anymore” (p. 163). Further, his second baby taught him “how profoundly different people are even at birth” (p. 163). As a result, foster parents who have been charged with raising someone else’s children, and not having influenced them from birth, require various approaches to accommodate the diverse needs of foster children.

Doll’s (1993) postmodern view is aligned with Erikson’s perspective. In this regard, Doll has indicated that “future experiences and behaviors will emerge from present experiences and behaviors” (p. 68). Doll has addressed the relationship, or rather the interconnectedness, of life experiences. This approach, if adopted, for the foster parent pre-service curriculum, could provide a strong foundational base. In the case of minority children, a traditional theory of racial identity formation (Cross, 1991) and a postmodern perspective (Doll, 1993) form a lens for critical analysis of the PRIDE foster parent training curriculum. Doll’s work as a curriculum theorist is first introduced in Chapter 1 of this study. His postmodern perspective parallels social work’s emerging

worldview and is compared and contrasted with social work's fundamental system theory in Chapter 2. Doll's paradigm can be juxtaposed to the foster parent training curriculum.

4.3.1.2 Erikson

One such need is identity formation. No scholarly work of identity formation can be complete without Erikson (1959, 1964), who has been acknowledged as the father of identity theory (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2010). Discussion of Erikson is threaded throughout this study and reviewed here. In Erikson's (1968) psychosocial theory, the eight stages of development he proposed each includes a "crisis" that, if resolved well, "makes an individual better prepared to cope with the next" crisis (p. x). Erikson (1968) has explored the formation of identity during the adolescent stage. The numerous opportunities for personal identity development provide opportunities, challenges, and at times confusion. The possibility of multiple roles or multiple facets of an individual personality can result in what Erikson has labeled "role confusion" (p. 261). The PRIDE foster parent training curriculum does not address identity and role confusion directly. Foster children struggle with the roles of biological child and foster child, biological sibling and foster sibling, a student at their home school and a student at their new school near the foster home, and biological relative and foster relative. Each of these junctures brackets identity formulation and guides foster children to positive identity and, hopefully, a balanced personality. Additionally, there may be dual social roles and career exploration.

4.3.1.3 Cross

Cross's work, formation of racial identity, is also overlaid onto the PRIDE

curriculum. Racial disproportionality in the child welfare system necessitates the study of African American racial identity. Cross (1991) has linked concepts related to racial identity with theories of Black identity development. Cross's focus on the nigrescence model is relevant for discussion here based on the disproportionate number of African American foster children to African American foster homes. Cross's (1991) work on Black identity development is essential for inclusion in foster parent training. Because African American children have been disproportionately represented in the foster care system, the probability that a Black child will be placed transracially is higher than a White child being placed in an African American home. Nevertheless, both scenarios were present in this study's population. Crumbley's (1999) work on racial identity has been viewed as less academic and more practical for active foster parents. Crumbley's (1999) work, like the PRIDE manual (2003), was published by the Child Welfare League of America and appears to have been designed to convey resources and practical tips for active foster parents. Both appear to focus on acquiring knowledge rather than on skill development.

Even a cursory view of the racial composition of the children in the child welfare system reveals a higher percentage of children of color than of White children in foster care and available for adoption (AFCARS, FY 2009; Equity Report, 2006). Thus, the concern of identity development for children of color assumes a higher priority based on numerical values alone, and Cross's work is the lens preferred here for racial analysis. The work of Doll, Erikson, and Cross has provided the platform to critically examine the foster care training curriculum.

While Erikson's focus has been on universal identity formulation, Cross (1991),

on the other hand, has focused on identity development as it relates to Black identity or, as in this study, African American identity. The PRIDE manual, in Session V, utilizes a literary rather than an academic reference to illustrate the need to support “the development of positive cultural identity” (PRIDEbook, 2003, p. 159). A quotation from Toni Morrison’s book *The Bluest Eye* illustrates the plight of “a young Black girl who wanted to have blue eyes so she could be as beautiful as all the blond-haired blue-eyed children at school” (p. 159). Session V in the PRIDE manual conveys to foster parents their responsibility as part of the foster care team “to assist children to develop positive self-esteem” (p. 159). Young Black girls will not be able to change their eye color to blue nor their skin color to white. Therefore, it becomes the responsibility of foster parents to share a cultural identity that is more obtainable and culturally appropriate. The PRIDE manual continues with the idea that the best way to accomplish this task is through support of family relationships. The remaining emphasis of Session V is on family relationships, including sibling bonding, parental responsibilities, and family continuity.

Time during the session is allocated for the development of an ecomap. Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman (2010) have suggested that an ecomap provides a visual representation of family members within their social environment. Ecomaps have been used by social workers and clients to conduct family assessments and identify appropriate interventions. The PRIDE manual, however, uses the ecomap to create a drawing that represents the foster family’s “connection to the other individuals and to the community” (p. 148). An ecomap consists of a circle centered on a page with a series of smaller circles surrounding the larger circle. Lines connect the circles and represent

relationships (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2010). The PRIDE manual suggests that the foster family be placed in the center circle with the other circles labeled “friends” and other community connections. The connecting lines illustrate relationships in the social environment. As the emphasis is on total inclusion of the foster child in the family, the foster child is understandably placed in the centered family circle.

However, if cultural identity is the goal, as in this study, an alternative view could be entertained. One scenario would be to place the foster child and identity development in the center circle and place family, friends, and other community connections in the outside circles. This suggests a postmodern view and a paradigm shift and is illustrated in Figure 4.1.

4.3.2 Curriculum Analysis

The exploration of the curriculum in this study aligns with a postmodern approach as do other aspects of this study. This theoretical outlook always incorporates multiple ways of thinking. Although Doll's (1993) perspective is the primary point of view, this outlook also incorporates other mindsets. Frankel and Wallen (2003) have provided content analysis instructions for the researcher indicating that the researcher should “have a specific research question in mind beforehand” (p. 485). The research question addressed in this study was “How do the foster parent training curricula address racial identity development?” Of particular interest was the training received related to cultural identity issues with the idea that all foster parents would be prepared to address transracial concerns if any emerged.

An extensive review of the PRIDE manual identified words and phrases associated with the development and support of cultural and racial identity. The

definitions in Chart 4.1 below constitute the terms identified for inclusion here. Unless otherwise noted, the definitions have been provided by the researcher as defined within the context of this study. Each of the seven sessions, including the supplemental material and annotated bibliography in the PRIDE manual, was analyzed for key words; the words were manually counted, and then all closely related terms were grouped together.

Chart 4.1
Analysis Terms

Term	Definition
Black Males	term used to refer to men of African descent, especially those who were born in America
Children of Color	refers to people under the age of 18 who are members of a non-dominant group, more commonly of African American descent
Culture	the total life experience, including language, clothing, food, art, and music
Cultural Identity	a voluntarily association with a specific life experience shared by a group of people, such as community of clothing, food, art, etc. with which one connects his or her sense of self
Different Culture	indicates at least two racial or cultural groups
Ethnic	pertains to or characteristic of a people, esp. a group (ethnic group) sharing a common and distinctive culture, religion, or language (www.dictionary.com)
Ethnicity	ethnic traits, background, allegiance, or association (www.dictionary.com)
Hair/Skin Care	the use of appropriate products for grooming and styling
Identity	a personal definition of self
Minority Group	a member of one of the non-dominant groups in American society
Racial	of or pertaining to physical characteristics, such as hair texture, skin color
Racial Identity	a personal affiliation with a specific racial group
Racism	the action form of discrimination solely based on skin color or other physical characteristics
Skin Color	the absence or presence of pigmentation resulting in the coloring of one's body
Transracial	involving or between two or more races (www.dictionary.com)

A method of classification that allowed the “categories to emerge as the analysis continues,” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003, p. 484) was utilized. The terms were coded for frequency. It was important to know how many references were made to terms, not just whether or not the terms appeared in the PRIDE manual. For example, the term “cultural identity” appears 15 times in Session V but only twice in Session III. If cultural identity had been coded for existence rather than frequency, the term would appear only once rather than a total of 17 times in these two sessions (see Tables 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3). However, in this qualitative study, the single inclusion of any term related to racial and cultural identity was deemed important.

Another matter requiring attention was the degree of generalization used during the classification process. In other words, should concepts be coded exactly as they appear in the PRIDE manual, or should all forms of the word be considered? Table 4.3, Session V, provides this example: The terms “cultural” and “culture” are both initially coded as they appear in the text. Later, both terms are grouped into the larger category of “culture” and appear in Table 4.3 as such. The grouping of codes into categories represents themes or major ideas from the descriptive material (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003).

Table 4.1
Session III – Meeting Developmental Needs: Attachment

Term	# of Occurrences	Total Category	Category Code
Child's Culture	1		
Cultural Identity	2	3	Culture Identity
Ethnic Identity	1	1	Ethnic
	Total Session III	4	

Table 4.2
Session IV – Meeting Developmental Needs: Loss

Term	# of Occurrences	Total Category	Category Code
Cultural Affiliation	1		
Cultural Heritage	1	2	Culture Identity
	Total Session IV	2	

Table 4.3
Session V – Strengthening Family Relationships

Term	# of Occurrences	Total Category	Category Code
Culture	4		
Child's Culture	1		
Cultural	6	11	Culture
Cultural Identity	15	15	Cultural Identity
Ethnicity	2		
Ethnic Group	3	8	
Ethnic Identity	3		Ethnicity
Minority Group	4	4	Minority Group
Race	3		
Racial Group	1	9	
Racial Identity	5		Racial
Skin Color	2	2	Skin Color
	Total Session V	49	

The term “African American child” occurs only once in Session VIII (Table 4.4) but is included based on the over representation of African American children in the foster care system (Billingsley, 1972; Downs et al., 1996; Rothschild & Ekas, 2004). However, since it is mentioned only once in the entire training curriculum, this term melts into the larger “children of color” category. The “children of color” category also includes the terms “people of color” and “families of color” all from Session I.

Table 4.4
Session VIII – Planning for Change

Term	# of Occurrences	Total Category	Category Code
African American Child	1	1	Children of Color

Culture Cultural Issues	2	2	Culture
Identity	1	1	Identity
Race	1	1	Racial
Special hair or skin care	2	2	Hair/Skin Care
	Total Session VIII	7	

Similarly, the term “Black males” from Session VII (Table 4.9) also occurred only once but is present for categorization. Unlike the terms that constitute the “children of color” category, the term “Black males” does not seem to blend easily into the “children of color” category. The term “Black males” usually refers to adults of African American descent (Analysis of Terms, Chart 4.1) but not to males of African American descent less than 18 years of age or those within the age range of children in foster care, usually less than 18 years of age.

Session VI contained no terms relevant for this study, but it is interesting to note here, as cultural differences in discipline are not acknowledged within the PRIDE curriculum. Disciplinary measures are standardized by the licensing agency and are not subject to individual cultural influences. Item five on the list of 15 in-session learning objectives for Session VI is “explain the agency’s policy on discipline” (p. 177). Probably the most helpful aspect of this session on discipline is the chart that compares discipline to punishment (p. 182). The explanation supports discipline as preventive and a technique to avoid punitive behavior. Punishment is depicted as reactive, hierarchical, and undesirable.

The supplement to the PRIDE manual, *Promoting Safety, Permanence, and Well Being*, is packed with the basic nine sessions. For the purposes of this study, this supplemental information was divided into three additional sections and was also

subjected to content analysis. Part 1, “Promoting Safety,” contained no terms relevant for this study and therefore is not included. The same was true of Part 3, “Promoting Well Being,” which also made no mention of identity development-related terms. Only Part 2, “Promoting Permanence” (Table 4.5), contained terms relevant for this study.

Table 4.5
Part Two – Promoting Permanence

Term	# of Occurrences	Total Category	Category Code
Culture	1	2	Culture
Cultural Experience	1		
Cultural Identity	1	2	Cultural Identity
Sense of Culture	1		
Ethnic	1	1	Ethnic
Identity	1	1	Identity
Racial Identity	1	1	Racial Identity
	Total Part 2	7	

4.3.3 Content Analysis

Royce (1999) and Frankel and Wallen (2003) provided information used for the content analysis. Royce’s audience consists of members of the social work profession, and that work represents the unique characteristics of research within that domain. Royce (1999) has addressed the value orientation and ethical parameters stipulated by professional social workers, while Frankel and Wallen have targeted the education system and appropriate methodology for research within that setting.

Royce (1999) has detailed five steps for conducting content analysis. As mentioned in a previous section, Frankel and Wallen (2003) also have asserted that these steps begin with the formulation of a research question. Royce (1999) has defined the first level of content analysis as manifest content, or the “counting of individual words [or] expressions” (p. 216), whereas Frankel and Wallen (2003) have

suggested that the units for analysis “should be specified before the researcher begins the analysis” (p. 485). For this study, groups of words related to culture, racial or ethnic identity or heritage became the units for analysis.

Royce’s Step 2, deciding on source materials, was primarily limited to the PRIDE manual. The universal requirement for mandatory use of the PRIDE curriculum curtailed the scope of materials that might otherwise have been analyzed. Agencies are allowed, not required, to augment the training materials if desired. However, this study reviewed the supplemental training materials used by the private child welfare agency of the foster care workers who were participants in this study.

Step 3 involves the process of deciding “units of analysis or recording units” (p. 217). Royce noted a common mistake of counting key words only and possibly missing closely related terms. Also note that the terms “ethnic backgrounds” and “ethnic groups” are individually tabulated in Table 4.6. Both derivations were listed, reviewed, and then grouped into the larger category “ethnic,” which also contains other related concepts. Weber’s (1990) method is supported by Royce (1999) and suggests that many words or phrases necessarily should be grouped into categories if the meanings are similar. Royce has warned the researcher to avoid self-imposed restrictions by limiting the analysis to only one form of a word. Again, Table 4.7 groups the terms “culture” and “cultural” in the same larger category. Weber (1990) has extended this advice to suggest that classifications can be made based on “precise meaning of the words” such as synonyms, or common connotations (p. 12).

Table 4.6
Session I – Connecting with PRIDE

Term	# of Occurrences	Total Category	Category Code
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Culture	3		
Cultures	3	6	Culture
Culture Identity	3		
Culture Heritage	1	4	Cultural Identity
Transracial Placement	2	2	Transracial
Ethnic Perspective	1		
Ethnic	1		
Backgrounds	1	3	Ethnic
Ethnic Groups			
Children of Color	4		
People of Color	1		
Families of Color	2	7	Children of Color
Racism	1	1	Racism
	Total Session I	23	

Table 4.7
Session II – Teamwork and Permanence

Term	# of Occurrences	Total Category	Category Code
Culture	1		
Cultural	2	3	Culture
Cultural Heritage	2	2	Cultural Identity
Identity	2	2	Culture
	Total Session II	7	

The source material chosen for review is Royce's Step 4. For this research, Step 4 was included in the research design. The PRIDE manual was determined to be the standard and required manual for training; therefore, using this material for content analysis seemed appropriate. Supplemental material attached to the PRIDE manual, which was not a part of the nine sessions, was also included in the analysis. Likewise, resource information, such as the annotated bibliography (Table 4.8) of the PRIDE curriculum, was considered.

Table 4.8
Annotated Bibliography

Term	# of Occurrences	Total Category	Category Code
Cultural Identities	2	2	Cultural Identity

Identity	1	1	Identity
Racial Identities	2	2	Racial Identity
Racism	1	1	Racism
	Total Bibliography	6	

As mentioned earlier, agencies are allowed to supplement, not substitute, the PRIDE training, and the private not-for-profit agency in this study did so. The agency's foster parent policies and its foster parent program mission statement are examples of pre-approved supplemental material. Additionally, this agency developed a game, similar to a popular television game show, using the most frequent answers by foster parents to questions that were likely to surface. In this game, questions were asked of 100 foster parents, and their top eight responses were ranked in order of frequency of response. This was designed to generate topical discussion about the most frequently asked questions and their most popular answers. The additional material in the training packet provided for foster parents also underwent manifest content analysis but contained no references to any of the previously identified terms.

Royce's (1999) fifth and final step suggests rating of the same material by multiple readers in an attempt to establish inter-rater reliability. Likewise, Weber (1990) agreed that "different people should code the same text in the same way" (p. 12). The results of additional readers of the PRIDE manual, who each surveyed Session V, "Strengthening Family Relationship," showed little variation in terms identified by the researcher.

Session VII (Table 4.9) contained the highest number of items related to cultural identity. As previously discussed, the items related to cultural identity were counted for frequency. The more often a concept was mentioned, the more importance. Session

VII contains the most relevant information for foster parents who must convey positive racial identity to their foster children. Regarding validity, Weber (1990) has argued that validity exists if the variable “measures or represents what the investigator intends it to measure” (p. 12). The items in Table 4.9 represent aspects of racial and cultural identity noted in the session on family relationships.

Table 4.9
Session VII – Continuing Family Relationships

Term	# of Occurrences	Total Category	Category Code
Black Males	1	1	Black Males
Child of a Different Race or Culture	2	4	Different Culture/Race
Child of another Culture	2		
Culture/Culture	7	12	Culture
Cultural	1		
Competence	2		
Cultural Issues	2		
Cultural Identity	1	1	Cultural Identity
Discrimination	1	1	Racism
Heritage	1	1	Cultural Identity
Racism	2	2	Racism
Transracial	1	3	Transracial
Transracial Placement	2		
	Total Session VII	25	

Because foster parents begin the training program with diverse values, diverse lifestyles, diverse ages, diverse races, and different genders, it is more than obvious that all essential training would require a postmodern perspective. Each of the parts of the three-fold theoretical lens of Erikson (1968), Cross (1991), and Doll (1993) is important in providing a comprehensive understanding of racial and cultural identity in foster children who are placed in homes which are racially and culturally different.

Especially key here is Doll's perspective. The postmodern worldview allowing for "multiple ways" of knowing incorporates the major tenets of Doll's (1993) curriculum concept, especially the idea of an open system. An open system allows an unrestricted flow of energy between its components. In this instance, foster parents and foster children are two major components of the foster care system. Foster children's understanding of racial and cultural identity is communicated to foster parents both verbally and behaviorally. The foster parents' concept of racial and cultural identity is likewise transmitted to foster children. Further, each foster child and each foster parent may have a different interpretation. The postmodern model requires multiple views of the same matter. Racial/cultural identity is manifested in the postmodern view by acceptance of alternative ways to understand racial equity. If the power differential between the races is not accepted as the norm, the racial groups previously considered inferior can be elevated to a more equal status.

The PRIDE training curriculum's content in Session V best represents Doll's curriculum intent. Session V (Table 4.3) exemplifies each of Doll's four "R's." The high number of identified terms, 15 references to "cultural identity" and 11 references to "culture" or "cultural" illustrate Doll's concept of recursion. Other examples of the repetition of terms are the nine references to "race" and eight notations in the "ethnicity" category. The 11 separate terms which form the category code "culture" provide an illustration of richness. The category term "culture" has three distinct components that provide layers of meaning, Doll's second "R" is "richness." The term "cultural" is used six times, the term "child's culture" is mentioned once, but the term "culture" is mentioned four times. This is an example of the concept of culture assuming more than

one interpretation, or “richness” in the parlance of Doll (1991). There is an inherent connection between the concept of children’s culture and the concept of culture. The first term is a more specific version of the later and is Doll’s third “R,” “relations.” Rigor, the fourth “R,” is better exemplified by the 15 references to “cultural identity.” This term appears 15 times and registers more the “cultural” category with 11. The “cultural identity” term is strong, firm, and has rigor.

The rights of biological parents, foster children’s development of positive cultural identity, and the concerns of the foster family are each stated in the in-session or at-home learning objectives in Session V. Four of the 16 in-session learning sessions objectives focus on the following: “What meanings do foster parents assign to transracial foster care experiences?”

1. Describe the connection between family relationships and the child’s self-esteem, personal identity, and cultural identity.
2. Describe the impact of placement on the child’s self-esteem, personal identity, and cultural identity.
3. Describe how positive cultural identity develops in a child.
4. Identify age-appropriate strategies for positive cultural identity.

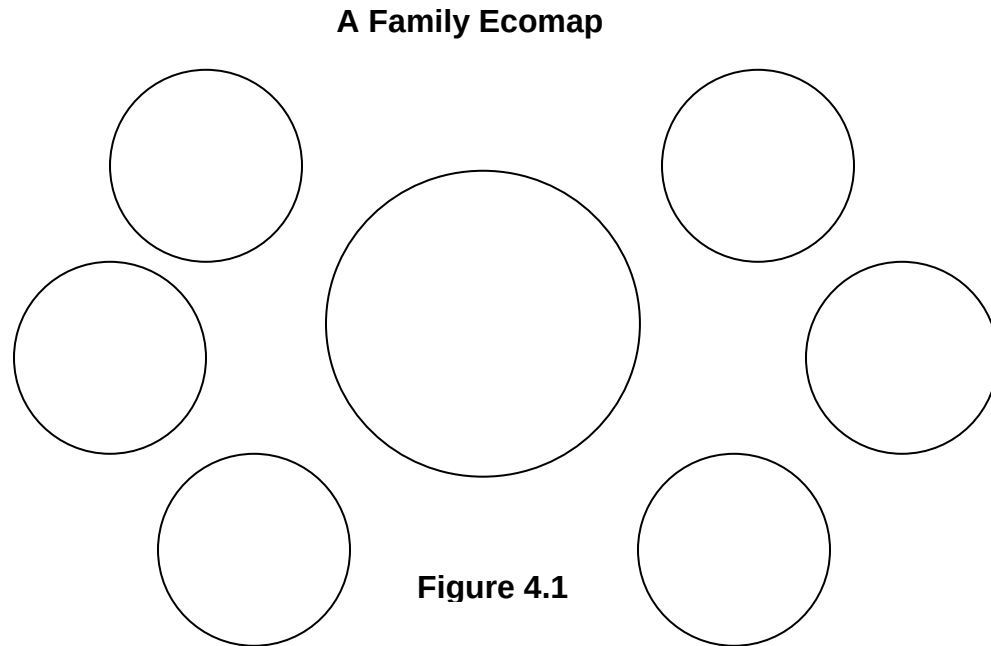
The selected session objectives again confirm the appropriateness of Doll’s application of a postmodern curriculum that features the idea of an open system. Note that the objectives range from family relationships to the child’s personal view of self. The child’s self-esteem is evaluated in light of the “impact of placement.” The child’s developmental age, considering physical, social, and psychological factors, is brought to bear on cultural identity. This dynamic relationship is an example of system input and

openness. Crumbley's (1999) development of racial identity along age divisions is one aspect of Doll's layering for richness. With the addition of instructions for creating an ecomap, Doll's concept of relationship is crystal clear. Note this explanation from the PRIDE manual to foster parents: "The ecomap represents your family's connections to other individuals and to the community" (p. 148). For this purpose, the ecomap is used as tool to illustrate relationships. The PRIDE manual lists six detailed steps designed to construct an ecomap. The instructions support multiple relationships and complexity of interactions. Following are the first two steps abridged for inclusion here (PRIDEbook, 2003, p. 148).

1. The large circle in the center represents your family. In a circle, put smaller circles representing the people who live in your home.
2. The circles on the top left represent friends and family. Circles connected by straight lines indicate positive and supportive relationships.

The remaining steps focus on various connections in the foster family's community, including medical clinics, schools, day care, or other resources. Also included is identification of financial resources and employment sources. The last circle represents voluntary participation in the community, such as organizations, clubs, and church.

Figure 4.1 illustrates an Ecomap format.



The ecomap is designed to reflect the specifics character of the foster family who authors it. There is flexibility within the design that enables the outer circles to contain connections with sources that may not be pertinent for another family.

The examples of ecomaps in the PRIDE manual graphically illustrate how foster families can enhance a spectrum of interactions. The pages immediately preceding the ecomap instructions focus on “prompting positive racial identity” (PRIDEbook, 2003, p.146). Positive family and community relationships are identified in the ring of outer circles. These connections assist in reinforcing positive racial identity and are evidence of rigor, richness, and relationships.

The outline of PRIDE’s Session V at the beginning of the chapter portends the development of positive racial identity (p. 144). The inclusion of an ecomap as an instrument for reinforcing family relationship directs the foster family to another route to achieve the goal of racial and cultural identity. Multiple ways to the end goal echoes

Doll's (1993) perspective.

Another pillar of Doll's postmodern perspective is valuing differences. A fixed response to the environment does not allow deviation from the expectations; in other words, it does not require a predictable response. Foster parents who hail from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, diverse races, diverse ethnic groups, and diverse family configurations need an approach to training which acknowledges such differences. Many people may begin with the idea that foster care is a great opportunity to "help kids." Some of these well-meaning people do not really understand the personal commitment that fostering involves. Some people decide that the time commitment is too great. Others decide that the financial commitment is more than they can afford. Still others decide that the impact on their family would not be favorable and later withdraw from the process. A sensitive and flexible approach to pre-service training allows for support of the foster parents as they struggle to negotiate such barriers. Session I of the PRIDE training program contains a letter to prospective foster parents. Following is an excerpt that acknowledges various responses to the initial session:

You need to educate us about you and your ideas about adopting or fostering. Then we will make the best decision about whether fostering is right for you or adoption. Remember, sometimes folks decide that neither fostering nor adopting is right at this time. That's okay, too. What's important is to make the right decision, together. (p. 7)

This statement above serves as a preemptive explanation for some people who begin the process but eventually wish to withdraw from participation in the foster care system. It is understood that an interest in foster parenting may not be sufficient to drive the entire process. Education about foster care is provided only after parents are able to make an informed decision regarding their participation. The right choice made at the

right time for the Jones family could also be the right choice for the Garcia family but the wrong time. The postmodern view accounts for right choices with diverse family situations.

Multiple ways of understanding and interpreting one's experience are integral to Doll's work in the area of curriculum and training. Doll introduced the innovative concept when he unveiled his new curriculum focus in 1993, which incorporated an expanded concept of diversity. His work has forced educators and curriculum specialists to reexamine their philosophy of education and to design instructional programs to best meet the needs of the people the programs are designed to serve. A postmodern approach provides the best opportunity to recognize the individual needs of foster parents and foster children as well as their connection to the larger foster care system.

Lewis (2004) has taken a myopic view of Doll (1993). Lewis (2004), while exploring Doll's (1993) pedagogy, has interpreted the postmodern curriculum as allowing learners to understand issues at a local level, while simultaneously connecting these same issues to a "larger global community" (p. 119). Doll's postmodern perspective, although essential to address relevance issues facing foster parents and children, has been partially utilized in addressing racial identity development in the PRIDE pre-service curriculum. Traditionally, the three "R's" represented reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic (Lewis, 2004). Doll (1993), however, shifted the paradigm and has formulated a new order of curriculum with his four "R's."

Manifest content analysis only partially encompasses close examination of terms or concepts in documents. Simply identifying and counting the number of occurrences

of an item is helpful but does not provide complete information necessary for a comprehensive understanding. Royce (1999) has expanded the scope of content analysis to include a second stage. After “searching for and counting key words, phases, or concepts in communication” (p. 211), there is a more complex stage of analysis that can be conducted. This second stage, examining latent content (Royce, 1999; Frankel & Wallen, 2003), extends the examination beyond basic counting and seeks to understand the meaning through “interpretative reading” (Royce, 1999, p. 217). Latent content “refers to the meaning underlying what is said” (Frankel & Wallen, 2003, p. 487) and in this situation is relevant to cultural identity development in foster children.

Tabulations of the manifest content analysis contained in tables 4.1 through 4.8 provide a foundation for the latent content analysis. The key terms were selected because of their relevance to the research question exploring racial and cultural identity. Subsequently, the actual terms “cultural identity,” “cultural heritage,” and “racial identity” were counted and the meaning explored. Stages of racial identity development by biological age intervals are explained along with step-by-step instructions for promoting “positive racial and cultural identity” (PRIDEbook, 2003, p. 146). Although the list contains only general statements, it addresses relationships between the foster child, the foster family, and the larger society. The following excerpt illustrates a shift from a micro focus to a macro focus; “The child and his or her minority group have the same rights and entitlements as members of the dominant group” (p. 146). With this assertion, a foster child from a “minority group” is paired with the larger society. No secondary class or minority status is accepted as less than any other. Further, PRIDE encourages the foster parent to broaden the child’s awareness to include information

about “historic figures” and the child’s own cultural “group’s accomplishments, capacities, value, and culture” (p. 146). The most frequently used term in the PRIDE curriculum was “culture” and its derivatives. “Culture,” in variable frequencies, appears in seven of the nine sessions. Clearly, the authors of the PRIDE curriculum were concerned about the inclusion of cultural information.

Curiously, cultural competency is not on the master list in Session I as a training competency. It is, however, mentioned 10 times in Session I (table 4.6). It is not specifically defined, but the meaning is tacit within the context. Since Session I is designed to “spell out the knowledge and skills (known as “competencies”) that successful foster families...need” (p. 15), why wouldn’t “cultural competency” be listed? A cursory review of PRIDE leaves the impression that a perspective sensitive to diverse groups is foremost. The term “culture” is sprinkled throughout the manual. If culture is important in the training of foster parents, it is a logical conclusion that foster parents should be culturally competent, yet this emphasis on competency is absent from the master list of what foster parents need to know. Cultural competence links to other related concepts, such as “exploring the ways in which families support a child’s identity, cultural heritage, and self-esteem” (p. 15). Linking identity with heritage and self-esteem telegraphs to foster parents what needs to be understood about foster children’s identity.

A few other terms, though lacking recursion, are nonetheless important. “Hair” and “skin color” were mentioned only four times (Tables 4.3, 4.4) out of a total of 130 but were a constant theme in the interviews of foster parents and foster workers. Lack of hair and skin care training is a conspicuous oversight. This is clearly an identified

area where additional training is urgently needed. Interestingly, the term “racism” (see Table 4.6) was mentioned only three times (one additional time in the annotated bibliography) and then only in an historical and macro context. Individuals must examine their own feelings about race before tackling the emotionally charged subject of racism. PRIDE gives superficial attention to this subject of utmost importance when operating within a transracial foster family.

4.4 Applicability to Study

In delineating the history of child welfare in America during Session I, the PRIDE manual (2003) highlights the “impact of poverty, homelessness, and racism on the child welfare system” (p. 27). In Session VII, with emphasis on family relationships, foster parents are told “to teach children about racism” and teach family members “how to handle racism” (p. 238). However, the “how to” for instructing the foster parents to teach their family members is not evident. The concepts of “transracial” or “transracial placement” were mentioned but only four times. Each reference to the transracial idea was in conjunction with permanency planning and the need “to support children’s developing identity when they are in transracial placements” (p. 17). Permanency planning in the PRIDE manual includes adoption only because foster care, by definition, is temporary. The concept of “transracial foster care” is inferred in instructions to the foster parents.

Session V (Table 4.3) of the PRIDE training is designed to “recognize the impact that family relationships have on self-esteem, personal identity, and cultural identity” (PRIDEbook, 2003, p. 313). Consistent with this stated purpose, the content analysis revealed the highest number of terms, with 49 from five large categories. Only Session

VII (Table 4.8), with an emphasis on continuing family relationships, has more categories, at six, with 25 terms tabulated. The connection between cultural identity development and the foster parent training is primarily contained in these two sessions. Session V (Table 4.3) has the only reference in the curriculum to minority group, racial group, or skin color. Each of these terms is relevant to a discussion of cultural identity. Skin color is a socially recognized marker for racial group affiliation. Minority group status in America is defined by the non-dominant racial group or the racial group with fewer people; hence, the dichotomy of majority versus minority. Race is a component of cultural identity.

A review of the item tabulations from the PRIDE manual illustrates the recurring concepts related to the development of racial and cultural identity. There are 25 related terms (Table 4.8) in Session VII. The grouped terms were reviewed for commonality, and a general term was identified which served as a category code. In Session I, for example (Table 4.6), the following terms appeared: “culture,” “cultures,” “cultural identity,” and “cultural heritage.” The base concept and repeated word is “culture.” Therefore, the category code became “culture.” This same method was utilized for each group of terms found in the PRIDE manual, resulting in larger categories related to racial and cultural identity.

Fifteen composite categories emerged as significant for this study. There is clear evidence of recursion. Lewis (2004) has stated that “recursion...helps curriculum grow in richness” (p. 119). Doll’s (1993) concept of richness, when applied, leaves one with feelings of inadequacy. One glaring omission occurs as the areas of competencies are enumerated in Session I.

Chart 4.2
Cumulative Results

Category Code	Total Occurrences
Black Males	1
Children of Color	8
Culture	38
Cultural Identity	32
Different Culture/Race	4
Ethnic	5
Ethnicity	8
Hair/Skin Care	2
Identity	3
Minority Group	4
Racial	9
Racial Identity	4
Racism	5
Skin Color	2
Transracial	5
Grand Total	120

Absent from the instructional curriculum in Session I for new foster parents on “knowledge and skills” needed is cultural competency (p. 11). In Session I, the key elements and focus of the curriculum are set. This method is consistent with Weber (1990), who has suggested that “many words of the text are classified into much fewer content categories” (p. 12). The frequency of terms in these larger categories ranged from a low of 1 to a high of 38 times that one concept was mentioned in a session. Of the 15 categories on the culminate table, all except one code had an occurrence of fewer than 10 times. Eight category codes occurred five times or fewer.

Doll’s “R” of richness is not richly conveyed in this curriculum. An effort at richness can be seen if the curriculum is viewed in totality. This richness is supported by the other “R’s” of recursion and relationship. There is considerable evidence of the third “R,” relationships. The relationships in this study are interwoven and interdependent. Doll (1993) would certainly have nodded approvingly at the intersection

of foster parent, foster children, and cultural identity. This is indeed a complex picture where the PRIDE curriculum could but fails to develop richness. Lewis (2004) has indicated that “richness refers to the curriculum’s openness and layers of meaning” (p. 120). Although the PRIDE curriculum is an open system, input is not solicited from every component of the system. For example, the perspective of foster children is not evident in the curriculum. The limitation of richness essentially forfeits rigor, as it is the element of interpretation.

Additionally, when foster parents are asked to parent across racial lines, the already complex scenario becomes even more complicated and ripe for a postmodern interpretation. Discussions about race create discomfort, as articulated by the participants interviewed for this study. This discomfort cannot be ignored but must be tackled in order to establish a culturally sensitive and appropriate view necessary to reach diverse groups. Such groups in the foster care system include diversity of race, age, values, prejudices, and life experiences. This researcher is unaware of a universal communication model designed to ease conversations related to race and culture. Rather, each discussion on racial and cultural issues dictates an awareness of multiple perspectives in an open system.

The open system is vibrant and exciting, as it pulsates with energy and activity. The relationships among foster parents, foster children, and foster care workers are dynamic and subject to constant change and evolution. These interactive relationships are so dynamic as to seem almost chaotic. It is a vibrant web of activity and exchange producing increased racial understanding and positive racial identity formulation. The PRIDE manual provides an overview of this complex concept of racial identity in two

pages of outlined information. As overviews go, this one is sparse and nearly adequate. It is global in its scope and probably only raises awareness without building skills. The cumulative results (Chart 4.2) record 32 occurrences of the term “cultural identity” and four occurrences of the term “racial identity.” During the mandatory basic training, terms related to development of culture and racial identity are evident in seven of the nine sessions.

Cultural heritage and self-esteem appear again in Session II, with seven related terms identified in the manifest content analysis (Table 4.7). Session V (Table 4.3) provides the strongest format for the most discussion on cultural identity and contains 49 references to terms in the manifest content analysis, the highest number in the curriculum. Session VII (Table 4.8), of the nine total sessions, is the forum for dialogue related to supporting developing identity in transracial placements.

The items on Chart 4.2 form a continuum of frequency from 1 to 38. The term “black males” was mentioned only once, with most terms having fewer than 10 references. Only two terms, “culture” and “cultural identity,” emerged more than 10 times (38 and 32 times, respectively). The PRIDE training curriculum designed for pre-service foster parents does not adequately address the following important concepts to ensure cultural competency: hair/skin care (2 cites), ethnicity (8 cites), racial identity (4 cites), and transracial (4 cites).

4.5 Summary

This chapter examined the PRIDE foster parent training curriculum and its support of the development of cultural identity in foster children. The life experience of foster parents varies to the degree that a common base has to occur in order to ensure

uniform parenting of foster children; furthermore, additional rationale for such training warranted observation. The PRIDE pre-service training is the common ground for foster parents licensed by 14 state child welfare agencies. This chapter analyzed the presence of terms associated with racial and cultural identity in the PRIDE curriculum as indicated in the content and manifest analysis. This initial session of the pre-service training program that delivers the program expectations “spells out the knowledge and skills (known as “competencies”) that successful foster families and adoptive families need” (p. 15). Highlighted in the session are the following five competencies: 1) protecting and nurturing children; 2) meeting children’s developmental needs; 3) supporting relationships between children and their families; 4) connecting children to safe, nurturing relationships; 5) and working as a member of a professional team (PRIDEbook, 2003, p. 11).

This inclusive list of five competencies neither requires nor suggests the need to understand or be proficient in the development of racial or cultural identity. This profound oversight at the beginning of the curriculum is bewildering. Although the major concepts pertaining to racial and cultural identity occur frequently in the curriculum elsewhere, they do not appear to develop depth of understanding, nor do they emphasize the exploration necessary for richness. The addition of companion videos helps to mitigate this situation. Doll’s theoretical lens provides the filter for the PRIDE curriculum.

Recursion, richness, relationship, and rigor form the postmodern curriculum approach. Doll’s four “R’s,” included in varying degrees in the PRIDE training curriculum, connect to racial/cultural identity. Rigor relates directly in this analysis with

recursion. For rigor, the concept of culture identity has strength and stamina throughout the nine sessions. Eight of the nine sessions, plus the annotated bibliography, include some discussion of cultural identity. For example, the topic of cultural identity appears 15 times in Session V, 2 times in Session III and 4 times in Session I. The sporadic inclusion of “cultural” terms signals uneven rigor. Thus, the thread of rigor weaves tightly through some sessions and quite loosely through others.

The “R” of relationship has a scope limited to voices of the adults, i.e., foster parents and foster care workers. It may be that the voice of the foster child is validly silent in the curriculum. After all, the intended audience of PRIDE is the foster parent. PRIDE provides resources for the development and education of parents, not foster children. However, this omission of the foster child’s perspective almost ensures little if any richness, one of the “R’s”. The most identifiable evidence of the four “R’s” is recursion. Chart 4.2 has the composite tabulated results from each session. The culture/cultural identity category totals 70 occurrences, or 64% of all of the terms. This is clearly consistent with Doll’s concept of recursion.

CHAPTER 5 — TRANSRACIAL FOSTER PARENT EXPERIENCES

5.1 Introduction

The primary purpose of this chapter is to describe the variation of meanings foster parents attach to the transracial foster care experience. The researcher has constructed variations of meaning that parents have assigned to transracial foster care experiences based on interviews with foster parents who have experienced transracial foster care. Each variation of meaning is first introduced, and evidence from data is presented in the form of interview excerpts. Based on evidence for each variation of meaning, the researcher provides rich interpretations. In the discussion of parents' meaning-making processes, comments that foster children made are also included because they add much more value to the interpretations. Reflective comments in all excerpts are highlighted in bold font. Essentially, the chapter answers the following research questions outlined in Chapter 1:

1. What meanings do foster parents assign to transracial foster care experiences?
2. What sense do foster children add to parents' meaning about their transracial foster care?

5.2 Variations of Meaning by Foster Parents

The variations of meaning generated from the interview-dialogue between the transracial foster parents and the researcher are as follows: (1) I don't see race! (2) I celebrate racial differences; (3) White with White and Black with Black; (4) Problems in the community but not at home; and (5) What about hair? In the sections below, each variation of meaning is explained and analyzed.

5.2.1 I don't see race!

During the initial foster parent assessment and licensing procedure by the child welfare agency, several foster parents--Joseph, the Smiths, Ms. Patrick, Mrs. Ratcliff, and Harvey and Alexander--expressed no racial preference regarding placement of foster children. While interviewing foster parents for this research study, the researcher observed that Harvey and Alexander's approach to not seeing race was the most powerfully expressed of this group. Although the researcher refers to other respondents, Harvey and Alexander's responses provide a representative illustration of this variation.

Observing the family portrait of a White child and an African American child in Harvey and Alexander's home, the researcher was curious about this transracial foster family. Sitting in the living room at the home of Harvey and Alexander, the researcher asked them to describe their experiences both as foster parents and as adoptive parents. The researcher expressed interest in their parenting experiences when the foster child was of a different race or culture than they were. I asked them to articulate any racial or cultural issues which had surfaced. Excerpt 5A vividly illustrates the non-issue of race.

Excerpt 5A

R: Can you describe your experience fostering? Having adopted your son of a different race, describe in terms of any racial or cultural issues or concerns you may have had...?

Harvey: None. Well, from my perspective, when we were interviewed to become licensed foster parents, we never put on our application...

Alexander: We were given the opportunity to select boy, girl, age range, disability range, and then all the ethnic compositions. What would we be willing to do and not willing to do. **And we left race totally open. That was not a**

deciding factor as far as placement for fostering or adopting.

R: Okay

Harvey: I don't remember really even having a conversation with you about that, in terms of would we or not take someone of a different race. **It [race] was just was not really a point of discussion.**

Alexander: And I remember the agency almost giving us an out if we wanted to put that on the form. The person who did our licensing just **reiterating, you don't have to do outside your race if you don't want to. And I just remember thinking that never crossed my mind. It was more of a concern that we got a child that fit with our work schedules more so than race.**

Harvey: I mean race was...[he was interrupted by Alexander].

Alexander: Age.

Harvey: Yeah, **age was more important. Race never was.**

Harvey was first to respond and without a pause affirmatively said from his perspective no concerns surfaced, and as an exemplar of his statement, he added that neither he nor Alexander had indicated any preference on their foster care application. Passing the conversational baton, Harvey listened as Alexander explained the categories of options they were able to select, including age and gender. Alexander recalled a category on the application where race could have been stipulated, and they saw the line but left it blank. Pondering Alexander's words, Harvey stated there was not even one conversation where race was discussed because race was a non-issue. Alexander recalled that the placement agency's social worker noticed that there was no racial preference indicated and explained that accepting children of a different race was not a requirement, adding further that as prospective foster parents, they would not have to go outside their race. Alexander, while recalling that conversation, thoughtfully added that specifying race "never crossed my mind." Alexander paused, and Harvey

echoed Alexander's sentiment that race was not important, but age was important.

Foster parents are allowed a voice in the selection process of their foster children. Social workers during the licensing process offer a menu of characteristics from which to select foster children. The partial menu of characteristics, as described by Alexander, consisted of gender, age, disability, and race. Race was one choice, and age was also a choice. Interestingly, Harvey and Alexander spoke with one voice when they stated that race was not a deciding factor in the selection of their foster son. Harvey and Alexander seemed to agree, even without discussion, that age was the more important of the two. Harvey pointed out that race was not even a consideration for discussion, and so they skipped that item on their foster home application. Alexander recalled that the licensing worker thought the question of race had been inadvertently overlooked. In this regard, the foster care licensing worker reminded them they had not checked the slot about the desired race of the potential foster child that would be best for them. Harvey and Alexander carefully considered children's characteristics and eliminated those that were unimportant. The foster home licensing worker felt compelled to point out they did not have to accept a child outside their race. Harvey and Alexander did not see race as an issue. After scrutinizing the entire list of characteristics, the one that was dismissed without discussion was race.

Both Harvey and Alexander approached their parental responsibilities without seeing race and thus focused on generic parenting obligations. They did not imagine that race would be a relevant factor for foster parenting, and as they began to parent, they also did not identify any difficulties.

Ms. Patrick also did not see race as a deciding factor in the selection of her foster

children. However, she advanced the idea by introducing the concept of color blindness. Ms. Patrick passionately articulated her idea of color blindness during our interview. Excerpt 5B recounts Ms. Patrick's views on color blindness, and the researcher has highlighted a few pertinent statements from the conversation in **bold font**.

Excerpt 5B

R: Do you think it would be helpful to foster parents if there was material in the training that helps foster parents to relate to kids of [a] different race?

Ms. Patrick: Well, I think probably, if you're talking about predominantly White, which was what my training had and most of the workshops I've gone to have been predominantly White foster parents. **I think the color blindness idea...because there's a huge belief in White culture that if you just ignore color that that's "what nice people do." And that being color blind is the "best thing" that you can do,** because you don't want to be disrespectful because of somebody's gender, or race or social class. So **you ignore it.** But that's not how it's seen. It's seen as being equal or the same and being even and fair and being kind.

I went to a conference, and in doing some activities there was one young couple, who were White, and they were farmers, and they couldn't pick up and move. I mean, you know, their job... it was a family farm they'd been in for generations, and they, after doing some activities, their belief was **'Well, if we love the child, that will be enough.'** After doing some activities, they were just kind of shell-shocked. Oh, maybe we should think about if we adopt a child of color, that it's... that there's gonna be potential problems; we **won't have a role model** in our little rural community of predominantly White, almost all White people.

In fact, they said their school didn't have any children of color when asked. They were kind of sitting there shell-shocked, and I think they were seeing their dreams fall down, and they were just sitting there. And they were like, **'Well, you know, if you love 'em enough...'** (Tuesday, September 23, 2008)

During our interview in the early afternoon on a fall day, Ms. Patrick responded to

my question about the training needs of foster parents who parent foster children of a different race. The researcher was curious about her thoughts on preparing foster parents for the transracial experience. Before responding, Ms. Patrick clarified whether the researcher was asking about training for White foster parents. She continued by adding that predominantly White foster parents had attended the same training workshops as she had. At this juncture, Ms. Patrick introduced the concept of color blindness. She explained that there was a huge belief in White culture that ignoring color was the best option. As a researcher, I saw color blindness as an extension of the idea of not seeing race. My thoughts drifted in that direction as I reasoned that not seeing race when racial differences were present was similar to being blind to what was obvious. Any other position who acknowledged gender, race, or social class, she continued, could be considered an expression of disrespect towards the other person. Ms. Patrick said that race should be ignored as a way to be kind, equal, and fair. She continued by relating an experience she had at a conference where several other White foster parents were present.

Ms. Patrick recalled a conversation in which she had engaged with other White foster parents while attending a foster parent training session. She specifically remembered a young, White farming couple. Her concern centered on the life the couple had already established in a non-diverse rural community. Ms. Patrick reflected that this couple lived on a family farm that had been in their family for generations. She reflected that this couple could not “pick up and move” to a more diverse community. She added that this couple had not considered any ramifications of bringing a child of color to their farm community. After a portion of the training, the couple felt that if they

loved the child that would be enough to overcome any obstacles. Ms. Patrick described them as “shell-shocked” as the training continued, and they began to rethink the decision to bring a child of color into a community where the child’s presence might have been a potential problem. According to Ms. Patrick, the young White couple realized that there would not be any role models in their “little rural community of predominately white people.” The group of White foster parents may have helped the couple to process the new ideas and asked if the local school had any children of color. The couple responded “no,” and with shell-shocked expressions, they sat and saw their dreams shatter, but they still clung to the belief that “if you love them enough,” that might be enough.

As Ms. Patrick related the sentiments of the young White couple who expressed that love could conquer all potential social or racial problems for children of color in the farming community, she suggested that this idea is equal to the definition of “color blindness.” Ms. Patrick, acting as a spokesperson for her cultural group, introduced the concept of color blindness and labeled the young couple’s expression as such. In this regard, Ms. Patrick’s statement that “nice people do not mention color” clearly supports her view of colorblindness. Although some in our society consider not acknowledging race and skin color as the right thing to do, the research of Sue et al. (2007) has suggested otherwise. Sue et al. maintain that assuming a posture of color blindness erroneously embraces the belief that “race and color are not variables that affect people’s lives” (p. 282). This position, in effect, allows racial identity to be overlooked and ignored. Ms. Patrick confronted the young couple about their plans to deny the racial and cultural identities of their potential foster/adopted children and the couple’s

statement that they would not need to acknowledge race and rather just express love.

Interestingly, a similar position of not acknowledging race was expressed by Peter, one of the White foster children in this study. Peter, who had been returned to live with his biological mother, visited his former African American foster home each week for an overnight visit. Peter's biological mother granted permission for him to participate in this study about transracial foster care. Peter and I talked as he sat in the home of his former African American foster parents. A portion of that conversation follows in Excerpt 5C:

Excerpt 5C

- R: I'm asking you to talk about your experience when you were living in a foster home. I know you're not in a foster home right now, but when you were living in a foster home. What race are you?
- Peter: Race? What's race?
- R: Like Black, White, Mexican.
- Peter: I don't know. I think White.
- R: White, okay. And when you were in the foster home, were you in the foster home with a White family, a Black family, a Mexican family?
- Peter: **I don't want to say it.**
- R: Why not?
- Peter: **It's because it's mean.**
- R: **It's mean to say what?**
- Peter: **Black.**
- R: Mmm. Why do you think it's mean to say Black?
- Peter: Okay. I have a Black family, foster family.
- R: Okay, but you think you shouldn't say that?

Peter: **Yeah, 'cause it's mean.** (September 19, 2008)

Peter was visibly nervous during our conversation that fall Friday evening. He squirmed in his seat, avoided eye contact, and was hesitant to even say words that indicated race. Peter, as were all respondents in this study, was asked to identify his race as a way to establish a racial context for examining transracial issues. Initially, he hesitated to repeat the word “race” and followed with his own question, “What’s race”? I attempted to clarify by offering a few racial categories and named three major racial groups: Black, White, Mexican. Then he answered that he did not know, but in his next breath, he said without conviction, “I think White.”

Building the discussion, I acknowledged his race as White and inquired about the race of the foster home. Again I offered the same racial groupings as before. To that menu of racial options, he indicated that he could not say. In other words, he would not use a racial label for the foster family. He felt so strongly against identifying the racial group of the foster home that I was puzzled about why he was so adamant. Under my probing, he blurted out the words “because it is mean.” I was then a bit confused and with genuine bewilderment asked, “...mean to say what?” It was at that point that a breakthrough occurred. Peter responded “Black.” I pondered his answer for a few seconds before utilizing an interviewing technique popularized by Carl Rogers “one of the best know phenomenologists” (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2010, p. 102). Rogers propelled an individual’s understanding of self by reflecting back the individual’s own words. Each repetition brings increased self-awareness and progression toward personal insight. This style forces clarification by the speaker. I repeated his answer while confirming that he had said it was mean to refer to people by using the word

“Black.”

Unmistakably, he was uncomfortable with the initial question and thus reluctant to say that he was “White” when asked his race. Beyond that, he was also hesitant to identify the racial group of his foster home. He believed it was mean to say “Black” when referring to his foster family. Peter used the words “it’s mean” (Excerpt 5C), which are similar to the words Ms. Patrick used, “it’s not polite” (Excerpt 5B), to express the idea that special handling is needed when White people discuss race with people of color.

I continued to explore the twin concepts of foster parenting and racial issues. Further, I was particularly interested in the training foster parents received for transracial fostering. I wondered, as I continued to interview foster parents, whether the emphasis on racial identity would intensify as foster children moved into the adolescent years. This concept was explored with a foster parent who specialized in caring for teens. Mrs. Lewis, a White foster parent, was engaged in transracial placement and accepted only adolescent foster sons. However, she did not see race as significant in successfully navigating the turbulent teen years. Excerpt 5D underscores Mrs. Lewis’s beliefs about race, training, and parenting:

Excerpt 5D

R: What do you attribute that [the attitude change] to? Is there any racial connotation to that or [just] adolescent teenage boys; how do you see that?

Mrs. Lewis: I think a little bit of both.

R: Okay.

Mrs. Lewis: Because my 15-year-old African American boy that had been in my home for a year and a half, **all of a sudden he’s doing the same thing as the kids that came from the other county** [urban

community].

R: I see, okay.

Mrs. Lewis: You know. And he didn't do those things before.

R: Okay.

Mrs. Lewis: You know. He listened to what he was told, and he did what he was told, and he was doing really well...so well that we were talking about **taking him out of counseling**. That's how well he was doing. And **after these boys were there, he just went right down hill. And now he's into counseling every week.**

R: Oh.

Mrs. Lewis: Yeah.

R: So the situation hasn't reversed itself?

Mrs. Lewis: No, it's like, come on, get back where you were.

R: So then, the entrance of new foster kids to your home upsets the balance and the order that you've established?

Mrs. Lewis: Yeah.

R: And in this case, are you saying that the new foster kids were the same race as one of your kids so that there was a connection. Is that what you're saying?

Mrs. Lewis: I think so, yeah. You know, it was like, my 15 year old thought 'all right! **I'm not the minority in my household now.**' Okay, it was kind of even out then. 'Cause there was **my husband and myself and then the 16 year old and then the three boys.**

R: So, teams?

Mrs. Lewis: Yeah! [laughter]. I don't know about team [laughs]. So we really had a conflict. And I kept on telling him that they were telling half-truths and lies and they were believed...he was believing everything that they said because 'oh, well, **they're my brothers.**' And they are going, oh my word, please, you know; don't believe everything you're being told here. And he did. He believed it all.

R: Was there anything in your training that prepared you to handle or

parent kids of a different race?

Mrs. Lewis: Not really. I mean, my parents were foster parents, and they adopted two from India, one from Korea, plus they had others that they fostered. So, you know, **the racial thing isn't there. There's nothing** there, but **then I heard a lot of this 'oh, you're racist.'**

R: From [whom]?

Mrs. Lewis: After my 15 year old. After all this!

R: Okay, **first time you heard?**

Mrs. Lewis: Ahhh, **no, but more so.** You know. And I'm sitting here going, wait a minute [laughs], I said. I don't look at the color of anybody's skin to judge them. I don't judge people.
(Tuesday, September 23, 2008)

Mrs. Lewis's experience as a foster parent primarily of teens led me to ask whether the change in attitude she described could be attributed to adolescent rebellion. I wanted to understand whether she felt there were racial overtones, given that the boys were of different races. She responded without hesitation that she felt the attitude change was a result of a combination of causal factors, including both race and "normal" teen defiance. She tried to make sense of the change in attitude and began explaining the circumstance surrounding her African American 15 year old first. She relayed that he had been in her home for a year and a half; then, without warning, his attitude and behavior changed. It happened when the new foster children arrived, who were also African American teens. She continued that he had not displayed the behavior before the new teens arrived. She explained what she meant by adding that he previously listened and did what he was told to do. He had progressed so steadily that his counseling sessions had been discontinued. Mrs. Lewis added that since the arrival of the new teens, he had to resume counseling on a weekly basis. She waited for his

behavior to revert back, but it had not.

Listening closely, I asked if she felt the entrance of new foster kids in her home had upset the balance and order she had established. She responded “yes” and elaborated by agreeing that since the new foster teens were the same race as one of her foster teens, there had been a connection between them. Mrs. Lewis stated that her 15-year-old African American foster son no longer felt like the minority in the house. She said the people in her house were evenly divided racially among her, her husband, the 16 year old, and the three boys. I knew from her descriptions earlier in the conversation that the three boys she referred to were her African American 15 year old and the two new African American foster teens. She described herself and her husband as White at the beginning of the interview as she did her 16 year old. It sounded to me as if she was describing a division in the house, so I suggested a positive term “teams” to describe the two different groups she had identified. Mrs. Lewis laughed a joyless laugh and said she did not know about teams, but she knew they had real conflict. Her voice sounded pleading as she recalled telling her 15 year old that the new foster teens were telling him half truths, which he believed. Her 15 year old said he believed what the two new African American foster teens said because they were his brothers. She concluded with resignation that her 15 year old did not listen to her but believed everything he was told by his “brothers.” Her last words in this excerpt were, “He believed it all.”

Mrs. Lewis noticed differences in responses from her White foster sons and African American foster sons. She noted that while parenting Anthony, her 15-year-old African American teenage son, she observed marked behavioral disturbances. She

was not sure how much of what she saw was related to adolescent defiance and how much was related to a racial attitude. She believed her restrictions for Anthony were based on her usual disciplinary standards for all of the teenage boys in her foster home. Some of these teens were White, and some were African American. After he had spent 18 months in her home, she noticed a change in his attitude. This change coincided with an increase in the number of African American males in her foster home. The composition in her foster home changed from one African American adolescent male to three African American adolescents and one White male teenager.

Mrs. Lewis said there was a shift in her foster home when two new foster sons arrived. Since she had welcomed foster children of any racial group in her home in the past, she therefore welcomed two new African American teenage boys. With her four foster sons and her husband, the racial composition was three African Americans and three Whites. As she discussed the racial groups in her house, she articulated a division so clearly that it sounded visible. The separateness was so succinctly discussed that I jokingly asked her if the family had formed two teams. I implied, but did not add, racial teams. Mrs. Lewis was therefore left able to add her explanation to the meaning of term "teams." If the idea of teams had a racial context, then one of the teams would be White and the other Black. If the meaning of "teams" were related to how long people had been in the family, then one team would consist of those who came to the family last (within the last 90 days) and those who had been in the family for years. The White members of Mrs. Lewis's household had been in the home longest. Whatever Mrs. Lewis was thinking, she uttered a sad chuckle and seemed to loath categorizing the division in terms of teams. Mrs. Lewis gave the impression she

was disappointed that her African American foster son who had been living a year and a half at her home was aligning himself with the new African American foster children who only recently had arrived. She sought to explain to Anthony that the new foster teens were “telling half truths and lies.” Mrs. Lewis’s frustration grew as she added that Anthony believed everything he was told by the new foster teens. While Anthony had not met the other African American foster teens prior to them arriving at Mrs. Lewis’s foster home, he aligned himself with them and explained his loyalty in his own defense with the following words: “They’re my brothers.” They certainly were not his biological brothers, nor did they share a blood relationship; rather, they were brothers in the comrade manner that African American males relate to each other. Perhaps Anthony’s feelings about kinship were based on a cultural context.

Anthony shared his thoughts on the same situation with me during our interview several months later in 2008. My audio equipment used to record the interviews malfunctioned during the conversation with Anthony. Therefore, his interview was recorded manually and is available in narrative form only, and an excerpt is included here. Although he had been in foster care since age eleven, I asked him to reflect on his most recent placement. Subsequently, he spoke primarily of the last one and a half years living in a Caucasian foster home with other foster children who were of several races. This foster home was located in an almost exclusively White rural city. Although his foster mom had arranged the interview, neither of us referred to her during our conversation nor any of the topics she and I had discussed. He spoke easily of his peer friendships and mentioned that during his time in this foster home, about six teenage boys had also lived in the home at various times. He specifically mentioned two African

American brothers who not only came from a small urban community but who were also accustomed to much more freedom than allowed at the foster home where Anthony lived. These brothers assumed leadership of all of the foster children and gained their respect.

The foster children in the home separated into cliques based on race. Anthony stated he and the other African American boys were on one side and the non-African American boy was on the other side. The African American boys were treated differently than the non-African American boys, Anthony reported. Anthony explained that he and the other African American boys were yelled at more often. Further, he said that when the foster parents first treated him differently (as they did at times, he said), he reasoned they just made a mistake. Later, when he was treated differently, he reasoned the foster parents were prejudiced. Another example of this prejudice, he shared, was his "side" had to ask for everything and the other "side" did not. He said the foster parents did not like Black people and he knew that because they would say, "Some of my best friends are Black." To Anthony, when one made that statement, it meant the person was covering up for not really liking Black people. He said his foster mom made that statement. He stated that he discussed his thoughts with the other foster kids in the home and that they agreed with him.

His recollection differed somewhat from Mrs. Lewis's account. He recalled the foster children in the foster home at that time separated into cliques based on race. Anthony stated that he and the other two African American boys were on one side and the non-African American boy was on the other side. The African American boys were treated differently than the White boys, Anthony reported to me during our discussion. Anthony explained that he and the other African American boys were yelled at more

often. Further, he said that when the foster parents first treated him differently (good), which they did at times, he reasoned that they simply had made a mistake. Later, when he was treated differently (badly), he reasoned that the foster parents were prejudiced. Anthony positioned his foster parents in a no-win situation. When the foster parents treated him well, it meant they had made a mistake. When the foster parents treated him badly, it meant they did not like him because he was African American.

Mrs. Lewis continued sharing her experience as a transracial foster mom and her thwarted attempts to avoid the subject of race only to have it pushed into conversations she did not wish to have. She mentioned in exasperation that her foster son, Anthony, had called her a racist on several occasions. She relayed that conversation in excerpt 5F. Mrs. Lewis, having been exposed to the transracial foster home of her parents, seemed perplexed and somewhat disturbed by this accusation.

Mrs. Lewis had continued to struggle to make meaning of her transracial parenting experience. I wondered if perhaps she had felt unprepared to parent foster children of another race. I attempted to explore this idea by asking whether she had had any training to prepare her to handle a child of a different race. She replied softly, "Not really." She then qualified her response by adding that her parents were foster parents and had even adopted children who were a different race. She offered this as evidence that "the racial thing" was there. Her voice conveyed her irritation when she continued and said she had heard the following phrase a lot: "Oh, you're racist." I quickly thought she was connecting this comment to Anthony, her 15-year-old African American foster son, so I asked who had called her a racist. Mrs. Lewis admitted Anthony was not the first person to pen this appellation on her. Again Mrs. Lewis

laughed without mirth and concluded that she did look at the color of anyone's skin to judge them.

Mrs. Lewis's foster son, Anthony, disagreed with her assessment that she did not judge people by their skin color. Anthony said, "Oh no; it's because I'm Black!" Anthony felt that Mrs. Lewis in fact *did* see color and negatively. Anthony was adamant that Mrs. Lewis had negative thoughts and feelings about people who were Black. Further, Anthony expressed that Mrs. Lewis's treatment of him denoted discrimination. The White foster sons, in Anthony's opinion, had more freedom at home. The idea of being a racist seemed foreign, and Mrs. Lewis rejected it immediately. I asked her if she had been called a racist before. Mrs. Lewis quickly acknowledged that "racist" was a term which had been used to describe her on other occasions. From her sad tone and dejected body language, I surmised that others, not just Anthony, previously had labeled her philosophy as racist. The question of differential racial treatment entered the discussion much to the dismay of Mrs. Lewis. Anthony did not wish to avoid the discussion; rather, he introduced the sensitive topic of personal racism to his foster parent, the adult responsible for his care and well being. His outcry of racism was both an accusation and a challenge. By voicing those words, he charged her with unfair treatment based on race. Anthony was challenging Mrs. Lewis to deny being a racist or change her behavior to correct his misunderstanding. Neither option happened before he moved to another foster home. I am not sure who initiated it, but his relocation was welcomed by them both. Anthony left Mrs. Lewis's home and moved to another White foster home. When he and I talked about this move from a White foster home, where he felt he had been treated unfairly based on race, to another White foster

home, he expressed comfortableness and did not hesitate. In Excerpt 5E, Anthony calmly responded to my questions about his pending move to another White foster home:

Excerpt 5E

R: You were in a White foster home but felt you were not treated fairly, but you are moving to another White foster home. Do you think they will also treat you unfairly?

Anthony: No, I visited with this new family on weekends. **Some** White people are racists.

R: Why do you think racist White people take Black foster kids?

Anthony: For the money. (Tuesday, November 25, 2008)

Anthony seemed calm, almost sedate, about his pending move to another White foster home. I asked if he thought the unfair treatment he experienced in the White foster home where he lived would be repeated in the second White foster home. Anthony answered “no” and assured me that he felt comfortable with his new White foster family after his weekend visits. He added that some White people are racists. He emphasized the adjective “some.” My curiosity blossomed, and I asked, “Why would White people who are racists take Black foster children?” Almost without emotion and in a matter-of-fact tone, Anthony quipped, “For the money.”

Despite Anthony’s experience with Mrs. Lewis, which he considered unfair, he thought he would have positive experiences with other Whites in the foster care system. He was willing to assess each situation on its own merits and with an open mind. One unfair experience with one White person did not result in cultivating negative feelings about all White people. As Anthony spoke, I felt he expressed maturity by not dismissing future White foster parents as unfair. Further, Anthony was quite aware of

the monetary aspects of foster care because he pointed out some people become foster parents only for the money. At minimum, Anthony knew Mrs. Lewis received money for each of her foster sons.

Finally, Anthony shared another example of the prejudice he felt in Mrs. Lewis's home. He shared that his "side" (African American foster teens) had to ask for everything and that the other "side" (White foster teens) did not. He said the foster parents did not like Black people and that he knew this because they would say, "Some of my best friends are Black." Anthony said that when a person made that statement, it meant the person was covering up for not really liking Black people. He said his foster mom, Mrs. Lewis, made that statement. He stated he discussed his thoughts with the other foster kids in the home and that they agreed with him.

5.2.2 Celebrating Racial Differences

When Anthony questioned the other foster children in his home, he was convinced that his foster parents may have been motivated by financial remuneration and not the love of children. Despite his personal epiphany, Anthony maintained an open mind and positive attitude about transracial foster care. Anthony acknowledged racial differences, but he did not let those differences define people or situations. Some White foster parents in this study admitted to seeing race but as a basis on which to celebrate diversity. Foster parents who were engaged in transracial parenting saw the experience as an opportunity to embrace other cultures while simultaneously affirming the identities of their foster children. Mrs. Glad represented her thoughts, as well as those of foster parents Mrs. Ratcliff and Ms. Patrick, when she emphasized the racial uniqueness of her diverse foster family. These three foster parents were delighted to

embrace other races and cultures and saw this as an opportunity for personal growth, increased cultural awareness, and family diversity. Mrs. Glad was interviewed after her children finished school for the day. In Excerpt 5F, she eagerly shared her excitement about her diverse family:

Excerpt 5F

R: Have there been any discussions about the kids understanding their racial identity or their culture?

Mrs. Glad: We talk about that quite often. It's come up in my family. I teach them because I believe in God; I teach them God has made all of us, you know, and all of us have special needs. I can't sing. I would love to sing, but I can't, you know, so I'm kind of handicapped in that way.

I said you should try to go through and show their strengths and weakness. I had a social worker one time **call my house "little United Nations"** because she said she used to love to come to my house **because everyone was special** and it didn't matter if [they] were Native American or Spanish. We've had a Spanish girl. We've had Black children, of course. We've had, you know, light, light-skinned White children, you know? Oh, I don't know, Scandinavian or whatever.

R: Okay, pale?

Mrs. Glad: Pale, very pale, yep, and I've got a strawberry blonde with freckles. I mean, there is anything and everything that's been at my house. I can't imagine raising children and not exposing them to all the things that are in the world.

R: So, it sounds to me like **what you emphasize is their uniqueness as human beings.**

Mrs. Glad: Absolutely.

R: **More than their uniqueness as race.**

Mrs. Glad: Absolutely!

R: So, each of them have some **unique qualities and talents that are God given, so you enhance that and let them focus on that.**

Mrs. Glad: Yep, and we went for awhile... we went to an **almost all-Black**

church. There were several... there were maybe like six or seven White families, but it was **predominately Black.**

R: I don't know the name of the church.

Mrs. Glad: It was a wonderful church, and I went there for quite awhile. That church I love 'cause **that's like my house. They've got Black; they've got White; they've got Mexican; they've got Native American; they've got everybody, and they have this huge whole section of adult people with special needs.**

R: Can you give me some examples of how it [racial identity] comes up positively and how it is encouraged or reinforced?

Mrs. Glad: Oh, it was kind of cute; one day, **Anita Baker was singing** on the radio. She is my all-time favorite Black female vocalist, always will be. I said something to, I think Bobbie, like 'I wish I could sing like that!'

Bobbie said, '**But Mama, she's Black,**' and I said if I could be any color I wanted, I said I would probably choose to be Black. I love Black people's skin, you know. I gotta try to get a tan, but I said, 'You guys' skin is already brown.' I try to do things like that, and it was sincere. (Monday, September 15, 2008).

Given Mrs. Glad's obvious enthusiasm, I wanted to know how discussions about racial and cultural identity originated in her foster home. I was curious; did her enthusiasm about diversity spread to the children, or did the foster children drive the conversations? She comfortably chatted and responded that racial identity was talked about quite often and stemmed from her belief in God. This belief included her understanding that God made all people and each person with special abilities and special needs. Using herself as an example, she explained to her foster children that despite her intense desire to have a lovely singing voice, she was still unable to sing. She referred to her own inability to sing as a "handicap."

In these discussions with her foster family, she explored the strengths and weaknesses of her foster children. She recalled a conversation with a previous social

worker in which the social worker had labeled Mrs. Glad's house as a "little United Nations." This social worker had explained how much she loved visiting with Mrs. Glad because everyone was special irrespective of racial or cultural classification. Mrs. Glad then delineated the major racial groups and especially named Native American, Spanish, and Black children, "of course." Mrs. Glad thought it was important to mention the pale coloring of one of her foster daughters. Mrs. Glad identified this "pale, very pale" child as Scandinavian. She added that the range of racial features of her foster children also included a "strawberry blonde with freckles."

She concluded this portion of the conversation by adding that her house had welcomed every kind of child. She expressed that not exposing her foster children to all things (cultural) in the world was unimaginable. Listening closely, I remarked that it sounded to me as though she emphasized their uniqueness as human beings. Mrs. Glad responded with a resounding "absolutely." Seeking further clarity, I said that it seemed to me that their uniqueness as human beings was more important than their racial uniqueness. Again, Mrs. Glad, almost bellowing, responded, "Absolutely." Continuing, I paraphrased Mrs. Glad, adding that she acknowledged unique qualities and talents as God given and that she worked to enhance those qualities and focused on the positive. Her energy level seemed to recede a bit as she informed me that her foster family had attended an "almost all-Black church" for awhile. The "almost" all-Black church did include about a half-dozen White families. Somehow, I felt I should have been familiar with the church she had referred to, but I did not. So I said I did not know the church. Mrs. Glad continued, stating that it was a wonderful church and that she loved that church because it reminded her of her house. She then listed the diverse

racial groups and concluded that there was also a “whole section of adult people with special needs.” Mrs. Glad at that time had adult foster children with special needs.

Mrs. Glad highlighted all the differences among her foster children: physical, racial, and ethnic. She described a conversation she had had with Bobby, one of her African American foster sons, which illustrated how she reinforced specialness and positive racial identity. Mrs. Glad returned to her example of not being able to sing as an illustration of individual value. She recalled a time when she and Bobby had been in the car together and an Anita Baker song had been playing on the radio. Mrs. Glad remarked to Bobby, “I wish I could sing like that!” Bobby replied with what he thought was just factual information, i.e., that Anita Baker was Black. Mrs. Glad said if she had a choice of color, she would probably choose to be Black. Mrs. Glad continued, saying how she loved Black because it is already brown and eliminates a need for tanning. She concluded with the statement that she was sincere.

Mrs. Glad’s family background, when combined with her work history at a state institution for people with mental and cognitive disabilities, provided her with transferable experiences for her foster home. Her philosophy for her foster children was that everyone was special to her, and everyone was special to God. Mrs. Glad’s approach was not to deny racial and cultural differences but to delight in them. Her spiritual orientation was the basis for her belief that each child was a manifestation of the divine and worthy to be celebrated.

Mrs. Glad wanted to convey to Bobby that being Black meant he had a wonderful skin color that she did not have. Mrs. Glad felt she had an opportunity to share the message of racial equality by utilizing an activity from the routine of daily living, such as

listening to the radio. She sought teachable moments and blended her philosophy into the daily tasks she and her foster children completed. Mrs. Glad thought the best way for her to convey acceptance of everyone was to seek to identify the uniqueness that made each person special. Further, she saw racial differentness as an exciting opportunity for festivity.

Race was a special characteristic, but race did not go far enough to highlight the unique contributions every one of her foster children could make to the family. It was her quest for this particular quality that propelled her through the years. She reflected that she should probably be slowing down since she had a 28-year history of transracial fostering. Her first “batch” of children was nearly 30 years of age with children of their own.

Mrs. Glad was joined by Mrs. Oliver and other foster parents interviewed for this study that were electrified by the racial diversity in their foster homes. Both women were positively exuberant when sharing stories about life in their multi-cultural families. Mrs. Glad felt it was a privilege to parent children who had diverse needs and expressed it this way: “God has given me the ability to love.”

Mrs. Oliver felt well prepared by family life experiences to embrace children from diverse racial and cultural groups. She believed her numerous personal exchanges with other cultural groups allowed her easily to do so, and she shared her insight with me in Excerpt 5G.

Excerpt 5G

R: What is it like parenting a kid of a different race, or one who is bi-racial, White, or Hispanic?

Mrs. Oliver: For me, it’s easy, but when the children come into, say, a Black

home and they are not used to being around, you know, Blacks every day, even living in the neighborhood, I say it is difficult for them. But **my family and I do things, so they usually fit in pretty good.** Things usually work out after awhile. But it is an adjustment, most especially for the child when they come in. As a matter of fact, my sister and her husband right now have **two White children, and a little Mexican boy just left last week. And they fit in.**

I have a **daughter-in-law who is Filipino;** I have a **granddaughter-in-law who is Mexican.** Whoa, I have a **niece who is White.** What race did I miss yet? An **American Indian married my nephew.** I have in my family almost every race you can think of.

So my **brother's wife is a Mexican.** So we have a bi-racial Mexican and Black, and they are very beautiful children. I keep telling you I've got a book [waiting to be written]. Last week, we all prepared Filipino food. We go 'real'; they go to the store, and we put 'real' Filipino dishes together. (Monday, November 10, 2008)

I began my exchange with Mrs. Oliver by asking her to tell me what it was like to parent transracially. She quickly responded, "It's easy." She acknowledged the experience might be different for a child thrust into a Black foster home in a Black neighborhood. Mrs. Oliver expressed confidence that "after awhile" the foster children would "fit in." It was then that she referenced her sister and brother-in-law, who had accepted two White children and a Mexican boy the previous week.

Mrs. Oliver continued describing her international family by adding that her daughter-in-law was Filipino, her granddaughter-in-law was Mexican, and her niece was White. After pausing for a few seconds, she recalled her nephew, who was an American Indian. Proudly, she exclaimed, her family had almost every race represented.

It was then that she thought to include her sister-in-law, who was Mexican, and their bi-racial children. She reiterated that she could write a book (about her diverse

family). She emphasized authenticity and interjected that a Filipino meal had been prepared the previous week. She stressed that “real” Filipino dishes were prepared.

Mrs. Oliver, with great pride and enthusiasm, detailed the international description of her family. She transmitted soaring eagerness and was practically bubbling over with fervor to share her thoughts about her suitability to provide transracial foster care. Happily, she chatted about her extended family and the numerous nationalities and cultures they represented. She listed each country as easily as if she were counting the number of guests scheduled to arrive for dinner.

Mrs. Oliver continued by discussing various family gatherings where culture was celebrated with food and dishes were authentically prepared by family members and served to everyone. She stated in the full transcription of our interview that the ethnic food themes rotated to reflect the cultures of the various family members. These dinners served to provide family fun, relaxation, and exposure to other cultures. While the family learned to sample and enjoy authentic cuisine, they celebrated their cultural differences while acknowledging familiar bonds. Both Mrs. Oliver and Mrs. Glad celebrated racial differences through ethnic meals.

For both Mrs. Glad and Mrs. Oliver, ethnic celebrations and ethnic foods were pivotal in creating racial identity for their foster children. Mrs. Glad was nearly zealous in her description of her family’s involvement in an ethnic celebration for one of her foster sons. Mrs. Glad shared a particular transforming experience when her foster family attended a powwow. A passage from that conversation is in Excerpt 5H:

Excerpt 5H

Mrs. Glad: **I had never had goose bumps like I had at the powwow**
because a little boy danced in the powwow, and that little brother’s

foster father danced in the powwow with all the feathers and head dress.

R: Okay.

Mrs. Glad: Then my husband went home, and he **made my son**, who was 7, he made him some article [of clothing] **that had bird feathers** and it had, you know, the handle. I don't know what it was...

R: I saw a powwow recently, and so I'm visualizing it.

Mrs. Glad: It's awesome, absolutely beautiful and awesome. Yep, **we ate there**, you know, "fry bread" and all the different kinds of wonderful dishes? **I've tried over the years to introduce them to their cultures and make it special for all the kids** so that everybody is getting a taste of everyone else's stuff.

Mrs. Glad said she was awed by the pageantry of the Native American powwow as she watched the dancing; listened to the drums; and saw the long, colorful feathers. She reported how inspired her husband was such that he then made an article of clothing for their foster son of Native American heritage. Next, she described the meal and the value she places on ethnic celebrations for her family. It was her goal that everyone in the family be exposed to all of the cultures represented in her home.

Mrs. Glad was absolutely floating with delight as she relayed her adventure at the tribal powwow. This excitement was contagious and passed on to her husband and to me as well. She shared her husband's excitement with me as she detailed his later attempt to fashion an article of clothing for their foster son. Mrs. Glad felt that the children in her foster home at that time also benefited from her husband's enthusiasm. Mrs. Glad's scope of transracial experiences designed to benefit her foster children included a Black church previously described in excerpt 5F, ethnic meals described in excerpt 5H, Anita Baker's singing described in Excerpt 5F, and powwows in Excerpt 5H.

Likewise, Mrs. Oliver was in active pursuit of awareness of multiple cultures for her foster children. Mrs. Oliver found that ethnic food, cooked at home by the people who learned to cook in their home countries, was an excellent introduction to cultural identity development. She discussed the authenticity of the meal preparation earlier in Excerpt 5G.

From the foster parents who did not see race at all, our discussion moved to those who saw and celebrated the rich cultural heritage of each child. The child's uniqueness was underscored by his or her cultural ways of dressing, cultural music, cultural food, and language. Also emerging as yet another iteration of the transracial foster care experience was the opposite concept—i.e., that people of one race should have foster children only of that same race. This new finding moves us along the racial identity continuum.

5.2.3 White with White and Black with Black

There were a small but passionate number of foster parents who expressed the desire for foster children to be placed only with foster parents of the same race. Although this idea of racial matching was expressed by only a few parents, it echoes the position of the largest organization of professional social workers of color—the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW, 1972), as documented in Chapter 2. Although both Mrs. Patrick and Mrs. Oliver articulated this position of racial matching, it was Mrs. Oliver who spoke with fervor. Throughout Mrs. Oliver's interview, she spoke with confidence and experience. However, when she tentatively raised this topic, her voice became passionate, and she spoke with renewed vigor. Mrs. Oliver explained her position on same-race foster homes in Excerpt 5K. I wish to direct focus to comments

in **bold font**.

Excerpt 5K

R: You said the kids have to adjust when they **have not been around Black people all day, every day**. What have you seen in this regard?

Mrs. Oliver: To me, a lot of kids, if they say are [in] the age range from 10-12 or 8-12, they always **appear to be uncomfortable**, and I know that I'm not wrong in the word that I am using—'uncomfortable.' Most people, I believe, have misrepresented, let's say, Black people. Let's stick to that 'cause I'm Black, so they expect us to do things that we don't even think about doing.

R: Okay.

Mrs. Oliver: So you know that they think that something bad is going to happen. This has been **a bad house 'cause these are Black people**. Some of the kids will outright say it to you. And I let them talk freely and let them talk about whatever they want to talk about, and then I say, 'This is how we do it here.'

This is what we do and what we don't do. You know, you will find, I found, over the years, most especially with the White children, and I'm a firm believer even though I told them everything I told you, [and] I have been very honest. **I feel Black children should be in Black homes and White children be in White [homes]**. You know why I feel this way?

R: Why?

Mrs. Oliver: Because they **have been displaced** in the beginning when they are taken out of their home—that's a big stab right there, a big heartbreak. Then you have got to go [to] the door of a little old Black woman standing there to the little White children, saying, 'Come on in, you're going to be alright.'

They don't know that and then looking at something that most of them have heard and been taught that we **[Black people] are not okay**. That we are not okay! So they have the biggest adjustment of all to make **coming from White families to Black families**.

And I would say that you are not going to find, most of the time, all of the time in foster care, children are from rich families or children who have been around to know all about Blacks, Mexicans, or

whatever. They only know their segment of life. And most of the time... Here I go; my daughter would tell me, 'Mom, there you go.'

R: Go ahead.

Mrs. Oliver: Most of the time, they are from families of low income; lower education, so that means they don't know and **they don't really know the truth**. They don't know it for real [life in a Black family] as my kids would say. So they've got to come into something that they are really afraid of. They are **afraid of this little Black person greeting them at the door**.

You know they are kind of scared, so here I am trying to find a way. I don't know what he [she] has been taught and told, so I've got to redo everything all in a moment, all in a day or a week. You know, whatever it takes.

And usually I can do it pretty good, but I have had a few that just could not adjust—you know, **to coming from an all White neighborhood, for example, into a Black family in a Black neighborhood [and] going everywhere with Blacks**. Going to church where mostly Blacks are, going to school, changing schools and switching to where it is Black.

So that is why I believe that everything should be done at almost all cost to place children into their environment that they are used to if we want them to grow, to develop, and adjust. (Monday, November 10, 2008)

I continued to explore race and parenting with Mrs. Oliver, an African American foster parent with experience fostering children of several races. I was particularly intrigued about her thoughts regarding adjustment by foster children who are placed in an African American home. Mrs. Oliver said the age of the foster child affected the rate of adjustment. She stipulated that children between the ages of 8 and 12, are noticeably uncomfortable. She added that at that age range, the children had been subjected to misinformation about Black people. Mrs. Oliver thought to expand her comments to include other races but changed her mind, stating that since she was Black, she would just stick with that. She continued to explain this phenomenon that the

foster children expected something bad to happen because they were placed in a bad home with Black people. Mrs. Oliver supported this statement by remembering that some of her foster children had actually made these statements. She let the foster children express their thoughts before she told them how things work in her home.

Then Mrs. Oliver made a statement which seemed inconsistent with the rest of her conversation: "Black children should be with Black children and White children with Whites." Seeking to clarify, she asked me if I wanted to know why. I did. Mrs. Oliver explained that the children had already been displaced and heartbroken by leaving their biological families. With those feelings fresh, the children are escorted to a house where they meet a "little old black woman" saying "come on in" to "little white children" and that "you are going to be alright." She said they do not know that and have been told that Black people are not okay. So, she concluded, the biggest adjustment begins as the children transition from White families to Black families. Mrs. Oliver qualified this by explaining that the foster children were not from "rich families" who knew about Blacks, Mexicans, or other groups.

It was at this point that she realized she was talking a great deal and sighed. She explained that foster children were mostly from a low-income and low-education segment of society and probably had not been exposed to diverse economic levels. Mrs. Oliver recalled her daughter would lament and say, "Mom, there you go [again]." Mrs. Oliver, unperturbed, resumed and explained the implication that limited education and limited income would equate to limited exposure to diversity and knowing the truth about families different from their own. So, Mrs. Oliver asserted, the foster children were afraid when they were greeted at the door by a Black woman at their new foster

home.

Mrs. Oliver continued to explain her experience helping children adjust to transracial fostering. She relayed that the foster children were “kind of scared” coming from a White environment. These White foster children were then placed with a Black family in a Black neighborhood, attended school with Blacks, went to church with Blacks, and went everywhere else with Blacks. Mrs. Oliver commented that she had to redo everything [thoughts] in a day or a week all that the foster children had learned. It was at this juncture that Mrs. Oliver’s position on transracial fostering emerged as clear as crystal: Children should remain in their own environment at all costs. Further, Mrs. Oliver added this situation would challenge her to “redo everything in a day or a week” that the foster child had learned. Mrs. Oliver felt the White foster child would not really understand what life was like in a Black family and that the adjustment would be like “a big, big heartbreak.”

Mrs. Oliver, in Excerpt 5G, shifted her paradigm from an elderly African American foster parent to that of a young, White foster child who was “uncomfortable” leaving a White environment. From this position, the White child was forcibly relocated with Black people, forced to go to church with Black people, forced to eat with Black people, and forced to live in a Black world. Mrs. Oliver added that this same White child had learned previously from the child’s White family that all of these new experiences with Black people could not be good. Because Black people were involved, everything associated would also be bad. Mrs. Oliver revealed that this would benefit neither the foster child nor herself. Mrs. Oliver concluded, “That is why I believe that everything should be done at almost all cost to place children into the environment that they are

used to if we want them to grow, to develop and adjust.

Mrs. Oliver was firm in her position that racial matching ensured the best outcomes for children who are placed in the foster care system. Her opinion, she defended, was based on 23 years of experience as a foster parent and as the matriarch of a multicultural family. Mrs. Oliver earlier expressed her strategies for incorporating appreciation for diverse cultures into her family's experiences and was noticeably proud of her success in this regard (Excerpt 5G). However, it was these precise experiences with her multicultural extended family which led her to conclude that same-race families produce more positive opportunities for the personal development of their foster children.

Mrs. Oliver was the only foster parent I interviewed who expressed this view of racial matching and separation. The most modest response was ignoring race, and the most radical was probably this idea of racial matching. Mrs. Oliver's perspective would necessitate White foster parents to be available exclusively for White foster children. Likewise, African American foster parents would have to be accessible for African American foster children only.

5.2.4 Problems in the Community but Not at Home

While foster parents prepared for the acceptance of a child from a different racial group, the communities where some foster parent resided were not ready for transracial families. All of the children in this study lived in neighborhoods with a different racial composition than their home neighborhoods. The foster parents were able to control the environment within the foster home but could at best only influence the external surroundings. Mrs. Terrell; her adult daughter, Heather; Jeb Sr.; and Mr. and Mrs.

Smith all reported detailed accounts of adjustment issues with their transracial foster children in schools and neighborhoods. Mrs. Terrell and Heather were eager to share their experiences with foster children who were a different race. The transcript of the interview in Excerpt 5L addressed the community's sensitivity, or lack thereof, to racial awareness:

Excerpt 5L

- R: Okay, you didn't get any help when they gave you the kids?
[They] just said, 'Here they are'?
- Mrs. Terrell: Yeah, yeah. Not that there **is a racial issue. It's just not racially correct.** For example, like Martin Luther King Day, we don't get it off up here. I mean most [other] places get it off.
- R: Okay.
- Mrs. Terrell: Yeah, and most places get it off. Up here, unless you have a reason to have it off for beliefs, you don't get it off.
- Heather: Yeah, they told Kathy (15-year-old bi-racial foster daughter) when she asked, 'Why don't we get Martin Luther King's birthday off?
- R: The school district you mean?
- Heather: The community too—I mean, it's just not a community that is...
- Mrs. Terrell: Well, we've had **problems with race here.** Remember [turns toward her daughter] them **White boys that beat up Billy (her African American foster son)** and the police came and...
- R: Billy, he's 7?
- Mrs. Terrell: Yeah, they were at the park, and they were with my daughter-in-law Playing and the park is right here, and the baseball field is here, and they were just playing. Billy and my 12-year-old granddaughter walked over there, and these **boys jumped him** [Billy], beat him up. Billy said **they called him the 'N' word**, but then, you know, when we got there and the cops all got there and everything, **the cops said, 'Oh I don't think this was a racist thing at all.'**

- R: Did you?
- Mrs. Terrell: Uh, I think so—yeah I do. I just... the way the kids acted and talked but we did have problems with that in the school with Mary (Mary was interviewed for this study) and some girl.
- Heather: They were fighting. What it was **wasn't really a racial issue, per se**, because the girl was **dating a Black boy**, and she thought that since Mary came in and was such a pretty girl and the same race as him, that he was gonna be more interested in Mary. He and Mary became friends. Well, then she decided she was gonna throw in **some racial slurs at Mary**.
- R: I see.
- Mrs. Terrell: And then she was mad that this boy was paying attention to Mary.
- Heather: Mary is tough. Mary has learned to be a tough girl—you know, when you live on the streets.
- R: Yeah, you said she was on the streets.
- Mrs. Terrell: Yeah, she's a tough girl. She's from the city, and she's tough, and you don't wanna—I mean, fighting would not be out of her category in a minute if you [crossed her], and she holds grudges forever.
- Heather: Kathy had an issue though. The one where she got kicked out of school.
- R: When was that?
- Mrs. Terrell: You know what? The boy didn't get kicked out!
- Heather: And that was a **racist thing**, and that was wrong.
- Mrs. Terrell: That was very wrong. She got kicked out of school because she stuck up for herself whereas he made a **racial slur** to her in front of the teacher and all and didn't get in any trouble.
- R: But she got suspended?
- Mrs. Terrell: And **she got suspended** for that **because she slapped him, and** then they called me.
- Heather: There is a no-tolerance policy, they said.

- R: I see.
- Mrs. Terrell: Of course, there should be **no tolerance for racism**. He called her something and said, 'Be an Aunt Jemima, like she's suppose to be' or a slave or something, you know. It was something about her being a slave, and go back and be a slave like she was born to be.
- R: That was toward Mary?
- Mrs. Terrell: Oh, no!
- Heather: Oh, no. If it would have been Mary...
- Mrs. Terrell: Mary would have kicked his butt all over the school. She would.
- R: Okay, okay.
- Heather: Mary, no. Kathy slapped him across his face.
- R: Okay.
- Mrs. Terrell: But Mary would have kicked his butt all over the school.
- Heather: She would have kicked him for a long time.
- Mrs. Terrell: Oh, yeah. Mary would never have tolerated anybody saying a **racist thing** to her, something like that especially.
- Heather: Yeah, Mary **don't like racist comments** at all.
- I
- Mrs. Terrell: And she always wears this polka-dotted scarf and hat or this scarf around her head. I said, 'I wish you wouldn't wear that it **looks like Aunt Jemima**.'
- R: What does she say when you tell her that she looks like **Aunt Jemima**?
- Mrs. Terrell: She just laughs at me, you know. But if someone else would have said it, she would...(her voice trails off) Mary's a great kid.
(Friday, September 19, 2008)

Mrs. Terrell's foster home was in an isolated rural community with little if any diversity. I was curious about the preparation she may have received which would

facilitate a transracial placement for foster children. Her initial response regarding life in her foster home and in her small town was denial of a racial issue in the community. She defended her community and called the town's failure to honor the national and state Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK) birthday holiday as not "racially correct" but not a racial issue. She admitted that most places get it off but not in her community. She did note one exception, which was if one has "a reason to have it off for beliefs."

She continued supporting this discussion by retelling Kathy's story. Kathy, Mrs. Terrell's 15-year-old bi-racial foster daughter, asked her teacher why the students did not get MLK day off. Heather contributed that it was both a school district concern and also a community issue. Mrs. Terrell acknowledged that racial problems existed in her community. She addressed her next few comments to Heather to amplify the details they provided for me. Billy, her African American foster son, was "jumped on" and called the "N" word by other boys who were also at the playground. When Mrs. Terrell arrived and spoke to the responding police officers, the police dismissed the incident and stated that no racist intention was evident. Mrs. Terrell disagreed with the assessment of the police officers and related the demeanor of the boys on the playground to another situation encountered by her other foster daughter, Mary.

Mary, 15, an African American foster teen who lived with Mrs. Terrell, tangled with a White teen in Mary's class who was dating an African American boy. The White teen felt her boyfriend would be attracted to Mary, who had been described as "such a pretty girl" and also African American. As the friendship between him and Mary developed, his girlfriend became angry and hurled racial slurs at Mary. Heather considered Mary's toughness as a honed survival technique when Mary lived on the

streets. Heather added that Mary would not hesitate to fight if the situation required it.

The conversation flowed into a recalling a similar situation but involving Kathy another foster teen in the same school system. Both Heather and Mrs. Terrell agreed that Kathy was involved in a racist scenario. Apparently, a boy in Kathy class made a racial slur about her in front of the teacher. When the teacher failed to respond to the inappropriate comments, Kathy decided to act. Kathy slapped the boy and was suspended for fighting. On the other hand, he was not suspended for his racist comments. Mrs. Terrell commented that there was a zero-tolerance policy for fighting and that there should also be a zero-tolerance policy for racism. This same boy referred to Kathy as “Aunt Jemima” and suggested Kathy resume her life as a slave.

It was at this point that I became confused and thought he had been talking about Mary. Mrs. Terrell and Heather hastened to clarify that of course they were not referring to Mary. They concluded that Mary’s response would have been more assertive. In fact, they felt Mary would have been more brutal and would not have been satisfied with just one slap. They felt that although Kathy slapped him, Mary would have kicked his butt all over the school as long as she felt it was deserved. Both Mrs. Terrell and Heather were adamant about Kathy’s low tolerance for racist comments. Then, interestingly, Mrs. Terrell remembered that Mary often wore a scarf around her head and resembled “Aunt Jemima” in appearance. When Mary was reminded, she agreed that, in fact, she did resemble “Aunt Jemima” when wearing the bandana. Mrs. Terrell relayed Mary’s nonchalant attitude but concluded after a momentary pause in the conversation that Mary was “a great kid.”

Mrs. Terrell spoke of three separate fights involving her foster children and that

conversation is represented in Excerpt 5L. Billy, her seven-year-old African American son, and his foster sisters, Mary and Kathy, both teens, encountered similar adjustment problems in the community. All had been in fights with racist overtures while living in Mrs. Terrell's community. Billy was at a neighborhood playground and singled out by other children who bellowed the "N" word as they beat him. The police dismissed the fight as having no racial overtones despite the use of a racial slur.

Heather dismissed as not "really a racial issue" Mary's fight with the White girl in her class who had been dating the African American student. Heather and Mrs. Terrell characterized this disagreement between the girls as adolescent rivalry commonly referred to in high school vernacular as a "cat fight." This term connotes girls fighting over boys. Historically, dating across the color line has been a racial issue. A White foster family might not be aware of the historical significance, but many African American families would see that altercation as racial.

The incident with Mary was obviously an encounter with a racial context. On this second occasion, Mary had defended herself in school when she was addressed by a negative racial term. However, Mary was suspended, as the school district policy dictated, but the student she fought with was not. A racial slur, a fight, but with punishment only for the person who was the target of the verbal assault indicated this was a hostile racial environment.

Heather, however, felt Kathy was justified and commented in Excerpt 5N that "Kathy had an issue." Kathy, another of the African American foster children living with Mrs. Terrell, was confronted with an overt racism comment. Kathy's violent response totally violated the school's code of conduct, and she was justifiably suspended. The

school's policy was that any fighting would result in suspension. Apparently, the rules did not consider provocation. Mrs. Terrell and Heather expressed frustration with the educational system, which did not punish the initiator of the conflict.

Excerpt 5L contains key information about the social environment in which transracial foster care was provided for many foster children. The undercurrent of institutional racism was battled by not only the foster parents but their extended families as well. Both had combined forces in defense of the foster children they vowed to protect. It was clear that racial tension and a low tolerance for racial difference was operating in this community. The adults who represented two major social institutions did not react when Billy, Mary, and Kathy were under attack. The police were dismissive, and the teacher was silent when a voice of justice should have been echoing in the community. There was overt racism in this community but not in the home. Mary's fight and subsequent disciplinary actions, when combined with Katy's dispute, would have created a milieu and a hostile environment. The teacher's passive reaction seemed to reinforce the rejection of Mrs. Terrell's African American and bi-racial foster children.

This was a sharp contrast to the supportive home environment nurtured by the Terrells. Large 8x10-inch portraits of Mrs. Terrell's biological children were displayed in the family photo galley along with 8 x10 professional portraits of the foster children who represented different racial groups. Grandchildren and group family photographs with the foster children were also prominently displayed in the public areas of the house. This denotes complete acceptance and inclusion in the family environment. The Terrells had embraced their transracial foster children—both the immediate family members and

the extended family members. In particular, Billy and his brother had been with the Terrells for so long that other family members were considering adopting the boys rather than see the boys leave the family. Mrs. Terrell's concern was her age since she considered herself an older grandmother. She felt her age might prevent her from being included by the foster care placement agency's permanent adoption plan. A meeting with her entire family provided a forum for discussing the fate of these small boys, i.e., Billy and his brother. The "family" agreed that should Mrs. Terrell be unable to care for the boys, another designated family member already identified would become the parents of record.

Whereas the foster child felt secure with the family, such was not the situation when they left the residence. This was partially why Mrs. Terrell explained the sandbox, the jungle gym climbing structure, the swing set, the bikes, the talking pet parrot, the picnic table, and the dog. Mrs. Terrell explained that the attempt to create a home atmosphere where the foster children could relax, explore, and grow in protective surroundings was the impetus for the housing layout.

Three of Mrs. Terrell's transracial foster children faced racism and ridicule when away from the foster home but still in the small town. The community can best be described as a city in a rural area. The houses were spaced as they would be in a city and there was no farmland evident. Apparently, negative interactions with African Americans, for residents of Mrs. Terrell's community, spanned age categories from young children to adults. Billy, age seven, was attacked by other boys. Mary and Kathy, teenagers, encounter racist comments in school. Neither Mary's teacher nor the police who investigated Billy's fight elected to address the issue of race. The school

system, at least in Mary's case, defaulted to their zero-tolerance policy regarding fighting, and the police dismissed the use of the "N" word in Billy's fight.

Community problems surfaced in other White areas where African American foster children had been placed. In some situations, the problems were not clearly racial. However, the problems were not clearly non-racial either. Another White foster parent, Jeb Sr., discussed with confidence the smooth transition of Karen, his 16-year-old African American foster daughter, to his White, rural community. In fact, only after I probed did he remember belatedly that Karen encountered some problems while adjusting to the school and community. He chatted with ease about his transracial fostering experience in Excerpt 5M:

Excerpt 5M

- R: At the time she was with you, everyone in your house was the same race as you, which is White?
- Jeb Sr.: Yes.
- R: Tell me the best part of having her in your house and the worst part of having her in your house. What are the joys and sorrows of having Karen with you for that time?
- Jeb Sr.: Well, Karen was actually a challenge at first because of the Down syndrome, you know. And then she got where she was more like family than anything else. So, we was just shopping...and she had a little [problem], like a five-finger discount. We had to take back to the store a lot.
- R: Yeah, and that's usually referred to as stealing.
- Jeb Sr.: Right, but when ma had to give her up, she just cried.
- R: Is "ma" your wife?
- Jeb Sr.: Yes, then Karen cried and wanted us to move in with her, and we couldn't do that, of course.

- R: So it was real hard for her to leave?
- Jeb. Sr.: Oh, yeah. Real hard.
- R: Were there any issues or concerns regarding Karen being African American in your home?
- Jeb Sr.: No.
- R: What about in the community?
- Jeb Sr.: Not that I know of. We never had a bit of problems with anybody around here.
- Re: What about in the school?
- Jeb Sr. Well, she had **a few problems at school** once in a while. But that was her own, **her own fault**. She would get in real bad fights with the teacher and scratch her all up and stuff because they would do something she didn't like or something.
(Tuesday, September 23, 2008)

I began my conversation with Jeb Sr. as I usually did, by identifying the racial identity of all members of the household. I was interested in Jeb Sr.'s perception of the joys and sorrows of living with Karen. He was able to respond without hesitation. Her special needs created by Down syndrome generated some adjustment concerns which were manageable for Jeb Sr. and his wife. Karen, however, had stolen items from stores, which required many items to be returned. Nevertheless, Jeb Sr. recalled his wife crying when Karen was returned to her biological family. He labeled the transition when Karen left his home as a "real hard" time for each of them. When I asked Jeb Sr. if Karen being African America contributed to any problems or issues? He answered, "no." I expanded the scope of my question to include the community. Again, he answered "no." When I asked about problems in school, Jeb Sr. acknowledged a few but attributed those problems to Karen's attitude and behavior.

Jeb Sr. stated that his wife and extended family liked Karen as much as she liked them. When Karen was ordered to return to her mother, Karen asked if Jeb Sr. and his wife could move back home with her. They, of course, could not, but her request hinted at the closeness and comfort she felt in their home. There were few if any problems in the home, and Jeb Sr. attributed Karen's problems in school to Karen's attitude and poor impulse control. It is evident that Jeb Sr. believed that Karen's problems in school were of her own making. Whether racism was a factor in Karen's problems in school or whether Karen's problem were of her own creation has remained and probably will remain an unanswered question.

The Smiths, who lived next door to Jeb Sr., believed that the problems their African American son encountered in school were also specifically related to him but not his race. However, just as Mrs. Terrell had reported fights, the Smiths also reported fights between their African American foster son, Ken (who was interviewed for this study), and boys in their White, rural community. The Smiths discussed adjustment issues Ken had experienced in the high school but attributed these issues to Ken's personality and attitude toward the educational system. In Excerpt 5N, the Smiths share their concerns about Ken's adjustment to the community:

Excerpt 5N

- R: What about Ken? Has he had any problems or any concerns in school or in the community as an African American?
- Mr. Smith: No, I got scared 'cause I know there's people out there, but I figured I can't put him under lock and key, but he has no problems being out. When we first got him, **the kid down the road jumped him...but**
- R: Because they were having a disagreement?

- Mr. Smith: No, **because they were prejudiced.**
- R: Okay.
- Mr. Smith: But he took care of that.
- R: How'd he do that? [laughs] Oh, fists, right?
- Mr. Smith: Right. Ken got him in a headlock. He [Ken] did not get in trouble because he didn't start it. After that...
- Mrs. Smith: Everybody's been friends.
- Mr. Smith: Yeah.
- R: Okay. (Tuesday, September 23, 2008)

The Smiths lived in a small rural town, and I was anxious to understand what life for an African American child would look like in this community. I asked specifically about the adjustment of their 15-year-old African American foster son, who previously had lived in an urban environment. Mr. Smith acknowledged his initial fear for Ken's safety but quickly reasoned that there was no supremely safe scenario. Mr. Smith allowed Ken to venture out from their home, and Ken was promptly "jumped" by the "kid down the road." I asked if the teens had a disagreement, but I was told the fight resulted from prejudicial attitudes. Mr. Smith was reassured by Ken's performance as a fighter and the friendship which bloomed after the blows subsided.

The Smith's acknowledged that the problems Ken experienced in the community were a direct result of prejudice against African Americans. Their home and extended family accepted people from various ethnic groups, but people in the neighborhood and school environment did not. Without hesitation, Mr. Smith classified the trouble Ken encountered as a result of prejudice. The Smiths were aware of the negative attitude

toward non-dominant group members and expressed some fear in this regard. Mr. Smith said that “he got scared” because he knew there were “people out there,” inferring that some of those people might be dangerous. Despite this external threat, the Smiths created a nurturing atmosphere in their foster home.

5.2.5 What about Hair?

The chorus of foster parents sang the same song continuously: What do we do with the hair? Foster parents from the three major racial groups—African American, White, and Mexican—all sought answers to this question. These foster parents represented a racial group, and their foster children represented another racial group. One African American foster parent expressed frustration at the foster care workers for placing a White foster child in her home without proper training. One such foster parent, Mrs. Oliver, was eager to share her pent up frustration regarding hair management. Her comments are presented in Excerpt 5P:

Excerpt 5P

R: Did you receive **training** to work with **children of a different race**?

Mrs. Oliver: No.

R: Do you think any would have been helpful and necessary?

Mrs. Oliver: I think it is necessary for most people that's becoming a foster parent. Yes, it is necessary because I even heard something being said in the class that **I disagree with about hair**. As a matter of fact, it was in the training of talking to White people of **how to do the Black kids' hair**.

R: Yes.

Mrs. Oliver: I would have handled it totally different if I would have been the one instructing the class. So, yes, because I think Blacks know how to do better... for example, doing the hair.

- R: Was a Black person teaching the class?
- Mrs. Oliver: Yes, it was a Black person teaching the class, but I felt it was taught very inappropriately. Now it's just me and my picky self, but I have addressed that before; they are probably upset with me about that.
- R: You tell them what correction you would have made to add improvements. Which one would you have made?
- Mrs. Oliver: White people come into the room with a derogatory opinion in the first place. Let's say about hair or lips or nose or whatever. So you don't stand before the group and say 'Vaseline on the skin 'cause we get ashy and put Vaseline on or grease the hair down and press.' I can't use the words that were used that day.
- R: It was disturbing?
- Mrs. Oliver: Yes, I never would have did it that way. It's a way if a person have a question, let them know that we need to set up avenues; if a **White person has a Black child and she doesn't know how to do that child's hair**, leave a door somewhere for her to go so she can learn how to do an African American child's hair.
(Monday, November 10, 2008)

I decided to begin with the most important question for me: "Did she receive training to parent a child of a different race?" Mrs. Oliver, who had been a foster parent for 23 years, answered "no." Exploring this topic, I then asked if she felt it would have been helpful or necessary. It was here that Mrs. Oliver began to express opinions she previously had formed. She stated that training would be necessary for most people. She added that she had heard that some information had been shared in training for White foster parents about caring for "Black kids' hair" that she disagreed with. She was adamant that the information would have been different if she had been the instructor. She further justified her statement with the defense that Blacks know how to do better doing the hair. Curiously, I asked if the instructor of the class had been a

Black person. She confirmed the racial identity of the instructor as Black but clung to her previous statement that the class was taught inappropriately. If I had any doubt, she allayed that with the statement that she had already voiced her opinion and she felt “they” were probably upset with her because of it. Naturally, the next segment of the interview focused on the improvements she suggested to the “Department of Human Services.”

Mrs. Oliver’s passionate rant continued with her assessment of the White people who attended the training session on hair. Mrs. Oliver expressed her belief that the White attendees came to the training with “derogatory opinions” of Black people’s hair and skin. She objected strongly to the trainer’s suggestion that Vaseline be used to eliminate ashy skin. She censored her language when retelling this story, concluding that she could not “use the words which were used that day.”

Mrs. Oliver’s mood darkened, so I asked if it had been disturbing. With a sad demeanor, she said it had been and she would not have conducted the training that way. She suggested as she neared the end of this conversation that there was a better way to convey the necessary information. Mrs. Oliver proposed an arrangement which would facilitate an exchange of information between those who needed the information and those who had the information. Mrs. Oliver labeled such an arrangement as “setting up avenues and doors” for a White foster parent to obtain information about Black hair care. She couched this information exchange as personal—that is, as one foster parent speaking to another foster parent.

Mrs. Oliver remembered how inadequate she felt when her foster care worker sent her a White child without sufficient hair care training. Her confidence plummeted

further when she was forced to disclose her inability to fulfill the basic task of hair care—one of her foster parent responsibilities. With some level of embarrassment, she shared with me a verbal exchange she had had with some of her previous foster children during her nearly two decades fostering:

A lot of kids will say, ‘Well, do **you know how to do White hair?**’

And I just say, ‘To be honest with you, **I really don’t.**’

Mrs. Oliver expressed very definite opinions about preparing foster parents to receive foster children of a different race and the management of hair care. She shared both content and format alternatives for the training sessions. We discussed her recommendations in our interview that fall day.

Clearly, from Mrs. Oliver’s interview in Excerpt 5P, she had strong opinions about the who, what, and how of hair care. Mrs. Oliver expressed the need for a network for foster parents where information about hair care could be exchanged. She expressed some sensitivity to skin care tips not usually shared outside of the African American community when she referred to the use of Vaseline (Excerpt 5P).

African American foster parents with White children reported some but fewer issues than White foster parents with African American children. The more frequent request was by White foster parents who asked about caring for their African American foster children’s hair. Many White foster parents who were interviewed for this study (Mrs. Lewis, Mrs. Betts, Mrs. Wright, Mrs. Glad, Mrs. Terrell, Jeb Jr., Harvey and Alexander) expressed the need for assistance with their foster children’s hair. I selected Mr. Cooper and Mrs. Wright as representatives of the collective thoughts of the group. Mr. Cooper and I spoke, and an excerpt of that interview is captured in Excerpt 5Q:

Excerpt 5Q

- R: Okay, for your 16-year-old African American child, have you noticed, or in your experience, is there anything you [do] different from your other adolescent girls? I know adolescent boys would be different.
- Mr. Cooper: The **only thing I noticed different is just, is I guess hair care.**
- R: Um-hum.
- Mr. Cooper: That's primarily it. Food wise, no. She is like all of the other kids.
- R: Hum.
- Mr. Cooper: Clothing, no. You know, she... it's **just hair products, different hair**—keep it greased, and that is about it. (Thursday, November 4, 2008)

At the time of the interview, Mr. Cooper has a full house of 11 children, which included six adopted, four biological, and one foster teen. He informed me that he and his wife had fostered more than 30 children in the six years since they became foster parents. With such broad experience, I wanted him to compare care for his African American foster daughter with care for his White teen daughters.

I sought to clarify that I was only interested in comparing girls from two racial groups not comparing his African American teenage foster daughter with foster teenage boys. Mr. Cooper indicated no differences in food or clothing choices based on his experience. He did, however, identify hair care and hair care products being different for his African American foster daughter than they were for his foster daughters of other races. Mr. Cooper seemed rather relaxed when he mentioned his concern about his foster daughter. He pondered for a few minutes before he amended his response by tacking on, "I guess hair care."

Although Mr. Cooper referenced African American hair care in a causal tone, Mrs. Wright's concern about African American hair management was more pronounced and impacted other family members as well. Mrs. Wright had two adopted daughters—one African American and one White. Mrs. Wright discussed hair care for her daughters as noted in Excerpt 5R.

Excerpt 5R

R: Has there been any difference that you know in your family since you've adopted Summer in terms of the kids or in [your] family?

Mrs. Wright: In family, no. Uh-uh. We kind of... we try and treat them all the same. I mean, but with the different personalities you do little different things.

R: Okay, okay.

Mrs. Wright: Our five year old has been accepting of all of them, and she's been pretty good with him, with our little one [new baby brother]. Um, I think time-wise for her **hair, for Summer's hair** [African American child with White siblings], to me, that is the biggest change because with Bridgette I have it cut short, and she combs through it on her own every day, and uh... but I've got to **spend at least a half hour doing Summer's hair every day.** (Thursday September 11, 2008)

I was fascinated with Mrs. Wright's family configuration. She had two adopted daughters and one biological son. The older daughter was White; the middle child, also a girl, was African American; and the youngest child was Mrs. Wright's only son. All three children were under the age of six years. Summer, her African American daughter was adopted last. I wondered how the family adjusted after adopting their second daughter, Summer. This was the initial point of the interview.

Mrs. Wright assured me that the family had not changed since the second adoption. Other than the three personalities requiring different approaches, she and her husband treated each of their three children the same. Nonetheless, her older

daughter, Bridgette, was already learning to comb her own hair, which had been cut short especially for this purpose. However, Summer's African American hair did not lend itself to the same treatment as Bridgette's. Mrs. Wright found it necessary to spend at least 30 minutes each day caring for Summer's hair.

Mrs. Wright's White adopted daughter often expressed impatience with Mrs. Wright about the amount of time required to manage the hair of her African American sister. Summer was a previous foster child who subsequently had been adopted. Mrs. Wright was combing Summer's hair when I arrived, and the television set was turned to children's cartoons. Summer sat quietly on Mrs. Wright's lap and expressed very little interest in any activity in the room. Summer's focus was on the television, and she rarely glanced away. Mrs. Wright's baby, in a nearby walker, was actively seeking attention throughout the interview. In fact, Mrs. Wright abandoned hair combing to quiet and feed the baby. After the baby was fed, we resumed talking about transracial foster care issues.

Mrs. Wright reported that as she combed and combed the hair of her African American daughter, her five-year-old White daughter remarked that it took a long time. Mrs. Wright regularly employed distractions such as cartoons to occupy both daughters during hair-care time. The length of time for hair care required for her African American daughter was more than for the other daughter. The process of combing, braiding, and creating a style for girls created challenges for Mrs. Wright, who was unaccustomed to Black hair.

All of the White foster parents interviewed for this study reported being unprepared to accomplish this activity of daily living. To successfully manage Black

hair, small sections must be combed separately. Then braiding or curling each section follows. This process necessitates more time for hair care. Further, haircuts for male foster children also had a cultural context. Primarily the texture of White hair allows haircuts when the hair is wet. Conversely cutting the coarse hair of African American children when wet results in an appearance far different from the anticipated results. The process of drying African American coarse hair is transformative, and it can lengthen in the drying process. Untrained parents responsible for hair care resulted in far too many “bad hair days” for their foster children.

Hair care was the one consistent area of concern expressed by the foster parents interviewed in this study. Foster parents of both races struggled to accommodate this basic need of every child. “Bad hair days” is the term I borrowed to describe this issue. Though not described as such by the foster care system, it is a regular occurrence for many foster children who have been transracially placed. The foster parents were both inexperienced and undertrained for this daily task. Mrs. Oliver, as other foster parents interviewed, seemed able to manage emotional, behavioral, and adjustment problems. But the quicksand of foster care was hair care. Transracial foster care was manageable, and most major problems could be anticipated. However, the question, “What do I do with the hair?” was asked repeatedly but seldom answered.

5.3 Summary

This chapter is the linchpin of this study’s exploration of transracial foster care. The data reported here represents a plethora of meaning assigned by the foster parents who were interviewed. Exploring the meaning these foster parents attributed to their transracial parenting experiences was certainly one of the critical factors in

understanding cultural identity development in their foster children. The perspective of the foster parents influenced the self-concept of their foster children. This influence can be viewed either as negative or positive. In turn, the process of cultural identity development is thus continued. It is this dynamic parenting relationship which forms the parameters for maintaining cultural identity in foster children.

The foster parents articulated a range of experiences that seemed to indicate points on a continuum of cultural understanding. Interestingly, foster parents who chose to close their eyes and not see race at all could be placed at one point along this continuum. Foster parents in this category decided to avoid seeing racial differences, and I identified them as being “in the color blind bind.” Failure to recognize the differences in racial and cultural groups was the same as failure to recognize unique qualities of the foster children.

Some of these foster parents’ comments can be classified as ignoring racial differences. “We are all equal, and we are all the same” is a philosophy which characterizes this group of respondents. But in so doing, this attitude denies a portion of the foster children’s core identities. This group of foster parents refused to see race either as a barrier to communication or as a bridge to cultural understanding.

For some foster parents who participated in this study, the characteristics which highlight racial distinctions became focal points for celebrations. One anchor point was acknowledgement of the rich heritage that racial and cultural variations offer. For some, diversity was a *cause célèbre* and a reason for a cultural festival. Foster parents who ascribed to this point of view celebrated race through ethnic foods, clothing, and music. Cultural differences had positive rather than negative value for this segment of the

foster parents who were interviewed.

This segment of foster parents was so sensitive to the essence of their foster children's racial identities that they orchestrated events which honored racial differences. This second group lauded cultural differences and embraced racial differences as a chef would embrace a new spice. Foster children of a racial or culturally different group added a welcome dimension to these foster families. Such families were eager to share with and learn from this diversity experience.

Foster parents who expressed the importance of each racial group being self-contained represented a third segment on this continuum. Foster parents I interviewed who were members of this group expressed a desire that racial categorization be made and kept separate. These foster parents believed that foster children benefit the most when kept in their own racial groups.

Foster parents who experienced negative feedback from the community provided a fourth level of concern for their foster children. These concerns were based on a residential community's reaction to a non-dominant foster child who had come to live there. Lack of enforcement of basic civil rights by law enforcement officers and racist education practices in the public schools existed.

Data indicated that some of the communities were entrenched in racist practices and not likely to emerge from those biased beliefs. In those situations, foster parents were left to fight institutional racism on behalf of the foster children in their care. Creating a transracial foster home forced some foster parents to face long-held but buried prejudices. This examination proved to be painful, and foster parents dismissed and denied the accusation. In the end, denial was not realistic, for their words were

condemning. All foster parents benefited from the transracial experience, but some did so at the expense of the foster children and for others, the benefit was greatest for the children in their care.

Finally, the foster parents' primary challenge was how to care for hair when in a transracial foster family. Nearly every parent commented, usually without prompting, about the need for specific training in hair-care management. Linking racial identity with hair care was not an automatic connection. However, in the data collected for this study, the connection between these two factors was especially strong and reinforcing.

It is the foster parents who have primary responsible for the daily nurturing and care of the child in the child welfare system. The data collected from the foster parents who participated in this study provided a wealth of information about transracial foster care experiences. These foster parents created meaning from their experiences parenting transracially, and each agreed to share these experiences. The data collected covered a range of topics that included hair care, community concerns, racist school practices, cross-cultural dating, and fun with food.

All foster parents were welcoming and willing to offer a glimpse into their lives. Some invited me into their living rooms, some were eager to share their family photo albums, and others served fresh coffee and snacks. More importantly, they were passionate and shared some of the most intimate moments they had with their foster children. They accepted me, and we quickly established mutual trust. The foster parent data gave voice to the topic of race that so many within the foster community have been reluctant to address.

The meaning that foster parents assigned to the transracial experience was

enhanced with comments from their foster children. It was the presence of the foster children that defined those homes as transracial. The very existence of children of another race in their homes created opportunity and challenge both in the foster homes and in the communities. All foster homes adjusted, but for some, the adjustment was more natural and consistent with the existing family pattern.

CHAPTER 6 – FOSTER CARE WORKERS' MEANING MAKING OF TRANSRACIAL FOSTER CARE

6.1 Introduction

The primary purpose of this chapter is to describe the meaning foster care workers attach to their transracial foster care experiences. While I have explored and discussed the voices of foster parents and foster children in Chapter 5, the focus of this chapter is to integrate the perspectives of the foster care workers, whose role in the foster care process is undeniably critical. Based on the foster care workers' responses in individual interviews, the variations of the meaning of the transracial foster care experience were developed in order to answer two research questions delineated in Chapter 1:

1. What meanings do foster care workers assign to transracial foster care experiences?
2. How does the foster care system address racial identity issues in transracial foster care placement?

Each foster care worker selected had significant experiences working with foster children, foster parents, and biological parents. The foster care workers discussed with me the following issues: (1) placement criteria, (2) parental preferences, (3) hair care, (4) chocolate children, and (5) acting White. The latter two categories denote exact racial expressions used or reported by the foster care workers.

Six of the eight foster care workers spoke in detail about the criteria for placing foster children transracially while only one commented about the cultural context of parental discipline. Managing hair and skin care continued to surface as a major issue with foster care workers just as it did in the interviews with foster parents and foster

children discussed in Chapter 5. Hair care was the one consistent theme in each of the three data sets for Chapter 7.

The foster care workers described their unique experiences, and each story had its own merit. The experiences of the foster care workers were broad, and their comments reflected their contacts with numerous foster families. For Amy and Winston, each with more than 10 years of professional experience in foster care, there was potential for data from dozens of foster families. I anticipated receiving a substantial amount of information, and I was thrilled at the prospect. With other foster care workers, some of the experiences were so situation specific that no other foster care workers reported similar firsthand knowledge. I have reported those concerns that surfaced consistently and those that arose from single situations. For example, only one foster care worker mentioned culturally specific parental discipline, which is an important focus and may be unique to this group of foster care workers.

Excerpts from the interviews are included as supporting evidence. Bold fonts are used to emphasize reflective comments made in the interviews. Following is a discussion of each theme.

6.2 Placement Criteria

Amy, as aforementioned, had more than a decade of experience and was recommended to me by her agency director. Amy was regarded as a foster care worker with broad experience in both the private and public sectors. I was therefore curious to discuss transracial foster care placement criteria and began the interview with the question most central to this research study. She and I discussed the role of race and other factors in foster care placement. Parts of this discussion appear in Excerpt 6A:

Excerpt 6A

- R: Is there any particular—well, I should say, does race come into the placement aspect, and if so, how?
- Amy: We try to keep children when they come into foster care as **close to their homes**. We do not think that's fair to the child [to be an hour from his or her biological parents] because we do parenting ties, and we really want to **keep them close together** so that they can work on the parent, the treatment plan, so they can really feel close to the child and that they can work on their issues of seeing them every week for their parenting time.
- R: Distance issues...
- Amy: Exactly. I completely agree with that. The race thing—we do have children in a home that is, I think, **culturally congruent**; it is on one of our forms. Um, so they have identity with their home, their culture.
- R: So that is one on your...
- Amy: Criterion?
- R: Criterion, yes.
- Amy: Number one—**the home is least restrictive**—most family-like placement are available, so not residential, a home. You know, a family can **meet the physical and emotional needs of the child**, making sure the foster parents can meet those needs...
- Then **placement with relatives**; we always try to place them with relatives, no matter what; **placement with siblings** is the fourth criteria. Um, obviously we always want to place them with siblings; **five is proximity of the child's family**, so we try to keep them close.
- Number six is **continuity of relationships**, offering regular visits with the family.
- R: OK, I understand that.
- Amy: And then **seven is the child's racial ethnic and cultural identity, heritage and background**. Um, and then **number eight is availability of resources**. (Tuesday, September 30, 2008)

Initially, I wanted to know if race was a factor at all when placing foster children. I must admit that I was surprised when Amy responded to that question by addressing

travelling distance between the foster home and the child's biological home. I struggled to connect two seemingly disparate issues. How did the distance between the child's biological home and the potential foster home impact the foster experience, I wondered? I pondered the possible connection between miles traveled for parental visits and racial placement considerations. Could distance influence placement of foster children as much or more than other seemingly more relevant criteria? As Amy and I continued our dialogue, I attempted to navigate my way through the placement maze. This occurred at the same time I was beginning to understand the agency's context for their definition of "cultural congruency." As our conversation proceeded, Amy explained all of the agency's placement criteria.

I asked Amy if she would list what criteria her agency valued when considering where to place a foster child who needed a foster family. She started with the number-one criteria as a home that presented the least number of restrictions. Amy compared a residential institutional setting as more restrictive than a single-family home. This least restrictive environment, she explained, must also be on par with addressing both the biological and psychological requirements of the child seeking placement. The placement decision thus far did include consideration of placement with relatives. Now, at this juncture, the perspective broadened to consider placing the child in the home of relatives or with siblings in a non-relative home. Distance was no longer a primary consideration.

Amy then realized that she was halfway through her list of nine placement criteria. Pausing momentarily with an "um" utterance, she continued with the fifth factor for placement consideration. The physical distance between the child's biological family

and the location of the child's foster home was the next factor. In other words, traveling distance became the sixth-ranked placement factor and is integral to maintaining a relationship between the foster child and the biological family. The relationship is cemented with a one-hour in-person visit each week in the presence of the foster care worker. These visits progress from a 60-minute supervised visit to a non-supervised visit. Then they progress to longer visits, then an overnight visit, and finally an extended stay.

As Amy continued to explicate the placement criteria, she arrived at criteria seven and landed at the very point where I wish we could have begun. The intent of my discussion with Amy was to determine the ranking of "racial and cultural identity" variables when placing foster children. I discovered this factor, however, was nearly at the bottom of the agency's list. Only "resource availability" ranked lower in placement value.

For Amy, with more than a decade of experience, cultural congruence was essentially in placing a child in a specific foster home. When we spoke in her office, she seemed cautious while articulating her agency's position. She wanted it to be clearly understood that placing a child in an environment similar to the environment where the child had lived might be the best option and was indeed her agency's practice.

Cultural congruence, as defined by Amy and when applied to an actual foster home, implied an environment that was similar to the child's biological home. This meant similar food, similar music, similar spiritual practices, and similar neighborhood composition. This idea had been institutionalized at the private agency where Amy worked and appeared as a placement criterion on the agency's forms. The philosophy

of the private agency that employed Amy was that foster children's environments should resemble environments that are "similar to their home and their culture."

I continued to struggle as I assembled the pieces of this placement puzzle. Some pieces fit easily, but others not all at. Was driving distance an overriding consideration, or was the biological connection primary? It was unclear at this juncture whether racial identification was a major or minor factor in placement. Distance was Amy's response to my question about transracial placement, yet on the priority list, distance ranked fifth in importance.

Although Amy's agency sometimes placed children in transracial homes, the goal for placement is always to assign a child to a home as similar to the child's biological home as possible. She spoke of a large county in the agency's geographic area of service where all of the placements consisted of children being placed with foster families of the same race. Amy added that most of her experience consisted of working with families who had only children of the same race placed in their homes. This was true whether the county was primarily Caucasian or primarily African American. Quoting Amy from the complete interview, "I've loved every foster parent that we've had, but yes, they've been all the same culture as their foster children." This concept is labeled as racial matching and can be traced to earlier studies on foster families (Auld, 1992; Campbell, 2001; Rhodes, 1992). Although it may not initially appear so, racial matching can be the official practice of transracial placement. Agencies may aggressively seek same-race placements rather than placing foster children in transracial settings.

Despite the agency practice of cultural congruence, racial similarity of the foster

child to the foster home was not ranked high as a priority on the list of placement considerations. Placing a foster child in a culturally congruent home seemed contraindicated to transracial placement. My preliminary interviews with Amy's agency director and the regional director supported my goal of exploring transracial foster care placement. The agency director identified Amy as a person with professional experience in the private and public sectors. I was then somewhat baffled when Amy explained in our interview that the foster families she had provided service to were all parenting foster children of the "same culture as their foster children." She did, however, concede that one of her cases at the time of the interview involved Caucasian parents and African American children. This transracial family was transitioning from foster care to adoption. Amy's primary contribution to this study is her implementation of the agency's placement practices. She was well versed in the agency's policy which governed placement of foster children, and she was able to interpret the practical meanings.

While one of Amy's principle placement considerations was a culturally congruent foster home, this seemed ironically incongruent with the agency's intake forms. Race and cultural background were ranked low among the criteria. In actuality, distance between homes appeared a far more salient concern for the private agency where Amy worked. Amy made a clear demarcation between the role of racial identity in foster home placement and the importance of traveling time between the biological family home and the foster family home.

Amy's agency numbered the placement criteria with the "least restrictive setting" as number one and the most important while "availability of resources" ranked last among the eight placement factors. Near the bottom of the list, item seven out of eight,

was consideration of a home that supported the child's racial and cultural identity. Kinship care, placement with siblings, distance between the biological home and the foster home were each considered more important than placement in a home of similar racial and cultural identity. If cultural congruence was the number-one criteria in actuality, then it would be a conflict to rank order it near the bottom at seven out of eight. By contrast, since cultural congruence was a high placement criteria, it would supersede all other criteria. For Amy, it did.

While providing racial congruency was important, traveling distance was also a critical element in placement. When I asked Amy if race was a consideration in placement decisions, she responded by saying that keeping children physically close to their biological home was perhaps more important than race. Distance issues, as she and I labeled them, were a significant consideration. Notice in the conversation from Excerpt 6A, Amy said cultural congruence was on the intake form. She did not say how or whether that factor was an important consideration. It appears that the agency's policy for placement may be similar but not identical to agency practice. The policy appears subject to interpretation by individual foster care workers. Some may choose to adhere strictly to the policy, but others may modify the policy as the situation warranted. Amy commented that her understanding of the placement policy was that sometimes decisions were made utilizing information not on the original list of eight criteria.

Her example of how this happens involved a Caucasian family moving from fostering to the process of adopting African American children. This family's scenario implied the use of other criteria. As Amy shared the details, it was evident that this was an exception and did not match the agency's self-definition of cultural congruence.

However, as Amy concluded, the family was in the process of adopting the day the interview was conducted, and she was not able to provide any clarifying information.

My curiosity remained peaked as I probed the public sector for answers to my placement questions. Winston was from the public child welfare agency and had 10 years of foster care experience, as did Amy. He explained the agency's position on foster care placement, and the highlights are in Excerpt 6B:

Excerpt 6B

- R: Now,, the foster parents are on the list, and then if you need a home, do you look at **the race or you look at the location** of the foster home? What are some of the considerations you look at when you are selecting a home for a particular child?
- Winston: Well, like I say, **we want to match** them up with their ethnicity groups, but we also want to try to **keep them in the area**, you know, where they [are] accustomed to [being].
- R: Which is **first**, looking at them **ethnically or looking at the location**?
- Winston: Location.
- R: Okay. (Friday, November 7, 2008)

I wanted to know whether the agency placed its emphasis on racial matching or driving distance. I also felt it was important to appreciate any other placement criteria. He stated in his interview with me that ethnically matching the foster child to the foster home was preferred. Continuing, he said he wished he could say "preferred" meant first consideration, but in actuality it did not. Often, a placement criterion being considered first was not always the determining criterion.

Winston explained that if he has to choose between two foster homes, one in the same racial group as the foster child but geographically distant and the other closer but

racially different, racial matching would slip from first to second place. Location then became number one. In this regard, he expressed sentiments similar to those Amy articulated in Excerpt 6A. Distance issues were an aspect of transracial foster placement that seemed to jostle a preset notion of placement factors. The geographic distance from the home of the biological parents to the home of the foster parents was a foremost consideration in foster care placement.

Winston, with 10 years of experience at this public child welfare agency, saw location as one of the single most important criteria for placement. He spoke extensively about the ranking of transracial placement and the preference of keeping the foster child in his or her own cultural environment. He, like Amy, kept distance foremost in his mind when he sought the “right” foster home. The physical distance between the child’s biological parents and the child’s foster home continued to emerge as a significant placement issue.

As Amy explained, since foster care was designed as a temporary alternative to facilitate the resolution of problems, foster care workers “... want to keep them [parent and child] close together.” Proximity was essential to support visitation, which reinforced the parent-child bond, allowed the parent to “really feel close to the child,” and to work on issues. Amy added that since foster children visit their biological parents each week, it seemed unfair “to the child to live an hour away” and thus increase the probability that transportation could be an obstacle.

I also interviewed Jackie, the intake worker, at the same agency where Amy worked. Amy indicated that Jackie would have more specific information about the intake process and a copy of the actual intake forms. It was from that interview with

Jackie that the criteria for placement expanded.

The additional placement criteria, as I learned from Jackie, were not as objective as the issue of distance between the foster home and biological home. The agency where Amy and Jackie were both employed had at least one subjective placement criterion. An equally significant question was which foster home placement would best serve the needs of the child? Jackie addressed the child's needs when we spoke. Selected comments from this conversation are presented in Excerpt 6C.

Excerpt 6C

- Jackie: I focus on what's in the **best interest of the child...**
- R: There has been some looking at the **foster home in terms of their strengths** and some looking at the kids' needs, so there's already been some matching of that independent of race and culture?
- Jackie: Yes.
- R: So I'm guessing that that would also be a point of discussion with the biological parents because this... this particular family has already been identified as having these **strengths that your child needs**, these services, and so it just **may be so happen that they are a different race.**
- Jackie: Yes, that's how we would talk about it.
- R: Okay, and do parents, the biological [parents], do they feel any comfort with that, or that's just not where they are?
- Jackie: It's, I've never had a situation that wasn't able to get resolved in that respect. As I said, there have been situations where the birth parent has their view, and their views stayed the same; they had their prejudices, but they were able to, um, go beyond that to do what was **best for their child.** (Tuesday, October 22, 2008)

I continued to gather information from the various foster care workers about factors which were important when placing a foster child. I persisted in my quest for an expanded list of criteria, and my conversation with Jackie provided an opportunity for

this discussion and some answers. Jackie was prompt in her response when she declared that she first considered what the foster child needed most. She said she considered the choices that would support the child's primary needs and be in his or her best interest. When the best interest of the child assumed central importance, what happened to other placement criteria, I pondered? Mentally, I juggled all of the foster care placement criteria and attempted to sort and prioritize based on my understanding and interpretation of the data from the interviews. I prodded Jackie during our conversation about the idea of the child's needs versus the idea of racial matching. When the focal point of placement assumes what is in the "best interest of the child," could placement be dynamically affected?

Jackie matched the strengths of the foster home with the needs of the child. Note in Excerpt 6C above that she did not mention racial matching but rather matching a child's needs with a family able and willing to meet those needs as identified for the child. When considering racial matching, Jackie hoped the biological family would lay aside any prejudicial concerns and focus on what was best for their child. The idea of the "best interest of the child" definitely remixed the placement criteria

This question of placing the foster child physically close to the biological family had many implications, including racial overtones, and was emerging as persistent theme. In responding to a question regarding placement of African American foster children in areas great distances from their biological families, Camelia, another foster care worker provided comments. She shared her views, and the highlights are as indicated in Excerpt 6D.

Excerpt 6D

Camelia: We also have a home up north too [a rural area 100 miles north of the city] that we ask if **they would accept African American children**. They said, 'Of course we would, but we know our community wouldn't. And the child would not feel safe here and would not be welcomed in the schools.' And so **we would not place any African American kids up there because we know it wouldn't be appropriate, and it wouldn't be good for the child**.

R: I see.

Camelia: The foster family said, 'Absolutely we would take anybody but our community and our school system, they wouldn't.'

R: Okay, in the last case, the foster parents had to make a decision that they thought was in **the best interest of the child** even though they themselves would be willing.

Camelia: Yeah, yeah, right. They didn't see a problem at all with an interracial family. But they knew their community wouldn't be accepting of it and didn't want to put a child through that...
(Thursday, November 13, 2008)

Excerpt 6D commences with Camelia's response to my question about transracial foster care placement priorities. She explained as Excerpt 6D unfolds that the placement workers are allowed some discretion where to place foster children and with whom. Nonetheless, she expressed this idea as a subjective perspective but one in which "the best interest of the child is maintained." She cited an example in which racial problems dance obliquely on the horizons of the community but are not present in the foster home. Camelia continued prognosticating that such a placement for an African American child would not be in the child's best interest. In this case, the family was willing, but the community was not.

As Camelia indicated in Excerpt 6D, the best interest of the child was not to place transracially. Camelia and the potential foster parents agreed that to place the African American children in the community in question was not in the best interest of the child.

The foster parents perceived the community reception would be less than favorable. The public child welfare agency also utilized the criteria of “best interest of the child” but with a different outcome.

Another foster care worker, Lucie, discussed a placement for a seven-year-old Caucasian girl with a two-parent African American foster family. This foster care placement involved a variety of complex issues. Lucie was employed at the public agency and spoke to me about the complicated process of getting the right match. A selected segment of that interview is presented in Excerpt 6E:

Excerpt 6E

- R: What kind of preparation did you have to do to prepare the African American foster parents to receive this seven-year-old Caucasian girl?
- Lucie: Well, far as I did to make sure it was OK. Not only was she different ethnicity, she had a lot of other issues.
- R: What kind of issues?
- Lucie: She was developmentally delayed. She was wearing pull-ups.
- R: Okay.
- Lucie: She had lots of temper tantrums and outbursts.
- R: Okay, she had emotional problems and physical problems.
- Lucie: She needed a lot of patience. We needed to make sure the other kids in the house would be able to be accommodating. So I met with the foster parents and told them all about the child, what she would need. And of course, she was Caucasian.
- R: Okay, it sounds like you are telling me... that the major concerns were whether or not the family could manage the health issues and emotional problems. Did I misread this, or is that correct?
- Lucie: That was my biggest concern over anything.

R: And that's what you were most concerned about?

Lucie: When I was looking for a family, you want to try place children with families who look like them. But the goal is in the best interest of the children. So you want a person to meet all of their needs collectively, and that's what I thought this foster family would do.
(Friday, November 7, 2008)

I was interested in exploring the thought process that resulted in the transracial scenario as outlined above. Permanently placing a White child in the home of an African American couple was a deviation from conventional wisdom. Lucie explained that this child was quite an anomaly fraught with a Pandora's Box of adjustment issues. Lucie outlined physical, emotional, and intellectual issues. To illustrate the range of complications, Lucie proffered that this child of seven years of age still wore pull-up underwear and was not toilet trained.

Lucie amplified the discussion with descriptors of the child's inability to successfully manage emotions and physical deficits. At this juncture in the placement consideration, race was not a factor. What Lucie wanted, she explained, was a family who could cope with the magnitude of issues this foster child presented. Lucie was not concerned about race but about the intrinsic strengths of the foster family.

The reflection Lucie sought was not a mirror image of a person—i.e., one who looked the same as the person looking in the mirror. Instead, what Lucie sought was a mirror image of a family and a foster child who looked more alike emotionally rather than physically. Lucie reported that what she found for the foster child was a family who mirrored the foster child even though the foster family's cultural identification was not the same.

This is another vivid example of how "in the best interest of the child" actually

resulted in an individualized placement plan tailored for the needs of a specific foster child. The child Lucie described above required a family who could provide emotional support/management and manage the resulting complications from the child's delayed physical development. Further, this child needed a family who would be nurturing and patient. These skills would be essential for the foster parents and for any other children in the foster home. Lucie was able to construct placement arrangements where not only the child would benefit, but also where the foster parents would be able to operate within their capabilities and comfort zone. What Lucie described in Excerpt 6E was a win-win scenario for all concerned. To ensure that the best interest of the child would prevail, racial identity issues were relegated to a lesser position on the hierarchy of foster care placement concerns.

There are clearly a variety of issues to contemplate when considering a foster care placement. Foster care workers are guided by agency practice, agency policy, the needs of the child, the needs of the biological family, and the strengths of the foster family. The ranking of the established criteria in some cases must be juggled to result in the best family situation for the foster child.

6.3 Parental Preferences

Another equally important aspect of placement criteria was the desires of the foster and biological parents. The foster care workers in this study were receptive to the requests of the biological parents and also the requests from the foster parents. Both the original biological parents and the foster parents expressed racial preferences.

The White family, whose story follows, expressed negative feelings and thoughts about African American people as their daughter was growing up. At the age of 10,

there was a need to locate a foster home for her. She had special needs, and after careful consideration, a foster home was identified, but the foster parents were African American and thus the “wrong color.” Throughout the 10 years of her life, she had heard from her family of origin that “those people” were not the ones with whom she should associate. I had the following exchange with Jackie, a placement foster care worker, and emphasized this concept of parental preferences in Excerpt 6F.

Excerpt 6F

R: Okay, so in your four years of experience in the area of foster care, have you had occasion to work directly with children who were a different race than their foster parents?

Jackie: Yes.

R: Okay, can you tell me about that experience?

Jackie: The most recent one was a little girl; **she was a Caucasian and was placed in an African American** home setting, um... and that was at first a **difficult experience for her due to her upbringing**, which in turn was difficult for the foster parents because there was some conflict there.

R: And um... what... what about her upbringing made it difficult for her?

Jackie: Um, **her parents were prejudiced and used racial slurs**, um... and so then she used them. I don't know how much she understood what she was saying. Um, but **she would use them**, which was obviously very offensive to the foster parents.

R: Okay.

Jackie: So, um... you know, that was a really good teaching experience because, uh... you know, as offended as the foster parent was, we talked about being able to teach her a different way and a different understanding. Um, so we did work on that for a really long time.

R: How – did she remain in that foster home?

Jackie: In that foster home, I don't recall, but she... this happened **in two different homes... in neither of the foster homes, she wasn't removed for that reason.**

R: And both foster homes [where] she was were African American?

Jackie: Correct (Tuesday, October 22, 2008)

I began by setting the context for the discussion which would follow. I asked Jackie if she would frame our discussion based on her professional experience in the area of transracial foster care. I assumed, even as I asked, that she would have numerous transferable experiences and offer a wealth of knowledge on this topic. Jackie relayed one of her most recent experiences, which was fraught layers of difficulty and long-held racial negativity by the biological parents, who were forced to place their child in foster care.

The narrative Jackie shared focused on a Caucasian child raised in a Caucasian household where racial slurs were generously sprinkled in the conversation. This child required foster care services and was subsequently placed in an African American home. There, she used negative racial slurs learned in her biological home. These terms were offensive to the people who then held the responsibility for taking care of her basic needs. Jackie persuaded the foster parents to use this incident as a teachable moment. Jackie's story did not include what outcome occurred for the foster parents, but she did share that for this foster child, behavioral management resulted in a successful placement.

The biological parents during this child's decade of life instilled certain unfavorable beliefs about people who were different. Specifically, derogatory

statements about African Americans were conveyed to and repeated by the child. Both the African American foster parent and Jackie felt the child may not have fully grasped the implications of the prejudices she was espousing, yet reportedly the words were hateful and, unfortunately, hurtful. The child found herself isolated from her family and placed in the lives of people she had been taught to hate. Nonetheless, this placement was successful for the child as was the one which followed. Both families were African American. This speaks to the child's resiliency.

Sometimes it is the foster parent rather than the biological parent who expresses prejudice and negativity. In view of the responsibility foster parents voluntarily accept, rejecting a child solely based on race would seem somewhat odd. Understandably, foster parents can and do express racial preferences. However, Winston tells of a foster parent in the following conversation (Excerpt 6G) who displayed cruelty and would have violated the foster parent code of ethics had one existed. In Excerpt 6G, Winston shares the communication:

Excerpt 6G

R: Okay, now are there any situations where you find the foster parent takes a kid of a different race and then does not want to continue the placement, not because of the child's behavior **but because of the kid's race**? Does that ever...?

Winston: We just had a problem a couple of weeks ago... you know, and this was before the placement of the foster child. We called the **foster parent; she's open on our list to take any ethnicity of children.**

We called her and let her know we had a [placement]; we get there, the child arrives with the other worker; this foster parent declined this child; she was arguing with the worker right in front of the child. **She thought the child was Caucasian... right in front of the child.**

R: Wow.

- Winston: You know, what the DHS [State Department of Human Services] Worker did was **file a complaint** on them. It was totally inappropriate, **arguing and dismissing the child** because you feel that this **child is not Hispanic**.
- R: What did that mean in terms of the foster care placement? Obviously, they were taken to the foster parent, but she didn't take them because they weren't Hispanic?
- Winston: Exactly, but she really was Hispanic, but in her eyes, she didn't look it.
- R: Right, **she didn't take the child?**
- Winston: **No**, you have cases like that. (Friday, November 7, 2008)

Biological parents, already under stress, may reveal their most basic instincts, values, and prejudices when entering the foster care system. Foster parents, however, volunteering as professional parents and role models, are expected to display exemplary behavior under most, if not all, parental circumstances. Foster parents, therefore, are not permitted to let their prejudices show. One day, one foster parent did, and that event has been recorded here.

Although I did not have a perceived opinion, I must confess I was shocked to hear Winston's story about a foster parent who denied placement to a child because of the child's race. The foster parent had a positive reputation and an open-to-all-races-and-culture status among the foster care workers. Therefore, the foster care worker felt confident asking this foster parent to accept a placement without revealing the race of the child. Because the foster parent thought the foster child was Caucasian, the child was rejected upon arrival when the child's race seemed revealed. A contentious debate ensued in front of the foster child, who needed a home that day. This foster parent did

not accept foster children who were White. The state Department of Human Services ultimately filed a complaint against that foster parent. The irony was that the foster parent wanted only Hispanic children and rejected the foster child in question because the child did not look Hispanic; however, in actuality, the child was Hispanic.

Winston and I discussed how difficult it was for this child at that moment. We were particularly concerned about her emotional health and what emotions surfaced for this vulnerable foster child during this exchange. The girl, after separation from her family, stood and waited to be embraced by a caring substitute family. Incredibly, she was rejected at the door. The immediate dismissal was not because she was female, nor was it because of her age; rather, it was because of her skin color. This foster parent refused to accept Caucasian children but would gladly accept Hispanic children, or at least children who looked Hispanic and did not look Caucasian. In Excerpt 6G, the foster parent, in fact, rejected a child who was Hispanic (the foster parent's preference) but who did not have the racial appearance of a Hispanic girl, as the foster parent perceived it.

6.4 Hair Care

One significant issue that surfaced in each data set—foster children, foster parents, and foster care workers—was in the arena of personal grooming. Foster parents who were fostering transracially, either African American foster parents with White children or White foster parents with African American children, had questions about hair care. Foster parents interviewed considered the foster care workers experts based on their professional experience in child welfare or their personal life experience. Of the foster care workers interviewed for this study, one fourth personalized the

concern of hair care. Amy, a White foster care worker, provided a vivid example of contextualizing the issue of hair care, and Amy's comments are in Excerpt 6H:

Excerpt 6H

Amy: I like, for example, if I were to be licensed as a foster parent and I had an **African American girl**.

R: Um-hum.

Amy: I would **need to be taught** how to do her hair.

R: Okay.

Amy: And **take care of her hair** because it is different, and I didn't know that. I had one at my old foster care job; the little girl's hair was so dry, and it was breaking.

R: Yes.

Amy: And I was like, 'What's going on?' and she was like, 'I don't know. I wash it every day...' I said, 'Oh no, you can't!' I said I was told you can't because it takes all the oils out and it breaks, and she ended up taking a class and finding out.

R: Okay.

Amy: She took the class and found out how to do this poor girl's hair, and she ended up taking her to a beautician to do it.

R: Okay.

Amy: And um, she didn't know. You know, there are things that I do think, and then I had, um... I had an African American family have a Caucasian little girl and, um... she was asking me how to do her hair, and I said, 'Just put the pony tails in.'

You know what's different is that you have to wash her hair every day because the oils will make our hair really greasy and, um... look really... it'll get... it'll get dirty, and it'll be awful. (Laughs). Two days I'm, you know, um, she's like, 'Oh,' so I told her just wash it every day.

R: You are Caucasian?

Amy: Yes. (Tuesday, September 30, 2008)

When Amy and I discussed hair care for foster children by foster parents of a different race, Amy offered an example to illustrate the need to train foster parents. Her eagerness to provide a clear illustration of the issues shaped her example of what she herself would actually need to do if she were in the place of a foster parent. Amy then recalled a former foster parent who had concerns regarding grooming her foster daughter. The essence of that experience is captured by Amy and retold to me in Excerpt 6H.

Amy described the state of the former foster child's hair as so dry that it was breaking. The foster mother expressed confusion about why the foster child's hair was breaking. The foster mother felt washing the child's hair daily was especially attentive and appropriate. It was neither. In fact, the daily washing of the foster child's hair may have been a causal factor of the breakage. The child's hair was constantly striped of essential oils, many of which were external products added by the foster mom. The foster mom added oil, then unnecessarily washed it out. The foster mom was certain this was the proper procedure for African American hair care.

Amy then revealed that the foster mother felt wholly unprepared and inadequately trained. This awareness resulted in the foster parent enrolling in a class on hair care and subsequently understanding the complexity of the process. The foster mother, armed with this new knowledge, then escorted the foster child to a beautician for professional support.

Amy continued our discussion but seemed to need to shift the focus of our conversation. Amy hesitated before proceeding to explain another situation in which the

foster parents were African American and the foster child White. In this family, there were also hair issues. Amy was comfortable responding and promptly told the foster family simply to put pony tails in her hair. Amy again personalized this exchange by shifting to the first person as she went on to explain. Perhaps in an attempt to help me understand, Amy said, "The oils will make our hair really greasy." Notice the use of the first person pronoun.

Basic hair care, such as when to wash hair and what products are best for different hair types, e.g., blow dry or press and curl, was a concern for all foster care workers when placing transracially. Sometimes the foster care workers knew the answers, and sometimes they did not. Foster care workers must serve as a resource for foster parents who have questions but not answers.

In another scenario captured during these interviews, the foster care worker, based solely on her race, was asked to consult with a foster parent who had been assigned to another foster care worker. Even though Carol was not the foster care worker of record, she was a consultant based on her expertise and experience. However, Carol was not sought because of her broad experience as a foster care worker. Rather, she was referenced because of her role as an African American woman who may have hair issues sometime in her life. This discussion is illustrated in Excerpt 6J.

Excerpt 6J

R: In the time you have been working in foster care, have you had occasion to case manage children who were placed in homes where they were racially/culturally different than the children?

Carol: Yes.

- R: Okay, can you talk to me about that experience?
- Carol: Um, one particular case, I think the first time that I actually paid attention to it was a little um... a little African American girl. She wasn't on my caseload; [she] was in a foster home with a White female who was in the process of adopting her as well as the little bi-racial boy on my case load.
- R: Okay.
- Carol: And even though the African American child was not on my caseload, I ended up having quite a few **conversations with the foster parent about her hair.**
- R: And why would the foster parent ask you about her hair?
- Carol: Because, she, uh... **the child had what we label as very coarse hair.**
- R: And you are African American?
- Carol: Yes.
- R: Okay, um hum.
- Carol: And, um... she just wanted tips on how to make it manageable and look pretty
- R: Okay.
- Carol: The **products** that she had tried wasn't working, and it was drying her hair out, so I would talk to her about different things she could try, **what to use and what I wouldn't suggest she use**, and things like that. (Thursday, October 30, 2008)

I began this interview, as I did others, with an opening question about the foster care worker's experience with foster parents and foster children who were from different racial and cultural groups. I suggested to Carol that she just talk about the meaning she attached to those experiences. This boilerplate introduction to the topic provided a platform from which Carol could begin at a juncture of her own choosing.

Carol elected to begin with a brief story of a foster family where the African American foster daughter and a bi-racial son were forming a new family through adoption with a single, White female. The African American girl was not on Carol's foster care caseload. Carol was asked for assistance with the case by another worker. Although Carol was not a beautician, she provided a wealth of information for the foster mother. Carol's primary qualification as a consultant was that Carol was African American, the same race as the foster child. Carol's consultation services included advice on hair care products also.

Foster parents relied on the foster care workers for a variety of information, resources, and education. It was more than evident that hair care was one topic foster care workers, such as Carol, were asked about and one question to which they were expected to have answers. Their positions as foster care workers placed them in a position of authority in the eyes of the foster parents they served. Foster care workers were expected to be knowledgeable about both Black hair care and White hair care.

Carol's cultural heritage as an African American woman was the basis of the foster family's request for assistance. The foster family reasoned that since Carol had African American hair, she therefore must know how to care for it. With hair care surfacing as a consistent concern, it emerged as an important and major finding based on the frequency of responses alone. Notwithstanding is the conversation shared in Excerpt 6K, which I held with one foster care worker. This conversation illustrated that hair care was a concern for most, but not all, foster care workers. Camelia's experience was quite different. Excerpt 6K captures part of our conversation.

Excerpt 6K

- R: In your experience with foster parents, have you known [if] the training they received to be foster parents has prepared them to receive a child of a different race?
- Camelia: I think so. I think the biggest thing that I can think of may be the kids are thinking that we don't know about getting their hair cut and styled—all that kind of stuff. They are not telling us.
- R: Are these boys that you are referring to—the 15 year old (Anthony) and the 16 year old? Have either raised the hair cutting as a concern?
- Camelia: Nah, they just take them to wherever they go to whoever knows how to cut African American hair.
- R: I see.
- Camelia: So I know there may be more things the kids are thinking that we don't know about, but what I have seen of the hair is pretty trivial. In the scheme of things, [hair] is pretty trivial.
(Thursday, November 13, 2008)

I wanted to know if in Camelia's work with foster parents, she felt the current cadre of foster parents received training sufficient enough to parent a child from a different racial or cultural group. Camelia answered positively, confirming that the scope of the foster parent training was sufficient but with one exception. In a somewhat confusing dialogue, Camelia attempted to explain. She said that the foster children may not have been aware that the foster care workers knew that hair care and receiving proper haircuts were problems. Camelia dismissed any further discussion, which may have indicated that the situation regarding hair and skin care was not important. Camelia classified hair concerns as "trivial."

If even a minority of foster care workers think hair care issues and grooming are minor and trivial, that can become a major problem. Chapter 5's section on hair care focused on the importance of personal grooming and its link to racial identity. Camelia,

as revealed in Excerpt 6H, was unaware not only of the present concern of foster parents, but she also was out of touch with the research (Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Crumbley, 1999; Harrison-Ross & Wyden, 1973) on this subject. Almost every foster parent in this study, and some of the other foster care workers, saw hair and skin care as a significant component of the transracial foster care experience.

6.5 Chocolate Children

In excerpts above, foster care workers mentioned foster parents' experiences when considering the characteristics of foster children. Although the focus of Section 6.5 is also parental preferences, it was intentionally isolated and separated. The term "chocolate children" intrigued me as it was a term Lucie, a foster care worker, used to describe a parental preference for African American children. With the focus of this study on transracial foster care, a foster care worker's casual comment on racial placement with the term "chocolate children" was particularly interesting to me. When Lucie referred to African American foster children by the seemingly affectionate term "chocolate," there were several inferences. Not only is chocolate a confection, sweet but it is most often thought of in its natural form as shades of brown. The use of such a term in a formal research interview denotes the foster care worker's high comfort level with this cultural group. I explored the meaning of this experience with Lucie as noted in excerpt 6M.

Excerpt 6M

R: Okay, then, so in order for you to feel comfortable placing the kid in a different foster home, especially different from themselves, you would have to have some comfortableness with the family that they are open to this kind of placement.

Lucie: Right.

R: The family has really positioned themselves to be open to any kid. And those are the ones you go to first.

Lucie: Right.

R: Or maybe even exclusively.

Lucie: Right, there are some people who only take certain **chocolate children**. And that's okay. That's how they work. You have some families that either because that's what they tell the licensing worker that you worked with before.

I can work with a family, you know, that I have placed, you know, kids in the home that are of their race, and then I get another kid that's not their race, and I know that this family can help him, I will call them and tell them I have a kid—he is not the same color as your family, but you remember when you did work with CMH [Community Mental Health] with a child? This child has those same needs. (Friday, November 7, 2008)

I needed to understand the placement process involved in selecting a family for a transracial foster home placement. Further, I was curious about the rationale that was the undercarriage of the placement practices. This interview, as illustrated in Excerpt 6M, opens with me requesting clarification on comfort levels of the foster parents and foster child pending a transracial placement. Lucie confirmed that there must be a high level of recognition that each of the relevant cohorts has staked his or her right to claim success. Lucie gave me moments to ponder what she said before continuing. Lucie talked, and I listened, and in this process, I had an epiphany. During this time of heightened awareness, I realized that I understood, so I rephrased what I heard, and Lucie confirmed what I said.

The foster care worker's reference to "chocolate children" was a curious but casually mentioned comment. The words followed so smoothly in her conversation that there were no follow-up questions for clarification. Lucie assumed that this was a term that did not need explanation. She did not pause but just acknowledged it as fact and,

furthermore, an acceptable criterion foster parents used.

The term on the surface sounded benign, especially from Lucie, who is African American, and apparently quite comfortable with this term. The tone, however, may change if it were used by White foster parents or White foster care workers. The different viewpoints could be perceived from another perspective. Carter-Black (2002) found that the race of the workers directly influenced their transracial placement in both foster care and adoption. The foster children were not only going to take up residence in the home of the foster parents, the foster children were, in fact, joining the foster families. Therefore, the foster care workers considered which foster families would “fit” best with which foster children.

6.6 “Do I have to act White?” : What’s My Identity in THIS Foster Home?

The racial quagmire expressed by the foster children in this study exceeds superficial concerns. Often “trying on cultural identities” became confusing and nearly dysfunctional for the foster children who were required to adjust to each new foster home.

Amy relayed a story from a foster child who struggled with cultural identity. This 10-year-old foster child and his foster parent ascribed to the mantra that “love is blind.” Amy told me the story of the racial identity confusion of this African American boy in foster care. This foster child moved from kinship care to a Caucasian foster home where other African American children lived (both foster and adopted). Amy, the foster care worker with 10 years of experience and who was featured in Excerpt 6A, shared more of her transracial experience here in Excerpt 6N:

Excerpt 6N

Amy: When I went there [new foster home] one day, he asked me something about being White...

Re: Okay. He's African American?

Amy: **He's African American**, and he came from **his aunt [who] was African American** as well. She really, um... taught him a lot of... she taught them that color... to **separate people by color** and just **didn't teach them love is color blind**, and that it doesn't matter, and he identified a lot of things by White people 'cause when he came right to that foster home, he asked, **'Can I act White.'** She [foster parent] said, 'Honey, what are you talking about? What does that mean?'

You know, she didn't know what he meant, and he said he wanted to act White, and she said, **'How do you act White?'** and 'What does that mean?' And he was telling her, and she said, um... she was just trying to teach him that color of our skin does not matter; we act how we want to act. She said, **'I want you to act like you.'**

R: How old was he when he came to the home?

Amy: Ten. He just came there.

R: Okay, so he came with an idea that **when you're Black you act one way, and if you are White, you act a different way?**

Amy: Yes.

R: And he was in a home where there are Caucasians; **he was trying to figure out...**

Amy: Who he was.

R: Right, and if he would be **okay to act White.**

Amy: Yes, and she worked with it; now it isn't even an issue (September 30, 2008)

Amy was anxious to share the story of a foster child and his confusion about whom he was and whom he was expected to be. Leaving a kinship care situation and moving to a foster home posed a distinct challenge for this child. He understood that White people and Black people behave differently. Therefore, he requested permission from his foster parent to act White. The foster parent, perplexed, wanted him to explain

what he meant. Amy explained that he and his foster parent chatted about the meaning of “acting White.” His foster parent suggested that the child just act like himself.

At 10 years of age, this child conceptualized racial behavior and articulated these beliefs to the foster care workers and foster care parent. He was besieged with conflicts about his cultural identification. His foster parent assisted in the resolution of his identity confusion.

He recalled his aunt instructing him to separate people by color and not be color blind. But it really was an issue for this foster child. Perhaps it was not an issue for the foster parent, but this foster child expressed confusion about whom he was and whom he was expected to be. Because he was verbal, he was able to articulate his bewilderment. Another child with less confidence and fewer verbal skills may not have been as able to express in words those feelings. He was aware enough to understand that he could not *be* White. He only asked if it was okay for him to *act* White. A 10-year-old child, such as the child in the interview, who is approaching adolescence and facing the developmental task Erikson (1968) has identified as “identity versus role confusion,” could be facing a new task: “identity confusion versus role confusion.” It is not known how long this child has been in the foster care system, but it was evident that he has been in the system long enough to become baffled about who he was and what he has to do to conform to the expectations of others.

6.7 Summary

Racial dynamics are evident in each realm of this research. Interview excerpts from the foster care workers document the continuing dialogue regarding race. For example, Amy, Jackie, and Winston each included the topic of race in their interviews (Excerpt

6B, Excerpt 6C, Excerpt 6D). Camelia (Excerpt 6E) recalled a conversation with a foster parent regarding a transracial placement. In fact, placement criteria and parental preferences were issues replete with racial overtones. A foster parent rejected a foster child at the door based on misidentified race, a foster care worker labeled foster children as “chocolate children,” and still another worker spoke about racial congruency but failed to employ the strategy. Such were just a few highlighted talking points from the narratives.

Logically, the development of a racial and cultural identity plagued some of the foster children in this study who were placed transracially. Mary focused on her multi-racial heritage (Excerpt 3B) while Anthony struggled to find his place with the foster mother he described as racist (Excerpt 5G). The children reported the necessity of a malleable identity as they transitioned from foster home to foster home. This transitory state was further exacerbated not only by placement in foster homes of their cultural group but also of placement in foster homes of other cultural groups. Placement of a Black foster child in the home of another Black family does not ensure that the child will encounter the same food selection, the same musical selections, or the same religious practices that he or she may have known.

Diversity within diverse cultural groups is an intrinsic but often an overlooked factor. Likewise, placement of a White child in a White foster home also does not guarantee the same life conditions. Indeed, the child welfare system is structured so that foster care placement represents an environmental change for foster children. The foster home is supposed to be different.

The eight foster care workers who provided the data for this chapter were

detailed and comprehensive in their accounts. They shared both their professional experiences and their personal stories about what it was like to be on the inside of the child welfare system. With each having a decade as the average amount of time in the system, their narratives were rich and complex. Their places of employment, racial identities, and years on the front lines with parents and children contextualized their comments. Their eyewitness accounts substantiated their stories and supported what they said. Even if their views conflicted with others' views, their views were shaped from their own experiences, as were the views of those in opposition.

The placement criteria guided but did not determine the process. First, it should be clearly understood that the biological parents are often in crisis when foster parenting is requested or required. When contact is involuntarily established with the child welfare system, homeostasis ensues. Secondly, removal of a child and subsequent placement of that child in the home of strangers only contributes to traumatic overtones. At this juncture, the biological parents may experience feelings of loss and helplessness. Third, the parental values and opinions about people from other racial and cultural groups surface. These feelings could range from neutral to negative, with positive emotions somewhere in the middle of this continuum. If the biological parents are granted a voice in the placement process, it can often mitigate the feeling of powerlessness. Further, honoring the wishes of biological parents allows their child or children to continue to view the biological parents in a position of authority. Whether these two factors are positive for the child or have a negative effect on the placement process depends on factors outside the scope of this research. However, as noted in the introduction in Chapter 1, even if a child is being removed from an abusive situation,

there is often expressed resistance. It is at the point of removal that family loyalty manifests. If a child is placed transracially and the placement violates the child's family values, trouble can ensue. All of these factors accompany the child as he or she enters the foster care system.

The foster care workers interviewed for this study were dedicated and committed to the children who needed foster care and the families who provide it. They spoke with fervor of the need to provide quality placements for the foster children in which the children can grow and thrive. They were able to articulate the preferences of the foster parents and the concerns of the biological parents. There were of course times when the foster care workers strongly disagreed with some of the viewpoints expressed both by foster parents and biological parents. However, the foster care workers represented those divergent viewpoints as well. Further, they had the ear of the foster children and communicated that perspective also. Finally, the foster care workers linked issues common to foster parents and foster children. The foster care workers were the connectors for the components.

CHAPTER 7– CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to document, analyze, and interpret the racial and cultural identity development of foster children. This examination was conducted focusing on only those foster children placed in transracial foster homes. This study investigated whether maintaining racial identity while foster children were in a temporary placement was a priority addressed by the foster care system. A primary goal of this study was to analyze the training curriculum in order to understand how foster parents were prepared for transracial parenting. The pre-service curriculum was studied from a postmodern perspective and subjected to a content analysis. Terms related to a transracial foster experience were first identified, and then the curriculum was manually searched for the inclusion of the targeted terms. The identified terms were then regrouped into broader categories.

Foster parents, foster children and foster care workers were defined as stakeholders of the foster care system and provided the fundamental data. Since the foster children in my study were in foster homes where the racial and cultural markers were different than their own, the meaning they attributed to their transracial experience was critical. Foster care was designed to provide substitute parents for children at risk. Therefore, my goal was to identify what strategies, if any, foster parents utilized to address racial identity development.

From a series of semi-structured interviews of foster parents, foster children and foster care workers, the researcher constructed the meaning of their transracial experiences. The in-depth interviews were rich with layers of meaning, contained

volumes of information, and presented new opportunities for innovative reflection. The 19 transcripts from foster parents, eight from foster care workers, and five from foster children were analyzed for commonality. The reoccurring themes were clustered, summarized, and interpreted.

In this chapter, the findings for each research question are discussed; key issues based on evidence are presented; implications of this research are outlined; and proposed recommendations for future research are submitted. Beyond the formal research questions for this study, several supplemental questions were also explored to explicate the understanding of the data. Conclusions from the findings serve as a basis for support of the implications. The questions and conclusions are discussed in the following sections.

7.2 Conclusions

Three investigative questions were posed as a means of exploring the transracial foster care experience. Question 1: Is the pre-service training designed to inform and instruct foster parents about racial identity? The question fundamental to my research was whether the intent of the pre-service training for foster parents was designed to provide instruction on racial identity. This study focused on what, if any, pre-service training foster parents received before accepting a foster child of a different race; standard training curriculum for foster parents inadequately addressed the expressed concerns both of foster parents and foster care workers.

The content analysis in Chapter 4 details the specificity of the targeted areas deemed important by administrators and consultants but not necessarily those who were in the position to use the services. The topics of importance to the administrators

were, in part, child development benchmarks, potential behavioral problems of foster children, and transitional issues for children from their biological families to foster families. The PRIDE curriculum begins the process of educating foster parents on racial and cultural concerns. While some of the PRIDE curriculum is devoted to the subject of racial and cultural identity, e.g., sessions five and eight, this was not enough to cover the range of concerns actually identified by foster parents in this study. Hair care is referenced only twice in Session VIII but not at all in Session V. Skin care for foster children in transracial placements was mentioned in both sessions but only twice in each.

Additional research questions that guided this study include the following:

Question 2: How do foster parents and foster children add meaning to their experiences in transracial foster homes? This research question sought to elicit the meaning of transracial foster care from the foster family perspective. Foster parents and foster children engaged in individual discussions with the researcher about their personal transracial experiences and pondered the meaning of these experiences. The foster parents were asked to 1) describe their experience parenting children who were racially and culturally different, and 2) comment on the joys and sorrows of fostering children of a different race. Further, foster parents were asked to share their techniques for helping children of a different race to feel comfortable in a new and different cultural environment within the transracial foster home.

Foster parents interviewed for this study were sensitive to the fact that they had accepted a serious responsibility by bringing a child in crisis into their homes and into their families. These foster parents accepted the foster children without complete

histories and pledged to help the children feel safe and loved. What was implicit in this arrangement was to support positive mental health and promote self-esteem. The premise of this research is that racial and cultural identities are fundamental for a healthy sense of well being. This study explored the meaning that foster parents, foster children, and foster care workers assigned to the transracial foster care experience. What was evident from each of the three groups of participants is that race is an important dynamic but one that can be overlooked.

Some foster parents choose initially to avoid acknowledging racial concerns and subsequent issues. This first sub-group knew race was evident but chose not to include race in any discussion. There are numerous possible explanations. Some of the foster parents in this group thought race was so unimportant that they saw it as a waste of time to talk about the obvious. I believe, based on their conversations from Chapter 5, Harvey, Alexander, and Mr. Joseph would fall into this category. Others in this first sub-group who “didn’t see race” included Mrs. Lewis, who herself was raised in a transracial foster home. However, even with years of experience in a transracial foster setting, she apparently lacked racial sensitivity. She was called a racist by her foster son, and as she previously admitted, it was not the first time. Avoidance would define the coping strategy used by some in this first sub-group of foster parents.

The second sub-group of parents who said “I don’t see race” displayed an awareness of racial differences, but rather than avoiding the idea of race, they decided to celebrate it with ethnic dinners and attendance at cultural festivals. This group of parents was keenly aware of the importance of a racial identity. Mrs. Glad epitomized parents in this category.

The final sub-group of parents was radical in their beliefs. This sub-group was adamant that not only would they acknowledge the value of racial identity, but they thought that others needed to as well. Participants in this third sub-group forced the foster care system to be introspective and initiate discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of transracial placement. Mrs. Oliver and Ms. Patrick could be charter members of this third sub-group. All of the foster parents in this study can be placed in one of the three groups. If these three groups are spread along a racial continuum, there would be a place for all 19 of the foster parents who were interviewed.

This study underscores the necessity for solutions that address racial and cultural identity for foster children. Every foster child interviewed had an opinion about his or her cultural identity. Just as the foster parents had varying opinions on the importance of this topic, so did the foster children. Even if the position that the foster child assumed was not strongly held, each foster child was able to articulate what he or she believed. The probability that some children will exit foster care later rather than sooner is well documented in the research (AFCARS, 2010; Equity Report, 2006). The likelihood that a foster child may have some feelings about transracial placement and cultural identity is also documented in this study.

Question 3: How do foster care workers address issues of transracial foster care? Foster care workers were asked to describe their experiences with foster parents and foster children in transracial placements. A vital aspect of this process for the foster care workers was an interpretation of the placement process. The web of factors in the process of foster care placement became complicated when race and cultural identity factors were added for consideration. The foster care workers relied on their

professional expertise, agency practice (not necessarily agency policy), and personal values. These foster care workers combined what was required by edict with what they knew intuitively to make transracial foster placements.

As employees of the child welfare system, foster care workers were ever mindful of the system's overarching goal of family unification. Since the universal goal for the foster care system is to reunite families, keeping separate components of the families in physically close proximity overrode most all other considerations. This meant that foster children needed a foster home placement as close to their own biological families as possible. With the system's ultimate goal hovering overhead, foster care workers made decisions in which racial compatibility and cultural compatibility were not the determining factors.

7.3 Discussion

The researcher critically analyzed the PRIDE manual (2003) that was used to educate and train foster parents before they were certified to care for foster children. Additionally, the researcher interviewed foster parents as they completed the training but before they began foster parenting in order to find out what they were taught. I was particularly interested in the level of preparedness after the initial completion of the pre-service PRIDE training. Analysis of the PRIDE manual and interview data pointed to several issues:

1. PRIDE Curriculum Deficits
2. Constituents of Core Training for Transracial Foster Parents
3. Incorporating Racial Beliefs and Attitudes into Foster Parent Preparation
4. Awareness of Cultural Identity

7.3.1 PRIDE Curriculum Deficits

Session I, “Connecting with PRIDE” (PRIDEbook, 2003), delineates seven core competencies and nine objectives for foster parents. The scope of Session I is broad and includes foster parents’ rights, responsibilities, and roles. It is the right of foster parents to receive education and “learn the knowledge and skills” for “development into a successful new foster family” (p. 7). Included in the statement of responsibilities of foster parents is “to nurture” and “help a child grow in a family [setting] in a caring way” (p. 7). Foster parents have a role: to participate as a members of the professional team and assist in planning for the foster child’s transition back to the biological family (p. 12). Foster parents have an important role to play on the permanency planning team as well as a responsibility to that team and the foster child. The standardized content in the PRIDE manual covers broad issues, such as lying, loss, sexual abuse, and relationships. The preparation of foster parents to cope with such issues is the curriculum’s primary focus. State child care welfare agencies consider the foregoing elements as the foundation of foster parent education. The adoption of the PRIDE training curriculum by 14 state child welfare agencies and endorsement of the curriculum by the Child Welfare League of America points to its relevance and credibility. Besides the PRIDE curriculum, each agency that is certified to license foster homes within states can design additional training components targeted for specialized needs.

One research question in this study focused on analyzing the PRIDE training curriculum. Content analyses of the PRIDE curriculum, as discussed in Chapter 4, points to an important issue related to transracial foster care. This issue is the omission

of race, culture, or cultural identity in the competencies. However, the cultural aspect appears once in the PRIDE manual, and it is the fifth learning objective of the nine listed. In reference to culture, the objective is to be able to “identify the value of helping children and youths stay part of their families and culture, because strengthening families is the first goal of child welfare services” (PRIDEbook, 2003, p. 4). The concept of cultural identity, although referenced and treated as equally as the objectives, does not have the prominence of one of the competencies. When I think of a level of competency, I think about “having suitable, sufficient knowledge, experience or skill for a special purpose” (Dictionary.com, 2010). With that as my point of reference, I was disappointed that the concept of cultural identity was absent from the list of seven competencies. The inclusion of “cultural identity” as an objective, but not as one of the competencies, relegated this concept to a position of less importance. Reference to hair, skin care, or skin color (see Table 4.3 and Table 4.4) was made only two times each (p. 160, p. 260, p. 269). The term “transracial” occurs only five times in the entire document (p. 17, p. 215, p. 236, p. 238).

To address the issue of racial identity, the PRIDE curriculum adapts a concept from Crumbley’s (1999) work on racial identity. For example, in Session V, this statement appears: “There are many factors that affect how children proceed through the stages of development, and this is also true with regard to how racial identity develops” (p. 160). Crumbley’s work was central in forming standards for transracial foster care in the late 1990’s and was embraced by the child welfare community at that time. His work was intended for the professional and designed to assist those who were guiding others through the transracial experience (www.eric.ed.gov). The

Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) classified Crumbley's book as a non-classroom book and a "guide" for practitioners. Although Crumbley's work on racial identity is included in the PRIDE curriculum, it does not adequately address this issue and is not integrated throughout the PRIDE manual. There is only one citation in the PRIDE manual text (p.160). I searched each page and reference citation, much as I did for the content analysis of the curriculum, for evidence of Crumbley's work. Crumbley is, however, listed twice in the PRIDE manual's annotated bibliography. It is first mentioned in the adoption section with this descriptor: "This book goes beyond arguments to provide guidelines on making transracial adoption and foster care placements work, so that children develop positive racial and cultural identities" (p. 391). Secondly, it is mentioned in the "Family Foster Care" section with the same description. Crumbley's work on racial identity appears to have been discounted and dismissed based on its limited inclusion in the PRIDE manual (p. 397). The annotation appears as an endorsement, but Crumbley's work is largely absent from the training curriculum. I searched the PRIDE manual for Crumbley's name. The value of Crumbley's pioneering work is not in dispute (PRIDEbook 2003, p. 397). However, the limited use of his work on transracial foster care and reference in the PRIDE manual poses a direct contradiction to a postmodern perspective by Doll (1993). The postmodern paradigm mandates "multiple ways of knowing" but is not reflected in the PRIDE manual, which features only Crumbley's position on racial identity. PRIDE missed an opportunity to enhance racial understanding through sharing multiple theoretical perspectives. The literature review in Chapter 2 contains numerous theoretical perspectives on racial identity (Cross, 1991; Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001; Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1991;

Daughtery, 2002; Diller, 2007; Gibson, 1995; Helms, 1990; Hill & Peltzer, 1982; Putman, 1997; Rodriguez, 2000; Shriver, 2004). Of particular significance is Cross's (1991) theory of Black identity development and Helms's (1990) theory of White identity development. Identity is more narrowly focused for both Rodriguez (2000) and Daughtery (2002) on identity development for those in the foster care system.

Apart from issues of race, culture, and cultural identity, the PRIDE curriculum indicates evidence of Doll's four "R's" in addressing developmental needs. Three of the nine training sessions for foster parents identify as the subject, "meeting developmental needs" (p. 16-17). The approach to meeting developmental needs is three pronged, with the secondary focus in Session III, attachment; Session IV, loss; and Session VI, discipline. Doll's postulates are recursion, richness, relationship, and rigor. The first "R," recursion, means "to happen again, as in to recur." Recursion allows for extraction of deeper meaning. The second "R," richness, and the third "R," relationships, are linked. Richness is the layering of meaning resulting in the development of complex relationships. Finally, rigor completes the tableau and denotes credibility. Applying the four "R's" highlights substantial gaps in the PRIDE training with respect to issues of race, culture and cultural identity, and why the PRIDE program fails to meet cultural and racial training objectives.

One approach to enhancing PRIDE would align the training with Doll's postmodern perspective (1991). The addition of a new session devoted to meeting the needs of transracial foster families would begin the process. Building on the aforementioned theoretical base (Cross, 1991; Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001; Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1991; Daughtery, 2002; Diller, 2007; Gibson, 1995; Helms, 1990; Hill

& Peltzer, 1982; Putman, 1997; Rodriguez, 2000; Shriver, 2004), this new session would incorporate theory with practical strategies. The formation of cultural identity, the identification of cultural references, community resources, and hair care are examples of subjects that could be included in this new session.

7.3.2 Constituents of Core Training for Transracial Foster Parents

Every foster parent interviewed in this study was required to participate in the PRIDE pre-service training. Since the life experiences of each foster parent varied, the initial training was expected to lay the foundation for initial transracial competence. I was curious to find out what the foster parents were taught about transracial parenting. The data indicated that the foster parents had qualitatively different understandings about cultural identity. Mrs. Glad and Mrs. Oliver relished the uniqueness cultural identity offered, and each sought opportunities to acknowledge and celebrate cultural heritage. Both foster mothers had extensive personal experiences with children from several cultures. Mrs. Glad fondly recalled the foster care workers identifying her house as the “little United Nations” (p. 177). For Mrs. Oliver, those multiple cultural experiences were independent of her fostering. On the other hand, Mrs. Lewis, who was raised with adopted siblings from Korea, denied seeing color, race, or cultural identity. Yet despite her lifetime interaction with people from different cultural groups, she reported more than one occasion when others accused her of being a racist. Mrs. Wright, who adopted two daughters, one African American and one White, and had one biological son, stated, “We treat them all the same.” Mrs. Wright thereby denied any racial and cultural differences. Then there was Mrs. Patrick. She had an almost militant view that cultural identity should not be ignored as she had witnessed some foster

parents attempting to do. Obviously, some foster parents were in a position of advantage to care for transracial children because of their experiences with cultural issues.

Foster parents (Mrs. Oliver and Mrs. Wright) pointed out that the training information related to transracial fostering was insufficient to provide substantial knowledge necessary for successful transracial parenting. The foster parents further added that in order for foster parents to parent transracial children successfully, the basic curriculum was augmented by supplemental materials that dealt with racial and cultural issues. The additional training based on the augmented curriculum was optional, and it was provided only after the placement of the child in the foster home. Mrs. Wright was of the view that instead of dealing with racial and cultural issues in subsequent specialized in-service education and training, it should be an integral part of pre-service education. This foster parent's concern suggests that even before the foster parents had completed the required pre-service curriculum and instruction, supplemental material related to and training on race and cultural issues seemed necessary to augment the core curriculum.

The issue of deficits in the PRIDE curriculum continued to surface throughout data collection. Camelia, a foster care worker with five years of professional experience, reported that one of the training deficit expressed by some of her foster parents focused on hair care management. Winston, another foster care worker, was concerned that some of the foster parents he worked with needed training in cultural sensitivity. He related a situation when the foster parent refused a foster child who arrived at the foster home. The foster parent did not wish to engage in that transracial

experience and rejected the foster child at the front door. The foster care workers shared stories of their interactions with foster parents who were engaged in transracial foster care. The issue of preparation for transracial foster care was a constant concern. The foster care workers emphasized the importance of clearly understanding what each foster family had to offer a foster child. Jackie referred to this concept as the strengths of the foster home. Such an assessment depended on many elements, such as positive cultural identity, communication patterns, and knowledge of child development benchmarks. These topics are each connected to the PRIDE training, some more thoroughly than others.

The foster care workers were concerned about what the foster parents knew about transracial parenting. It was the expectation that basic information had been shared during the PRIDE training. Most of the foster care workers I spoke with expected the foster parents to have received specialized training in addition to the basic PRIDE curriculum. The assessment by the foster care workers included the foster parents' ability to manage a child from a different cultural group. This assessment was constructed from foster parent training and their life experiences. We have already established that personal values and attitudes shape interaction in a transracial foster situation.

Like the foster parents, the foster care workers also mentioned that more training was needed for their foster parents engaged in transracial fostering. The most consistent concern was hair care management. This topic repeatedly surfaced as a missed opportunity for the foster care system to prepare foster parents. Carol, an African American foster care worker, was asked to consult with a White foster parent

about hair care for a foster child being adopted. Since this foster child was not on Carol's caseload, this request was unusual. Carol became an immediate hair consultant. Amy recalled a somewhat painful story of a foster child whose hair was being severely damaged by the foster parent who was not trained in diverse hair care management. The foster care workers also indicated that the PRIDE curriculum was not an equalizer and therefore did not bring all of the foster parent trainees to the same level of competent fostering. The core training areas, such as supporting family connections, nurturing relationships, protecting children, and permanency planning targeted in the PRIDE curriculum, according to foster workers, did not include proficiency in understanding or maintaining racial or cultural identity. The areas identified for attention by the foster workers included meeting the child's developmental needs; establishing a safe, nurturing environment; and working as a team to support the child's return to the birth family. They iterated that racial and cultural identity as training topics were shockingly omitted.

The experiences of the transracial foster parents document essential missing elements in the pre-service training. The consistent complaint relative to preparation was that training about hair care management was inadequate. This inadequacy is due in large part to the lack of attention to this topic during the pre-service training and represents an egregious error. Both White foster parents and African American foster parents in this study reported concern about hair care issues. Multiple foster parents I interviewed denied receiving any training to work with children of a different race. In my conversation with Mrs. Lewis, I asked, "Was there anything in your training that prepared you to handle or parent kids of a different race?" She replied, "Not really."

Clarifying Mrs. Terrell response to a similar question, I asked, “Okay, you didn’t get any help when they gave you the kids? They just said, ‘Here they are’?” Mrs. Terrell’s answered, “Yeah, yeah.” I received the same kind of response from Mrs. Oliver. I asked, “Did you receive training to work with children of a different race?” “No” was Mrs. Oliver’s complete response. Most of these foster parents quickly added that based on their individual fostering experiences, they would request training on hair and skin care. These comments were expressed by foster mothers and foster fathers and referred to both foster sons and foster daughters. Both the White and African American communities were represented in the comments.

Ford (2010), who has written about her experiences as a White foster parent, framed the issues encountered in this study in these words: “I have spoken with dozens of White parents over the years whose list of top five concerns about raising a black child includes hair” (p. 53). Ford has included in the preface of her guide for transracial parenting that she was “a foster parent for eight years and never received a single hour of training on parenting a child of a different race” (p. xi). She explained her perspective that hair care in the African America community assumes different meaning than in the White community. Gibson (1995) and Arie (2007) also have reported the significance of hair for African American girls. Arie (2007) popularized a ballad in which she pleads not to be classified solely on the appearance of her hair. Gibson (1995) and Byrd and Tharps (2001) have addressed the problems inherent in hair care management.

7.3.3 Incorporating Racial Beliefs and Attitudes into Foster Parent Preparation

The life experiences of foster parents, as expressed in Chapter 5, influenced not only their understanding of hair issues but racial beliefs and attitudes as well. Mrs.

Lewis's experience growing up in a transracial home led her to accept foster children of all racial and cultural groups. Mrs. Patrick announced she was expressing a belief of the White culture when she stated that in "White culture... you just ignore color" and that being "color blind is the best thing that you can do." Those life experiences shaped in part their own racial beliefs and attitudes. This was clearly evident when they offered those statements as a partial explanation for their current views and opinions. Thus, it is important in foster care training that foster parents' racial beliefs and attitudes are elicited prior to foster care training and used as frameworks for education and training.

During training, instructors should carefully monitor foster parents' understanding of transracial care and continuously incorporate their ideas into the curriculum. Foster parents' previous experiences can then become the foundation for the pre-service training to increase awareness of race and culture. At the end of instruction, what foster parents learned during the PRIDE training should be correlated with what they believed about racial identity so that they are aware of the changes they have made in their thinking. A conceptual change in pre-service education and training would be ideal to connect expert knowledge to foster care parents' knowledge and experience. Conceptual change models need to be borrowed from other disciplines, such as science education, that use them with teacher professional development and change (Stofflett, 1994). This oversight of not addressing foster care parents' prior and evolving conceptions of transracial children is another important facet of the PRIDE training issue.

For the purpose of using foster parents' beliefs and attitudes as frameworks in the PRIDE curriculum, an array of theorists (Cross, 1991; Helms, 1990) has advocated

engaging foster parents in self-reflection and metacognition. The more foster parents understand the structure of their own racial and cultural belief systems, the better able they will be to support cultural and racial identity development for the foster children in their care. It is likely that the individual life experiences of foster parents prior to fostering filters their beliefs about the importance of racial identification. Even so, an overview of the ways racial attitudes are formed may prove helpful in exploring the belief system of foster parents who engage in the transracial experience. For this purpose, a curriculum that promotes reflective practice of foster care parents is important.

7.3.4 Awareness of Cultural Identity

Data clearly revealed that foster parents were given a responsibility for which they were seriously underprepared. Lack of hair care training was the most glaring example. Another significant area where foster parents were expected to perform but could not was in the maintenance of positive cultural identity. One group of foster parents did not see any problems with their foster children related to cultural identity. Other foster parents felt that same-race foster home placements would reduce if not eliminate the need to focus on cultural identity. For example, I classified foster parents' responses in Chapter 5 with the following subheadings: 5.2.1 "I don't See Race" and 5.2.2 "I Celebrate Racial Difference." When success happened, it resulted in part from the foster parents' positive sense of their own racial and cultural identity. The ability of the foster parents to absorb and react positively to the training was an outcome of their own personal struggle with identity. Mrs. Lewis seemed baffled that the foster teens in her home said she was a racist. Her level of incredulity was based on her personal

history with diversity. Just as unbelievable as it was to her, given her family history, it was also mysterious to me. The foster parents' connection to their personal identity seriously influenced how they saw themselves and also how they saw foster children of other racial and cultural groups. Mrs. Oliver is a petite African America woman with nearly a dozen grandchildren and foster grandchildren. In our interview, she expressed pride in her history as a foster parent and as a grandmother. She described herself receiving foster children as "a little old Black woman" beckoning to "little white children" to come into her house because everything was "going to be alright."

The life experiences of the foster parents predisposed them to assume ideological positions on race and culture. These personal life experiences formed the framework for their interactions within the foster care system. The foundation of this framework was their identity development and personal value set. The awareness of their cultural identity influenced how they interacted when involved in a transracial foster care scenario. If the foster parents did not understand their personal racial and cultural identity, they were not equipped to guide foster children in the endeavor. Mrs. Lewis again provided an excellent example of an individual who believed she had resolved racial issues for herself. Others, including her transracial foster son, felt she was projecting negative racial attitudes rather than positive regard toward others from a different racial group.

Hill and Pelzer (1982) have challenged White foster parents to focus on their cultural identity and also on racism in America. It is unlikely that either African American or White foster parents could be immune to the effects of racism. Hill and Pelzer (1982) explicitly stated that White foster parents must be aware of their own racism and how

their racism will affect their treatment of their foster children.

7.4 Implications

Major implications emerge from the data in the following areas:

1. Curriculum Development for Foster Care
2. Enhancing the Foster Care Experience by and through Foster Parents
3. Enhancing Foster Care Workers' Experience with Foster Care Parents

7.4.1 Implication for Curriculum Development for Foster Care

The data collected in this study suggest that increased emphasis in the curriculum on hair and skin care is necessary to increase the ease of transition to a transracial placement. This was a recurring concern for foster parents and foster care workers in this study as well as for others (Crumbley, 1999; Harrison-Ross & Wyden, 1973). The foster care system at present has gaps as it attempts to produce foster parents who are culturally prepared to meet the specific needs which surface in a transracial situation. The in-service training for existing foster parents is a new requirement for transracial fostering, and this effort is applauded.

I was invited in 2010 by the public child welfare agency to conduct a six-hour workshop for foster parents on transracial parenting. I was told by the foster care supervisor that such trainings are now mandatory for foster parents who have foster children from a different race or cultural group. However, some of the attendees were already engaged in transracial parenting prior to in-service training. The obvious difficulty is that for many, this training was conducted post placement. The continuing efforts by the foster care system to bridge the training gaps are commendable. However, no children should be allowed to fall through the cracks while the system is

being redeveloped.

Based on my interaction with foster parents and foster care workers, I suggest that the PRIDE training be enhanced with some modifications. A PowerPoint® presentation with an emphasis on the psychology of hair care would be both educational and interesting. This introduction to hair care would incorporate an historical perspective, contemporary images, and music. A review of specific hair types that included techniques for hair management demonstrated by a licensed cosmetologist would be a component. The participants would be able to become familiar with various products and handle the equipment which they would use at home with their foster children. Additionally, participants would visit a beauty school and observe the processes required for diverse hair care. Beauty schools are also a source of inexpensive service as the beauty school students “practice” on real customers.

Aligning with Doll’s (1993) perspective, the connection of hair care to cultural identity would be woven throughout the PRIDE manual. Presently, the sample welcome letter to foster parents has no reference to racial or cultural issues (p. ix). I would propose rewriting the second paragraph to include a statement addressing the probability of transracial fostering. Following is an example:

To work effectively with children and youths who have experienced these tragedies and separation from their parents, foster parents and adoptive parents should have certain knowledge and skills called competencies. *In some situations, the children may be from a different racial or cultural group but still need the special care you can offer in your home. You will receive training to address any concerns you may have, including training focused on transracial parenting.* Foster parents and adoptive parents must work in partnership with social workers in the child welfare agency and an array of other professionals in the community. Additionally, foster parents and sometimes adoptive parents, also work with the families of children in their care.

With the addition of the two sentences above (see italicized sentences above) the

pendulum swings toward expanding the training to include transracial parenting. To establish Doll's four "R's", we must next add a competency eight to the established list of seven (PRIDEbook, 2003, p. 3). I suggest the following addition to the list of competencies: "Understand the factors that enhance racial and cultural identity." The curriculum is building Doll's first "R," recursion, and will move toward the second "R," richness. Session V is the logical location for enhancing the curriculum by increasing racial and cultural awareness and sensitivity. The foundation is there in the lesson and could be supplemented with additional specialized case scenarios. Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* is cited as an example of a young African American girl's struggle with self-image. However, numerous biographical and autobiographical sources exist, and I would recommend including real-life situations rather than fictionalized accounts. I would introduce others (Byrd, 2001; Gibson, 1995; Golden, 2004; Hall, 1998; John, 2003; Kennedy, 2004; Parks, 1996; Rowell, 2007; Simon & Roorda, 2000; Whiting & Lee, 2003) as a supplement to Morrison.

In Session VIII of the PRIDE manual (2003, p. 255), two references are made to "special hair care" (p. 260), and this provides an ideal location to include details on special hair care. This term is listed under the heading "daily life/cultural issues" as it is all too often an unpleasant daily task. Perhaps this would be an ideal juncture for a professional beautician or barber to demystify hair care.

The modified curriculum at this point would be fully consistent with Doll's (1993) perspective. These modifications have already met the definition of recursion, and, with the modifications, would also embrace rigor, richness, and relationship. This *new* PRIDE curriculum would be enhanced to provide improved foster care services.

While the pre-service training manual, the PRIDE manual, made only two references to hair and skin management, these topics ranked high in priority for the participants interviewed in this study. Concerns about hair were not addressed for White foster parents with African American foster children or for African American foster parents with White children. Although the foster parents approached this issue from the standpoint of a routine activity of daily living, hair management ascends up Maslow's hierarchy of needs to the level of self-esteem. Harrison-Ross and Wyden (1973) have admonished readers not to "think for a moment that hair is a frivolous subject" (p.30). In their parent groups, the subject of hair constantly resurfaced. These authors concluded "that [this] makes sense, because we talk about achieving a black identity, and hair is a very important part of physical self-image" (p. 30). Writing primarily for Black parents, Harrison-Ross and Wyden (1973) have encouraged the personal expression of various natural hairstyles as a form of identity expression in children.

Hair care can easily be relegated to a position of lesser or no importance. This is, of course, a serious oversight. Before babies leave the nursery, statements about hair begin circulating. New parents from diverse cultures comment on the color, texture, and amount of hair on newborn babies. Some cultural practices do not permit haircuts until after the child's first birthday. Other cultural hair customs include saving a lock from the child's first haircut and placing it in the family bible or another sacred location. Hair, whether silky blonde, spiky purple, or coarse brown braids, communicates to others who we are or who we want to be. The same is true for foster children regardless of the race or culture of the foster home.

This foster care research indicates that there is a link between hair management,

self-esteem and positive cultural identity (Arie, 2007; Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Crumbley, 1999; Harrison-Ross & Wyden, 1973). The connection, though not obvious, has serious implication for the foster care system and arises out of the data collected for this study. The importance the participants assigned to hair care management underscores the need for both pre-training and in-service training for foster parents engaged in transracial fostering. African American children comprise 40% of the foster care population but only 12% of the total population. These African American foster children come into care at a higher rate and remain in care longer.

Nearly every foster parent interviewed in this study requested additional training on this topic. Even those who did not specially ask mentioned it would have been helpful during pre-service training. The majority of foster parents interviewed commented that this kind of specialized information would have been helpful prior to receiving a child from a different cultural group. Some of the foster parents reported attending informational in-service seminars focused on hair and skin management. However, such training currently is optional. The State of Connecticut Department of Children and Families created a policy statement and published a 31-page ethnic hair and skin care manual. The manual addresses both boys and girls in out-of-home placement and is designed to increase cultural competence for their caregivers.

Children who are members of the dominant culture have a wide array of products available in every store where hair care products are sold. African American foster parents also have exposure to managing White hair through general information or specific encounters on television, gym classes, and other personal experiences.

Concerns regarding the management of black hair surfaced as early as 1845

with the invention of the hot comb in France (Byrd & Tharps, 2001). The invention of the hot comb allowed dense, kinky African hair to straighten and resemble separate strands of white, silky hair. Heating a metal comb on the stove and pulling it through dense kinky hair produces temporarily straight hair (Byrd & Tharps, 2001). Indeed, the desire for this silky hair appearance continued to 1948, when Calva discovered “that the same process that turned sheep’s wool into mink-like fur could turn kinky hair straight” (Byrd & Tharps, 2001, p. 183). Fortunes have been built on African American hair and beauty products, and Madam C.J. Walker has the distinct honor as the first self-made Black millionaire (Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Cole, 1999). Madam Walker invented a chemical process to straighten Black hair. Caring for Black hair requires more time and patience than caring for white hair (Byrd & Tharps, 2001).

When African American foster parents accept children of a different race, there is also a learning curve. African American girls may get their hair washed once a week, once every two weeks, or once a month. The hair may be straightened by with a pressing comb (a.k.a. a “hot comb”) and hair oil applied prior to braiding or affixing in some other style. On the other hand, White girls may require daily washing of their hair to remove oil and maintain a particular style. Barbers who serve primarily black clientele may or may not be familiar with the differences associated with cutting and style the hair of White children. Further, White foster children typically receive haircuts when their hair is freshly washed but not dried. The opposite is true for African American foster children. If foster parents patronize their usual beauty and barber salons and do not acknowledge the racial differences of their foster children, cultural incompetence may result. Given the difference in frequency of hair washing for African

American and White children, if this information is not shared, mishaps in transracial parenting can result. The knowledge necessary for cultural competence extends to the selection of hair combs and brushes. Knowledge about the differences in textures between White hair and African American hair, as well as the need to clean an existing brush or comb before passing it on to a new foster child, may prove inadequate. Selection of appropriate hair tools is essential. While, some African American parents provide hair care at home, training may be required for foster parents who need additional skills, such as learning how to use a pressing comb. If services of a salon are preferred, foster care workers or other foster care parents can make referrals to culturally appropriate businesses.

Byrd and Tharps (2001) have confirmed the fact that Mrs. Wright's lack of knowledge could have a negative effect. Mrs. Wright said it verbally, and Byrd and Tharps have stated it this way: "White people's lack of knowledge about Black hair can be a dangerous deficiency in some cases" (p. 163). Cited as an example is the experience of a Black child in an orphanage who was subjected to nightly vigorous hair brushing before bed. This child's hair was washed and brushed. Although daily brushing of white hair may lead to hair growth and sheen, daily brushing of Black hair, especially if recently washed, can be particularly painful and lead to tears. Jackie Taylor, 39, provides this account in an article by Byrd and Tharps (2001):

These women had washed my hair before bedtime and were combing it out with such force I thought they were going to tear my head off. I cried so hard from the pain. By the time they were done, I felt that I had suffered a concussion by my brain being banged around in my skull and from all the pulling and conking upside my head. (p. 163)

7.4.2 Enhancing Foster Care Experience through Foster Parents

Without a doubt, transracial foster care experiences could be improved for foster parents. The most conspicuous enhancement is the aforementioned modification of the PRIDE curriculum. However, the question then becomes, is that enough? Will transracial foster parents, once the expanded curriculum is in place, parent better? Book knowledge alone may not be enough. Building a community of foster care parents, beginning with pre-service education, may enhance foster care experience. Coming together as foster parents of transracial children to share their experiences and stories may develop positive racial attitudes. Underlying the parental actions of foster parents in this study was their attitude toward race; culture; and, in a few cases, racism. Three types of attitudes toward transracial children were evident.

Mrs. Lewis's behavior resulted in people perceiving her as having a less than positive attitude toward people of different races. She defended herself against accusations of racial bias by her African American foster son but stated she also had been accused of this very same bias by others. He had levied the charge when he witnessed what he perceived as racial bias. She lamented during our conversation, "I am not a racist!" (p. 169). Sue et al. (2007) indicated that the statement, "I am not a racist" is often a defense mechanism which shields a person with racist attitudes from their own biased beliefs. This antiracist statement, ironically, is often a statement voiced by a racist (Sue et al., 2007).

Mrs. Glad, on the other hand, stated that she discussed her foster children's understanding of their racial identity by sharing her belief in God. She explained to her foster children that God made all of them. Believing that all are God's children, she focused on their strengths. Her belief that all were God's children shaped her attitude to

accept each foster child regardless of race or cultural affiliation. While Mrs. Lewis attempted to convince others that she is not a racist, Mrs. Glad depended on her belief in God to accept all races.

Mrs. Oliver's attitude is yet another type. Her attitude about race slowly surfaced from her soliloquy about racial matching for foster families. Almost apologetically, she stated, "...I feel Black children should be in Black homes and White children be in White [homes]." Mrs. Oliver noted that foster children "grow, develop, and adjust" when they are placed "into their environment." Otherwise, they "are kind of scared," she stated. Mrs. Oliver wanted the foster children who entered her home to first know "real life" in a Black family. She seemed bothered about the process of assisting in the adjustment of her foster children because she had to try to find a way to "redo everything all in a moment, all in a day or a week."

The experience of transracial foster parenting could be enhanced with cultural sensitivity experiences. In this regard, I do not suggest another supplemental session in the PRIDE curriculum. Rather, I propose real-life interactions with people from many cultures and racial groups. The delight of one foster parent, Mrs. Glad, was contagious when she recalled the feelings she experienced when her family attended the Native American powwow. The excitement from that day was evident months later when she related her joy. In her state of jubilation, she added her family had also eaten fry bread. Within a community of foster parents, Mrs. Glad, by relating her experience, might be able to point Mrs. Lewis and Mrs. Oliver to other ways of viewing their transracial foster children.

I fully understand if these experiences are not within the boundaries of the

standard PRIDE training and that the expectation may not be enforceable. However, assuming that the foster parents desire only the very best for the children in their care, I suggest the exposure be in an authentic real-time environment rather than in an academic classroom. If the latter option is more feasible, then at least some case studies illustrated in this study should be included in the PRIDE manual along with discussion guides.

7.4.3 Symbiotic Relational Influences for Cultural Identity

Foster care workers are official representatives of the child welfare system. As such, it is their responsibility to maintain positive interactions with all stakeholders. The social and emotional development of nearly a half-million foster children annually is dependent, in part, on the foster care workers' ability to support positive communication with foster parents. The foster care workers are guided by agency policies and personal integrity.

The private agency in this study had established standard formal procedures for placing children in foster care. The process, if followed, was designed to prevent personal preferences from interfering with the successful placement of children within foster homes where they would receive nurturing. The goal was to standardize and prioritize criteria used to move children into foster homes with ease and efficiency. The objective measures were designed to avoid contaminating the process with personal values and provide the best possible outcome for the foster child. Despite this safeguard, personal bias was a factor in the placement process. Understandably, people who become foster care workers assume these professional roles with a confirmed value set. Carter-Black (2002) found that the attitudes and beliefs of the

foster care workers influenced their decision making. Likewise, Massatti et al. (2004) in their comments on future research to test their transracial adoption scale also addressed foster care worker attitude. Massatti et al. (2004) have offered their newly designed instrument “for training students who will work in foster care...” and invited individuals “to examine their own beliefs and biases about TRA [transracial adoption] families...” (p. 50).

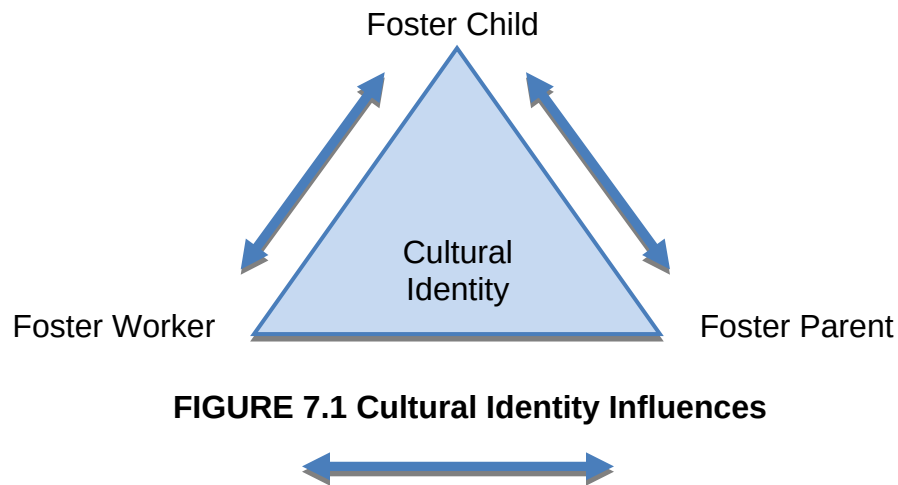
One premise of Carter-Black’s (2002) study was that decisions regarding child welfare made at the macro level were misaligned with the real-life practices of child care workers who operate at the micro level. One of the research questions addressed child welfare workers’ perceptions regarding transracial foster care placement. The 10 Black child welfare workers who participated in Carter-Black’s study “declared that the most important determinant in making foster care placement decisions...” was “to ensure that the family is able to meet the child’s needs” (p. 351). Then these workers each defined the domains which needed to be addressed and how such attention would reinforce a positive outcome for the foster child. Although the foster care workers in the Carter-Black study agreed on broad areas of focus, interpretation of the “how to” mechanisms of making day-to-day decisions was subjected to the individual experiences of each worker. Even though the aforementioned workers all belonged to the same cultural group, there was variance. Speculating to an expanded and diverse foster care worker population, and these individual interpretations become mosaic.

The foster parents, the foster children, and the foster care workers in this study formed a symbiotic triangular relationship (see Figure 7.1). The interconnectivity was underscored as the foster care worker evaluated then identified the particular

characteristics of each foster home. The foster care worker likewise assessed the situation of each foster child in order to make an informed recommendation about a specific foster home with specific strengths for a specific child. Granted, sometimes the urgency of the child's situation may sometime truncate the process. What was described herein reflects an optimum situation.

Information within this system of foster parents, workers, and children ideally moves with ease among the parties. A central focus in this triangular relationship is the concept of the cultural identity of the foster child. The social environment, especially the foster parents and the foster care workers, send messages to the foster child about cultural connections and acceptance. The foster child absorbs and responds to this information and begins to knit together the fabric of race and cultural identity. If the foster child remains in the same foster home and the messages are consistently positive, the foster child's self-worth, personal confidence, and cultural identity develop, grow, and remain strong. Conversely, if the above conditions are not met, the foster child's cultural identity can be shattered, and negative, far-reaching emotions and implications can result. Adding complexity to this scenario is the impact of each move of the foster child to a different foster home. From each new foster home, cultural messages are both sent and received by both foster parents and foster children. If the messages about racial and cultural identity sent by the foster parents are affirmative, the foster child's sense of self-worth is positively reinforced. If the child receives mixed messages, some positive and some not, his or her sense of self-worth may also become ambivalent, which can result in psychological instability. This exchange continues with each foster home having input. Figure 7.1 shows the dynamic and

interdependent relationships among foster children, foster workers, and foster parents.



The process is ongoing and was evident in the foster children in this study. This resulted even when foster parents stated that racial identity and cultural identity were not evident issues or concerns for their foster children. Mr. Joseph, an African American foster father, and Peter, his White foster son, perfectly illustrate this discrepancy. Mr. Joseph stated that Peter did not understand racial issues. He said it was apparent because Peter failed to raise any concerns for discussion related to race. Peter, however, in a separate interview, thought it rude even to say the words “Black people,” so he was reluctant to voice any racial concerns or issues. Peter’s hesitation erroneously signaled he was racially unaware since he raised no questions or concerns. This was in fact not completely accurate. Peter felt that to express racial terms was an affront to his foster family, so he did not do so. This was Peter’s attempt to spare the feelings of his foster father. Mr. Joseph’s perception that Peter was ignorant about racial matters seemed to conflict with the literature. McAdoo (2002) and Quintana (1994) postulated that by age two, children are aware of skin colors but have not attached associated race with social meaning. Between the ages of three and four,

marks the beginning of racial identification and a preference for White culture. McAdoo (2002) further has suggested that between five and eight years of age, Black children relate to their own racial group. According to Quintana (1994), children between four and twelve years of age attempt to connect external differences, i.e., appearances to internal non-physical characteristics. The final age delineation for McAdoo is nine years old. At that age, both Black and White children are comfortable with their own racial group. McAdoo's theory of racial identification seemed to confirm Peter's feelings and negated Mr. Joseph's dismissal.

Children of color are aware of racial differences earlier than children of the majority group. If the social environment telegraphs negativity to the foster child based on race and culture, the African American foster child begins to internalize negative self-esteem. Fortunately, by adolescence, this process becomes mitigated for most adolescents. Whether this is also true of foster children who remain in care during this developmental stage seems contraindicated. The teens interviewed for this study related unresolved racial and cultural concerns.

Chapter 6 recounts the story of a foster parent who refused to accept a foster child who did not look Hispanic. This foster parent had superficial criteria for the child she helped. Her prejudice superseded common courtesy as the foster parent rejected the foster child upon arrival at the foster home. The foster child overheard the remarks of the foster parent. A vivid imagination is not required to summon what feelings probably surfaced in the foster child who waited with anxiety to be included in the new family. Unfortunately, the foster child was met with rejection rather than acceptance. Separating under stressful circumstances from her biological family and then

experiencing rejection by one foster family is undoubtedly an unhappy scene.

7.4.4 Implication for Research

The significance of this research study is the careful content analysis of the PRIDE training curriculum and in-depth qualitative interviews of the stakeholders in the foster care system. The microscopic examination of each training session revealed depth and a comprehensive treatment of developmental milestones and social expectations for children entering the foster care system. The primary focus of the training was preparation for foster parents to receive foster children who have a broad range of needs. The clear deficit was insufficient information provided to develop cultural competence in foster parents. Doll's four "R's," recursion, rigor, richness, and relationship, were absent for the one element—racial and cultural identity. It is perhaps this attention to detail that creates a space in the research literature for this study to occupy.

Several studies have revealed inadequate treatment of racial and cultural identity in the foster care system. For example, Carter-Black (2002) offered a glimpse into the professional and personal practices of child welfare workers who are responsible for placing children in transracial homes. Campbell's exploratory study (2001) identified "the racial_socialization practices of foster parents caring for African-American children" (p. 1). Daughtery's (2002) focus was "identity development of African American female adolescents through their foster care experience." These researchers, Carter-Black (2002), Campbell (2001), and Daughter (2002), each investigated only one of the three elements of cultural identity influences (foster care workers, foster parents, and foster children) as I have illustrated in Figure 7.1. Figure 7.1 demonstrates the comprehensive

scope of this study and the connection of various components previously studied separately. Noteworthy of this study, as opposed to studies by Campbell (2001), Carter-Black (2002), and Daughtery (2002), is the revealing and reinforcing of the dynamic relationship not often attempted but parsed into separate elements by the creation of the research triangle based on the interviews with foster parents, foster workers, and foster children.

An important aspect of the audience in the research triangle is the inclusion of the foster children. Daughtery (2001), Simon (2000), and Whiting and Lee (2003) have each declared that speaking to foster children is more valuable than not. Other researchers have postulated that children are a valuable resource in qualitative research by giving voice to their own life experiences (Misha, Antie, & Regehr, 2004). For example, Whiting and Lee (2003) embraced an ecological perspective with a qualitative research design and analyzed 23 narratives of preadolescent foster children's experiences. In their qualitative research study, which captured "voices from the system," Whiting and Lee warned other researchers of the inherent challenges of those who desire to learn more about children's perspectives. Their advice included awareness that researcher skill could influence data collection and that the researcher could be viewed as an authority figure by the foster children.

Because of barriers that researchers face in interviewing foster children, researchers seemed to have excluded children from their studies. I provide two examples; however, Barber and Delfabbro (2003) in their study on placement stability and psychological well being of children in foster care precluded foster children. During this eight-month study, these researchers investigated stability and well being, and

assessments were made using the foster care workers' reports. The research design included a review of "the foster children's case files and face-to-face interviews with their social workers" (p. 417). At predetermined intervals, "the social workers of children remaining in care were again administered standardized measures of the child's well-being" (p. 417). Data were collected from "central agency records," "government databases," and "face-to-face interviews with social workers" (p. 418). Despite such in-depth assessment, no direct contact with children being studied was included in the study. One would presume that the obvious source of the well being of foster children was the foster children participating in the study. No reason was offered for excluding the subjects the research was studying.

Massatti et al. (2004) designed and tested a transracial adoption parenting scale without input from foster or adopted children. Contact with foster children did not seem to be part of their research design. However, in the introduction to their study, they stated that there is a need for parents in transracial adoption families to "develop considerable expertise related to race and culture to help children develop positive racial identity" (p. 43). Despite this need statement, it does not appear that the inclusion of children was considered. Approximately one-third of the children (707 out of 2,115 children ages 0-29 years) connected to their study were between 7 and 29 years of age. Children were available but strangely not interviewed, nor were they directly contacted in any way. Information was obtained about them rather than from them. Including children may have provided an interesting element to the transracial parenting scale development. Again, Massatti et al., like Barber and Delfabbo (2003), gathered information about children but declined to directly include the actual subjects they

studied.

Including foster children in the research design of this study was an ambitious undertaking with numerous complicating factors. For instance, the journey to receive permission from the child welfare system proved an arduous one. More than six months of emails, calls, and document exchange elapsed before I received permission from the state child welfare authority to interview foster children. Most foster parents were reluctant to arrange for the interviews with their foster children. These parents stated or implied that they felt such discussion might “raise issues” already resolved or issues never evident. Others not quite as assertive agreed verbally but failed to follow through. This later group included foster parents who “missed appointments,” “double scheduled,” or “forgot.” After multiple attempts to overcome these barriers, the researcher ultimately decided not to include these parents and their children in this study. Yet without the possibility of hearing from foster children and including their voices, the picture would be incomplete. Although, there were hurdles, the foster care workers and foster parents both were involved in identification of the foster children participants.

Another barrier was the natural hesitancy of the foster children to engage with a stranger who was asking personal questions. Foster children by definition must regularly interact with strangers, but hesitation is a survival skill. Researchers—in this case, me—must offer a psychologically and physically safe space for them to respond (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Because the developmental level of foster children varies not only by age but also by life experiences, assessing a psychological safe space is often difficult for the researcher. I was aware of this barrier, and I attempted to provide

safe psychical space with limited success. For example, both Mary and Anthony were interviewed on separate days in private offices at their foster placement agency. In contrast, the interviews with Kay and Ken occurred in public rooms at their respective foster homes. Although in both situations I asked the foster parents whether another space was available, the foster parents assured me that the “room” they offered was fine. Still, when both Kay and Ken entered the designated space, I queried them about their comfort level answering questions in the rooms where we sat. Both were dismissive. In truth, I was not comfortable, and I was distracted by the background noise and room traffic. This surprised me, for I spent more than 10 years as a home-based therapist for foster families. It was my familiarity with foster home ambience that gave me false confidence that interviews with foster children in their foster homes would be “fine.” The intent of the research interviews was similar in some ways to therapy interviews but different in many other aspects. First, the research interviews were one-time events, and therapy is a process. Secondly, the research interviews were conducted in borrowed space. In a therapeutic relationship with a foster family over time, I was able to suggest alternate locations in their homes. These requests for a different room or privacy in a public room were most often honored. Third, and most importantly, the foster children in a therapeutic relationship “knew” me, but the foster children I interviewed did not. I addressed this last hurdle in my research design, but I would suggest extending the time to establish rapport in any future research design. Finally, without a long-term relationship with the foster children, I had to find ways to motivate others quickly. The use of incentives filled this gap. Rice and Broome (2004) investigated types of incentives to offer based on the child’s biological age. The

incentives I offered the foster children (a *new* \$5 bill for foster children and \$10 for foster teens) at the beginning of the interview were an attempt to provide a direct benefit that would motivate them.

This research advances elements of the research triangle (see Figure 7.1). Through examination of the foster care system, a multiple dimensional approach unfolds from diverse perspectives. The point of view of each stakeholder in the foster care system was honored in this research design. The value of this approach is the confirmation of meaning making with each triad. Since I these these data, it provided an opportunity to analyze, compare, and contrast several versions of the same stories.

Implication for new research is the enhancement of the participant research grouping. The foster parents with their foster children and their foster worker would become this participant research set. The resistance present in the foster care system to include foster children as full participants reduced the visibility of this phenomenon. Peter, a foster child, and his foster father, Mr. Joseph, had vastly different ideas of racial identity. Mr. Joseph was confident that Peter was unaware of race and racial issues. In Peter's research interview, it was apparent that he did understand racial dynamics. Interviewing within the Peter/Mr. Joseph "research set" provided information to compare and contrast as well as information for collaboration. Other research sets were Anthony (foster teen), Mrs. Lewis (foster mom), and Camelia. Just as the Peter/Mr. Joseph set, Mrs. Lewis's view of racial issues differed sharply from Anthony's perspective. Thus, this study points to the construction of research on a three-pronged orientation: foster children, foster parent, and their foster care worker.

Directions for future research include capturing of stories, building relationships

with foster children, and developing a coherent picture of foster children's experiences.

One direction for future research involves capturing the stories of foster children. Foster teens developmentally in the throes of identity solidification are an important group to study. Further research should focus on the foster children in Erikson's (1998) adolescent developmental stage of "identity versus isolation." Expanding the role of foster children in understanding transracial foster care will expand the threefold relationships among foster children, foster parents, and foster workers.

A second direction for future research involves building relationships with foster children. Building a relationship between the researcher and the foster children should be a component of any new research design involving foster children. Whiting and Lee (2003), whose research was predicated on interviews with foster children, advised researchers about the status of the informant; in particular, they advised that the informant should be viewed as an authority figure. Thus, more structured time with the foster children to build a relationship could yield more useful data. All social workers are taught to establish rapport with clients as a component of the interview process. Since the focus of my research study could be viewed as sensitive subject matter, more than one interview with the same foster child may be advised. Even a brief introductory session prior to the formal interview could facilitate conversation. A format which included both small-group interaction and individual interviews may also be beneficial.

A third direction for future research involves developing a coherent picture of foster children's experiences. With a consistent national average of nearly a half-million children in foster care, small qualitative studies such as this one should be conducted throughout the country until a representative sample of foster children's voices in a

transracial placement have been heard. So far, qualitative research studies (e.g., Campbell, 2001; Carter-Black, 2002; Daughtery, 2001; Hill & Peltzer, 1982; Mulkerns & Owen, 2008; Simon & Roorda, 2002; Whiting & Lee, 2003) have best captured the nuances of identity development. The sample size for this study of 18 foster parents, 8 foster care workers, and 5 foster children is within the range of research studies with a similar area of interest. For example, the sample size in Campbell's (2001) study was 10 former foster children. Carter-Black (2002) interviewed 10 foster care workers. Daughtery (2001) based her findings on 7 subjects. Mulkerns and Owens' (2008) sample consisted of 12 youths emancipating from the foster care system. Whiting and Lee (2003) collected 23 narratives from pre-teen foster children. Dramatic increases in these numbers would yield valuable information by providing an expanded knowledge base. Increased empirical information would support a broader scope of research, which would document the need for both policy modifications and resource allocations. Better understanding of several case studies will contribute to the development of a composite picture of the experience of children in transracial situations and transracial children.

7.4.5 Implications for Policy

Child welfare policy places less emphasis on racial and cultural identity and more on the safety and well being of the child. This historic focus was and continues to be pertinent. However, the scope of policy should now include racial and cultural identity. The prevalence of children in the foster care system in numbers not consistent with their ratio in society begs for consideration of racial and cultural identity. The reality is that the children are already in foster homes where attention to racial and cultural identity is

not consistent. Some of the vulnerable children are further exposed to foster parents who were willing but ill prepared to be culturally competent transracial parents. Foster parents in my study expressed the need for training to address specific issues related to race and culture. The concerns of these foster parents are evident throughout this study. Mrs. Ratcliff, Mrs. Patrick, and Mrs. Oliver each expressed a desire for foster parent training as preparation for transracial foster children.

Davis, in the forward to Ford's (2010) guide to transracial parenting, noted that "love is not enough" when trying to be a successful transracial family. Further, McRoy continued and noted that "knowledge was needed to better prepare families for the many unforeseen experiences in parenting transracially."

Understandably, if a child is at risk for physical or sexual harm, cultural identity does not matter. Perhaps, it is this single focus on child protection that has rescued thousands of children from danger and death. It may be time for the child welfare system to shift the paradigm to include racial and cultural identity. With 473,773 children in the foster care system as of September 30, 2010 (30% African American and 20% Hispanic), attention to race and culture is necessary (AFCARS, FY 2009). This same report indicated that the mean length of stay was 26.7 months. More than two years is not a temporary time in foster care. Hundreds of thousands of children are in foster care. Half of these children represent non-dominant groups in our society, but most are in foster homes with families which represent the dominant American culture. These same children reside with culturally different families not just for one day, one week, or one month. At the six-month mark, these children often remain in a transracial foster home. Eventually, a year passes, and the foster parents continue to parent transracially

but may not be culturally competent. Meanwhile, little if any attention is given to the child's cultural values. The foster child continues to linger in the foster care system past 18 months without recognition of his or her race or cultural. This same child then remains in foster care past the two-year mark—developing physically and developing emotionally, but not developing culturally. This is “why” race and culture are important for foster parents; for foster care workers; and, most vividly, for foster children. The raw numbers of children who land in the system, the percentage of children who represent oppressed groups, and the length of time the children remain in foster care create a short but powerful argument for racial and cultural training for foster parents (Rockymore, 2006). As noted, children land in foster care for a temporary stay (Kluger, Alexander, & Curtis, 2000) but remain for many months.

The value of positive racial and cultural identity is also a necessary component of well being. Thomas and Schwarzbaum (2011) have acknowledged that “the development of the self and the interaction of cultural factors with self-concept” (p. 3) is integral in personality development. Racial identity and cultural identity are essential in the development of foster children as these facilitate children's personal identity.

Mary, a foster child interviewed in this study, when discussing her mixed racial background, described life in transracial foster homes. Mary said it did not “really bother” her at the time we spoke because all of her foster homes “were all White.” Then, in the same sentence, she added, “Sometimes it bothers me because, like... I don't talk the same...” This statement implies that it may have bothered her in some way. She continued by returning to her pro-and-con dialogue: “It doesn't really bother me because I am comfortable with who I am, you know... where I am going, you

know... and what I've been through." She presented a confident façade but may in fact have had some insecurity. Her verbal volley about her sense of self based on transracial foster care and being "comfortable with myself" versus her statement that "it bothers me" is an indication of her ambivalent feelings.

This sense of "who they are" is challenged by being displaced from their biological family. Should foster children experience another loss? This second loss is a loss of a racial and cultural connection. The implication for policymakers is to acknowledge that racial identity and cultural identity are essential aspects of personhood. Mulkerns and Owens' (2008) final words in their study tracking identity development in youth aging out of the foster care system provide hope "as long as ...informed clinical social workers are bolstered by culturally responsive...practice" (p. 447). This understanding also needs to be acknowledged while the child is in the foster care system. Chiemi, (Casey Family Programs, 2005), a child welfare administrator, strongly and simply puts it this way:

Race matters. We can't be afraid to talk about it.
We must bring it to the surface and not be afraid.

The "Who am I?" question reverberates through the years as the foster children remain in foster homes which do not address such a vital component of self-worth.

The treatment of race historically in America has been overt and based on skin color. Appleby, Colon, and Hamilton (2011) have indicated that skin color is, in fact, the first feature associated with race. If a person had physical characteristics of a racial group, that person was more than likely treated as a member of that racial group absent confirmation. Although people see race, they often wish to avoid recognition or acknowledge racial differences. Cullen (2008) has labeled the statements "I don't see

color” and “I am color blind” as one of the “dumbest things well intended people say.” Cullen explains that this statement “renders the person of color invisible” (p. 73). Therefore, discussions about race and culture are not initiated and avoided if at all possible. One foster parent, Mrs. Patrick, and one foster child, Peter, stated that White people often believe it is not polite to raise the question of race. The policy implication begins to emerge if this belief is shared by other White foster parents and foster children. Race is a factor when children enter the system (AFCARS, 2009). Race is a factor in how long children remain in the system. Race is a factor in placement of the children. Race is a factor in how children exit the system. Race and cultural identity development in foster children placed in transracial foster homes has received some attention, but more is needed. Foster parents, foster care workers, and foster children expressed an understanding that race matters. Not addressing this factor may signal a loss of racial and cultural identity for transracially placed Africa American foster children.

7.5 Limitations of the Study

The first limitation was the number of foster children who participated in this study. Expanding the size of the sample of foster children could provide an opportunity for more foster children to express their feelings and concerns. A groundswell propelled by foster children and their advocates could change the course of child welfare by shifting the focus from macro down to micro up. This is particularly true within the sample of foster children in this study. Most of the foster parents were not comfortable with their children participating in the study. There were at least two foster parents who agreed to participate but later failed to schedule an appointment, even after numerous attempts to do so. One foster parent scheduled an appointment but cancelled because

of scheduling conflicts and failed to reschedule, even after I made extensive outreach efforts. Approximately, 4 of the 14 foster parents had adopted or were in the process of adopting and did not wish to have the subject of transracial placement approached. These parents seemed tentative and expressed reluctance to have the researcher raise issues of adjustment to the foster/adopt home where the concept of race was dormant. Indeed, otherwise relaxed parents (Harvey and Alexander, Mrs. Betts, and Mrs. Wright) displayed some nervousness during discussion about including their children in the study.

This study explored the void created by the space when training for foster parents is insufficient for them to successfully maintain transracial foster homes. The meaning all stakeholders in the foster care system attribute to the transracial foster care experience was also explored in this study. Research groupings of the stakeholders would be fundamental in future research studies.

The second limitation was the design of the interviews, which were semi-structured and subject to influence of the participants. Since the structure was more of a frame than a set structure, participants were able to demonstrate freedom in their responses. I was challenged to either follow them and their thoughts or limit my inquiry to the preset questions. In every case, I followed them, but sometimes the conversation meandered and ended where I did not intended it to go. The result was some single data without corroboration. I did not always know it was a topic of interest for other foster parents. For example, Mrs. Patrick spoke extensively about training for White foster parents and the meaning she ascribed to that experience. My questions regarding foster parent training were general, and I did not probe for the "White"

experience, even when I was speaking to White foster parents. My interview with Mrs. Patrick occurred on Tuesday September 23, 2008, after 11 of the 19 foster parent interviews. No one to that point had spoken of their foster parent training and connected to a “White” orientation. I did not know if Mrs. Patrick’s issue (newly introduced to me) was of concern to others also. I was also unsure whether the new concerns were representative of the group or exclusive to her.

A third limitation was the methodological design of the interviews. Just as one interview session provide rich information, conducting multiple interviews would have been better. For example, when Mrs. Patrick raised a new issue for me, with the flexibility of multiple interviews, I would have been able to revisit other foster parents and raise the issue Mrs. Patrick mentioned to ascertain relevance. Additionally, after transcription, sometimes new questions emerged from the data. However, since I had previously stated to the participants that there was only one interview required, I was reluctant to ask for another conversation. This prevented exploration of some ideas gleaned after a second look at the data. This eliminated clarification on points which would have refined the information. One topic not explored was the decision to progress from a foster family to an adoptive family. A discussion about this process and any related issues could have provided an interesting foundation for a second interview. Mrs. Betts, Mrs. Wright, Mrs. Patrick, Mrs. Terrell, Harvey, and Alexander all transitioned from transracial fostering to transracial adopting. Given the scope of the original research, moving from fostering to adoption was not germane and thus not addressed. In some interviews, the length of the single interviews was sufficient, but the option to return to the participants later in the process would have enhanced the

data as points could have been clarified and probed. This proposed second interview would have allowed for exploring the new topics. Mrs. Terrell volunteered to share stories of involvement by her siblings in the parenting of her foster children. Mrs. Terrell's extended family support included discussion about care of her young foster sons if she died before they reached the age of independence. This family conversation occurred prior to Mrs. Terrell's formal adoption of the foster children.

In conclusion, this research study serves as a glimpse into the Pandora's Box of racial identity when paired with the foster care experience. This lens should function as a kaleidoscope that brings forth a perfusion of seemingly random color but definitely orderly. This study represents an important contribution to the literature because of the paucity of research on transracial foster care.

APPENDIX A – SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR FOSTER PARENTS

1. How long have you been a foster parent?
2. Do you have biological children? What are the ages of your biological children?
3. Do they also live in the foster home?
4. Approximately how many foster children have lived with you since you became a foster parent?
5. What is the shortest amount of time a foster child racially or culturally different has lived with you?
6. What is the longest amount of time a foster child racially or culturally has lived with you?
7. Please identify the racial or cultural groups of the foster children who have lived with you.
8. Describe your experience parenting the foster children who were racially and culturally different from you?
9. Tell me about the training that you received in preparing you to foster the child racially or culturally different.
10. Please identify what was helpful and what was not?
11. Discuss what you do as a foster parent to help your foster child feel secure within his/her racial group?
12. Tell me about the joys and/or sorrows of foster parenting a child racially/culturally different.
13. Do you have any other comments you feel will be helpful to this research?

APPENDIX B – SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR FOSTER CHILDREN

1. How old are you?
2. How long have you lived in this foster home?
3. What is it like to live here?
4. I noticed that your foster parents are a different race than you are? How is that for you?
5. Do you think other people notice? How do you know?

APPENDIX C – SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR FOSTER CARE WORKERS

1. How long have you been working in the area of foster care?
2. Describe your experience with foster children and foster parents of different racial or cultural groups.
3. Describe the process of placing a child in a foster home when the family is different racially and culturally.
4. Are additional services necessary for transracial foster homes? If so, please explain.
5. What other information do you think would be helpful to consider?

APPENDIX D – SAMPLE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION FOSTER PARENTS

Interview with Foster Parent

1 Researcher (R): Okay Today is Thursday November 4 and this is Mr. Cooper* and we can continue to talk about your article and the award you just got. How many years have you been a foster parent?

3 *Mr. Cooper: Coming up on six years.*

4 R: Okay Six years; tell me about the award you just won.

5 *Mr. Cooper: It was an Adoption Award nominated by our state representative with support of others, including a Judge, and the foster care supervisor.*

7 R: Oh I know the supervisor she is my friend.

8 *Mr. Cooper: Um hum*

9 R: Okay, okay

10 *Mr. Cooper: So they wrote a nice letter and sent it over to the state representative.*

11 R: Okay

12 *Mr. Cooper: This was back, oh back there, in the middle of September. We went to the capitol.*

14 R: Okay

15 *Mr. Cooper: And met with the Representative and received the award. We were lucky enough too met with other people that do this and it was kinda nice being able to discuss ¹⁷ having so many kids, being in the foster field, and the adoption with people that could relate to us.*

18 R: And tell me about the “so many kids”...how many kids have you fostered?

19 *Mr. Cooper: 30, just over 30 in the last almost six years*

20 R: Okay, alright okay and you mentioned adoption too. Have you adopted some of them?

22 *Mr. Cooper: Six*

**A code was substituted on the original transcript*

23 R: Oh you adopted six?

24 *Mr. Cooper: Yes*

25 R: Okay, okay, now in the six years you've been in foster care, have you had occasion to foster any children of a race different than yours?

26 *Mr. Cooper: Yes,*

27 R: Okay

28 *Mr. Cooper: Yes...We had two*

29 R: What race do you consider yourself to be?

30 *Mr. Cooper: Caucasian*

31 R: Okay and what races were the two children you fostered who were not Caucasian?

33 *Mr. Cooper: African American and then we had one that was Pilipino so we had three actually.*

35 R: And um what, tell me about the two African American kids. What were their ages when you first got 33them?

37 *Mr. Cooper: The first one was an infant um um.*

38 R: Um um

39 *Mr. Cooper: He had a rare genetic disorder.*

40 R: Okay

41 *Mr. Cooper: We were told um that he probably wouldn't survive. Pretty much it was we were the last family to go hum if we didn't take him they would probably send him 43home with mom and I couldn't do that.. So my wife and I took him in um around December time and he ended up passing away on Valentine's Day.*

45 R: Oh really, from your home?

46 *Mr. Cooper: Uh hum*

47 R: Ooh okay

48 *Mr. Cooper: So*

49 R: Did he require any special medical...?

50 *Mr. Cooper: Oh yes,*

51 R: ...attention

52 *Mr. Cooper: He had the G-tube which is the feeding tube every four hours getting up night and day he would feed..So*

54 R: What about the other African American child you had?

55 *Mr. Cooper: We have her right now. She is a sixteen year old getting ready to turn 17. We started out with her getting visits with her every other weekend for about six months.*

58 R: Okay so she has been with you since August?

59 *Mr. Cooper: Hum ho,*

60 R: So you had visits to for the transition?

61 *Mr. Cooper: Yes, she was in placement*

62 R: Okay, okay, okay

63 *Mr. Cooper: Which we really like that. It was kinda nice to get you through the honeymoon period. If there are going to be issues, they are going to come out so. That was nice to work through that.*

66 R: And how many week end visits did you have? Or how many months of weekend visits did you have?

68 *Mr. Cooper: Six months*

69 R: Six months! Okay, okay. Do you have biological children also?

70 *Mr. Cooper: Yes, three.*

71 R: And what are the ages of your biological children?

72 *Mr. Cooper: Eight, ten and seventeen*

73 R: Okay and how many other foster kids do you have right now?

74 *Mr. Cooper: Just one*

75 R: Oh, and how old is that one?

76 *Mr. Cooper: Sixteen*

77 R: So, you have an eight, ten, seventeen-year-old biological, sixteen foster kid. And do you have two sixteen year olds or is the sixteen year old you told me about earlier the foster child?

80 *Mr. Cooper: No, that's her, she is the foster child.*

81 R: So you have four kids here?

82 *Mr. Cooper: Yes*

83 R: It looks like there are more than that.

84 *Mr. Cooper: That's including my brother-in-law who just turned 20 so.*

85 R: Okay

86 *Mr. Cooper: The baby who is going to be eight months here soon,*

87 R: Okay

88 *Mr. Cooper: we have a 2½ year old,*

89 R: Ah okay

90 *Mr. Cooper: we have the eight years old, the eight-year old; the we have the ten year old,*

91 R: right

92 *Mr. Cooper: a twelve year old*

93 R: Oh! okay

94 *Mr. Cooper: Fifteen-year old*

95 R: OH

96 *Mr. Cooper: two sixteen year olds,*

97 R: [Yes, it is going to be quick and now you are too]

98 *Mr. Cooper: a seventeen year old,*

99 R: Okay

100 *Mr. Cooper: and then our eighteen year old right here*

101 R: And I was going to say which one are you?

102 Mr. Cooper's Son: I am the eight year old.

103 R: Hum, hum okay

104 Mr. Cooper's Son: I could pass for eight can't I?

105 R: No, Not in this life time (chuckles). So you have a houseful? And of all these children four of them are foster children.

107 *Mr. Cooper: No, just one*

108 R: Just one?

109 *Mr. Cooper: Three adopted, or six adopted, three biological, my wife's brother and our sixteen year old foster*

110 R: Okay, I finally got it right
For the sixteen year old girl, some of these kids are boys. Is she is the only girl?

112 *Mr. Cooper: No*

113 R: Okay for your sixteen year old African American child have you noticed, or in your experience, is there any thing you different from your other adolescent girls? I know adolescent boys would be different?

116 *Mr. Cooper: The only thing I have noticed different is just, is I guess hair care.*

117 R: Hum um

118 *Mr. Cooper: That's primarily it. Food wise, no. She is picky just like all of the other kids in the house.*

120 R: Hum um

121 *Mr. Cooper : Clothing, no. You know she it just hair products, different hair keep it greased and, that is about it.*

123 R: Hum and does she go to school with all Do all of the kids go to the same school in the same age range?

125 *Mr. Cooper: Yes*

126 R: Okay, okay, how is she doing in school?

127 *Mr. Cooper: She's had ups and downs. You know. She is very smart, if she would stay in class and focus she would 116be a straight A student.*

128 R: Okay

129 *Mr. Cooper: But she is about a B average student.*

130 R: Okay...what about any questions she may have had...[oh the baby's back. Yea, you want your Daddy don't you? Baby coos. You want me? Baby sounds]

132 R: have you noticed any difference any questions your foster daughter [oh earrings. I don't think you should pull these. They might hurt my ear. I better take them off. You can probably play with my necklace as long as you do not eat it. You are not going to eat it are you?] She is going to put it in her mouth.

136 Do you have to do any thing with your sixteen year old foster kid to reinforce her culture or does she have any questions about that?

137 *Mr. Cooper: No, no not really.*

138 R: Okay

139 *Mr. Cooper : Um, she has a sibling here, a sister that is about a year younger who actually lives in town here*

140 R: Oh not at your house

141 *Mr. Cooper: No*

142 R: Oh but you mean the same foster care area

143 *Mr. Cooper: Hum um she is actually living with a biological brother here about five minutes up the road*

145 R: Oh, oh! [Are you caught in my dress here? Baby continues to coo] Do they visit?

147 *Mr. Cooper: Oh, we try pretty regularly, almost every week-end [There is an exchange with the "eight year old" about ordering Chinese food for dinner)*

149 R: So there hasn't been any kind of questions about racial identity?

150 *Mr. Cooper: No*

151 R: Does she run into any problems in the city or in the schools?

152 *Mr. Cooper: We had a neighbor girl we had issues with. She is one of my son's*

former girlfriends. She has had racial comments toward her and right now the school is working on this as we speak. So before I forget, we did have one when we moved out here another African American . How she grew up in the culture she grew up, primarily with White people, coming from B city wasn't too bad but when we moved to M we started to had some behaviors with that problems with that.

153 R: Okay

154 *Mr. Cooper: Because our city has the reputation of higher class, you know, I believe she felt that she was going to have a harder time in the schools because of her color.*

155 R: Did she?

156 *Mr. Cooper: No, because she sabotaged her stay here and she ending up going to live I don't know where she went when she left us but it was in S where she wanted to go from the get-go.*

157 R: The plan with your foster child, the one who is fifteen year, it that long term foster care?

158 *Mr. Cooper: Yes*

159 R: So it does seem that the visits went well for you and for her as if the week-end visits went well because she ended coming to stay with you?
So she is the only African American within the house isn't she?

160 *Mr. Cooper: Yes,*

161 R: But her sibling does not live very far

162 *Mr. Cooper: Correct*

163 R: Uh hum what about this little muchin, what's her story?

164 *Mr. Cooper: Well, she is the biological sibling of our two year old.*

165 R: Oh

166 *Mr. Cooper: All of the ones we have adopted are sets of siblings. The two youngest are siblings, this one you just seen here is our eighteen year are siblings and the teen girls are biological siblings.*

167 R: Oh did you get them when they were younger?

168 *Mr. Cooper: No, hum our eighteen year old he was one of our very first came to us when he was thirteen. He stayed with us about six months and went back to mom.*

Then about one ¹⁸⁰month later they removed the kids from the house and he came back to us. We were his only foster home until adoption.

¹⁶⁹ R: Okay, okay. Is there anything that you think would have helped if you had had it in your training to help prepare you to deal with an African American child or you said you had a Pilipino child too. Anything that would have been helpful for you to know before you got them?

¹⁷⁰ *Mr. Cooper: I think... timing is always important. Sometimes they call you in the middle of the night. But maybe family history family background family heritage. A routine. I think that would have helped living with a family of a different race.*

¹⁷¹ R: [Baby coos] Is there any thing else you want to say before I turn off the tape? [speaking to the baby] More coos. Okay thank you.

APPENDIX E – SAMPLE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION FOSTER CHILDREN

Interview with Foster Child:

1. Researcher (R): Today is Monday, November 17, 2008 and this is Mary. Um as we just said before we turned the other tape, I am interviewing kids who were placed in one home where they are a different race. So can you tell me how you identify yourself in terms of race?
2. *Mary: I actually identify myself as just mixed.*
3. R: Ok, mixed. Ok, and what are you mixed with?
4. *Mary:: Black, White, Indian, and Chinese*
5. R: Oh, Ok, that's really multiple huh?
6. *Mary:: Yeah*
7. R: Ok, and how old are you?
8. *Mary:: I'm seventeen*
9. R: Ok, and what, you're in foster care?
10. *Mary:: Yeah*
11. R: Ok, and can you tell me the race or the culture of the people who are you're foster family?
12. *Mary:: They're Caucasian*
13. R: Why do you say it like that -'they're cau-cas-ian'? (very drawn out and deliberate pronunciation)
14. *Mary:: I don't know, I just, I don't know*
15. R: You don't?
16. *Mary:: I just say it like that...*
17. R: Ok? Ok. How long have you been there?
18. *Mary:: This week...this week I think is my two years.*
18. R: Two years! I had no idea...

19. *Mary:: (sighs) Yeah, I've been there a LONG time...(timidly laughs)*
20. R: How is it?
21. *Mary:: It, it has its moments where it's frustrating just because it is foster care, but other than that, it's pretty good. It's the longest I've ever been in a placement, so I guess that's got to show some type of good.*
22. R: On your part? Or on the families part?
23. *Mary:: I think on both 'cause I used to be, I guess I would be a 'problem child' in my past, but now I've just matured a lot and I just grown out of a lot of my bad habits...so, and they just help me stay out of bad situations.*
24. R: The foster family that you've got?
25. *Mary:: Yeah*
26. R: Ok, ok. Two years?
27. *Mary:: Yeah*
28. R: Ok. What's the best thing about being there two years?
29. *Mary:: Um, I don't know I guess, just getting to know people and they expect certain things from you and they know how you react, so you know, and you know how they react, so you know there's not a lot of butting heads or anything like that...*
30. R: What's the worst thing about being there?
31. *Mary:: Because it's foster care...(laughs)*
32. R: OK (laughs) And, uh, what does that mean 'because it's foster care'?
33. *Mary:: I've just been in foster care for so long I feel like it's taking forever, and it's just, because it's foster care it seems to drag on even longer, I don't know, it has it's moments when it seems to go by fast, but this being my senior year it is taking forever*
34. R: Senior year in high school?
35. *Mary:: Yeah*
36. R: Ok, well how long have you been in foster care?

37. *Mary:: Um, for in August it, no in June, well, my case starts in June, but I didn't get caught 'til like August, so I guess from June until, this June was four years.*
38. R: What's ahead for you?
39. *Mary:: Um, actually after I graduate I've applied to a lot of colleges, so I plan on attending college somewhere in the state and I graduate at 17 so my caseworker was going to set up some kind of independent living so I can, you know, have a good transition into life outside foster care.*
40. R: Life outside of foster care...
41. *Mary:: Yeah*
42. R: What do you think is going to be the most exciting of the life outside of foster care?
43. *Mary:: Um, I think, I think it is going to be a good thing and bad thing, like it's a good but it's still scary, like making my own decisions, as if I know it can't be very stressful, you know, be a lot sometimes but I think it's good for me to learn those types of things.*
44. R: Ok, um, you described yourself as mixed?
45. *Mary:: Yeah*
46. R: Um, are you in a community where you are other mixed people or how would you describe the community where you are? In terms of race and ethnicity or race and...
47. *Mary:: Mostly Caucasian, there's one..two..there's two other mixed kids one full Black kid now the boy that lives with us Brett, he's Asian, but that's all of us at the school.*
48. R: Um, how is it for you to be mixed in an environment where there is only one mixed kid, one full Black kid, and one Asian kid ?
49. *Mary:: Um, well it doesn't really bother me now because all of my foster homes have like they were all White but like I don't know, sometimes it bothers me because like I don't talk the same, I don't speak the same as everyone as everyone else, I don't dress the same, and the way I was raised was different sometimes people make comments or something you know but it doesn't really bother me because I am comfortable with who I am you know where I am going, you know and what I've been through.*
50. R: How were you raised? You say you were raised differently...what did you mean by that?

51. *Mary:: That down south raising...you know?*
52. R: Oh...
53. *Mary:: That, what do you call it, that corporal punishment, as they call it, mama didn't take no...I learned not to talk back to her...lol...*
54. R: Is your mom Black or White?
55. *Mary:: My mom is Black, Indian, and Chinese*
56. R: Ok, Ok...and she was southern?
57. *Mary:: Um, well she is in Dallas but um my Grandma is from New Mexico yeah, and her mom is from New Mexico, yeah and they're all coo-coo-for-cocoa-puffs, all crazy actin'...ya know?*
58. R: I see...so um it sounds like you are saying, are you saying it was a stricter environment?
59. *Mary:: A lot stricter...*
60. R: Not just a little bit?
61. *Mary:: You did what you were told to do...you weren't askin' no questions about it...it was a smack in your teeth...or rollin' your eyes, or bobbin' your head back and forth unless you wanted to get switched...other than that, I don't know, like the kids up there, this one time this girl was yellin' at her mom on the phone, I was like you could not be my child...mmmhhmmmm ...you be moms child either you would have got snatched up...I don't know it's just very different parenting...*
62. R: Mmmhhmmmm....
63. *Mary:: It's very passive parenting compared to what I was used to.*
64. R: Did, was that, were you excited about the change or passive about the change in parenting styles...or how did you perceive the big difference?
65. *Mary:: Um, sometimes I just laugh at it like I just can't believe these people actually, you know, take all that, but then other times I'm just like well, you know everybody don't have the same parenting methods, but I wouldn't let my kids get away with some of that stuff, like yellin' and screamin' and throwin' fits, sayin' 'I hate you' and stuff, no!*
66. R: You say that is not the type of parent you're going to be?

67. *Mary:: I'm not going to tolerate that.*
68. R: And do you see the difference in terms of race or is it in terms of, how do you see the difference? Cause you've said this is mostly what you've observed in your foster homes right?
69. *Mary:: Yeah*
70. R: And you said they've been mostly White?
71. *Mary:: Yeah*
72. R: OK
73. *Mary:: I think it's, I don't know, I think it, I don't think it's race, I think It's where like more of the surroundings, like rural versus urban.*
74. R: I see, OK.
75. *Mary:: Like people in the city are definitely different than people where I live cause you know like they don't know big city life and everything that goes on there, they're just used to small, like, their, their highs school is like 500 students, that's how many kids are in my middle school.*
76. R: Ahhh...
77. *Mary:: So they are all small and close and they all, you know everyone has been in the same class since kindergarten. When you know, where I grew up it wasn't like that.*
78. R: Mmhhmm...
79. *Mary:: And there is like, a lot more drugs and violence, so there is a lot more going on than there is up there...I mean there is still a lot of drugs, but they do whole different types of drugs than you see in the city, like they're bustin' meth labs everyday up here, but, I don't know...*
80. R: Which, which um, which community do you prefer, when you are able to choose, where are you going to settle a small community? Rural community? Urban community?
81. *Mary:: Oh, probably, definitely city...*
82. R: You're smiling now, you're beaming almost...

83. *Mary:: Yeah, I'm like, there's cows and deer, ya know, and all those animals, and cornfields and stuff like that, that's not my cup of tea...*
84. R: Is that part of why you said that foster care takes a long time? Cause...
85. *Mary:: Yeah, there is nothin' to do! Gosh I get so bored, I'm like sitting around, like what am I going to do? There is nothing to do...*
86. R: But you also seem happy...?
87. *Mary:: Yeah, just I don't know...*
88. R: Or maybe I don't, am I reading it incorrectly?
89. *Mary:: No, I'm happy, it's just on the weekends sometimes I get so bored that I wish I could be somewhere else, I could at least like walk around because like everything is close, I could walk to the store, ya know I can walk to my friends house, but up here I have to like, yeah my friends live like way way way out there, and I can't walk there so I just like sit at home. But when I go to school I hang out with people so it's not all that bad, and I go to there every other weekend so...*
90. R: Oh, you do?
91. *Mary:: Yeah, cause my dad, my dad and my mom still live down there...*
92. R: mmmhhhhmmm...
93. *Mary:: And my brothers and sisters...*
94. R: Oh, so do you, you have visits with them?
95. *Mary:: Yeah*
96. R: Weekend visits?
97. *Mary:: Yeah*
98. R: OK
99. *Mary:: And then in the summer, like during the school year I go every other weekend, but during the summer I go every, I go for like, I get to go for like the whole week.*
100. R: OK
101. *Mary:: Every other week*

102. R: And do you stay with your mom or your dad?

103. *Mary:: My dad, I'm not allowed, I'm really not allowed to see my mom*

104. R: OK

105. *Mary:: But she does drop by and she doesn't do though...*

106. R: And you're dad is White?

107. *Mary:: Yeah*

108. R: And is he in a White family?

109. *Mary:: Yeah, Um, well, all my brothers and sisters are mixed..*

110. R: Oh...OK

111. *Mary:: My dad just has my little brother and my sister...but my dad doesn't really act White, he everyone say's he thinks he's black and my mom thinks she's White, so they're backwards...*

112. R: And what do you think?

113. *Mary:: I think it's true, because my dad like, (laughing) my dad wears a doo rag and he's like 'yeah, I'm about to go get some J's from the mall.' He's been like, 'I'm like Lil' Wayne.' And my mom, she's like, 'Nuh, uh! She all preppy, and I'm like 'What? Mom you can't even tell you're from Dallas...you just act so fadiddy and she's like 'No I don't, nuh uh.' And I'm like, 'Oh, no.'*

114. R: And what about you're brothers and you're sisters?

115. *Mary:: My little sister Melinda, I don't know what's wrong with her, one minute she's black, the next minute she's White, she's just, you know, in between...*

116. R: Yeah

117. *Mary:: My brother, Harry, you know he acts more White because he's all head banger and skate board type thing, but my sister Micki, she's ghetto fabulous...really!*

118. R: OK

119. *Mary:: And my sister Margarita, she thinks she's Mexican...I don't know where she got that one from.*

120. R: Margarita...duh! (laughing)

121. *Mary:: Yeah she like changed her last name and everything!*

122. R: Oh, she did?

123. *Mary:: She like won't date any guy that isn't Mexican, and when people ask her what she is she says she's Mexican, and she has a twin brother, she'll be right next to him, and they'll ask my brother Mel, and he'll say he's mixed – Black, White, Indian and Chinese and*

124. *she'll say, 'yeah, I'm mixed, Black, White, Mexican, Indian and Chinese.' And he's like, 'where did you get Mexican from?' I'm like 'yeah, Mel's like Black, White, Indian and Chinese, and you guys are twins, how did you just get a little bit of Mexican? And what God just blessed you with Mexican?*

125. R: But she maintains?

126. *Mary:: Yeah, She'll tell you she's Mexican, and she'll be like 'can't you tell?' and then she'll start switchin' the way she talks. I don't know it's weird.*

127. R: So, you're like international family then? It sounds like even, at least in thought.

128. *Mary: Yeah, we're like the United Nations or something...*

129 R: But you identify yourself as mixed?

130. *Mary:: Yeah*

131. R: So how does that play out in terms of which style you gravitate to? Do you go back and forth?

133. *Mary:: I just do whatever makes me feel comfortable, like, a lot of people are like, you dress so black Salma, like when I'm up there, they're like you dress so ghetto today and I'm like really I thought I just looked nice (laughs) but ok...And then people, it's like a big joke, my friend Minny's like 'you Black Mia,' and I'm like 'no, I'm mixed, there's a difference. So I'm not Black, I'm not White, I'm not Indian, I'm not Chinese, I'm all of them, I'm not just one. And I accept it, and I embrace it, I like it, it makes me different.*

134. R: Have you, how long have you been like that?

135. *Mary: Um, I don't know. All that, like always,*

136. R: Mmmhhmm...

137. *Mary: Like I always, I never said I was just Black, or said I was just White, I always said I was mixed.*

138. R: As opposed to Margarita who said she's Mexican? (laughs)

139. *Mary: Well, I don't even know where she got that from! Just one day...*

140. R: Her name maybe (laughs) huh?

141. *Mary: Yeah, just one day she was like, she started changing the way she pro, she said my names not Margarita, it's Mar-ga-rita (phonetically) and I was like, 'Your name's Margarita, my name Salma, your name's Margarita, and your name's Melinda.' She's like no, it's Mar-ga-rita, you've got to roll you're tongue at the R, and I'm like whatever, you're name is Margarita!*

142. R: I see, what do you want to study when you go to college?

143. R: Well, gosh, when I stop the tape we should talk!

144. *Mary: I have a lot of experience with Social Workers, Stacy, I think Stacy is my fourth social worker, my fifth, I've had like five social workers or something,*

145. R: Have they all been good?

146. *Mary: No (laughs)*

147. R: That was a loaded question (laughs) Let me see what I wanted to ask you before I shut off the tape here...Ok, one thing I wanted to ask you before we run out of time is have you noticed among all you're foster parents do they treat you any differently than, do they treat you in a way that reinforces that you're mixed or is it like you're a foster child, or like you're their child? Or does in any way you're being mixed come in to the equation?

148. *Mary: My first foster home it wasn't a problem. My second foster home, when I stayed it was always, it seemed like it was always a way for my foster family to say something smart about me, like the way I talked, the guy, my foster dad was like 'uhh, you're ghetto! You can take the girl out the ghetto, but you can't take the ghetto out the girl.'*

149. *And me being the person that I am said 'You ain't spoke no truer words just to be smart, and he'd be like, 'you're racially confused' and I'd be like, 'No, I know who I am!' And then, or he would say, I was a second-class citizen because I didn't speak proper English, and that I was loud, and I was like, 'I guess.'*

150. *But the Terrell's, we don't even see color in that house. Like we make jokes about it, Oh, those are the black kids, and I am like yeah, I'm mixed. But then Tim thinks he's*

White sometimes then, he'll say he's White, and then Jay, I don't know what's wrong with Jay, that boy's crazy

151. R: (laughs)

152. *Mary:: He is, like, I don't know, something is wrong with him. He just, I don't know what's wrong with him. He just is crazy.*

153. R: So, like sometimes, at least where you are now, you refer to race, but it is in a friendly, joking...

154. *Mary:: Yeah, it's just joking, like I call Holly my White sister.*

155. R: OK, And she calls you?

156. *Mary: My Black sister, and I'm like, no, I'm you're mixed sister! She's like 'whatever,' and I say we can say we have the same mom and different dads...(laughs)*

157. R: (laughs) And everyone laughs?

158. *Mary: Yeah*

159. R: All right, um, is there anything else you want to tell me?

160. *Mary: Ummm*

161. *Mary: Um, oh yeah, we just like have this one joke where my head is scarves they call me Aunt Jemima.*

162. R: I hope it's not red.

163. *Mary: It is, it is red with white polka dots...(laughs)*

164. R: OK

165. *Mary: They're like 'Hey Aunt Jemima,' and I am like 'I do not look like Aunt Jemima, it is just a head scarf...(laughs) But I don't know, we just, like the Terrell's listen to my music, and um I listen to rap and R&B and she's like I would never listen to this music if you hadn't come, and now she like dances to it, and sings it and stuff so, we give and take, you know to even out.*

166. R: No problems in school?

167. *Mary: No, I'm in, I just joined National Honor Society*

168. R: Congratulations!

169. *Mary: Thank you. I got my academic letter last year, I've just been doing really good.*

170. R: Sounds like it.

171. *Mary: This is like the best set though, I've missed like a lot of school but like I made up like all my credits I needed to make up to graduate and like I graduate in May so*

172. R: OK

173. *Mary: I'm super excited to graduate*

174. R: I guess, and then off to wherever you go!

175. *Mary: Yeah, I am hoping to get into a university.*

176. R: OK, because they have a good social work program?

177. *Mary: Yeah, and like, they're just a good school all around for all their programs are pretty good, so just in case I don't decided to go into social work, I will still have whatever I choose as my major*

178. R: OK, well, best of luck!

179. *Mary: Thank you*

180. R: This is *Mary's* interview. Thank You.

APPENDIX F – SAMPLE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION FOSTER CARE WORKERS

Interview with Samuel, Foster Care Worker

1. Researcher (R): This is Samuel and um today is Tuesday, November the 25th and I was just explaining to you on the tape that I am looking at the experience of the foster workers when they have to place kids in a home that is racially different than themselves. So why don't you begin by telling me how long you've worked for the agency.
2. *Samuel: Uh, 20 years.*
3. R: Oh, OK, and what are some of the areas where you worked for the agency, all foster care or?
4. *Samuel: Yeah, I did protective services and I did some employment training I think out of the 20 years, 19 in foster care, well 18 in foster care.*
5. R: And in those 18 years have you had occasion to place children in homes that were racially and culturally different than the children?
6. *Samuel: Yeah, all the time.*
7. R: OK tell me about some of those experiences, what is it like for you or the foster parents. Tell me what it was like for you I should say.
8. *Samuel: As far as what?*
9. R: As far as how you identified the homes, any preparation you had to do for the foster parents, any preparation you had to do for the foster kids, how you arranged placement for children in homes that are different than the children. You look puzzled, is it in any way different than how you do if the kids are the same race.
10. *Samuel: It's not for me.*
11. R: OK
12. *Samuel: Well, presently I have a brother and sister White, placed in a Black home and I have um Black twins placed in a White home. For us when we go through the list we look at, and I know, I go through the foster care list and I, it's not so much looking at the race or whatever, it is looking at the people. And for instance, I have two White children with Rachel Hasbro, and um, and I know she's had White children in the past and I told her those things...*
13. R: She's not White?

14. *Samuel: No she's Black, but she's not someone, she's, I've known her for five or six years, I've known her mom who's a foster parent, and I've had White kids in her home as well, and they've been wonderful with White, Black, Hispanic kids, and it's been one of those things where it's more of the fit.*

15. R: The fit?

16. *Samuel: The fit in knowing what kind of um, temperament they are, because Rita Hines she works wonderful with kids that are a little trying, you know, that are uh, and so for me it's not uh the racial thing, it's more of like the quality of the foster parent that I look for.*

17. R: OK, so it sounds like it would be the same thing with the two African American twins you say are in a White home, it was a fit for them.

18. *Samuel: Sure, you know because the mom, these were folks that knew that the mom, and I went with them too, because they probably going to be terminated too because the mom is deceased. But you went through the list and it was like, you know you'd call a Black home, and they just couldn't do twins, they couldn't do twins with medical problems, they all had some kind of different problems. I was not intent to split 'em all, I think they needed to be together and this home where the mom is a stay at home mom, and the dad works is kind of an ideal situation for me.*

19. R: OK, and you say you went through the list and some Black homes couldn't take them, the twins for various reasons, does that mean you tried Black homes first because the twins were Black?

20. *Samuel: Well, I tried the Black, yeah I tried the, yeah that's, and that's what we do especially with infants when they come in where you think there is going to be a possibility of adoption.*

21. R: I see.

22. *Samuel: Where you, ideally that would be the place, the best situation, but I mean I've had um Black kids in White home where they've adopted and vice versa.*

23. R: You've had Black homes adopt White kids, or non-Black kids, maybe Hispanic or Asian or something?

24. *Samuel: Um sure.*

25. R: Do you, have you found that the parents need any kind of preparation to receive a kid from a different culture, different race?

26. *Samuel: Um, I think the folks that I work with, the foster parents that I work with that I feel comfortable with, that can handle something like that, they have that sort of*

innately, where they are vicarious about, well, White families doing Black kids hair, you know an um, I you know, I uh guess I really don't pay that much attention to Black homes that I put White kids in and vice versa, it's the quality of the people

27. R: And probably in 20 years you have a pretty good way to decipher the quality of the people.

28. *Samuel: Yeah, I do. I've seen um, I've seen White families, in Bayfield, when I worked in Bayfield, I seen White families that would adopt just exclusively Black kids and I never really kind of understood it, they, because there are not a lot of Black children that were in foster care in Bayfield, but they were, they I, they were, they just adopted Black kids for some curious reason. I mean it's, and they were from the same, I think a couple were from the same sib. group, but it was like they were identifying Black kids to adopt and that is curious, if you had a, if you served as a foster parent for some kids and you had them in your home for two years and they came up for adoption, I could see that but these people looked would go out in the Manor book, the adoption book an find Black kids, and they would adopt Black kids, exclusively Black kids.*

29. R: What did you figure out about that situation?

30. *Samuel: Well, I worked at the Juvenile Home and I saw all these, some of the kids that subsequently came into the Juvenile Home cause they were five or six, you know all of the damage had been done to them already and it was, it was just curious how these folks feel we had to, we had one Black kid that was, I was real close to at the Juvenile Home, and I know he had been adopted by them, he would be in the Juvenile Home and they were playing Sound of Music, the TV show Sound of Music*

31. R: Mmhhmmm

32. *Samuel: And he knew every word verbatim, he could have done the whole, and I said "Oh my God, you know, were you in the musical or something like that?" He said uh, "No around the home um, with the little black kids, the White, the foster dad was from Ohio, and they sang all those songs from the Sound of Music which was real curious, I mean there is a lot of Black musicals*

33. R: I can understand. So did you ever it out, what was it about?

34. *Samuel: I don't know it was kind of like a novelty*

35. R: OK

36. *Samuel: you know um, you know a lot of foster parents and you know the kids are kind of an aside, you know they adopt these kids and they are not really invested in them, or in love with them like they are in love with their children. They adopt these kids and it's like they, they make sure they drag 'em in, in front of church and you know, they uh, they're kind of like objects more than actual people you know?*

37. R: You've seen that?

38. *Samuel: Oh God yes, it's just unnerving, folks now I use, I uh, I use, uh uh, well, Regina for instance, they are people that I, my interaction with them is that I don't really see any color with them, you know? 'Cause I am close to them, and I have worked with them for so long it's like I don't really see any cultural differences between us.*

39. R: OK, and you are White?

40. *Samuel: Yes*

41. R: OK, OK

42. *Samuel: That's like my neighbors, I live next door to Black folks, and my son and their son are very close, and it was like, uh, I have more in common with my, 'cause the wife works at the hospital, my wife works at the hospital, and the husband, he's retired but we have more, I have more in common with him than I have with like the White folks down the area, because, like, we have some much in common, the son's the same age, you know uh, so I never really, you know uh, we interact, we do family, well not really family stuff together, but we invite to the graduations and back and forth, and I am much much closer to the Black family than I am to the White family on the other side.*

43. R: Because of common interests and commonalities?

44. *Samuel: Mmm yeah, more, um, sort of the same income level, our kids have both gone to college and you know I have a lot more in common with them, you know.*

45. R: Ok, and that sounds like the same kind of philosophy that you bring to the work place. In terms of the fit that you talked about, matching the experiences or the situation that the children need if the parents can't provide it, then you match them up and you are saying at home, because your experiences are kind of similar to one family, you kind of gravitate toward them as opposed to the other family and race is not really a factor in that.

46. *Samuel: Race is not really for me, and there is a wonderful um, and I can't remember, I think her last name is Jones, and I used her with, and she's wonderful, um, um, she's I think she retired, Black lady, her husband passed, she wanted to get into foster and she does just marvelous with teenage girls, just wonderful. And so when I call her, if I have a teenage girl that's kind of a pain, White, Black, Hispanic, it doesn't matter, I call her initially first. Um, if you've got teenage boys, 12, preteen and they are a pain in the butt, and they are aggressive, and need some discipline, I call um, the folks that live over on Main, Thomas... Thomas...um, I can't remember their last name, Black family...*

47. R: Mmhhmmm

48. *Samuel: He does, and I put Black, White kids in his home all the time it's just the fit, you know?*

49. R: OK, OK, well that sounds good. Um, is there anything in you're experience that I need to know as I am researching this area of trans-racial placement for foster care that I didn't' ask you, that you might be important for me to know?

50. *Samuel: The kids I see, you know the Black kids that were adopted by White families and the White kids that were adopted by Black families or stayed with them or whatever the situation is, an you see them age out of the system, you know um I don't really, the cultural or the racial thing and I, I know it like a kind of like a politically correct thing*

51. *for us folks for us to be dealing with that now I know they bring that stuff up, but I don't really see that much of an issue with it. It's the quality of the foster home is regardless of what it is, it's like nurturing, like the Collins for instance, they don't, well I don't know if*

52. *they do it for the money or not, but they hug the children, the children are attached to them, there doesn't seem to be any of the artificial, you know I'm a foster parent here, watch me! It's more of the um, you know they are more interested in the kid doing well and that's the uh, you know?*

53. R: Connection

54. *Samuel: Yeah, I think it's the quality of the people, so race really doesn't, you know really doesn't play a big deal with me*

55. R: OK

56. *Samuel: I, I place, I have no compunction about placing White kids in Black homes and verse visa*

57. R: OK

58. *Samuel: It depends on the people*

59. R: OK, Well, thank you very much Samuel.

**APPENDIX G – SAMPLE LETTER OF APPRECIATION
FOSTER CARE WORKERS**

Date

Agency

Address

City, State Zip Code

Dear _____

Thank you for participating in my doctoral research on racial and cultural identity development in foster children placed in transracial foster homes. Your assistance in identifying eligible foster parents and foster children was of great value to me in this endeavor. I trust any resulting findings or recommendations will continue to reinforce our combined dedication to improving the lives of children who are in need of foster families.

Thanking you sincerely,

Vanessa Brooks Herd, LMSW, ACSW

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ABSTRACT**RACIAL/CULTURAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT IN FOSTER CHILDREN
PLACED IN TRANSRACIAL FOSTER HOMES****by****VANESSA BROOKS HERD****May 2011****Advisor:** Dr. Jazlin Ebenezer**Major:** Curriculum and Instruction**Degree:** Doctor of Education

This qualitative study was designed to identify how racial and cultural identity is developed and maintained in foster children who are placed in foster homes racially and culturally different than they are. A review of the literature reveals scant studies of transracial foster care but many on transracial adoption. A myopic exploration of transracial foster care has not been undertaken. The importance of this new research is its singular purpose of spotlighting transracial foster care and its relationship to racial identity and cultural identity.

This study was developed to contribute to the body of child welfare literature focused on foster care. The goal of this study was to explore how cultural identity is maintained and reinforced by foster families when the foster child has a different racial

and cultural orientation. The research questions included how the foster care system addresses racial identity issues and how foster parents assign meaning to the transracial foster care experience. Another area of interest was the preparation by the foster care system for foster parents to manage issues of racial identity. The pre-training curriculum for foster parents was subjected to a content analysis. Qualitative methodology was the selected research method. Three sets of research informants were identified: foster parents, foster children and foster care workers. Semi-structured interviews were audio recorded then transcribed. The interviews with foster parents were conducted in their homes, agencies, or at church. Interviews with the foster children were held at their homes or at the foster care agency. All interviews with the foster care workers were conducted at the agencies where they were employed. One rich interview was conducted per person with telephone follow-up if needed. Following is a summary of the major findings:

1. Race and culture concerns are important but often ignored by the child welfare system.
2. The standardized pre-training curriculum needs reinforcement in the area of race and cultural issues.
3. Personal values of the foster parents and foster care workers influence placement of foster children.
4. Increased emphasis in the curriculum on hair and skin care is necessary to increase the ease of transition to a transracial placement.

The child welfare system designed to rescue children from harmful conditions creates a situation that can be psychologically unhealthy for the very children it is

designed to protect. Transracial placement, not preferred by foster care workers, is sometimes necessary. However, race is often ignored and relegated to a position of non-importance by some foster care workers and foster parents. White foster parents in this study suggested that race did not matter, but some foster children and some African American foster parents directly embraced racial discussion and cultural issues.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Vanessa Brooks Herd began her career as a school social worker after earning both a bachelor's and master's degree from Wayne State University. She continued her professional ascent assuming professional positions at a crisis center as a shift supervisor, community liaison, and finally as the assistant director. The assistant director's position became the launching point for other administrative positions as a director of a drug day treatment program, a social service agency, and an adult educational social agency. Brooks Herd's career spanned more than two decades before she joined Saginaw Valley State University and became a tenured assistant professor in the Department of Social Work. Brooks Herd and her husband have been foster parents since 1994 and live in Michigan with their two sons.