Heritage for difference, Culture for belonging; white Canadian parents' incorporation of black children born in the United States

by

Alix Lesley Little
B.A. University of Lethbridge, 2005

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Abstract

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Prospective adoptive parents in British Columbia are required by provincial law to attend workshops on parenting. Key advice given to parents wishing to adopt transnationally, transracially, or both, suggests promoting a positive identity in their children; an identity founded on feelings of belonging within their own family, as well as an acknowledgment of their background. This advice is largely influenced by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption, as well as Canada's national policy of multiculturalism.

Bearing these external laws, policies, and ideologies in mind, this thesis explores how white Canadian parents who adopt black children from the United States respond to this advice. Within this thesis, I contextualize the adoption of black children from the United States by white Canadian parents in a local, national, international and global historical perspective.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

> Adoption across political and cultural boundaries may simultaneously be an act of violence and an act of love, and excruciating rupture and a generous incorporation, an appropriation of valued resources and a constitution of personal ties.
>
> Pauline Strong 2002: 471

Prospective adoptive parents in British Columbia are required by provincial law to attend workshops on parenting. Key advice given to parents wishing to adopt either transnationally, transracially, or both, aims at promoting a positive identity in their children; an identity founded on feelings of belonging within their own family, as well as an acknowledgment of background, or heritage. This advice and its prescribed methods of implementation are largely influenced by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption, as well as Canada's national policy of multiculturalism.

However, the distance between international convention, national policy, and the daily practices of parents and children is vast and coloured by innumerable factors. Bearing these external laws, policies, and ideologies in mind, this thesis explores how white Canadian parents who adopt black children from the United States respond to the visible difference between themselves and their adopted children. Within this thesis, I contextualize the adoption of black children from the United States by white Canadian parents in a local, national, international and global historical perspective. Through my research I ask how these adoptions are possible, why they are possible, and what the possible outcomes and consequences of such adoption may be.

Racialized children placed for adoption outside of the United States

In April 2008 the Hague Convention[1] came into force in the United States, ending – for a time – the practice of placing children born in the United States for adoption out-of-country. In the decades preceding the ratification of the Hague Convention, American children were being placed for adoption outside of the United States at the same time that American citizens were adopting record numbers of children from other countries. (Briggs and Marre 2009; Howell 2006; Quiroz 2007; Selman 2009; Volkman 2005). This led to questions as to why one of the wealthiest countries in the world would place its own children for adoption out-of-country while there was every indication that Americans were interested in adopting children transnationally. The issue has been further complicated by the fact the majority of the children placed outside of the United States have been non-white, with a larger percentage of black, or biracial children with at least one black parent placed internationally (Gower and Philp 2002; Hall 2005; Leung 2005; Quiroz 2007).

In 2005, some mainstream media outlets began publishing articles on the movement of black children from the United States into Canada through the adoption process. A Canadian national newspaper, *The Globe and Mail,* stated that "Some parents of black and mixed-race children in the U.S. who have to put their children up for adoption are choosing to send their children across the border to Canada, believing that

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[1] Although the United States signed the Hague Convention in 1993, the convention was not ratified until December 12, 2007, and was entered into force April 1, 2008. In Canada the convention was signed April 12, 1994, ratified December 19, 1996, and entered into force on April 1, 1997. http://www.hcch.net/index_en.php?act=conventions.statusandcid=69

Canada is a land of little racial strife" (article accessed through *Intermix*, Hall 2005: 1). The CBS television programme 60 Minutes examined these sentiments further. In an interview, Lesley Stahl asked *The Open Door* [2] adoption agency CEO Walter Gilbert why his agency specialized in placing black children from the United States with Canadian parents.[3] Gilbert replied, "In Canada … people are just color-blind" (Leung 2005: 2). While this notion of Canada being tolerant, or even "color-blind", is often given as the reason for placing Black children out-of-country (2005: 2),[4] both what is meant by "color-blind" and the experiences of adoptive parents in the Canadian province of British Columbia suggest that the reality is highly different.

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[2] The Open Door Society began in Montreal, Canada in 1960 with the aim of placing black children with families in Canada's black community. However, the society eventually began to recruit white parents despite their efforts to include the mass media and black community leaders in Canada to recruit black families (Simon and Roorda 2000: 5; 2007: xi). In the next decade, there were 47 organizations similar to the Open Door Society in the United States (2007: xi).

[3] By Canadian parents, I am referring to parents who have Canadian citizenship. While it is possible for people with permanent residence in Canada to adopt, the process is somewhat more detailed. All parents who partook in my research were Canadian citizens themselves. Additionally, all parents who I interviewed were women.

[4] In the questions following, the provider indicated that neither he, nor staff at his agency had made attempts to place the children with African-American or other local families first, causing one to wonder what exactly is meant by "color blind" (Leung 2005: 5).

"Color-Blind": Conflicting ideologies, contested practices

> To advocate 'colour-blindness' as an ideal for the modern world is to adopt the false mythology of 'racelessness' that has plagued the Canadian legal system ... and serve[s] to condone the continuation of white supremacy across Canadian society.
>
> Constance Backhouse, 1999: 274

During the civil rights era the term "color-blind" referred to Dr. Martin Luther King's speech in which he famously spoke of a society where his children "will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character" (Quiroz 2007). Color-blind ideology with specific reference to adoption in the United States is used to describe the Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA), signed by United States President Bill Clinton in 1994 (Hansen and Pollack 2007: 7). According to the U.S. Department of Health and Social Sciences Administration for Children and Families, the three intentions of MEPA are as follows:

- Decrease the length of time that children wait to be adopted;
- Facilitate the recruitment and retention of foster and adoptive parents who can meet the distinctive needs of children awaiting placement; and
- Eliminate discrimination on the basis of the race, color, or national origin of the child or the prospective parent.

Administration for Children and Families, 1994

While this act was implemented with reference to all children awaiting adoption, part of the purpose in doing so was to reduce the amount of time "children of color", and in particular, "African American children" spent in state care because these groups had

longer wait periods than other children (Hansen and Pollack 2007:7).[5] However, despite the stated intentions of the act, the 1994 act contained the statement, "An agency may consider the cultural, ethnic, or racial background of the child for adoption or foster care on the basis of race, color, or national origin in the adoptive or foster parent or child involved" (Simon and Roorda 2000: 3).

In 1996, the Interethnic Adoption Provisions (known as MEPA II or MEPA - IEP) were passed by Congress and then President Bill Clinton (Hansen and Pollack 2007: 7). The Interethnic Adoptions Provisions explicitly stated that "race" was to be excluded from placement guidelines; however, while explicit use of "race" as a determinant in placement can lead to investigation by the Office for Civil Rights, implicit use of "race" as a determinant in placement in the day-to-day practice of social work is more difficult to identify, let alone investigate (Hansen and Pollack 2007: 8). Study of foster and adoptive parenting training by Wilson, Katz, and Green (2005) indicates that "a local agency or an individual social worker can still subtly propagate the belief that mismatch in ethnic or racial background would, on its own, be a bar to successful placement" (Hansen and Pollack 2007: 9).

Because of the language used in the statement "eliminate discrimination on the basis of race" this act has been referred to as being "color-blind" (Hansen and Pollack 2007: 7; Quiroz 2007). However, the term "color-blind" holds other interpretations. Users of the term have been accused of taking the prescriptive as descriptive by assuming that

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[5] "Of particular concern are the African American and other minority children who are dramatically over-represented at all stages of this system, wait far longer than Caucasian children for adoption, and are at far greater risk of never experiencing a permanent home" (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families).

"race" is no longer a factor, and ignoring historical discrimination, the impact of which may still be felt today (Quiroz 2007: 1). At its worst, "color-blind" ideology has been described as a "sincere fiction", one that "offers up a highly racialized understanding of racial inequality (though paraded as transcendent) notion of agency, while providing an ideological space free of guilt, self-reflection, and political responsibility" (Giroux 2006: 77).

Currently, the United States is the only "first world" country that regularly places children for non-relative adoption outside its national borders, even though U.S. citizens often choose to adopt transnationally.[6] Keeping in mind both the wealth of the United States and the large number of transnational adoptions by American families, this movement of children through adoption appears to be at odds with the larger movement of children from poorer countries to affluent countries through transnational adoption (Selman 2004: 270; Volkman 2005: 1). As with the demographic of waiting children in the United States, these placements for international adoption are highly skewed in terms of "race", with black children being placed out of country at a higher rate than white children (Hall 2002: 2). Often these adoptions are transracial,[7] with white, heterosexual middle-class couples adopting most often (Anagnost 2000: 393, Chen 2003: 12). According to the Adoption Council of Canada, statistics for international adoptions in British Columbia for 2006, the United States came in second as a source country (Harris 2009). According to the U.S. federal Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting

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[6] In this thesis, transnational adoption refers to adoptions where the adopted child is born in a country different than the adoptive parent(s).

[7] In this thesis, transracial adoptions refer to adoptions where an adoptive child and adoptive parent(s) are of different "racial" backgrounds.

System (AFCARS) 2008 estimates, 30% of children waiting to be adopted in the United States were black,[8] even though 12.3% of Americans identify as black or African-American (Census 2000).[9]

The relationship between poverty and the increased likelihood that a child will be placed for adoption has been explored specifically regarding black populations in the United States by Freundlich and others (Freundlich 2000; Quiroz 2007; Simon and Roorda 2000; Simon and Roorda 2007). The higher rate of placing black children out of country suggests a connection between poverty and availability for adoption, given that historically, black populations in the United States have faced significant legal and social barriers in terms of education, gainful employment, and resources. However, black populations are also under-represented in social service positions; 83% of caseworkers are white even though approximately 30 – 40% of their caseload is black, creating a situation where "most people who work in the system know very little about black culture or the black community" (Simon and Roorda 2000: 11). While statistically significant, this imbalance increases when taking into account the findings that indicate "a social worker's race is one of the strongest factors affecting attitudes toward transracial adoption, with black social workers disapproving more often than white social workers" (Simon and Roorda 2007: xii). As a result, "there is a historic suspicion of public agencies among many blacks, the consequence of which is that many restrict their

[8]U.S. federal Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) 2008 report website: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/afcars/tar/report16.htm

[9]U.S. Census 2000 website: http://www.census.gov/population/www/pop-profile/profile2000.html

involvement with them" (Simon and Roorda 2000: 12) at times engaging in informal adoption or fostering relationships (2000:12).

Although most often children are moved from a third world or developing country to a Euro-American country through adoption, in this case, marginalized non-white children from one wealthy country move into white[10] Euro-American households in other wealthy countries. This suggests that although the movement of black children out of the United States is an anomaly on a state level, it is actually in keeping with the current global movement of children from conditions of poverty to those of affluence, and from non-white families into white families (Howell 2007; Leinaweaver 2007; Yngvesson 2002).

This pattern of moving children from conditions of poverty into circumstances of privilege through transracial and transnational adoption raises issues such as economic inequalities, systematic racism, and a loss of community or cultural practice among marginalized or underprivileged groups. Most importantly though, this leads to questions concerning whether such placements are in the best interests of the children involved, which I address in more detail later in this chapter (pp. 10 – 13). Further complicating this issue is the fact that while black babies born in the United States are less likely to be adopted within their nation of birth, international adoption fees for black children born in the United States are markedly lower than children of other backgrounds. White girls

[10] I use the term white throughout my work due to its use in the vernacular, and to avoid medicalizing or essentializing this group as 'Caucasian’. White implies historic and social positionings, rather than a category based purely on somatic or physical features (Hartigan 1997).

garner the highest adoption fees[11] and black boys the lowest. This calls into question the equal treatment suggested by MEPA-IEP's "color-blind" ideology (Freundlich 2000: 113).[12]

While the disparity in adoption fees has been cited by some adoption agencies as an incentive for black families in the United States to adopt, this is highly contested (2000:113). Lower income is likely not the only obstacle preventing black families from adopting black children. According to Simon and Roorda "blacks have not adopted in the expected numbers because child welfare agencies have not actively recruited in black communities – using community resources, the black media, and churches" (Simon and Roorda 2000: 12). Critics of transracial adoptions claim that rather than operating as an incentive for black families to adopt black children, the lower fees and higher rates of international placement are a reflection of continuing marginalization of black children (Freundlich 2000; Philp and Gower 2003; Quiroz 2007).

This reflection of marginalization becomes more obvious through adoption, which acts as "a market economy, one that allows racism to enter in its unusual but nevertheless repellent ways" (Jacobson 2008: 425). In practice, it becomes considerably less costly for Canadian families to adopt black children from the United States than children from other countries. Lower adoption fees and the geographic proximity of the two countries (Philp and Gower 2003) serve to make this option more attractive to prospective adoptive

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[11] In 2005, the adoption fees for a white baby girl were estimated at $40 000.00 in American funds (Hall 2005:1).

[12] In 2005, the adoption fees for a black baby boy were estimated at $10 000.00 in American funds (Hall 2005: 1).

parents in Canada, a number of whom cite long waiting time and less chance of successfully adopting domestically as factors in their choice (Chen 2003: 12). Therefore, while prospective parents welcome their children, they as parents are not blind to the circumstances that influence their decisions.

Settled families, transnational children

Although I illustrate the macro-level policy and politics surround and influence transracial and transnational adoptions within the context of the global movement of labour, people, production, capital, goods, and ideas, my fieldwork itself is focused on the issues of micro-level integration of black children into British Columbian families and communities. In this thesis I explore the following broader question: "how do white Canadian parents who adopt black children from the United States respond to the visible difference between themselves and their adopted children?". In a more specific and simplified sense, my major research question is "How do adoptive parents create belonging while recognizing difference?".

A sense of belonging and an awareness of difference, often referred to in this context as heritage, are considered to be a child's right and also as essential to a child's well being and sense of identity (CRC articles 8.1, 8.2). In the case of children adopted transracially and transnationally, special provisions are in place to ensure that adopted children have a sense of both belonging and heritage (CRC articles: 8.1, 20.3, Hague articles: 15.1, 16.b). Heritage differs from culture, and is understood by the Adoptive Families Association British Columbia (AFABC) and other adoption support advocates

as, "the traditions of an individual's country of origin; for example: music, art, geography, language, literature, food, history" (AFABC 2005: 16).

African-American and other black community and advocacy groups have raised questions about whether it truly is in the best interest of black children to be brought up by white parents who may not have experienced personally the racism to which their children may be subjected. Further criticism stems from the separation of heritage and culture; some argue that a recognition of heritage is disingenuous, "lacking any taint of responsibility" (Honig 2005: 217). Others argue that separation from culture, "a learned set of norms, assumptions, attitudes, customs, traditions, communication styles, roles, expectations, and organizational structures that are shared among members of a group" (AFABC 2005: 16), leaves children adopted transracially and transnationally unprepared for life in their adopted communities where they may experience discrimination for being viewed as different. With regard to the adoption of black children specifically, some groups, including the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW), the Black Caucus of the North American Conference on Adoptable Children, and the Black Adoption Committee for Kids express concern that white parents may not be able to prepare their adoptive children for life in communities where they will be a visible minority and may experience racism (Hansen and Pollack 2007: 42; Silverman 1993: 110; Simon and Roorda 2000: 7, 12).

Subsequent research on social and personal adjustment of transracially adopted children suggests that children adopted transracially into white families have rates of adjustment similar to those of white children adopted in similar circumstances (Bagley 1993; Bartholet 1991; Barth and Berry 1988; Simon and Roorda 2000: 14).

Although adopted children, regardless of “race” or adoption transracially, show correspondent rates of adjustment in similar circumstances, this does not negate the cause for concern over the politics of transracial adoptions, bias within practice, or the potential impact any of the above may have on adopted children. It would be false to assume that transracially adopted children and their families react uniformly to the role that racialized difference may have on their identity. Even among those who support transracial adoption, there is concern that "removing the preference for in-racial placement from policy would lead social workers, families, and the public to discount the importance that race and culture play in a child's life" (Hansen and Pollack 2007: 6).

In terms of birth parents and their communities, there is the added concern of "whether allowing transracial placement allows child welfare service providers to avoid equal treatment of Blacks" (Bartholet 1999 from Hansen and Pollack 2007: 6). Unequal treatment, particularly the summative effects of social worker decision-making, lead to greater numbers of black children being placed in government care (Griesgraber, Wells, Bauerkemper, Koranda, and Link: 2008). In light of these findings, equal treatment of black children, families, and communities would have to come in the form of working more closely with communities, not only to recruit adoptive parents, but also in terms of judgment and decision making (2008). In other words, by taking a preventative approach that takes into account historical and present day disparities and works to correct them. However, in terms of more immediate action, evidence dictates that time in government care is harmful to a child's development, even when government care remains a better option than neglectful or abusive home situations (Hansen and Pollack 2007: 6). As "delay or denial of adoption clearly harms children" (2007:6) permanency placement

through adoption remains a preferable outcome at this time. To that end, transracial adoption can improve the lives of individual children after they may have been subject to systemic discrimination, but does not and cannot address the causes of discrimination and disparity.

As indicated by Strong (2002) in the quotation introducing this thesis, adoption across borders is complex. The conditions under which certain children are made available for adoption, as well as the conditions under which certain individuals may be considered eligible as adoptive parents are fraught with local, national, and global inequalities and privilege. However, children themselves who are adopted in this way show signs that they develop into healthy, well-adjusted children, adolescents, and adults. Transnational and transracial adoption, therefore, is not a solution to poverty and structural inequality, but rather an outcome of it, coupled with the good intentions of those in privileged circumstances, namely those who can afford to adopt.

Considering the above, my initial research question creates a number of additional questions including:

- How do prospective adoptive parents prepare themselves and their families to incorporate an adopted child from a different country and with a different racial background? How do they prepare for their family structure becoming highly visible as a result of visible, racialized differences?
- While the term "heritage" is used as a means to incorporate difference, does it differ from "race" in the minds to adoptive parents? Is an acknowledgment of heritage seen as part of acknowledging racialized difference? Conversely, does the awareness of "race" lead to a lack of specificity, or under-differentiation in terms of heritage?
- Do adopted parents talk to their adopted children about heritage?
- Do adoptive parents do anything specific to address difference in their child's life to create a sense of belonging? What is belonging for them?
- How do adoptive parents address any attention their families or adopted children experience because they appear different in their adopted community?

To address these questions, I conducted my fieldwork on Vancouver Island and in the greater Vancouver area. I attended workshops held by the Adoptive Families Association of British Columbia (AFABC), designed for parents interested in adopting transracially[13], cross-culturally[14], and transnationally[15]; I attended support group meetings (*Akoma Ntoaso*)[16] and interviewed workshop facilitators, mentors, and adoptive parents. My intention was to gain insight into how adoptive parents prepare for an adopted child who will be visibly different from them, and what formal processes were in place to aid in this preparation. Formalized support networks and organizations, such as the Adoptive Families Association British Columbia (AFABC) and *Akoma Ntoaso* served as sources of information, guidance, and as my three field sites.

My fieldwork was informed by my analysis of the public and academic discourses surrounding transnational and transracial adoption, and preliminary interviews with members of adoption placement agencies and parent support groups. My field research

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[13] Transracial adoptions are those in which an adoptive child and adoptive parent(s) are of different racial background.

[14] The term cross-cultural is used primarily by participants and in the recommended literature on adoption. However, it is a term that I find to be contentious. It loosely refers to adoptions where an adoptive child and adoptive parents come from different cultural backgrounds. This presents some difficulty because culture itself is not clearly defined, and sometimes this term is used euphemistically to refer to transracial adoptions and transnational adoptions.

[15] Transnational adoptions refer to adoptions where the adopted child is born in a different country than the country their adoptive parent(s) live(s) in. Sometimes this is referred to as international adoption in adoptive literature. However, the inclusion of “nation” in this term is the source of some contention, as 'nation’ is not analogous to 'country’. For this reason, adoptions of Native American or First Nations children within North America are sometimes considered to be transnational.

[16] *Akoma Ntoaso is* the name of a mentoring group in Burnaby British Columbia. According to a print advertisement for the program, *Akoma* “is a West African word meaning 'the heart’” (*Akoma* Print Advert). *Akoma Ntoaso* is represented through an Adinkra symbol depicting linked hearts, and means an agreement or shared understanding (http://africanhistory.about.com/library/bl/blfreestencil-AdinkraAkoma -Ntoaso.htm).

itself consisted of hours of participant observation and interviews with British Columbian parents who have adopted black children from the United States. Although numerous anthropological studies examine both transnational and transracial adoptions (Cartwright, Chen, Honig, Howell, Leinaweaver, Strong, Volkman, Wilson, Yngvesson and others) this particular movement of children across national and “race” boundaries has not been analyzed academically.

I focused on how adoptive parents addressed issues such as racism, racialization, and conceptualizations of "race" with their adopted children, particularly if the parents have not experienced such racism or racialization firsthand. Although the most immediately visible aspect (at least from the purview of an outsider or stranger to the families) is that of skin colour, I did not choose participants based on the "race" of their adoptive children; rather, I conducted recruitment based on the adopted child's country of origin and the demographic categorization of children placed for adoption out of that country. I did so, not only because of the close relationship between Canada and the United States, but also because it provided a means of understanding the different perceptions and experiences of Canada and the U.S. that an individual may encounter based on appearance and skin colour. Further, within the public discourse surrounding these adoptions there is an assumption that the category of black is homogenous; the geographic location, background, or community association of the children placed for adoption is not discussed, but the fact that they are black is discussed.

To this end, I am investigating a demographic category, rather than a purely social one, based on the demographic categories used in US census 2000, and by the American Administration for Children and Families. Within both of these organizations, the broad

category of black is employed. While some of the children placed for adoption outside of the United States are bi-racial, often in the eyes of social workers, placement officers, and their adopted communities they may be viewed as black. With respect to the specific context of the adoption of black children from the United States, it should be noted that "the physical markers of race are always open to interpretation by others [meaning that] "Race" as a social status is in the eye of the beholder" (Smedley 1998: 697). In other words, while the adopted children themselves may have originated from different cities, states, different backgrounds and – in the case of the *Akoma* mentoring group – countries, in the eyes of their adoptive communities they appear different from the norm. This, in turn, diverts attention from the fact that they are also different from one another.

The adoption of American children who are black by Canadian parents who are white has presented an anomaly in international adoption because the adopted children are moved between two wealthy countries. Adoptions from the Unites States to Canada serve to highlight issues of "race" and discrimination, as they are a reminder that even within wealthy first-world countries, systemic poverty exists. This is in turn largely related to the concept of "race", as "race" "is nothing to do with the intrinsic, or potential, qualities of the physically differing populations, but much to do with the allocation of power, privilege, and wealth among them" (Smedley 1998: 698-699). As I saw in my research, these adoptions prompt adoptive families to consider the impact of "race" and privilege in their own lives, as they must acknowledge these realities and then prepare their adoptive children for them.

“Race”: between avoidance and essentialism

> The concept of race is proving something of a 'floating signifier' that can mean everything – or nothing – depending on the context, criteria, or consequences.
>
> Wallis and Fleras 2009: vi

The term "race" has many uses, and is neither an objective reality, nor a neutral term. In broad terms, "race" as I use it in my analysis refers to cultural understandings of somatic difference, rather than to somatic difference itself (Smedley 1998: 690). Although “race” as it is used in the public discourse may refer to an essentialist understanding of “race” as a biological category, more genetic variation exists within culturally ascribed racial categories than between them (Eriksen 2002: 5). Although the biological variation that is understood as being "race" accounts for very little of the possible physical variation within human beings, to dismiss “race” as a factor in identity, association, and social acceptance would be to dismiss the "complexity and diversity of human social life and [to ignore] … the representations, ideologies and discourses in which "race" is embedded" (Street 1987: 14).

To avoid any discussion of “race” as a category, – albeit a cultural one superimposed onto physical variation-- risks ignoring the historical and cultural constructions of racial discrimination, the ramifications of which continue to be felt. Although belief in "objective" racial difference, or the notion that "personality is somehow linked to hereditary characteristics" (Eriksen 2002:5) itself is racist, any study involving racialization and the use of concepts labeled as “race” must involve the use of such terminology, "since [the] object of study is the notion that race exists [within the public discourse] … [through] the social construction of race" (2002: 5). To analyze the

effects of, or to argue against, racism and to identify both overt and hidden forms of racial discrimination and prejudiced behaviour, involves understanding first what concepts of “race” are, and how these concepts then frame an individual's actions, beliefs, and understanding of contemporary society.

Transracial adoption; when skin colours do not match

Neither transracial, nor transnational adoptions are new phenomena, nor are the socio-political issues surrounding them. Often the two forms of adoption are equated with one another even though the two are not the same; nor are their definitions uncontested. While transracial adoption refers to the adoption of a child into a family who is not of the same “race” and transnational adoption refers to adoption of a child by a family who lives in a different country, some adoptions challenge these definitions. Adoptions of First Nations children by white families have at times been referred to as transnational, since it is argued that these adopted children cross borders similar to those experienced by children adopted transnationally: culture, “race”, ethnicity, nation, or class, (Volkman 2005: 3).

A blurring of categories is also evident in my fieldwork sites; adopted children who are black and were born in the United States attend support and mentoring groups created for "all families parenting children of African heritage" (Adoptive Families Association British Columbia website; http://www.bcadoption.com/site_page.asp?pageid=323). This group includes adoptive and non-adoptive families from a variety of backgrounds; however, the unifying factor is

visible or racialized difference.[17] For this reason, I argue that a visible difference -- in this circumstance what is inscribed as “race” -- presents a greater challenge with respect to integration in adoptions than would a different place of birth.

Since the transracial adoption of black children by white families officially "surfaced in the 1950s, adoption professionals, legislators, scholars, and other interested decision makers have debated its capacity to serve the best interests of adopted children" (Swize 2002: 1081). In the United States this presented a complex problem; "in the years following World War II, single pregnant African-American women became the scapegoats for a host of societal problems, including the growing costs of welfare, the presence of unwanted children in U.S. society, and the endemic poverty among African-Americans" (Freundlich 2000: 7).

It would appear that paternalistic notions of social responsibility tied to stereotypes of "White man's burden"[18] framed the adoptions of black children by white families during this time. The stigma attached to unwed mothers in the post-war era led to the belief that, as a community, blacks were "costing" society (2000: 8). By this logic, children born out of wedlock in black communities would be better served in different

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[17] These mentoring groups, although largely composed of adoptive families, also include birth families who are of African heritage, mixed "race" families, and mentors who were not adopted but who share a racial background.

[18] “White man’s burden” is understood as a belief that it is the duty of the “White Race to uplift those with darker skins” (Sherrill 1929: 64). The saying is taken from a poem by Rudyard Kipling, The White Man’s Burden (1899) which may have been meant as satirical (Snodgrass 2002). Although the intent behind Kipling’s poem is contested, White Man’s Burden as a belief is considered to be patriarchal, and tied to colonization, however during the colonial era and into the twentieth century it provided the baseline belief for charitable action (Sherrill 1929).
The White Man's Burden, by Charles H. Sherrill The North American Review © 1926 University of Northern Iowa.

(namely white) families, while society would be better served if black mothers were not offered economic assistance, such as welfare (2000: 8). The stigma of black children born out of wedlock and the consequent inaccessibility of support resources stemming from a history of discrimination and lack of assistance understandably led to child abandonment. Given the explicit role played by the state in this phenomenon, and in all circumstances where child abandonment becomes pandemic, Panter-Brick's question of who holds responsibility for child abandonment -- the family or state and society -- bears consideration (Panter-Brick 2000: 3).

To this day, predominantly white, middle class parents adopt black children; a situation with which many black community groups take issue. For the last forty years, black community and advocacy groups like the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) have criticized the adoption of black children by white parents within the United States, expressing concern that white adoptive parents may not adequately prepare their adopted children for the challenges they face in a racist society (Silverman 1993: 109, Hall 2005: 1, Lee 2003: 713). Conversely, "advocates of transracial adoption … suggest that children adopted transracially are not harmed by the diverse family composition and that concerns for the preservation of black cultures are irrelevant in adoption decisions because the best interests test focuses on the individual child and not on society at large" (Swize 2002: 1982).

Adoption agencies argue that transracial placements are influenced by the lesser likelihood that black parents would apply for adoption. Agencies state that while they attempt to place black children with black parents first, if no applicants exist, it is in the child's best interest to be placed with other parents, rather than to remain in state care

which has been linked to developmental delays and emotional harm to children. However, the effort put forth to do so has been called into question, even though only two states (Ohio and North Carolina) have officially been charged with failing to adequately attempt placement with black families (Briggs and Marre 2009; Simon and Roorda 2000; Quiroz 2007; Simon and Roorda 2009).

Transnational adoption

In the twentieth century, the availability of children for transnational adoption was typically tied to wars, poverty, lack of social welfare, changes to state reproductive policies, and social upheaval (Briggs and Marre 2009; Lee 2003: 714, Volkman 2005: 1). However, this is not to say that poverty, lack of social welfare, changes to state reproductive policies, and social upheaval do not affect domestic adoption as well. At the same time, changing notions of children and childhood that developed near the end of the nineteenth century influenced the emergence of transnational adoption on a larger scale.

Although many waves of transnational adoption in the twentieth century have been closely connected with war outside of North America, two large-scale movements of adoptive children have occurred within Canada, both beginning near the end of the 19th century and continuing into the twentieth century. Between 1869 and approximately 1935, more than 100 000 children from Great Britain were sent to Canada as Home Children (Collections Canada 2010: 1). The 100 000 were "orphaned, abandoned and pauper children … [believed to] have a better chance for a healthy, moral life in rural Canada, where families welcomed them as a source of cheap farm labour and domestic help" (2010:1).

At the end of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century, both Canada and the United States permitted the placement of First Nations and Native American children out-of-country through government adoption programs. Adoptions continued with First Nations children from Canada being placed with American families until the 1980s (Schacht, Wilson-Fontaine and Tisiga 2003: 1, Briggs and Marre 2009: 9). Although a number of informal adoptions involving placing First Nations and Native American children with white families on both sides of the Canadian/American border occurred prior to the 1970s, the Adoption Resource Exchange of North America (ARENA) formalized these adoptions (Briggs and Marre 2009: 9). During this period of time, First Nations children were frequently considered abandoned, as "social workers rarely considered extended families as sources of permanent care for [First Nations] children" (Bagley 1991: 61).

Following the First World War, the notion of childhood as a distinct phase in life, one in need of protection and special consideration, was central to the creation of the Fight the Famine Council. This was a precursor to both the Save the Children Foundation and to transnational adoption itself (Briggs and Marre 2009: 2).

During the interwar years, the Fight the Famine Council was instrumental in the 1924 drafting of the League of Nations Declaration of Children's Rights (2009: 3). At the same time, the American Friends Service Program (a Quaker group) began their own child aid program (2009: 3). These and other organizations developed during this period of time were instrumental in transporting children from occupied countries in Europe during the 1930s and later throughout the Second World War. Notably, *kindertransport* saw 10 000 children (many who were Jewish) removed from Germany, Austria, and

Czechoslovakia, while upwards of 70 000 Finnish and Danish children were evacuated to Sweden (2009: 3).

In the aftermath of the Second World War (1939-1945), parents in Canada and the United States adopted children orphaned or displaced by war (Liem 2000: 2). These adoptions were viewed as a form of humanitarian assistance, while the children themselves were categorized as "war orphans", even if the children had been consciously relinquished by one or both parents (Briggs and Marre 2009: 4).[19] In the United States, these adoptions were possible through the easing of the Immigration Restriction Act, initially put into place in 1924 but altered in 1939 for the purpose of finding homes for children from war torn Europe. This change to the act, however, was contested within the United States (Briggs and Marre 2009: 4). In Canada, similarly strict immigration laws prevented more wide scale adoption of children (and immigration of imperiled families). The most notable instance of this was the rejection of the SS St. Louis in 1938, which resulted in an entire ship of German Jewish refugees returning to Europe (Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre 2002: 3).

The large-scale adoption of children following the Second World War has been identified as a large-scale shift from the United States' position as an isolationist nation to that of American Exceptionalism, or paternalism (Briggs and Marre 2009: 5). Similarly, in Canada, Order in Council #1647, passed in 1947, granted permission for 1 000 Jewish

[19] Both the view of adoption as humanitarian, or a charitable act, as well as the depiction of adopted children as 'orphans' and 'innocents' are highly contested today. These depictions erase any social or familial connections that children may have, and frame adoption as charity, rather than as a form of kinship (Howell 2007: 26).

war orphans to enter the country. In 1948 immigration policies were liberalized to support the booming post-war economy (Vancouver Holocaust Education Center 2002:4).

In the early 1950s the wave of transnational adoptions following the Korean War (1950-1953) attracted tremendous national and international attention within Canada and the United States (Liem 2000: 3). Many adoptive parents felt it was their personal duty to provide safe homes for children whose families and communities were lost and/or damaged by American military occupation. These adoptive parents were decidedly open about such adoptions being tied to notions of charity in addition to a personal desire to raise these children (Liem 2000: 3). Much of the push for taking a charitable approach to these adoptions was the result of the Evangelical Protestant Revival occurring in the United States at this time (Briggs and Marre 2009: 6). Even though these new Evangelists were often politically conservative, lending their support to anti-immigration policies, the belief that all people were equally God's children, along with their opposition to the spread of communism led to an interest in transnational adoption (Briggs and Marre 2009:6).

Sympathy for orphans, particularly those identified as "Amerasian", fathered by American GIs in Korea, was promoted by World Vision and American couple Bertha and Harry Holt who very publicly adopted 8 children from Korea as a form of Christian Transnational Adoption (Briggs and Marre 2009: 6). The Holts' efforts led to the establishment of Holt International Children's Services (HICS), a charitable foundation that remains one of the largest international adoption agencies operating in the United States (Briggs and Marre 2009: 7). During the wave of adoptions from Korea, couples experiencing infertility considered international adoption more frequently, mostly

because it was considered (and often still is) more feasible and desirable than domestic adoption (Lee 2003: 714). International adoption is also considered to involve less immediate controversy than domestic transracial adoptions, whether they include white Canadian parents adopting First Nations children, or white American parents adopting black children (2003: 714). The wave of adoptions following the Korean War marked another change in the Western practices of child aid; namely, that of adoption and permanent physical removal from a birthplace as the ultimate goal of such efforts rather than temporary (even if long term) removal in times of political unrest (Briggs and Marre 2009: 8).

A similar pattern of adoption followed the Vietnam War (1959-1975). This wave of adoptions was well reported for political reasons, as the Vietnam War was extremely unpopular, and widely protested. In particular, the military-related "Operation Baby Lift" of 1975 was highly publicized as a humanitarian rescue operation (Liem 2000). It is estimated that a minimum of 2 000 Vietnamese and mixed-raced children (many fathered by American GIs) were brought into the United States for adoption through Operation Baby Lift (2000). This operation was, for a number of reasons, controversial. Although well intended, the conditions under which the children were relinquished were questionable, and it is likely that some of the children involved in the airlift may not have been orphaned. Unfortunately, "lost or inaccurate records were the norm and, in several cases, birth parents or other relatives who later arrived in the U.S. demanded custody of children who had previously been adopted by American families" (Liem 2000).

During the 1970s, the transnational adoption of children from India and Bangladesh gained popularity among first world adoptive parents. Children -- particularly

girls -- were and continue to be abandoned because of a lack of resources available to unmarried women in particular and the added stigmatization of children born to unwed mothers, as well as cultural practices which value male children more than female children (Wilson 1999: 687). Although the numbers of children adopted internationally from India and Bangladesh increased in the 1970s, child abandonment in these countries was not a new phenomenon, proving that "abandonment is restricted neither geographically nor temporally" (Wilson 1999: 687).

Abandonment continues to be a determining factor in transnational adoptions of children, particularly girls from China. While China's one-child policy had a profound impact on abandonment, lack of resources and an existing cultural practice that places a greater value on male children ensures the perpetuation of this practice. (Chen 2003: 11).

Political unrest and war in South America led to an increase in adoptions of children from Peru, Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico and El Salvador into Western families in the 1980s (Liem 2000: 22). It has been argued that the "proxy wars" in South America stemming from the Cold War not only led to greater numbers of South American children being placed for adoption, but that these adoptions were politically motivated on the part of international adoption agencies, and became a significant propaganda tool in these conflicts (Briggs and Marre 2009: 10).

During the Cold War (1947 - 1991), many Latin American countries organized systems to make significant numbers of children available for transnational adoption. These were based on a model that combined the earlier goal of rescuing refugee children from war zones and matching impoverished children with childless couples in other countries. Children "disappeared" for political reasons were also part of this mix, and

many adoptive parents inadvertently became part of this process of disappearances (Briggs and Marre 2009: 11).

As Latin American nations returned to democratic systems of governance in the 1990s transnational adoption from most Latin American countries -- with the exception of Guatemala -- declined (Briggs and Marre 2009: 12). However, "allegations of exploitation, kidnapping, commercialization, and even the adoption of children for organ theft" (2009: 12) remained.

Various events near the end of the twentieth century led to an increase in transnational adoption. When the fall of Communism opened countries of the former Soviet Bloc for international trade in the early 1990s, their borders were also opened for transnational adoption (Berberoglu 2005: 488). It should be noted that such adoptions stemmed not from the opening of these borders per se, but from widespread poverty exacerbated by the sudden transition from a communist mode of production to an international capitalist mode of production (2005: 488). Concurrent with this was an increase in the number of adoptions from China, assisted by borders being opened for international adoption and coupled with China's one child policy and the abiding preference for male and the subsequent abandonment of female children (Selman 2009: 42). The desire for children by (often older) European or North American couples experiencing infertility served to increase the demand for these children. As with public discourse surrounding previous waves of transnational adoptions, there was a strong element of charity and duty associated with this wave of adoptions. Unfortunately, birth mothers and their children were exploited as a consequence of the manipulation of the desire to "save" such children (2009: 42).

Similar discourses surround adoptions from Haiti, which have occurred for close to two decades. The discourse of "saving" was again brought to international attention regarding adoptions from Haiti, and the circumstances under which children become available for adoption. Following political unrest and a devastating earthquake in Haiti on January 12, 2010 a number of similar questions regarding the best interests of children and parental and guardian consent for a child to be adopted surfaced.[20] Many recalled the conditions under which children have become available for adoption following the fall of the Communist leader, President Ceausescu in Romania.

In 1984, Romanian President Ceausescu passed a population policy aimed at increasing the number of 'pure-blooded' Romanians (Cartwright 2005: 189). Under this program, abortion was criminalized and punishable by death or incarceration both for women who had abortions and any doctors who performed the procedure (2005: 189). Additional pressure was placed on Romanian families to produce five children; the consequences of not doing so were increased taxation and the withdrawal of healthcare and other services (2005:189). As a result, this increase in children, coupled with the rapid privatization of Romania's economy following the fall of Ceausescu's regime in 1990, led to conditions of extreme poverty where child abandonment became rampant (2005:190). Romanian children were taken under questionable circumstances, ranging from economic duress for the mother or parent to instances where institutional staff falsely informed relatives that a child had died while in respite care. This led to

[20] Immediately following the earthquake in Haiti, and article published by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation addressed this "Thousands of children orphaned in Haiti following last weeks' devastating earthquake most desperately need food and basic care — not adoptive parents, say those who run orphanages. "Taking children out of their community, out of their culture, out of their language in a crisis situation like this is not the best choice," said Boyd McBride, executive director of Ottawa-based SOS Children'sVillagesCanada."
Read more: http://www.cbc.ca/canada/ottawa/story/2010/01/21/ottawa-haiti-orphans.html#ixzz1B3fRgttR

speculation that the false reporting may have been done intentionally, to fulfil the "demand" of the international market for children (Liem 2000: 2).[21] These children displayed higher levels of emotional problems and developmental delay linked to the time they spent under inadequate care[22] in institutions before being adopted (2000: 2). The Hague Convention itself was created in response to the abuses in Romania.

Application of the Hague conventions has implications for the adoption of black children from the U.S. by families outside of the country. Prior to the U.S. ratification of the Hague Convention in April 2008, it was possible, and in some instances easier, for families in Canada to adopt American children than Canadian children (Gower and Philp 2002). The convention explicitly states that "an adoption within the scope of the Convention shall take place only if the competent authorities of the State of origin – … have determined, after possibilities for placement of the child within the State of origin have been given due consideration, that an intercountry adoption is in the child's best interests" (Article 4, b). There is nothing in the convention that states that families within a country that has ratified the convention are bound by the terms of the convention. Therefore, Canadian parents can legally adopt children from the United States, even though Canada has ratified the convention; the United States, prior to April of 2008, had not. Since the U.S. ratification of the convention, these adoptions have continued, although they were stopped for a brief period at the discretion of placement agencies themselves (AFABC).

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[21] Such children were referred to as 'social orphans', meaning that their parents were alive, but unable to care for them financially. Some placements in orphanages were intended to be temporary (Cartwright 2008: 184).

[22] Care in such institutions was inadequate, as "Romania lacked the infrastructure to manage the social orphan crisis generated by the [population program] mandate" (Cartwright 2008: 1990).

Although neither transnational adoptions nor the role of socio-economic disparity in adoptive relationships are recent developments, the anomaly of a wealthy industrialized country placing children for adoption internationally requires examination. The fact that black children are disproportionately represented in transnational adoptions from the U.S. suggests an existing bias in terms of policy, practice, and circumstance. While such macro-economic factors frame the context in which such adoptions are possible, my research focuses on the result of these factors; on the incorporation of adoptive children in Canadian families and communities, and the subsequent discussion of "race", discrimination, belonging, and family.

* * *

Chapter 2 of this thesis outlines my research methods, and includes some findings that highlight some assumptions as well as unforeseen reactions to my research that constitute data. This chapter identifies three sources of data for my research: participant observation at both Adoptive Families Association of British Columbia (AFABC) workshops and *Akoma Ntoaso* mentoring group, participant interviews, and the literature recommended for prospective adoptive parents. My role as a researcher within my field sites and adoptive parents' approaches to talking about their families are also discussed here.

The third chapter introduces two of my field sites, Building Skills for Transracial Parenting, and Cross-Cultural Adoption Workshop, both offered by the AFABC. This chapter also includes concepts such as the study of kinship in anthropology, adoptive

kinship, transnationalism, stratified reproduction, and the desire to adopt. Material that I used to create a conceptual framework for my research is presented along with empirical examples and descriptions of fieldwork in this chapter, which focuses on anthropological theories about kinship, adoption in a transnational context, stratified reproduction, and the desire to adopt.

Chapter 4 also includes material from the AFABC workshops, but relates this material to theories on difference and connection. Often similar terms or concepts appear between the theoretical material and empirical examples; however, this chapter indicates that these terms may not have the same use in different contexts. The use of concepts such as privilege, "race", racism, multiculturalism, identity and intersubjectivity as they relate to the field sites and educational material offered by the AFABC are discussed in this chapter.

In the fifth chapter, another field site, *Akoma Ntoaso*, is introduced, as are the data from interviewing participants at this site. This chapter presents a closer examination of adoptive parents, particularly mothers', efforts to incorporate their adoptive children into their families and communities. The empirical examples in this chapter largely stem from interview data.

Lastly, the concluding chapter synthesizes the concepts and data from the previous chapters and suggests future research on this topic. The use of participant language to construct identities (personal, family, and community) and conceptualize difference and belonging are reviewed in this chapter, and links between higher level concepts and theories are connected to micro-level incorporations and relationships.

Chapter 2: Accessing the transnational through the local; international adoptions in British Columbia

In this chapter I describe the research settings, ethnographic process, and participants involved in my research on adoptive support networks. My research focused on the group activities, interactions, circulating language, and texts framing this process of incorporation in order to understand how adoptive parents in British Columbia (who are mainly of white European descent) create a sense of belonging while acknowledging their children's background as black and born in the United States. In short, my research relied on three main resources: participant observation, interviews, and text analysis.

Research context: people, meetings, and texts

The Adoptive Families Association British Columbia (AFABC) workshops and the *Akoma Ntoaso* mentoring and support group meetings were the sites of participant observation,[23] while I conducted most interviews at the Boys and Girls Club in Burnaby. I used the recommended literature supplied to prospective adoptive parents by the AFABC for the text analysis.

The workshops for prospective parents were offered by AFABC, a province-wide support network and contracted association with the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). These workshops are modeled on MCFD's Adoption Education Program, which offers a number of different modules or program outlines for different

[23] *Building Skills for Transracial Parenting* in Victoria, *Cross-Cultural Adoption Workshop* in Burnaby, *Akoma Ntoaso* support group in Burnaby.

types of adoptions while providing a consistent adoption education framework across British Columbia.

Akoma Ntoaso is a support group for families who have adopted children of "African/Black/Caribbean heritage". [24] The group gives adoptive families the opportunity to meet, and to introduce their adopted children to mentors who may share the same racial background. *Akoma* is part of the Afro-Canadian Adoption Support Network (ACAN) and also appears on MCFD's list of post-adoptive support services.[25] The group meets monthly and is operated by a board of adoptive parents who are also group attendees. Although this organization does offer information to prospective-adoptive parents, its chief purpose is to provide support for adoptive families. At the same time, the programs and mandate of AFABC largely influence its members. I attended the activities of *Akoma* and conducted interviews among its members who had adopted black children from the United States.

What I refer to as the recommended literature includes manuals and texts recommended to prospective adoptive parents by AFABC, as well as texts produced by AFABC itself. This literature served as a source of data, rather than as conceptual material; however, there was some overlap with my theoretical material regarding Peggy McIntosh's article, *Unpacking the Invisible Backpack*. Despite this overlap, I categorize the recommended literature as data rather than as theoretical material because of its

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[24] This is from the print advertisement for the support group, which appears in AFABC's monthly newsletter, Focus on Adoptions. A copy is available in appendix D

[25] http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/adoption/events.htm This list serves as a source of information; the British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development do not endorse agencies and organizations that appear on this list.

instructive nature and purpose within the field sites and with the participants in this research. Even as data, the recommended literature presents some bias, and can only be viewed as representative of the AFABC and *Akoma Ntoaso*'s views. That said the recommended literature is a significant source of data because it helps to establish language and a common ground for understanding adoptive parents' attempts to include transnationally and transracially adopted children in their families and their communities.

Participants and practices of observation

Most of the research at my field sites involved participant observation, meaning that I interacted with participants at a series of workshops for prospective adoptive parents, as well as a mentoring and play group for families with children of "African/Black/Caribbean" background (*Akoma* print advertisement). Structurally, participant observation presented a potential challenge in my research, as the community on which I focused did not have a fixed location per se. Instead adoptive families were drawn together for the purposes of creating community, rather than originating as a community from geographic proximity.

Despite this initial concern, I conducted participant observation at three different sites: the two-day *Building Skills for Transracial Parenting* offered by AFABC and held at Choices Adoption Agency in Victoria British Columbia, *Cross-Cultural Adoption Workshop* at the AFABC office in Burnaby British Columbia, and the support/play/mentoring group *Akoma* in Burnaby. The workshops and information sessions for prospective parents planning to adopt transracially or cross-culturally offered the opportunity for participant observation, as well as more direct engagement with

adoptive parents and specialists who attended as guest speakers and facilitators. In these settings, it was possible to experience part of the process of planning for an adoptive child and learn more about how prospective parents are guided through this process. *Akoma* proved useful for understanding the operation of support group facilitators, and the general reactions and anxieties experienced by adoptive parents (whether transracial, transnational, or otherwise).

Attendance at these workshops was not limited to prospective parents or parents who have adopted black children. Volunteers, support group workers, guest speakers, and workshop coordinators were present at the *Building Skills for Transracial Parenting* workshop in Victoria and *Cross Cultural Adoption Workshop* in Burnaby. *Akoma* in Burnaby included parents who have adopted children of African descent (not necessarily black children from the United States), parent volunteers, other adoptive family members, mentors, and children. Although I had not initially planned to interview mentors, guest speakers, or parents who had not adopted from the United States, I realized that, as members of the support network, their input was essential to gaining a detailed and well-rounded account of their community.

Both the *Building Skills for Transracial Parenting Workshop* and *Cross-Cultural*[26] *Adoption Workshop* are of use to parents interested in adopting black children from the United States. However, each workshop addresses slightly different aspects of adoption,

[26] AFABC and the Ministry of Children and Family Development use the term "cross-cultural". It refers to adoptions where adoptive parents and child are viewed as being from two different cultures or ways of living related to nation, or country of residence. In my findings the problematic nature of this category is discussed, since it assumes that a cross-cultural adoption means the parents are from a western nation (and assumed to be white) while the child is from a different country, and with the exception of children from Eastern Europe, assumed not to be white. It risks eliding culture with "race".

and is relevant to other types of adoption. The mentoring and playgroup, *Akoma* caters to families who have adopted children of "African/Black/Caribbean heritage" (*Akoma* print advert), and provides an opportunity for families to meet with other adoptive families. Adoptive parents can introduce their children to mentors who may share the same racial background.

Participant observation in its general description involves "getting close to people and making them comfortable enough with your presence so that you can observe and record information about their lives" (Bernard 1995: 136). However, participation may range from being present in social contexts to having a stance or holding a stake in the issues at hand.

All my field sites focused on adoptive parenting, presenting a potential challenge to a non-parent hoping to build rapport and study adoptive parents' efforts to create a sense of belonging while recognizing their adoptive children's heritage. When viewed as a non-parent, I became an outsider by default; however, in other contexts where I was attributed the role of prospective-parent by group members, I was able to interact and participate more actively.

I participated in workshops for adoptive parents (*Building Skills for Transracial Parenting* in Victoria, *Cross-Cultural Adoption Workshop* in Burnaby), attended mentoring and playgroup meetings (*Akoma* in Burnaby), and spoke with staff at the AFABC office. In doing so, I was afforded the perspective of both a prospective-parent alongside the others as well as a researcher developing an understanding of the workshop as a learning and teaching process. This two-fold learning process magnified the prescriptive dimension of conversations and interactions with the workshops facilitators

and the participants. This meant that my understanding of parenting and family issues is coloured by such an interactive and intentional context; one in which parenting is taught and specific forms of parenting are promoted and reproduced self-consciously through workshops.

In some respects, I went through the steps that prospective adoptive parents take to prepare themselves for adoption.[27] This walk through of the process taken by adoptive parents was reflected by the interaction I had during participant observation with my field site participants, many of whom openly considered me to be a prospective parent, albeit "one who is a little further away from adoption just now" by virtue of my age and interest (albeit anthropological rather than personal) in the topic of adoption. I was a "white" graduate student, younger than the parents, with no child of her own, nor any immediate plan of having one. Another layer to my ascribed identity of prospective-parent lay in being a prospective-mother, meaning I could more easily access discussions of motherhood in a context where mothers take the central role of organizing and attending workshops and support groups, leading me to methodologically and theoretically clarify my approach to parenting as a gendered process of construction, which I elaborate upon in Chapter 4.

As mentioned previously, I was less conspicuous as a researcher (observer) at workshops than at the support groups, because the functions of these groups differed

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[27] I began my inquiry at an adoption agency in Victoria, Choices adoption. From here, staff members suggested that I speak with AFABC, where I spoke with volunteers and received permission to attend workshops as a researcher. AFABC also allowed me access to their library where I found additional resources. At the AFABC workshops I received a great deal of reading material that became the bulk of the text I analysed. After attending AFABC workshops and reviewing the texts, I attended some mentoring and support group meetings at *Akoma*, where I conducted my qualitative interviews.

(educational versus support focused). In this sense, I found that I could more closely approach "member" status if I were to have a personal interest in potential future adoption myself. As an individual "a little further away", I was immune to the pragmatic concerns and obstacles the prospective adoptive parents were experiencing and sharing with each other.

Although offered by the same organization, *Building Skills for Transracial Parenting* and *Cross-Cultural Adoption Workshop* were structurally differently in terms of length and location. I attended *Building Skills for Transracial Parenting*, a two-part workshop that ran 14 hours in total in Victoria, British Columbia, while *Cross-Cultural Adoption Workshop* was a one day, eight-hour workshop in Burnaby British Columbia at AFABC's office. This environment differed from *Akoma Ntoaso*, which meets weekly for three hours at the Burnaby Boys' and Girls' Club. Because of the group's weekly schedule, attendance was more casual in this site, and fluctuated throughout the afternoons that I was there.

I was less active in terms of participation at the support group meetings, since there was less opportunity within the group for a prospective-parent to participate. In these circumstances I introduced myself less as a formality than as a means of initiating conversation, since my non-member status in this setting was less likely to lead to conversation with participants. However, through observation I was able to determine how or if the advice given at the AFABC workshops was relevant or used in the support group setting.

Interviews

I conducted a total of seven interviews with six adoptive parents (two of whom were involved in the operation of AFABC and *Akoma*), and one mentor. All of the parents I interviewed were mothers. With the exception of one mother who had adopted her daughter from Liberia, the rest had adopted one or more black child from the United States. I interviewed three adoptive mothers and one mentor at *Akoma*; two mothers I interviewed following the AFABC workshops in Victoria, I interviewed another mother in Victoria at a location away from my field sites. Three of the parents I interviewed had adopted children and birth children in their families; three families had multiple adopted children, one of whom was black from the United States. The adopted children ranged in age from 18 months to seventeen years, while birth children were generally older (ranging from 10 - 21 years).

After I spent time at my three field sites, I began to recruit participants for interviews. Generally, my intention was to spend time at these social settings, gain an understanding of the site operation, and build rapport before beginning interviews. At one site a key informant with the support network office said she would send a research call for me by email. While this did accelerate my research process, I felt that it was somewhat at odds with the ethnographic tenant of observing, participating, and gaining some understanding of the community being researched. However, after spending time at the meetings, I began to understand that treating adoptive parents; participation in my study as an "appointment" was more in keeping with the structure of their lives. This reflected the fact that most participants did not live near field sites and, therefore, viewed

their participation in the support community as an extra-curricular or appointment-like activity.

Three of the seven interviews used in my thesis were appointment-based interviews where I did not have any in-person contact with the participants prior to meeting them for an interview. The interviews were framed with open-ended questions determined beforehand; however, the discussion itself was not overly structured because of the qualitative nature of this study. The questions, which I approached as themes rather than direct questions to allow participants to establish their own narratives and chronologies, were as follows:

- Can you describe what you did to prepare yourself/your family for your adopted child?
- Do you talk to your adopted child about difference ("race", their birth communities, stereotypes)? If so, what do you say??
- Have you, or has your child, experienced attention because they appear different in their adopted community?

Five of the seven interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission for the purposes of transcription and note taking; however one participant did not want to be recorded, and asked that she be able to write her own notes as I interviewed her, which she gave to me after. The second un-recorded interview was an unscheduled interview.

Although my research did not involve interviews with children, children were the focus of my field sites, either through their presence or in conversation. In terms of ethical concerns, I felt that the involvement of children and the impact of my research led to a strong need for participant confidentiality. Therefore, names of participants, their family members, places of residence, and all other potentially identifying details have been changed. I made it clear both verbally and on signed consent forms that participants

were not under any obligation to answer any questions that made them uncomfortable. They could also end an interview at any time and could withdraw their data from my research.

Participants were very approachable and willing to be interviewed. However, they were cautious in their responses, particularly in the language they used, and what they shared. That said they viewed the ethical questions of my research differently from both myself and the *Human Research Ethics Board* at the University of Victoria. In conducting this research I was most concerned with the protection of participant privacy. The Human Research Ethics Board emphasized the need to ensure that my interview questions would not cause emotional distress to research participants. The major concern of the participant parents, however, was their relationship to their children. Namely they were most concerned that they respect and protect their children's stories and not betray their children's trust. This concern is largely in keeping with the recommended literature, which advises that families let the adopted children decide when, what, and to whom details about their adoption are shared (AFABC 2005, McCreight 2002). The following example from the recommended reading summarizes participants' responses.

> Transracial families are often stared at by strangers. People also feel free to make comments on your family. Be prepared to respond quickly and simply. A return stare can speak volumes about your family's right to be in the community. If the person staring is making comments such as, "Are those your children?" or, Are they adopted?" you can answer in any way you choose, but find a way that the family has already agreed on. Some families will prefer, "That's none of your business," others will prefer, "They are mine and they are adopted," others will presser, "Why do you ask?". The response is not important, only that is has been agreed upon with your child.
>
> (AFABC 2005; 38, adapted from McCreight 2002)

Language, audiences, and personal versus public narratives

The didactic and prescriptive dimensions of the conversations from the workshops allowed me to be more acutely aware of the particular language shared among the parents at *Akoma* and in my interviews. Throughout my interviews, the language and mode of explanation employed by participants to define their experience as adoptive parents was strikingly similar to the language used at the workshops. Some of the terms from the workshops that I often heard in my interviews included: heritage, culture, cultural tourism, background, family, belonging, and adoption story. There was also much discussion about increased visibility as a transracially adoptive family (often labelled as "multi-racial family identity"), common steps for creating a support network, and the steps taken to prepare adoptive children for life as a visible minority ("stare-back", or "spend time with people who look like your child"). In addition, I found that the responses to my questions were often phrased, or qualified, by saying "well, I can't speak for my [child]", or "My advice to someone considering adoption", or "I'd suggest that adoptive parents…".

As I illustrate in chapter 4, not only were these responses framed using the terminology and categories from the workshops, individual responses were also notably similar, particularly those involving the terms heritage, culture, and cultural tourism (see chapter 3). At first I took this to mean that I was not coming close to learning the parents' "authentic" perspective, however, I realized (after the fact) that in the more formalized context of my interviews participants advocated the values of the group with which they

associated, while in the less formal context of participant observation they were sharing their experiences with me as a prospective parent. I later came to the conclusion that the parents were sincere in expressing their views even when they were using the same language and reasoning as that used in the AFABC workshops.

For many, the language used in the workshops seems to be the "acceptable" way to discuss adoption in a formal setting; it is an internalized "politically" correct way to share this information. It seemed as though this was more pronounced when participants were discussing issues associated with common conceptions of "race". In discussions about "race" participants used as number of euphemisms which some indicated were a more "politically correct" way of talking.

Words that were avoided, or referred to euphemistically throughout my interviews were: "race" and difference. When discussing a group of people who were racialized, participants would use the terms "them", or "they". However, it was more common to use the term "heritage" or "culture" in these circumstances. Heritage, often elided with difference, was used euphemistically to refer to "race", however it was often done so in a positive tone, indicating that heritage stood in for differences that were seen as beneficial.

> *We're a family with many heritages. I mean, you can see it when we walk down the street together, and we're so proud of it. Of who we are.*
>
> Mother, Married, Late 30s, 2 adopted children (1 daughter, 1 son)

Culture was also used euphemistically in place of "race", however the connotations were not always positive. When "race" made participants uncomfortable, they would use culture instead. However, even in doing so the boundaries between what they saw as "race" and what they viewed as culture remained somewhat fluid.

> *There was a young man, I knew him in college, he was from the Ivory Coast. I didn't date him, but it was because of his culture.*
>
> Mother, Married, Early 50s, 1 adopted child

> (*Regarding poverty) It's… well, I guess it's a cultural thing. It's their culture. It's not fair, but after facing ... years of prejudice, it gets... it gets to be your culture.*
>
> Mother, Married, Mid 40s, 2 daughters, 1 by birth, 1 adopted child

A second factor was the awareness that as the subject of research, their group and their actions would be analysed. This self-awareness in many respects led to explanations that supported the group to which participants subscribed, and may also be related to some avoidance of the term "race", even though the social category of "race" was implied. All of the mothers I interviewed told about when they first noticed racism, often creating a common narrative where they described themselves as witnesses or helpless. It was common to say "*I never really noticed racism, my family wasn't that way*" or "*I don't think that way, so I didn't notice until I was confronted by it*". Comments similar to this were deconstructed during the AFABC workshops during a discussion about privilege, which I elaborate upon in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

The third major factor related directly to some of the advice and beliefs offered in the workshops and in the support group; namely, the idea that while adoption -- more specifically transnational and transracial adoption -- should be discussed and normalized, adoptive families and children have a right to personal privacy; to "own their own stories".

Reflections on research design; limitations and limitations as data

> The details of a child's adoption make up his or her personal story, and this needs to be respected, as any other personal story would be within a family.
> …
> Remember that our children's details belong to them, and we're caretakers of those details.
>
> AFABC 2005: 7 - 8

Since much of my research is related to notions of identity, a narrative approach provided insight into the cultural meanings through which adoptive parents organize their behaviour and interpret their experience (Spradley 1979: 93). To access this concept of identity and identity creation I chose to conduct fieldwork at the sites of community creation and support for adoptive parents. "Grand tour" questions gave me insight into the process itself, while narrative inquiry provided insight not only into how adoptive parents make use of AFABC discourses to promote positive identity in their children, but also how they use these discourses and community sites to create identities for themselves. These identities are supported through shared meaning within the intentional support communities which themselves can be said to have their own culture.

Insight into cultural meanings is useful for understanding how adoptive parents create personal, familial and community identities for their children. Using a narrative approach invites participants to describe their adoption experiences using their own words. In this sense, a narrative approach provides a more accurate reflection of how individuals understand and create meaning in their lives, which are strongly tied to notions of identity (Czarniawska 1998: 3).

Through such narratives, I was able to gain a better understanding of the ambiguity and complexity of individual, group, and organizational structuring of transracial and transnational adoption in British Columbia. Spradley states that "an informant's cultural knowledge is more than random bits of information: this knowledge is organized into categories, all of which are systematically related to the entire culture" (1979: 93). In addition, the narrative provides insight into the balance that parents must achieve in preparing an adopted child for the realities of racism and discrimination and promoting a positive identity in the face of discrimination. Through the use of narrative, I hoped to avoid imposing my own categories onto data by listening to the ways in which participants describe and define their experiences (Spradley 1979, Crane and Angrosino 1992).

In describing their experiences, mothers were careful to draw lines between their experiences, and their opinions versus their children's experiences. They were also cautious to frame their responses as advice or to reiterate what they had learned through the workshops. Examples of this framing include the following statements:

> *My experience is that people, in general, seem to pay a lot more attention to us. I'm still coming to terms with [it], but my advice to someone considering adoption is to be prepared, not all attention is negative, but remember that you don't need to answer all questions people ask, it's not rude if you don't.*
>
> Mother, Married, Late 30s, 2 adopted children (1 daughter, 1 son)

> *When you are a parent, a mom, you learn to handle these things differently. I didn't know any of this before, so my way of doing this is, make sure that I don't take it personally, and at the same time, make sure you don't answer personally. Keep your boundaries, but be, well, give them an idea where they can get this kind of information. Not your family's [information].*
>
> Adoptive Mother, early 50s, married, 3 grown children by birth, 2 adopted children

> *My advice to someone who is considering adoption is, well pretty much talk to other parents, but I think it would also be good to read, uh, Beyond Good Intentions, that really helped me.*
>
> Mother, Married, Mid 40s, 2 daughters, 1 by birth, 1 adopted child

After reviewing some of the strategies that were given to parents as a means of coping, I came to realize that the similarity of the answers actually said a great deal about the experience of being an adoptive parent in a mixed-race family. While answers were rote, I noted that participants were very forthcoming in terms of additional material. Many provided me with books they were given when they considered adoption, and advice on where I could find "better" answers to my questions. In some ways, their manner of providing information to me mirrored the process that a prospective parent would take. I was given materials that had helped them, contact information for people who may have further information, and invitations to attend events that they felt would be useful to me.

Because of the limits of time, my age, and status as a non-parent, I was not able to access the support group in many ways. However, when I was viewed as a prospective parent as well as a researcher, I was able to interact with participants at field sites more naturally. When viewed this way, they led me to participate in the process of becoming an adoptive parent, rather than giving me their personal stories. This approach to my inquiry was in keeping with the advice given to new parents, which is that your child's story is not your story to tell (McCreight 2002: 95). If someone is genuinely interested, let them know more about adoption, more about the politics of “race”, and more about the politics of identity, but keep your children's lives private.

Chapter 3: Adoption across borders; concepts, and implications

> Families are not neutral settings
>
> Fahlberg 1991: 289

In this chapter I explore some of the theories and domains that frame the adoption of black children from the United States by white Canadian parents. I conceptualize the larger, macro-level factors that make the movement of black children from the United States into Canadian homes possible. I also define one of my research settings, the AFABC workshops, due to their function as educational sites and therefore as the meta-work of kinship, and some of my findings regarding adoptive parents' desire to adopt as it is influenced by larger, macro-level factors.

Research setting and the meta-work of kinship

In the methods and methodological reflections chapter I discussed how my fieldwork was similar to the socialization process a prospective adoptive parent goes through. This process is to a large degree institutionalized, despite the Adoptive Family's Association British Columbia (AFABC) beginning as a small-scale social support group. Currently provincial law in the form of the Adoption Act (RSBC 1996) in British Columbia requires that prospective adoptive parents[28] take courses on parenting before an adoption can be finalized (Harris 2009: 2). These courses are required as part of the homestudy conducted

[28] Or at least one parent if a couple is adopting.

by social workers with the provincial government, and are designed to educate prospective adoptive parents about:

> (a) separation and loss issues respecting the birth parents, the prospective adoptive parents and the child to be adopted;
> (b) the difference between adoptive and biological parenting;
> (c) adoption as a life-long process and how it affects child and adult development;
> (d) the impact of the child's life experiences;
> (e) if applicable, inter-racial and cross-cultural adoption.
> (Queen's Printer Adoption Act; Financial Administration Act articles 3.2: 1996)

Additional educational components addressing "specific issues related to the special needs of the child" are required "if the prospective adoptive parents have applied to adopt a child with special needs" (Queen's Printer Adoption Act; Financial Administration Act articles 3.3: 1996).

Depending on the type of adoption, prospective parents may be required to take additional courses, or a different combination of courses determined by the social worker conducting their homestudy. There are 12 courses for adoptive parents offered by AFABC, some applicable to all adoptions (Adoption 101, Waiting Child Information Sessions, Attachment Toolkit, Coming Home, Adoption Education Program - Training Enhancement Sessions, Safe Babies Training, Try Being Me For A Day, Parenting Strategies, Keeping Connections for Children) and others tailored to the specific types of adoption detailed above (Building Skills for Transracial Parenting, Fetal Alcohol Spectral Disorder Parent Retreat).[29] The courses on adoptive parenting recommend that adoptive parents seek out support groups for their families (AFABC 2005: 11; Hall and Steinberg

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[29] The 12 workshops are: Adoption 101, Waiting Child Information Sessions, Attachment Toolkit, Cross-cultural Adoption, Building Skills for Transracial Parenting, Coming Home Adoption Education Program - Training Enhancement Sessions, Safe Babies Training, Try Being Me For A Day, Parenting Strategies, Keeping Connections for Children, and FASD Parent Retreat.

2000: 29, 30, 36; McCreight 2002: 96). Of the parents I interviewed, all but one[30] had heard of the support group *Akoma Ntoaso* through AFABC. As with AFABC, support groups such as *Akoma* are recommended in government and support group literature as sources of post-adoptive support.[31] These workshops present one aspect of white Canadian parent's responses to the visible difference between themselves and their adopted children.

AFABC workshops

> There is no simple blueprint to becoming and living as an adoptive family. For this reason, adoptive families need the advice, support and kinship of other families who are on, or who have taken, a similar journey. Our members don't just seek our assistance at the beginning of their adoption journey but come back as the need arises.
>
> AFABC website

> These workshops alone will not ensure that an African child being raised in a white North American family will be free of emotional strains and identity challenges, but at the very least, these workshops can label the issues that will come up for such families.
>
> http://www.bornblackmag.com/transracial-adoption.html

AFABC offers 12 different workshops for adoptive and prospective adoptive parents. These workshops are held in different locations across the province of British Columbia[32]

[30] One participant had moved here from Ontario recently, and had not been involved with AFABC prior to adopting, but did become contact them after moving to the greater Vancouver area.

[31] While *Akoma* itself is not endorsed by MCFD, attendance at post-adoptive support groups is, and *Akoma* appears on MCFD's list of post-adoptive support services.

[32] Abbotsford, Burnaby, Kamloops, Vancouver, Victoria, Salmon Arm, and other locations by arrangement.

but cover a uniform curriculum and are facilitated by an AFABC staff member from either the Burnaby main office or from satellite offices on Vancouver Island and in the Interior of British Columbia. For my research, I attended *Building Skills for Transracial Parenting*, a two-day workshop held in Victoria and *Cross-Cultural Adoption*, a single day workshop held in Burnaby. In addition to the facilitators a number of guest speakers including a child psychologist, health care professional (nurse), adoptive parents, and adults who were adopted as children, were in attendance.

Within the workshop environments, prospective parents take on the role of student, putting them in a position similar to mine as researcher. The workshops teach the importance of support or mentoring groups for adoptive families, leading several workshop participants to seek out groups such as *Akoma Ntoaso*, a mentoring and support group. Attending *Akoma* introduced me to most of my interview participants. Attendees at the AFABC workshops were prospective adoptive parents, more than half of whom were prospective adoptive mothers. While prospective mothers did attend either as single parents or without their partners, no prospective fathers attended workshops without partners and there were no single fathers present at the workshops I attended.[33]

Provincial law requiring adoptive parents to attend parenting workshops indicates a state level interest in kinship, specifically regarding adoptive families. With specific regard to transnational adoption, the act of adopting is an act of incorporation that may have nationalist overtones. As such, it follows that the workshops not only reflect state values surrounding kinship, but that they also seek to recreate them. In many respects,

[33] Additionally, although the organization offers advice for single parents, and for homosexual parents (whether single or partnered), there were no homosexual couples present at the workshops I attended. There were women who were single parents; however, none explicitly mentioned their sexuality.

these workshops are not only concerned with indicating what appropriate parental actions are, but also in encouraging adoptive parents to recreate these values in their children. In this respect, the AFABC workshops can be considered a setting of meta-kinship and incorporation.

Locating kinship

> The average anthropologist … has his doubts whether the effort needed to master the bastard algebra of kinship is really worthwhile. … Can all this really be reduced to formulae, symbols, perhaps equations?
>
> Malinowski (1930: 19)

> Kinship is to anthropology what logic is to philosophy or nude is to art; it is the basic discipline of the subject.
>
> Fox (1967:10)

> Anthropologists use relationships to uncover relationships.
>
> Strathern (2005: vii)

Although once considered to be the core of anthropological theory, kinship's prevalence in anthropology waned somewhat during the 1970s before experiencing a rebirth near the end of the twentieth century. This renewed interest coincided with an increase in the number of international adoptions at that time, as well as advancements in reproductive technologies (Howell 2009, Rapp 2001, Strathern 1992). Lewis Henry Morgan is credited with bringing kinship to the fore of anthropological thought in the mid 1800s. Morgan established a typology of kin relationships by essentially "drawing a border around certain aspects of human behaviour, isolating them for study and affirming that they do indeed constitute an object, that they cohere" (Trautmann 1987: 4). In doing so, it became

possible to identify kinship as an orderly social structure, therefore making the study of kinship possible.

Identifying kinship as an object led to a systematic account of kinship as a "functionally defined institutional domain" (Peletz 1995: 345). This influenced both British structural-functionalist[34] and French structuralist[35] thought. In structural functionalist thought, kinship was considered paramount to understanding non-Western tribal societies, as the organization of kin relations was believed to be a product of a society's mode of production (Partapuoli and Nielsen 2009).

Under this school of thought, promoted by Esther Goody among others, anthropologists worked to understand the cultural practices of a different group as practical, and therefore reasonable (Howell 2009: 154). This approach in turn served to prevent judgment of cultural practices as irrational or as strange or incomprehensible customs. Despite this emphasis placed on finding reason in other cultural practices, in later years this approach to kinship was criticized as othering, due to an assumption that kinship determined the structure of primitive societies, while the state was responsible for the structure of modern societies (Kruper 1988).

David M Schneider advanced kinship theory in his 1968 work, *American Kinship: a Cultural Account*. Schneider proposed that American kinship be viewed as a "system of

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[34] British structural functionalism is a theoretical school in social anthropology. It began as an alternative to evolutionism, and was most popular from 1930 – 1960. Structural functionalist thought focuses on political and economic issues, with some focus on meaning and symbolism. Segmentary lineage theory stems from this theoretical school (Partapuoli and Nielsen 2009).

[35] Claude Lévi-Strauss is known as the founder of French structuralism. While sharing a holistic focus with structural functionalism, structuralism focuses on the subconscious aspects of meaning. Structuralism too focused on kinship, however, rather than the structural functionalist concern with social structure, structuralists focused on structures of meaning (Partapuoli and Nielsen 2009).

symbols and meanings, rather than focusing on kinship's statuses, roles and institutions" (1995: 345). Despite this approach, Schneider's early work is considered to suffer from under-differentiation, due to an assumption that kinship is comprised of symbols that mean the same thing to all Americans, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, class, or geographic region (1995: 347).

Schneider's work addressed the othering that resulted from earlier kinship studies by turning his analytical gaze on American families, as opposed to non-Western societies. His empirical data helped in grounding his findings, preventing kinship from becoming a series of "formulae, symbols and … equations" (Malinowski 1930: 65). Schneider's approach "facilitates looking at kinship as a medium for social behaviour with which people work creatively to accomplish their purposes" (Goodenough 1970: 14).

From this, Schneider argued that a Euro-American understanding of kinship predicated on biological connectedness led anthropologists to ask "wrong, irrelevant, and leading questions in alien societies" (Howell 2009: 150). In other words, only a partial understanding of kinship could be possible by asking questions that excluded forms of kinship not immediately rooted in biology from the view of Western anthropologists. Through this realization, Schneider succeed in decentering biology from kinship (Peletz 1995: 348), creating a more nuanced mode for analysis adoptive families.

At the time Schneider published *American Kinship: a Cultural Account,* anthropology as a discipline was experiencing a paradigm shift away from structural-functionalism and structuralism. This shift has since been described as "the shift from structure to process, from the objective science to epistemic science and from the part to the whole" (Holy 1996: 3). Although it would be reductionist to view anthropological

thought as seamless and unified prior to this shift in the 1970s, it is at this point in time that a number of subfields in anthropology emerged. During this paradigm shift many of the basic tenants of anthropological thought were denaturalized, including kinship. As a result, kinship was subject to analysis within the subfields of social history, legal anthropology, political anthropology, and feminist anthropology (1995: 350).

Although the above subfields approached kinship from different angles, many were concerned with a shift away from viewing kinship as a universal towards a more contextualized reading of kinship. While kinship was once considered to be "static, highly abstract formulations and models of "official" rules and principles of social structure" (Peletz 1995: 351), efforts were made "to understand actors and contexts … [by devoting] greater attention to behavioural strategies, especially everyday practical strategies geared toward the attainment of locally defined value" (1995: 351).

For the purposes of my own research, I argue that on an interpersonal level, any study of kinship would benefit from efforts to understand actors, context, and locally defined value, as well as the role of governments, international conventions, and even market influences. This range of factors suggests that, to some degree, a study of adoptive kinship involves "official" rules and principles of social structure, meaning that while it is a system of social roles and relationships it is also symbolic of culturally held values and beliefs. The approach used in this research involves an awareness of the different experiences of kinship that may stem from an individual's position within society and the range of role and expectations that kinship may entail. I understand adoptive kinship as framed by official structures and values (an abstraction) at the same time that individual

actors understand and operate within local contexts, which may involve different rules and expectations for the individuals therein.

Using anthropological theory on kinship, I ask: How do you approach a type of kinship that is so explicitly framed by international, national, and provincial governments; A kinship that crosses biological, national, and racialized boundaries; or a kinship that is highly self-conscious, shaped by formally organized workshops and support groups?

> *I knew what kind of family I wanted to have before I started this, and I chose this path. It led me to my son, to my family, my community here.*
>
> Mother, 2nd marriage, mid 40s, 2 adult step-children and 1 adopted son

Situating adoptive kinship in time, place, and theory

> Adoption goes to the heart of kinship studies
>
> Howell 2009: 150

Although kinship is considered a major tenant of anthropological thought, until fairly recently adoptive kinship has received little interpretive interest (Howell 2009: 149). More specifically, adoptive kinship in Western societies has only recently been considered to be of anthropological interest. Even though adoption is practiced in varying ways in all known societies, the study of adoption as kinship serves to highlight and even

challenge some previously held assumptions about kinship, biology, and the desire to become a parent.

Adoption has been characterized within anthropology and other discourses as "fictive, pseudo, ritual, or artificial kinship, without asking 'fictive to whom'?" (Howell 2009: 155). Jack Goody's historical and cross-cultural analysis of adoption in the late 1960s identified three reasons for adoption:

1. To provide homes for orphans, bastards, foundlings and the children of impaired families.
2. To provide childless couples with social progeny.
3. To provide an individual or couple with an heir to their property.

(Goody 1969: 58)

While Goody noted that reasons two and three were fairly similar, there is no mention of a desire for children themselves, let alone where such a desire would stem from, and what it would look like. Rather, the three reasons given treat adoption as if it were an act of charity or a calculated social benefit, as though it served as a solution for a problem rather than a desired outcome. There is also little discussion of adoption as potentially problematic in itself. Children in this equation become a means to an end, rather than an objective. Contemporary work on the subject focuses more on individuals' desire for children, often citing emotional, rather than economic or political desires. Current analyses of adoptive kinship hold the view that "adoption in Europe and North America during the past 50 years has primarily become a matter of emotional satisfaction on the part of involuntarily childless couples or individuals, a desire to become a 'normal' family" (Howell 2009: 152).

Much of the recent focus on the emotional desire to adopt stems from advancements in reproductive technology, rather than adoption itself (Strathern 1992).

While adoption has been considered problematic as a form of kinship because of its degree of separation from biological kinship, advancements in reproductive technology more explicitly draw attention to unexamined notions of kinship as biological, further differentiating biology from kinship (Strathern 1992, Howell 2009). However, it is precisely the introduction of desire into adoptive kinship that presents the opportunity to view adoption through the lens of commodification. In contemporary society, children hold expressive, rather than economic value. In essence, "Children have become worthless (economically) to their parents, but priceless in terms of their psychological worth" (Scheper-Hughes 1998: 12).

The view of children as highly desired for psychological and emotional fulfilment but separate from labour and production is considered to be a further extension of the contemporary Western dichotomies of adult/child, public/private, and objective need/subjective desire (Stephens 1995: 6). This is reflected in the way in which children and childhood came to be viewed as separate from the everyday life of adult society, an ideal which developed in Europe between the Enlightenment and Victorian eras alongside notions of family, home, privacy, and individuality (1995:5).[36] At this time, the ideal of childhood as separate from "harsh realities of the adult world" was a luxury; however, the contemporary ideal of childhood, promoted by national and international institutions – state governments, schools, health care, national and international law – stems from this (1995: 5).

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[36] Stephens defines this as follows:

"Though the luxury of childhood was initially available to the upper classes, notions and practices characterizing this new domain came to be propagated – not without significant resistance – throughout society. In time, a vast network of institutions – ranging from the nuclear family to school, health, and legal systems – contributed to the generalization of childhood, at least as an ideal, throughout Western society" (Stephens 1995: 5).

The impact of this ideology, while promoting protection of children, may not address underlying structural problems that lead to children being removed from their families. In terms of placing children, in particular black children with black adoptive families, "many potential nonwhite adoptive parents are disqualified because of adoption agencies' widespread use of white middle-class criteria selection" (Simon and Roorda 2000:9). The biased criteria are an issue that Jessica Leinaweaver names, "the pathologization of poverty" (Leinaweaver 2007). As such, while many find the idea of marketing children or viewing them as luxuries to be morally repulsive, adoption itself comes at an economic cost that prohibits certain parents from adopting at the same time that other parents are unable to raise children (Yngvesson 2002: 234).[37]

In sum, it is through a desire for children that a desire for specific (or available) children becomes possible. Different values are placed on children available for adoption, dependent on the cost of adopting (specifically children from overseas), but also to a degree, dependent on the demand for certain children and certain childhoods (see Introduction, pp 18). Transnational and transracial adoptions present rich material for anthropological analysis as they not only challenge notions of kinship through crossing national borders and racial categories, they also do not allow adoption to be seen as local custom or a means to address the problems of children without parents, or childless couples. The effort put forth by adoptive parents to find, meet, and incorporate their adoptive children shifts the focus from a biologically centred view of kinship, but perhaps

[37]This can be understood as resulting from stratified reproduction, which I discuss pp 56 – 62.

most importantly, these forms of adoption place kinship within a contemporary, transnational milieu.

Adoption in transnational flows

Transnationalism as a term has been defined as social morphology, consciousness, cultural reproduction, avenues of capital, sites of political engagement, and as a reconstruction of place or locality (Vertovec 1999: 1). In its broad definition, transnationalism is the "multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states" (1999: 1). While such ties and interactions have existed prior to the concept of nation itself, the term has been coined in reaction to the increased and amplified movement of labour, people, production, capital, goods, and ideas across international borders resulting from advances in communication technologies (Appadurai 2000, Katz 2001, Vertovec 1999). Perhaps most importantly, transnationalism refers to the space for an accumulation of capital through ties and interactions across borders of nation states, as well as through an unhinging of production and capital from place (Katz 2001: 709).

Despite this unhinging of production and capital from place, capital and production remain hinged on existing ideologies and structures of power (Harrison 1995: 50, Mullings 2005: 668).[38] Much of the distinguishing features of transnationalism stem from the emergence of new communication technologies, which serve to amplify existing

[38] Harrison and Mulling support this point with specific regards to racism and its historical relationship to processes of accumulation and dispossession continue to structure and influence contemporary global production. Others have argued that marginalization based on gender, ethnicity, etc. also influence global production.

social patterns. However, this is not to say that transnationalism is a static process of "abstracted, dematerialized cultural flows" (Vertovec 1995:9). Rather, such advances in communications have an influence, and are in turn influenced by, the local and global, or micro and macro contexts that they link. In terms of analysis, transnationalism has drawn attention to the fact that certain people, ideas, capital and production are linked across wide geographic and political divides. However, it is not just that ideas, people, and places are linked that is the object of such study, but rather that these links and the relationships between ideas, people, and places are studied (Hannerz 1998, Marcus 1995).

Although not explicitly about adoption, theoretical material on transnationalism and its impact on the movement of labour, people, production, capital, goods, and ideas are useful for the purposes of this research. This material helps to define the contexts in which black children born in the United States are made available for adoption outside of the United States in greater numbers than children with other backgrounds. The interplay between adoption and the global market is uneasy and contested; both the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (The Hague) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) directly address the selling and trafficking of children. However, the costs of adopting and raising a child mean that it is impossible to entirely separate adoption from global market. Barbara Yngvesson speaks to this transnational context, as well as the unease that the connection between the global movement of children and capital creates.

> The idea that legal adoption is a 'market' is anathema to many adoptive parents, adoption agencies, and government officials in sending and receiving countries. But it is accepted as common (if sensational and often disturbing) sense by the

> public and many adoptees, some of whom comment ironically on their status as 'Made in …'
>
> (Yngvesson 2002: 234)

Due to a complex constellation of law, policy, practice, and privilege, certain categories of children may cross national, racial, and class borders that adults of the same background cannot. Arjun Appadurai explains such conditions through the concept "relations of disjuncture", developed as a means to study and understand transnationalism and globalization. In defining such relations of disjuncture, Appadurai states:

> The paths or vectors taken by these kinds of things [labour, people, production, capital, goods, and ideas] have different speeds, axes, points of origin and termination, and varied relationships to institutional structures in different regions, nations, and societies.
>
> (2000: 624)

Such selectively permeable boundaries as exemplified by Appadurai provide some insight into not only which children are available for adoption, but also which parents are able to adopt.

The disjunctive nature of these flows has been commented on frequently with regards to transnational adoption referring to it as an "unbalanced exchange" (Howell 2007, Leinaweaver 2007) that "recapitulates a global flow of resources—children—from poor countries to wealthy ones" (Leinaweaver 2007: 163). Of course, this is not to say that the flow occurs in only one direction; while "substances in the form of children move from the South to the North; and concepts, in the form of moral values and psychological discourses (expressed most clearly in international treaties), move from the North to the South" (Howell 2006: 8). Such movements raise issues of post-colonialism, nationhood, international relations, race and ethnicity (Howell 2009: 151).

While this provides an explanation of the typical global movement of children, it leaves some questions unanswered when applied to the movement of children from one wealthy country to another wealthy country. This can be explained somewhat by the realization that countries are diverse, and wealth, prestige, and resources are not evenly distributed throughout. Therefore, children move from conditions of poverty within a wealthy country to conditions of wealth in a different wealthy country.

Structural factors leading to an increased likelihood of poverty, specifically intergenerational poverty (Mullings 2005: 679 – 680) as well as social workers who may not understand non-white, middle class familial structures of culture (Simon and Roorda 2000: 11) lead to circumstances where children whose backgrounds are not white or middle class are more likely to be placed in government care at the same time that non-white, middle class adults are less likely to meet selection criteria as adoptive parents. In sum, even though the transnational movement of black children born in the United States through adoption occurs between two wealthy countries, internal disparity still raises the issues of post-colonialism, nationhood, international relations, "race" and ethnicity (Howell 2009: 151), but places them in different geographic locations.

Stratified reproduction; transnationalism, abandonment, and adoption

> A child whose mother took him or her to a hospital, orphanage, or other public place didn't abandon her child. She made the best possible plan for her child given the circumstances.
>
> AFABC 2005: 11

The tendency of transnational flows to amplify existing disparity applies directly to the notion of stratified reproduction, defined as; "the hierarchical organization of reproductive health, fecundity, birth experiences, and child rearing that supports and rewards the maternity of some women, while despising or outlawing the mother-work of others" (Rapp 2001: 469). As with the unhinging of production from place, reproduction too has become increasingly unhinged from place. This is not only related to the increase in transnational adoption, but also to advances in reproductive technology that enables new forms of reproduction (2001: 468 – 469). As with its ability to entrench disparity, "stratified reproduction, particularly with the increasing commodification of reproductive labour, itself reproduces stratification by reflecting, reinforcing, and intensifying the inequalities on which it is based" (Colen 1995: 78).

Material from Appadurai and Katz outline the contemporary global environment where production and even people can become "unhinged" or alienable from a specific place or even from a specific kin group. This unhinging is related to the disjointed global flows, in which law, policy, practice, and privilege may operate as selectively permeable boundaries in terms of location, class, and kinship. While these boundaries may alter the direction or speed with which people, labour, capital, or information may move, it is undeniable that much of the motivation for movement, as well as the limiting or accelerating factors in movement, are tied to the market, and its ability to commodify labour, information, and even people and reproduction.

While theories of alienable, or unhinged modes of production appear at first to be unrelated to adoption, Howell's concept of kinning/de-kinning and Yngvesson's concept

of "gift" children, although not identical, highlight some of the links between adoption, stratified kinship, and commodification.

> The transferal of a child from one "owner" to another unsettles this relationship of product to producer – of a nation to "its" citizens, a parent to "its" child, or a person to his or her "nature" (as Columbian or Korean, or as the natural child of a particular parent or parents). In commodity thinking, separation from this ground of belonging cannot help but produce an alienated (split) subject, which will always be pulled "back" to where it really belongs.
>
> Yngvesson 2002: 232

This is not to say that the motivations of adoptive parents are consumerist per se, but to indicate that the milieu of the global market frames and at times dictates what is possible, even regarding kinship.

Howell has termed this process of adoption as one of de-kinning and kinning. De-kinning may occur "when a previously kinned person is thrown out of the kin community for some reason or another, or when a newborn child is never kinned due to the fact that it is going to be abandoned" (Howell 2006: 9). Conversely, kinning refers to "the process by which a foetus or newborn child is brought into significant and permanent relationship with a group of people, and the connection is expressed in a conventional kin idiom" (2006: 8).

As such, before a family can begin the process of kinning an adopted child, they must first consider the child to have been de-kinned. While an explicit use of market rhetoric to refer to such children results in parents and advocates of child/human rights feeling uncomfortable, its use seems to indicate a process of de-kinning. It is through such a transaction that the adoptive parents' claims are made legitimate, and the child can be considered theirs. After a child is adopted, parents do not refer to their children in

terms of commodity, but rather in terms of family and belonging, suggesting that once a child is placed, efforts are focused on creating an appropriate familial and cultural world.

While abandonment is neither a new phenomenon, nor one limited to a single geographic local or group of people, it is often the result of social and economic factors (Panter-Brick 2000: 2; Yngvesson 2002: 233). Earlier in my introduction, I questioned whether a child's family, or their society and state were responsible for abandonment. Although personal situation and choice do factor in abandonment, "abandonment is related to the positioning of women within kin systems and the broader society" (Wilson 1999: 688). Rather, "the value of physically abandoned, institutionalized children developed as part of an economy of desire in which heterosexual, Caucasian couples from Europe and North America sought to adopt them" (Yngvesson 2002: 233).

While the notion of abandonment makes the kinning process seem simple, Panter-Brick expresses concern over the truth in the abandonment story. She makes the point that:

> The category 'abandoned children' is ambiguous, referring to both 'situations in which a child, usually a baby, is abandoned by a parent or caregiver … with the obvious intent of creating a permanent separation' and 'situations in which a parent places a child in a residential institution without the intention of relinquishing the child permanently'.
>
> Panter-Brick 2000: 2

Abandonment to some degree or another is part and parcel with Western institutions of adoption. The image of the abandoned child, one who is unhinged or de-kinned and in need of care is often central to mainstream imaginings of adoption. It is in this imagined unhinging that the central paradox of adoptability, "the interplay of value and the child's capacity to be thrown away" lies (Yngvesson 2002: 233). However, the seemingly clean break that the abandonment story offers for the adoptive parent hoping to

kin a child become more complex when abandonment itself is examined, or when an adoptive parent must explain abandonment to their adopted child.

Desire to adopt

> Adoption in Europe and North America during the past 50 years has primarily become a matter of emotional satisfaction on the part of involuntarily childless couples or individuals, a desire to become a "normal" family.
>
> Howell 2009: 152

In the 1960s, Jack Goody listed three reasons for adopting; to provide homes for children in need, to provide social progeny, or to provide an heir (Chapter 3 pp 57, Goody1969: 58). The first is an act of charity, while the last two are closely tied to socio-economic factors. In contemporary western societies, the ideal environment for children is one in which they have no economic value (Stephens 1995: 10-11),[39] which suggests that the economic aspect of Goody's last two points are not as relevant in this context. Instead, children are believed to hold great emotional value to their parents (Howell 2009: 152, Strathern 2005: 58 – 61, 177). This implies that understandings of adoption and of children are contextual and influenced by social values of the time, as is the desire to have children through adoption.[40]

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[39] Even though ideally children are considered removed from labour; “Properly loved children should ideally be protected from the arduous tasks and instrumentalized relationships of the productive sphere” (Stephens 1995: 14).

[40] Child circulation in Oceania is not institutionalized; although it presents additional context, my research is concerned chiefly with the institutional process by which prospective parents are educated and create adoption support for themselves.

The AFABC workshops did not take the desire of participants to adopt for granted. Over the course of the workshops, participants were asked to consider their reasons for wanting to adopt. It was stressed through the workshops that desire to be a parent is regarded as the only suitable reason for adopting. Facilitators explicitly warned against the dangers of adopting out of charity or taking the approach of adopting "*whoever needs me the most*", stating "*you are not a family out of charity*". With specific regard to adoption and charity, Lisa Cartwright identifies a "mediated transnational politics of pity articulated through humanitarian aid efforts to rescue social orphans" (2005:188). Cartwright's work, although addressing transnational adoption of Romanian children in the 1990s, highlights an approach to adoption that was explicitly discouraged throughout the AFABC workshops. In the workshops, prospective parents were encouraged to examine not only their reasons for adoption, but also the factors that lead to children being placed for adoptions and to the workshop participant's ability to adopt.

As part of the cross-cultural workshop, parents and grown children who were involved in cross-cultural adoptions were invited as guest speakers. The most common reason given for adopting cross-culturally was an existing affinity for that particular country or region. Although a sense of charity, or "saving" children was discouraged, a number of parents had conducted volunteer or charitable work in the countries from which they later adopted. It was understood in the workshop that it was through their experience as volunteers or charity providers that they developed a connection with a country and an understanding of the people in those countries as human beings.

An understanding of the politics, history and customs in the area was encouraged by these parents and in the AFABC literature (AFABC 2005: 18). Although their

experiences did provide them with a more nuanced understanding of the countries from which their adoptive children originated, no mention was made about the fact that some of the adoptive parents initial interest stemmed from a feeling of charity. During the workshop I asked if the guest speakers moved from a position of charity in their overseas work to a desire to adopt (as moving beyond good intentions), or if they saw the two as related, but not as one stemming from the other. The response was somewhat mixed regarding the degree to which charitable work informed their desire to be parents, but not the other way around. Despite this, all parents were clear that they viewed their adoptions as separate from their charitable work. Their feelings were summarized with the statement; "*If you want to be charitable, go overseas, help directly, or send money. If you want to be a parent, then adopt*".

In addition to discouraging charity or unexamined good intentions as the sole rationale for adopting, facilitators also cautioned against adoptive parents expecting expressions of gratitude from their adopted children. In the transracial adoption workshop, one participant remarked in response to a film on transracially adopted children in the United States that he found the grown adopted children to be ungrateful. When the guest speaker pressed the participant on this point, his response was that he was saddened that the grown adopted children did not identify strongly with their adoptive parents, and that he couldn't help but feel that it made them appear ungrateful. Other participants challenged his understanding of the film, one asking, "*well, when was the last time you thanked your parents for raising you?*". In terms of the workshop, this was an excellent point, as the second half of the film addressed the issue of thanking your parents, with the guest commenter adding that "*it may seem strange, but you should*

probably thank your parents, not because they saved you, or because they're the reason you're here, but because parenting is a lot of work".

Lastly, both the cross-cultural and transracial adoption workshops discussed and examined the factors that make cross-cultural and transracial adoptions possible. While the facilitators and guest speakers described situations which could be defined as stratified reproduction, the hierarchical valuing or under-valuing of women's mother work (Rapp 2001: 469) the term itself was not used. Instead of framing the following discussions using the concept of stratified reproduction, these discussions were framed within the concept of privilege (Chapter 4, pp 72). Regarding their position as privileged, it was explicitly stated throughout the workshops that as an adoptive parent you are privileged, not only to be a parent, but also to be able to adopt.

Viewing children as bettering their adoptive parents is not specific to AFABC, and remains a common theme in literature. Honig elaborates on this stating, "Children today are still brought up on these tales of emotional fulfillment through adoption, stories in which delightful children blossom in the care of wise, sensitive adoptive parents who are sometimes explicitly portrayed as "better" for the children than their birth families would have been" (Honig 2005: 213). While children are viewed as a source of emotional and psychological fulfillment, or "bettering" their adoptive parents, AFABC discouraged prospective adoptive parents from portraying themselves, or believing themselves, to be better for their children. A discussion of abandonment, in which birth parents', particularly mothers', actions were described by a workshop facilitator as "*being the best choice they had to make for their child*".

The facilitators at both workshops reminded participants "*in a perfect world, these children would be with their birth parents. They may belong with you now, but you don't have the right to have them, they are not your right*". Honig's point reasserts this prospective that the burden of gratitude on the part of the adopted children is based on fiction stemming from a lack of acknowledgement of privilege and stratified reproduction (Honig 2005: 218). In other words, the child is not lucky to have been adopted; the adoptive parents are lucky to have adopted the child.

Chapter 4: Difference and Connection

In this chapter concepts relating to difference and incorporation are explored through conceptual material I studied as a literature review and the framework created by the AFABC workshops. This chapter is concerned with difference; particularly how difference associated with privilege, racialized difference, and racism is viewed conceptually and empirically, as well as the prescribed methods for incorporating difference suggested in the AFABC workshops. While chapter 3 was concerned with kinship as a larger concept, conditions at a global level that make transnational and transracial adoption a possibility for some, and the desire of Canadian parents to adopt -- a larger framing of adoption -- this chapter looks more closely at the specific conceptualizations of difference and of belonging.

Privilege and whiteness

> In contemporary social settings, whiteness has been identified as a core set of racial interests often obscured by seemingly race-neutral words, actions, or policies.
>
> Hartigan 1997: 496

> Whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work that will allow 'them' to be more like 'us'.
>
> McIntosh 1988: 128

> Whiteness, considered as a set of institutionalized power relations, rather than as an aspect of biology or heredity, has profoundly disturbing epistemological as well as moral consequences.
>
> Flory 2008: 177

Peggy McIntosh uses the concept of "privilege" to explain a lack of awareness of, or an unwillingness to acknowledge, differential treatment. Privilege is defined legally and in the vernacular as "what someone or something has in virtue of being singled out for advantageous treatment" (White 1978: 299). McIntosh uses this basic concept to identify the invisible or taken-for-granted privilege attached to unearned social assets. Privilege in this sense refers to "an invisible package of unearned assets that [a privileged individual] can count on cashing in each day, but about which [the privileged individual] was 'meant' to remain oblivious" (McIntosh 1988:125). Recognizing privilege proves challenging, however, recognition of this privilege certainly does not negate the privilege an individual may experience.

As privilege is protected by denial and ignorance of its existence (invisibility), it easily leads to relationships of power becoming entrenched and normalized. Even in instances where a group's disadvantage is acknowledged, McIntosh identifies an unwillingness to concede that other groups are over-privileged as a result (1988: 125). This provides an additional barrier to addressing inequality, since individuals who may not consciously support discrimination are unable to fully see how they reinforce existing relationships of power through maintaining privilege.

Whiteness as a concept not only refers to a privileged category, but also to the "operations of racial privilege and advantage that structure the lives, attitudes, and actions of white people" (Hartigan 1997: 496) and to a subject position or even identity (Harrison 1995: 62). Unlike privilege, whiteness has not historically been "invisible", even though often it is assumed to be 'the norm' or neutral in contemporary white contexts. Whiteness

was at its most visible during the colonial era, where concepts of "White man's burden" and civilizing discourses were common. Whiteness became analogous with "Civilized", and in the process became essentialized as notions of “race” did. In this sense, whiteness can be viewed in part as a relational identity; one "constructed by whites defining themselves as unlike certain ethnic or racial Others" (Hartigan 1997: 496).

During this essentialization of whiteness, it should be noted that whiteness did not exist, and indeed does not exist, as a homogenous category or identity. If whiteness is understood as a relational identity, then it is reasonable that it should shift depending on who or how the Other is viewed to be, and vice versa. During the nineteenth century, the developing racial worldview in colonizing countries involved the racializing of ethnic, religious, and class stereotypes (Harrison 1995: 52). While colonial subjects, indigenous people, and slaves were viewed and essentialized as the Other, so too were certain white European populations (Harrison 1995, Hartigan 1997). This construction of whiteness therefore, has always remained highly relational. While "whiteness has excluded certain ostensibly white European groups only to incorporate them at a later date" (Hartigan 1997: 496), other populations, not limited to: Mississippi Delta Chinese; Egyptian immigrants to North American; or Japanese, South Korean, and Taiwanese populations in South Africa; have at various times been granted “honourary whiteness” (Harrison 1995: 59).

Whiteness operates within a more contemporary context as "a structural location that confers exclusive privilege, a standpoint from which to view and assess Self and Other, and a set of cultural practices that is usually unmarked, unnamed, and normatively given" (Harrison 1995: 62). In sum, the concepts of privilege and whiteness are an

analysis of the fact that "whites benefit from being white whether or not, as individuals, they hold supremacist notions, harbor racist sentiments, or are made anxious by the physical presence of peoples of color" (Hartigan 1997: 496).

"Race" and racism

> Many cultural anthropologists, in distancing themselves from the truly barbaric consequences of biological racism, have become "race avoidant" (Brodkin 1999: 68), considering race to be socially constructed, but in the process ignore racism.
>
> Mullings 2005: 670

In terms of my research, "race" and perceptions of racialized difference dominate the public, and often the educational and support group discourses on the adoption by white Canadian parents of black children born in the United States. From the unexamined assumption by a placement agency CEO that Canadians are "color-blind," to the fact that black children are placed for adoption out of the United States at higher rates than children of other racial backgrounds, to the creation of educational workshops and support groups dedicated to transracial adoption, "race" is a commonly mentioned but rarely defined aspect of these adoptions. On the surface, there appears to be an assumption that "race" is an objective reality and that racism is the unfortunate but obvious outcome of racialized difference.

As a discipline, anthropology has played a role in both the construction and deconstruction of “race”, whether it is viewed as a conceptual category, intellectual device, or social reality (Harrison 1995: 47). The history of the term “race” and the history of its usage are closely tied to the history of colonization, which is in turn is

closely tied to present day relations of disjuncture identified in theorizing transnationalism.

The use of “race” as a means to impose "social meaning on physical variations" (Smedley 1998: 693) grew from Enlightenment era Western ideals that in turn influenced, and were influenced by, European colonization (Blum 2002, Smedley 1998, Street 1987). Although inequality, discriminatory law, and slavery existed in the centuries prior to European colonialism, "no structuring of inequality, whether social, moral, intellectual, cultural, or otherwise, was associated with people *because of their skin color* [italics original]" (Smedley 1998: 693). [41] Conversely, while ethnocentrism and phenotypic prejudice existed prior to colonialism, such prejudice was not institutionalized prior to the sixteenth century (Harrison 1995: 51). Of course, it is through the colonial era that many of the characteristics associated with physical variation known as "race" was used to justify colonial expansion and the treatment of indigenous people and enslaved people (Smedley 1998: 694).

Although the treatment of indigenous people and enslaved people was at odds with developing European ideals of freedom, democracy, equality, and human rights (1998: 694), viewing certain populations as lesser forms of human beings while magnifying and exaggerating their differences (both somatic and imagined) served to justify this contradictory behaviour. This seemingly hypocritical stance has led to the conclusion that

[41] Bacon’s Rebellion in 1676 provides an early example of colonial thought and interests solidifying "race" as a legal category in America. While the rebellion itself saw African servants, colonial subjects, European servants, and freedmen challenging colonial law, after the rebellion “colonial leaders developed a policy backed by new laws that separated African servants and freedmen from those of European background’ (Smedley 1998: 694). This, coupled with the fact that those of European background had protection of English law (1998: 694), served to essentialize the relationship between class, law, and 'race’ in colonial America.

"seventeenth century Western philosophy has profoundly influenced the treatment of non-whites and their status as human beings, even while it outlined and established the bases for "universal" human rights and theories of liberalism" (Flory 2008: 176).

While a great deal has been written on the subject on the parallel development of liberalism and conceptions of "race", my Master's thesis does not allow me adequate space to further deconstruct the topic. David Theo Goldberg, and others (see for example Henry A Giroux, Dan Flory) have written a great deal on this topic. In sum, their argument is as follows:

> The abstracted, universal Subject commanded only by Reason, precisely because of its purported impartiality, is supposed to mediate the differences and tensions between particular social subjects in the domains of market and morality, polity and legality. Enter race. It pretends to universality in undertaking to draw otherwise disparate social subjects together into a cohesive unit in terms of which common interests.
>
> Goldberg 1993: 4

In other words, the cultural, class, and gender specificity of the concept liberalism colour what can be considered universal. Therefore, concepts such as "race", or the idea that a different experience of the world may exist based on racialized difference, challenges the very concept of universality. This challenge to universality is instead blamed not on the limits of what can be defined as universal, but on "race". In this sense, it becomes reasonable, or even rational, that a liberal subject can dismiss “race” while still reinforcing difference and even bias based on “race”.

Although hierarchical organizations of peoples based on somatic features existed prior to the rise of the Nazi politics of the 1930s, the term "Racism" itself stemmed from social scientists of that era defining and condemning this belief system (Blum 2002: 3-4). This belief system, however, was not purely a product of 1930s German thought, but was

strongly influenced by Euro-American colonial thought in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By the same token, although the term "racism" did not exist before the 1930s, " 'racist' phenomena predate the invention of the concept itself" (Blum 2002: 4). Despite this, "not every system of belief that led to the rationalization of human inequality or subordination could be called 'racist'" (2002: 4).

In its original use, racism referred to "'a fully blown system of thought, and ideology like Conservatism, Liberalism, or Socialism'" (Blum 2002: 4), rather than "an 'articulation of prejudice' or a 'metaphor for suppression'" (2002: 4). While racism is defined in its mainstream usage as "any set of beliefs which classifies humanity into distinct collectives, defined in terms of natural and/or cultural attributes, and ranks these attributes in a hierarchy of superiority and inferiority" (Blum 2002: 5 from Blackwells'1993 *Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Social Thought*), it is protected through contemporary systems of thought implicitly. However, there exist many "racisms" in all times and places, contingent on relationships of power (Lee and Lutz 2005: 4).

Often the same systems of thought that condemn racism are used to justify racism and other discriminatory acts, often without the realization of those doing so. An excellent example of this is the concept of "color-blind" that I mentioned in my introduction. While also “race” avoidant, the concept of color-blind promotes the idea that "race" does not exist. However, rather than address or acknowledge a history of discrimination, or present conditions of inequity, color-blind ideology risks reinforcing them by not acknowledging the existence, past or present, of discrimination based on racialized difference. By this reasoning, any discrimination that an individual may experience simply does not exist, and the result of discrimination can be viewed as the

fault of the individual. This serves as an example of racism becoming "rational" to the liberal subject.

The concept of human universals in liberal thought unintentionally ignores and strengthens discrimination in much the same way that the concept of color-blind does. It does so by failing to conceptualize the "overlapping yet distinct parallel universe of human experience where racist oppression radically alters everyday life [meaning that] oppression is overlooked by those professing to describe, theorize, and explain "universal" human experience" (Flory 2008: 175).

Recognizing privilege; making the invisible visible

Privilege, the disparate treatment of individuals based on hierarchical categorizations, was one of the central elements taught and discussed throughout the AFABC workshops I attended in my fieldwork. Various forms of privilege frame the movement of children internationally, across racialized and cultural boundaries, and between families. The framework provided by Peggy McIntosh to define privilege was used in the AFABC workshops, and referenced throughout the recommended reading for prospective adoptive parents. By using this framework, my observations from the workshops showed that privilege was not only highlighted as being linked to whiteness in this context, but also that whiteness was unquestioningly assumed to be the norm. In the workshops themselves, the first step in "seeing" privilege was for participants to vary their social circle. This was taught in the classes through two visualization activities that served to keep privilege from remaining "invisible" to participants.

Finding and contacting individuals who share a common background with adoptive children is considered part of creating a social or support network for adopted children. The adage, "it takes a village to raise a child" was used in reference to this throughout the workshops. The workshops further highlighted the importance of creating a varied support network through two visualization activities: the first, a review of mass media publications (particularly the representation of the human population through print advertisements) and the second, a consideration of prospective parents' social, familial, and community diversity.

These activities were inspired by Peggy McIntosh's work on the concept of privilege, specifically her article *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack* (1988). The concept of racial privilege was introduced in the *Building Skills for Transracial Parenting* workshops; however, it was not explicitly mentioned in the *Cross-Cultural Adoption* workshop. Privilege is defined as "an invisible package of unearned assets which I [someone with privilege] can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was 'meant' to remain oblivious" (1988: 2). According to McIntosh, one of the central obstacles which privilege presents is that "[those with privilege] may say they will work to improve [those without privilege's] status, in the society, the university, or the curriculum, but they can't or won't support the idea of lessening [their own privilege]" (1988: 1). This is compounded by the belief that lessening inequality involves helping non-privileged people to become more "like us" by assuming that a privileged existence is morally neutral.

McIntosh's sixth point in *Unpacking the Invisible Backpack*; "I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely

represented" (1988:3), was addressed through the workshop's first visualization activity. This involved posters with the words: "White", "Black", "Asian", and "First Nations", and a number of magazines. Participants were asked to cut out images of people from the magazines and put them on the poster they felt best described the people in the image. At the end of the activity the poster marked "White" had significantly more images than the others.

While this did serve to visually represent the skewed demographic represented in most mainstream publications, one of the participants remarked; "I don't see any images of white people wearing 'costumes', they are all wearing modern clothes", which prompted a discussion on how stereotypes, even those that may not appear ill-intentioned, are discriminatory.[42] Despite the discussion on representation, there was no discussion of why these particular categories were labelled as they were. There was also no questioning of the categories themselves, such as whether all participants agreed on the meaning of "White", "Black", "Asian", and "First Nations" as ethnic, social, demographic or racialized categories, or whether these categories referred to "race", a way of living, a place of origin, or a combination of these and other factors. Instead, silences surrounding this method of categorization made the categories themselves appear to be objective, and essentialized; they were not explained contextually.

In terms of addressing the lack of representation and the use of stereotype within representation, participants stated that they did understand the need to provide books,

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[42] Although the term racism was used in the workshop, Lawrence Blum refers to this as racialization (2000). When an interview participant asked me what I meant by racialization, her response to my answer was “why isn’t that just called racism? It is racism”.

magazines, newspapers, and images in their homes that would not result in their children feeling different. This prompted a discussion of point 20 in McIntosh's work: "I can easily buy posters, postcards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys, and children's magazines featuring people of my race" (1988: 4). This is reinforced in the reading material AFABC provides adoptive parents as well:

> In Derman Spark's ***Anti-Bias Curriculum***, the task force estimates that "more than 50% of the images our children see need to reflect non-European origins in order to counter the predominantly European-Canadian society around us."
> AFABC 2005:17

The second visualization activity at the workshops served to highlight McIntosh's first point: "I can, if I wish arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time" (1988: 2). Each participant was given a plate full of coloured beads and told to make a necklace representing their support network. The beads came in many colours, including primary colours as well as many shades of brown, beige, and pink. Participants were asked to select a bead for each person with whom they have regular contact in their lives; family members, neighbours, friends, banker, dentist, doctor, hairdresser, or others. The facilitator asked the participants to consider "Where is this person is from? What language do they speak? Do they practice a religion that is different from your own? Do they have a different ethnic or racial background than you?" before they chose a bead.

The purpose of the activity was to help participants see the demographic representation in their own lives, and consequently, in the lives of their adopted children. As with the media image activity, certain assumptions held by the workshop participants and facilitators were left unexamined. The assumption that the coloured beads would mean the same category to each participant was not discussed. The assumption that the

beads would have the same meaning to all participants led to a second assumption; that all prospective parents would be coming from a similar background themselves. While a number of factors, notably class and privilege, led to an increased likelihood that adoptive and prospective adoptive parents would have some similarities, the assumption that all adoptive and prospective adoptive parents would hold the same values and have the same experience risks being essentializing.

One of the participants at the workshops chose beads based on the favourite colour of the individual the facilitator had called out (spouse, parent, neighbour). The participant had immigrated to Canada at a young age and described having a "*mixed marriage*"; neither she nor her husband, who was of a different background than her, were white. While she understood the purpose of the activity, she also understood the assumption that participants in the workshop would be white, speak English as their first language, and be born in Canada. She chose her approach to show that these assumptions did not recognize her own experience and point of view, however she made this point quietly and only told myself and the woman seated on her other side. Despite the assumptions made about those who would be attending the workshop, following this activity most participants stated that they realized there was a need to include a greater variety of people in their lives.

While these activities presented a number of taken-for-granted elements of "race", such as the categorization of people as "Black", "White", "Asian", and "First Nations", and the assumption that the symbolism of the coloured beads was shared, these activities did serve to highlight privilege and some of the assumed aspects of privilege. Despite not identifying themselves as exclusive, most of the prospective parents at the workshops I

attended had no significant contact with non-white, non-English speaking people in their lives. This was not an accusation of exclusivity; rather it was an attempt to make participants aware a lack of representation that will have an impact on their children. Neither activity called into question certain held categories of identification, nor the existence of such categories themselves; however, they did indicate that while those with privilege may not actively or consciously use their privilege, their lives as privileged people are far from neutral.

Defining racism; beyond "individual acts of meanness"

> The Canadian Race Relations Foundation defines racism using the following definition: A mix of prejudice and power leading to domination and exploitation of one group (the dominant or majority group) over another (the non-dominant, minority or racialized group). It asserts that one group is supreme and superior while the other is inferior. Racism is any individual, or institutional practice backed by institutional power, which subordinates people because of their colour or ethnicity.
>
> Born Black Magazine, 2005

Previous to the second half of the *Building Skills for Transracial Parenting* workshop, the term racism was frequently used; however, neither racism nor "race" itself had been defined. In this second workshop, racism was described by a guest speaker[43] as being both individual acts and large scale, systematic discrimination and animosity directed at specific groups of people perceived as being "the other" or as inferior by a group in

[43] The guest speaker was a psychologist who was recruited as a member of the workshop facilitator's social network for her children. He was originally from the United States and identified himself as being African-American.

power. The definition provided was nearly identical to that given by Canadian Race Relations Foundation and is largely in keeping with the equation "racism = prejudice + power" put forth by Joseph Brandt, Studs Terkel, and others in the mid twentieth century (Blum 2002: 37). When considered from a political and academic perspective, this conceptualization of racism may be seen as dated and contested; however, in this context it was used as a pedagogical device to highlight the operation and existence of racism to an audience who may not be familiar with either academic or political theory on racism.

While providing this definition, the workshop speaker made the comment that although a member of a marginalized group may express biased or prejudiced sentiment and behaviour toward a member of the group that disenfranchises them, without the support of institutional power it remains prejudiced; but cannot be considered racism per se. I asked the speaker about why he had used this specific definition of racism, and he explained that his purpose was to highlight the point that racism is more than just ill sentiment or "*individual acts of meanness*" disconnected from larger systems of power and privilege. Although he admitted, "*it is far, far more complex than that*" his approach was meant to highlight the roles of privilege and power in racism, as well as in experience. In short, he wanted prospective adoptive parents to realize that racism is not just teasing or words disconnected from historical and present allocations of power and privilege. He explained that racism for the most part is not something the prospective adoptive parents in attendance had experienced; he wanted them to understand that racism is not just one individual's choice; it has larger implications and is indicative of a larger political picture.

Goldberg raised a similar point in conceptualizing racism, stating, "racist expressions are generally reduced to personal prejudices of individuals, to irrational appeals to irrelevant categories" (Goldberg 1993: 7). Viewing racism purely as personal prejudice held by an individual denies racism's reliance on systemic institutional power. Approaching it as an irrational appeal to an irrelevant category ignores that racism creates privilege for some at the expense of others through institutional power. As such, an individual may sincerely believe him or herself not to be racist, and may even be opposed to racism in its most overt and recognizable forms, without realizing that they personally benefit from racism or that their actions and beliefs reinforce existing racist patterns. In the same vein, while studying the rise of the Front Nationale in France at the close of the twentieth century, Stoler asks "why racist visions have such appeal to people who in good faith hold that they are not interested in race, but in defending their nation ... and are not, nor have ever been – racist at all" (Stoler 2005: 114). Therefore, it then becomes "rational" for the privileged liberal subject to reinforce racism, often without realizing or accepting that their "rational" actions are racist (Goldberg 1993: 119).

In the workshop participants began to discuss the definition of racism as prejudice + power and privilege. Approaching racism as teasing or name-calling, one participant's response was that his mother told him "*sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me*". While the participant had hoped he was lessening the power or effect of naming racialized difference it risked becoming an accusation of over sensitivity on the part of the person towards whom the words are directed by denying the power behind the words. The point in the workshop being that names are not simply names when they

are backed by power, and pretending the problem is with the name obscures existing systems of inequality.

The discussion on racism led to the next group activity, in which workshop participants were given specific problems involving difference and exclusion, some examples involving potentially racialized circumstances, and others involving overt forms of racism. The problems the group was asked to solve were:

- *Your daughter is in preschool. She told you that one of the little girls in her class wouldn't let her play house because "she is the wrong colour, and can't be a part of our family. Families match".*
- *Your youngest child (6) is adopted transracially. His older brother (your birth son, aged 8) and his friends exclude him from their games. He came home crying and told you that his brother and his friends won't let him go swimming and said it was because black people aren't good at swimming.*
- *You have adopted a First Nations boy [sic]. He is 17, and asked a girl he has been seeing at school to a dance. She told him that her parents say she cannot go, because he is a "no good Indian".*

Although most initial responses were flippant; "*I would yell at the girl's parents*", participants quickly became aware of the complexities in addressing these problems. The groups had to decide how they would act in a way that addresses the issue and informs those involved in a way that would not embarrass or cause further complications for their children. Most said they would be angry, but they realized that they should be careful about speaking for their children. Later many admitted that although they had hoped to make a statement against racism in their reaction, the reality was that they and their children would have to live with the consequences of doing so.

The impact that parents' reactions may have on their children was also considered. For example, young children do not have the same understanding of “race” that adults do, even if they use the same words that adults may. Therefore, reacting in the same way you

would had an adult made a comment would be out of place. Psychologist Marguerite Wright writes on this at length, stating that "Tragically, when [adults] misjudge children's responses to "racial" issues by relying on their own adult views, they run the risk of magnifying the significance of race problems in their children's lives and reducing their children's initially high capacity to handle these issues in positive ways as they mature" (Wright 2000: 5).

The difference between child and adult perceptions of “race” and racism led participants to work towards nuanced solutions. Taking into account the age of the individuals involved, and attempting to understand the intent behind the comment were encouraged as much as advocating for children who experience discrimination. The workshop facilitator gave advice on educating children about difference in a positive way, and educating them about adoption whenever possible, particularly when other children were involved. Despite this role as advocates for their children, participants were reminded that their first response to their child in these situations is to listen and consider their feelings about the situation before reacting.

In an environment such as the workshops, it was understandable, irrespective of his views on “race” as a concept, that the guest speaker was not in a position to deconstruct the concept of “race”. He expressed some concern that adoptive parents not take the approach that "*race doesn't matter to me, so it won't matter to people in my community and it won't matter to my child*". The comment the facilitator and guest psychologist gave on the subject was "*you are not preparing yourself for if your children experience racism, you are preparing for when they experience racism*".

Without context, this statement could be interpreted as heavy-handed, and by some as potentially damaging to younger children who may not be prepared for a conversation about racism. One potential risk would be to make a young child self conscious or ashamed by placing too much focus on the concepts of “race” and racism. Wright states that "young children ... are incapable of feeling shame about their color or race unless they have been unduly sensitized about the issues or somehow traumatized" (Wright 2000: 2). After leading with the statement about racism not being an "*if*", but a "*when*", the facilitator and guest speaker began a conversation about how to talk about difference, discrimination, and racism with children at different stages in life.

The purpose of this discussion was to encourage participants to think beyond a prescriptive reaction and to develop descriptive reactions. Most said that they would immediately comfort their children, but try to remain aware that they cannot feel what their children are feeling, even though they understand that their children are hurt. In the film, *Colourful Lives; Voices of Transracial Adoptees* (2007), created by AFABC, this difference of subjectivity is directly mentioned by adopted children themselves, who say, "don't try to understand, just listen".

The willingness to listen suggests an emphasis on intersubjectivity; the respect for their children's experience and realization that empathy for another individual is possible without a shared experience. What is emphasized here is that parents must respect what their children are telling them even though they realize it is not an experience they themselves have had. At the same time, while adoptive parents cannot experience what their children are feeling, they can to some degree "*feel their children's pain*".

In the end, the facilitator and guest speaker at the workshop suggested that parents of transracially adopted children must accept that they are privileged, and be aware of the impact that such privilege can and does have on the lives of their adopted children. Although there was some recommendation that adoptive parents work to recognize the impact that privilege has on their own lives as well, the focus was on recognizing the negative effects privilege can have on their children. In some ways this illustrates McIntosh's point that those who are privileged are willing to reduce the negative impact on those who are not, but are generally unwilling, or perhaps in some circumstances unable, to relinquish their own privilege (2005: 1).

While racism and the need for a positive racial identity were discussed at length, there was no mention of the category "race" itself. Although most participants agreed that "*race doesn't matter, we are all human beings*", "race" as a concept was not questioned and still taken as an objective fact. Furthermore, while racism was addressed and understood as a cultural (and negative) reality, “race” was not addressed or identified as a socially and culturally specific construction. Although privilege was discussed at length in the workshops, the lack of conversation about “race” as a category in some ways highlights Stoler's point about “race” in the collective imagination, with reference to the "tenacious resilience of race as a social, political, and psychological category that continues to exclude and embrace, to grant and withhold" (Stoler 2005: 114). In some respects, the approach taken towards “race” and racism in the workshops is an inversion of Mullings’ statement (2005: 670) that anthropologists have, by virtue of focusing on “race” as socially constructed, ignored racism. Considering the context of the workshops

and perhaps even the daily lives of parents, a deconstruction of "race", or a view of it as socially constructed may not be as effective as learning to identify and address racism.

While there was not an attempt to deconstruct or critically discuss "race" during the workshops, the facilitator and guest speaker did address the fact that despite an individual's best effort they may still hold racist assumptions. An example was shared by the facilitator regarding her son, adopted from the United States. She had agreed to buy her son a black hoodie for his birthday. Two weeks prior to her son's sixteenth birthday, she had been jogging with a close friend when two black men walked around the corner. The friend grabbed her arm, and told her to wait, because she didn't know those two men. Later, the friend admitted to being nervous because the two men were black and she wasn't sure if they were "*from the neighbourhood*". The facilitator was upset with her friend, and asked her if she found her nearly 16-year-old son, himself a tall black man, to be threatening. The friend apologized and stated that she had not considered that aspect of her anxiety towards the two men.

Later at breakfast on the facilitator's son's birthday she gave him his gift. He immediately put the hoodie on and pulled the hood over his head. She described her reaction to this by saying "*For a split second my heart stopped and I could not believe that I was suddenly afraid of my own son, in my own kitchen, wearing the shirt I bought for him*". The recommended literature suggests: "[as an adoptive parent] you must be prepared to confront your own racial biases in both overt and subtle ways" (Hall and Steinberg 2005: 29). While there is no suggestion that parents tell their adopted children if they have such fears, it is recommended that they examine them privately. At the workshops the guest speaker elaborated on this adding, "*you might have fears or feelings*

that you did not realize you could have …but learn from them. You can't always control your feelings, but you can be aware, you can control your actions".

Multiculturalism

> The rhetoric of multiculturalism and color-blindness (Sharp 2001, Erasmus 2005) is employed to suggest that the playing field is now level, facilitating the widespread opposition by whites to affirmative action, redistribution, and other forms of compensatory justice (Fletcher 2000).
>
> Mullins 2005: 677

> Multicultural policy can frame identity through a formalised temporality, placing emphasis upon roots and origins rather than the complicated identity routes of the individual.
>
> Mahtani 2002: 87

Throughout the AFABC workshops, visible difference was addressed through discussions about the concepts of privilege and racism. However, the conversations within these workshops extended beyond identifying difference to methods of incorporating difference through kinning adoptive children. These modes of incorporation were strongly influenced by Canadian understandings of multiculturalism.

While a critical understanding of “race”, racism, privilege and whiteness frame my analysis, an examination of multiculturalism, both as a national policy in Canada, and as a factor in identity creation adds further nuance to my research. Multiculturalism at its

broadest is defined as an "ideological stance towards participation by such minorities in national 'cultures' and societies, and the changing nature of national and transnational cultures themselves" (Turner 1993: 411). The implications of multiculturalism, as with transnationalism and “race”, begin at a macro-scale in terms of theory, policy, and legislation, yet can have a tremendous and complex impact on individuals' understanding of themselves, their families, and communities. For the individuals who participated in my research, multiculturalism has an effect due to Canada's identity as a multicultural nation, their place in transracial families, and their understanding of their adopted children's personal identity as influenced by being black in largely white communities.

While multiculturalism is defined in law and government discourse within Canada as a "mechanism through which to engage cultural diversity" (Mahtani 2002: 69), criticism of multiculturalism often suggests that while paying lip service to this ideal, in practice it uses cultural symbols to show a superficial diversity while maintaining a particularly Western, or white Euro-American system of capital, values, and belonging.

Mahtani identifies such homogenization and fetishization in her research, where her participants described feeling as though they were always identified as different before they were identified as Canadian, and that efforts to recognize their personal and cultural belonging in Canada resulted in tokenism or superficial celebrations of difference rather than full acceptance or inclusion (Mahtani 2002: 80). Being identified as different or other before Canadian is similar to the "hierarchy of belonging" identified by Eva Mackey. According to Mackey's research, "white Anglophone Canadians often consider themselves simply 'Canadians' or '*Canadian*-Canadians', whereas other groups are marked by difference from this implicit norm" (1997: 139).

The tokenism and superficial approaches to difference that Dei, Mahtani and others discuss is especially relevant in terms of my research as a form of Cultural Tourism,[44] which I elaborate upon later in this chapter. The implications of such are profound in considering Canadian adoptive parents' reaction to visible and other forms of difference between themselves and their children.

The framework presented through AFABC suggests that adoptive parents first need the tools to see the social impacts ascribed to visible difference –the granting or withholding of privilege and racism – as well as a means of incorporating or kinning adoptive children. Despite criticisms of multiculturalism as a normative and tokenistic recognition of difference, the suggested methods of incorporation put forth by the AFABC in their workshops and literature aligns with Turner's broad definition of multiculturalism as an ideology. That is, an ideology of participation by minorities in the nation, communities, and even in families, as well as their influence in the changing identities of the nation, communities, families themselves.

Heritage, culture, cultural tourism, and euphemism

> explanatory elements labeled [sic] as historical or 'cultural' tend to take precedence over those seen as political, and it is the cultural – pretty, colorful, distant, lacking any taint of immediate responsibility – that marks the stories that parents, as mediators, tell their adoptive children.
>
> Honig 2005: 217

[44] Cultural Tourism is defined as "Visiting a culture for the day and then going back to a life that does not integrate different heritage into its daily life. Centering activities on holidays, objects, and food taken out of context of daily life. These activities reinforce rather than challenge stereotypes" (AFABC 2005: 21)

> When applied to a child adopted at a very young age, the very concept of a 'culture of origin' seems to dissolve. Yet, the experience of many children, particularly children who are racially different from their adoptive families – and race, here, is often elided with culture, raises its own issues – suggests that the need for connection with a culture of origin may have considerable pull.
>
> Hearst 2002: 502

An ideology of inclusion or participation in national, community, and family groups, as well as an influence on the changing identities thereof frames the AFABC's advice to parents adopting cross-culturally (in their terms, transnationally, and transracially. Throughout my research three terms were repeatedly used throughout AFABC workshops, in AFABC literature, and by participants to discuss difference and methods for incorporating difference into their homes, families and communities. These three terms were "heritage", "culture", and "cultural tourism". Prospective adoptive parents wishing to adopt either "transracially" or "cross-culturally" are encouraged to seek individuals who may share their adoptive child's "birthplace, race, or ethnicity";[45] commonly referred to as an individual's "background" or "heritage" in the workshops and recommended literature.[46]

Heritage was the term most used at the AFABC workshops and in their recommended literature. Parents in my interviews also used this term. In the literature

[45] Association with people who share a common background or heritage is encouraged in response to the Hague Convention, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child CRC (articles: 8.1, 20.3, Hague articles: 15.1, 16.b), and numerous adoption advocates that stress the importance of continuing an adopted child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background (Honig 2005: 217). While this advice is given many reservations about the ability of adoptive parents to continue their adoptive child's background exist; I discuss them at length following my description, rather than at this point in my thesis.

[46] The terms used in the above sentence are the institutional categorization of individual's language, rather than being strictly emic or etic terms. They are the AFABC's organizational choice of words.

provided by AFABC, a distinction is made between heritage and "culture". Heritage is described as "the traditions of an individual's country of origin; for example: music, art, geography, language, literature, food, history. These attributes are fixed and don't change much over time" (AFABC 2005: 16). Conversely, culture is defined as "a learned set of norms, assumptions, attitudes, customs, traditions, communication styles, roles, expectations, and organizational structures that are shared among members of a group … culture changes constantly" (AFABC 2005: 16).

The definitions of these terms are specific to AFABC, with the term culture specifically differing from an anthropological definition of the term. Despite some differences in definition, culture within anthropology can mean a " complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." (Tylor 1958 [1871]: 1), or even "an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (Geertz 1973: 89). As a concept, culture is contested within anthropology:

> In the 1980's, the concept of culture was stridently attacked by the postmodernists, who argued that it misleads us to think of societies as static units, with an internal cohesion that is simply taken for granted; the reified exotification of the lifeways of an entire "people" was also heavily criticized by indigenous groups; while other actors saw culture as a politically dangerous term that might legitimize nationalism, ethnic stigmatization and racism. Even in the 2000's, the culture concept has not recovered from this barrage of critique, and many anthropologists have argued that the term (which has gained increasing popularity *outside* anthropology) should no longer be used by anthropologists.
>
> Partapuoli and Nielsen 2009

Although in the workshops the terms heritage and culture are given separate definitions, there was some slipperiness in their use, and some contestation about their meaning. Throughout my fieldwork I noticed instances where the terms heritage and culture were used euphemistically in place of the term "difference", in particular, these terms were employed when racialized difference was being discussed. Generally speaking, heritage, which became shorthand for difference was occasionally employed to discuss elements of “race” or racialized difference participants felt comfortable with. Culture, which became shorthand for belonging when used to discuss a family’s culture, became a euphemism for elements of “race” or racialized difference that my participant’s where not comfortable discussing. In these circumstances, culture became “their” culture, suggesting that what can be viewed as belonging when it is an individual’s personal experience becomes an uncomfortable “difference” when seen as belonging to those who are unfamiliar (Chapter 2, pp 41 - 42).

However, while both the terms heritage and culture were employed euphemistically, their official definition in the context of the AFABC workshops and literature suggest that heritage indicates difference, or items that symbolize difference, that can be incorporated into the daily life of adoptive families; difference that is not seen as threatening or as challenging. Culture was used to mean both belonging in the context of adoptive children belonging in the cultures of their adoptive families and communities, but when qualified as someone else’s culture became a euphemism for difference that could not be incorporated into the daily life or communities of adoptive families; difference that could be conceived of as negative or threatening.

Viewed from outside of the AFABC's official context, these terms can be problematic and normative; however, within the context of adoptive parents' efforts in creating a sense of belonging for their children while acknowledging difference these terms provide these families with a means of achieving this incorporation. Rayna Rapp summarized this point by formulating these actions as a means of "familiarizing difference" (Rapp 2008).[47]

Ideologically, these terms are strongly influenced by Canadian multiculturalism, rather than color-blind ideology. While both ideologies have been employed to create the fiction of a level playing field, multiculturalism attempts to engage difference (at least on the surface) while color-blind ideology attempts to ignore difference because it provides no means of accepting or acknowledging difference (see Introduction). The multicultural ideal of celebrating difference while retaining a white, English-speaking framework may in some respects bear similarity to the notion of familializing difference. However, the efforts made by adoptive parents to maintain contact (to varying degrees) with their child's birth family or community, as well as the suggestion that adoptive parents avoid cultural tourism imply that while potentially similar to the unexamined privilege of "'allowing them' to be more like 'us'" (McIntosh 1988: 128), familiarizing difference also suggests efforts to not only incorporate difference into the family, but also to adjust and recreate the family as different itself.

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[47] 2008 American Anthropological Association Annual General Meeting. Comment made during Rapp's discussion of the panel's papers, specifically regarding my paper, *Adopting Race to Foster Multiculturalism; Crisis of Identity in the Mosaic Family*.

Current research on adoptive parents suggests that many adoptive parents choose an approach of mediator or bridge between their child's birth heritage and their adopted culture (Honig 2005, Howell 2006, Volkman 2005, and Yngvesson 2002). As bridges, adoptive parents are expected to provide a route to their adopted child's birthplace through incorporating elements of the child's heritage into their family's culture. However, in taking this role as bridge or mediator, adoptive parents find themselves in a unique position, in which they are "encouraged to preserve a heritage they have witnessed but in which they have no social investment or position" (Honig 2005: 217) outside of the responsibilities they assume towards their adoptive children. In many sense, what they present as heritage is something that they themselves have co-constructed.

Attempting to represent a heritage in which an individual does not have firsthand experience can easily lead to the reproduction of superficial or misleading understandings, and of stereotypes. Criticism of Canada's policy on multiculturalism, and even criticism of multiculturalism as a social movement stress that cultural difference is not represented by "stereotypical snapshots" (Mahtani 2002: 73), that such snapshots do not address existing prejudices, and perhaps even re-inscribe prejudices. Further criticism suggests that as policy and a social movement, multiculturalism risks being ethnocentric as it "tends to sanction a policed diversity while veiling Eurocentric values" (Mahtani 2002: 73-74). Dei provides a similar critique of multiculturalism, stating that "Multiculturalism celebrates cultures and their diversity without necessarily responding to power issues of difference" (Dei 2009: 235).

The adoptive parenting workshops show an awareness of this criticism, and address this to some degree by discouraging "cultural tourism"; defined as the practice of "visiting a culture for a day and then going back to a life that does not integrate different heritages" (AFABC 2005: 16). However, even though fetishization and cultural tourism are identified as problematic within these workshops, there is some slipperiness between the prescribed methods of recognizing difference through heritage, distinguishing between culture and heritage, and the negative examples of cultural tourism.

At first glance, the definition of heritage provided by the AFABC may appear similar to the definition of cultural tourism. This similarity lies largely in the phrase, “these attributes are fixed and don't change much over time" (AFABC 2005: 16), suggesting an archival or even tokenistic view of heritage, perhaps even reducing it to a flavour or accessory to an otherwise white, Euro-American world view. However, art, music, and literature, all listed as "fixed" attributes that make up heritage, hold the capacity to move, inspire, educate and agitate, suggesting a purpose beyond a flavour or accessory; something more meaningful with which to engage. Language and literature too can hold meanings beyond tokenism, as "language can be a powerful symbol of cultural unity, as well as a convenient tool in the administration of a nation-state" (Eriksen 2002: 101 – 102). However, in the definitions provided by AFABC, these items remain alienable from culture itself, and are still defined as fixed and largely unchanging (AFABC 2005: 16). Despite discouraging cultural tourism, the official stance of these workshops remains; "we celebrate heritage, not culture" (AFABC 2005: 16).

Transracial and transnational adoptions face similar criticism questioning whether adoptive parents are able to represent their children's heritage in a way that is not

tokenistic, which largely prompted the discussion of cultural tourism in the AFABC workshops. The facilitator of the workshops recommended seeking mentors, other adoptive families, support groups, and "doctors, dentists, piano teachers, etc., from the same cultural group or racial heritage as your child" (Rowe, Brodie, Thalken 2005: 41, adapted from McCreight 2002) as a means of representing an adopted child's heritage and avoiding cultural tourism. Creating a varied social and support network was viewed as the active work of creating culture.

Key to this advice was to get to know people who share background with your child, and to be specific; "the fact that the child is Chinese or black does not mean that any Chinese or black person or black organization will suffice" (2005: 39). Within the home, adoptive parents were encouraged to learn to cook, decorate, and include art or music that reflects both their children's place of origin, and an element of their identity reinforced through the inclusion of heritage. In specific reference to cultural tourism, the facilitator at the Cross-Cultural adoption workshop remarked, "*it's not enough to go to China Town once a year for New Year*", to which a couple, who were both born in Canada of Chinese descent, replied "*Why not? It works for us!*" Although they understood the point that was being made, they planned to adopt a daughter from China, and realized that the assumption in the workshop was that it would be filled primarily by white, English-speaking parents adopting cross-culturally in the words of the AFABC, as well as transnationally and transracially. In this instance, heritage really meant “race”.

A similar example included parents who were planning on adopting a relative from the Indian subcontinent. The child would be expected to enter the second grade after she arrived, and would understandably experience culture shock. The response from the

workshop facilitator was, "*But you are from country x, and the child is related to you*". The prospective parents explained that the child has already grown up with a different family, in a different country, does not speak English, and has already begun school in that country. After this, the facilitator was able to offer a lot of useful advice, as her assumptions had caught her off guard. In this instance, “race” by virtue of shared birthplace and phenotypical resemblance was misunderstood as culture, or as belonging in a different family in a different country.

Although the facilitator was aware of her position as a white, adoptive mother, this slip between what is heritage or culture and what is "race" occurred frequently throughout my fieldwork. While there is a great deal of self awareness promoted regarding privilege and discrimination, the participants in my study demonstrated shifting definitions of heritage and culture. In her work, The Kinning of Foreigners, Signe Howell noted that adoptive parents in Scandinavia often used the term culture as a euphemism for “race”.

However, in my research culture was not exclusively used as a euphemism for "race", or as a way of conceptualizing the other. The idea that each community, social group, and family had its own culture was stressed to participants. Key to this was the idea that "the culture your child belongs to includes his or her family and community" (DiAngelo in AFABC 2005: 16). To this end, prospective adoptive parents were encouraged to view not only their adopted child as being multicultural, but rather to view

their families as a whole as being multicultural. In a sense, difference was "familialized".[48]

Multiculturalist ideology influences adoptive parents' methods of incorporating their adopted children through accepting their difference (defined as heritage) as part of the family's identity and culture (belonging). However, multiculturalism is criticized as superficially celebrating difference while reinforcing homogeneity and hierarchies of belonging or citizenship. To address this criticism, cultural tourism, the practice of "visiting a culture for the day" is discouraged.

Despite discouraging cultural tourism, and despite participants' attempts to recognize their own privileged position as adoptive parents, these approaches to incorporation remain normative in many senses. At best, inequalities are named, but not challenged. For adoptive parents, using the word heritage creates the possibility of incorporating different traditions and backgrounds into their homes and their families. Seeking other individuals, who may have a similar heritage as their adoptive children, be it by virtue of birthplace, ethnicity, or racialization, adoptive parents work to vary what may be a homogenous social network and provide role models for their children in communities where their children may be viewed as different.

Culture as it is defined by AFABC, and as specifically differentiated from heritage, provides belonging for adoptive children. The point underscored in the definition of culture is that an adopted child belongs in the family and the community where they live. It is how adoptive parents are encouraged to create belonging by incorporating heritage and recreating families as multicultural. Lastly, cultural tourism

[48] Rayna Rapp made this statement as a discussant at the American Anthropological Association Annual General Meeting in San Francisco, November 22, 2008 in response to my presentation, Adopting Race to Foster Multiculturalism; Crisis of Identity in the Mosaic Family.

acknowledges some of the shortcomings, as well as some of the negative approaches to heritages that may differ from the taken for granted, or invisible norm. By acknowledging that the adoptive child belongs in their community and adoptive family and viewing their heritage as a part of the family's heritage, adoptive families can avoid fetishizing their adoptive child's background.

The use of the terms heritage and culture to envision modes of incorporation of adopted children and difference into adoptive families and communities has implications on adoptive parents' identities and their intersubjectivity, while the active work of these incorporations, these creations of family identities and cultures have much in common with poetics. Identity, in the sense that the adopted child, adoptive parents, and family itself becomes reimagined as multicultural, intersubjectivity in adoptive parents' realization that they can neither experience nor inhabit their children's subject position, despite taking on the role as bridge or mediator. And lastly, as a form of poetics in the creation of meaning in daily life through the creation a family identity and culture from heritage; that is, using available materials to re-imagine and re-create a cultural world (Willis 2000: xiv).

Identity and intersubjectivity

Throughout my preliminary research for this project, the term identity was used, both in academic texts and in support group literature. A major argument presented throughout academic material and AFABC's recommended literature was that adopted children who are visibly of a different "race" than their adoptive parents' are likely to experience a

crisis in identity (Hansen and Pollack 2007: 42; Silverman 1993: 110; Simon and Roorda 2000: 7, 12). In terms of children adopted by participants in my research, this likely stems from an incomplete acceptance into white communities, coupled with a lack of significant contact with black people (Silverman 1993: 109).

While this argument is well supported, further analysis into what is meant by identity, and how it has an impact on adoptive families in terms of "race" and in terms of adoption is needed. Paul Gilroy describes identity as follows; "Identity is always bounded and particular. It marks out the divisions and subsets in our social lives and helps to define the boundaries between our uneven, local attempts to make sense of the world" (2000: 98). The idea that identity is "bounded" presents some questions regarding adoptions, and in reaction to multicultural ideology as it does not recognize what Mahtani terms, the “complicated identity routes of the individual” (Mahtani 2002: 87). Although Gilroy mentions that divisions and subsets exist within social lives, the bounded idea of identity seemed to be at odds with the idea that adoptive parents work to promote identity beyond their personal experiences, and with the idea that they create a family identity through a shared connection with their children, one which recognizes belonging, roots and routes.

As members of a visible minority within white families, adopted children who are identified as black demographically may view themselves as mixed at the same time that they feel that others view them as black (Silverman 1993: 110). However, "Adoptive students from a different group than their parents can also suffer from racialist ways of judging them as insufficiently 'Asian,' 'black,' and the like" (Blum 2002: 64). Gilroy discusses identity as "latent destiny …Seen or unseen, on the surface of the body or

buried deep in its cells, identity forever sets one group apart from others who lack the particular, chosen traits that become the basis of typology and comparative evaluation" (2000: 104). However, he notes that "different people are certainly hated and feared, but the timely antipathy against them is nothing compared with the hatreds turned toward the greater menace of the half different and the partially familiar" (2000: 106).

Such ambiguous feelings regarding identity suggest that adopted children are "halfies"; "people whose national or cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education or parentage" (Abu-Lughod 1991: 466). Complications arise in such situations where acceptance in the larger community may be impeded by racialized difference. Similar disjunction between how an individual self identifies and how they are identified by others is presented by Hearst, who presents culture as a tool which an individual owns and to understand their lives, stating "The term 'our' culture refers not to one in which we are born, for we might emigrate or be given up for adoption and raised in another culture, but one in terms of which we understand and organize our individual and collective lives" (Hearst 2002: 502).

In terms of creating a shared identity adoptive parents are encouraged to be aware that their children may have multiple identities based on their age, gender, “race”, and by virtue of being adopted, as well as others. Within the AFABC workshop on transracial parenting, the concept of multiple shared and personal identities was illustrated through a group activity coordinated by a guest speaker. Participants were asked to stand if the speaker called out a group to which they belonged. The speaker called a range of potential identities, including but not limited to "*first generation Canadian*", "*Islander*", "*Muslim*", "*African-American*", "*artistic*", "*student*", "*Rotarian*", and a number of other

titles that could be ascribed by birth, gender, or choice. At the end of the activity, the entire room was standing. The speaker concluded the activity by saying "*As individuals, we belong to many groups at one time. We all belong to groups that no one here may know by looking at us, or to groups people may assume by looking at us. Everyone belongs to more than one group .We have multiple identities.*"

Identity in its common usage "offers far more than an obvious, common-sense way of talking about individuality, community, and solidarity and has provided a means to understand the interplay between subjective experiences of the world and the cultural and historical settings in which those fragile, meaningful subjectivities are formed" (Gilroy 2000: 97-98). Subjectivity refers to "historically situated differences in social sensibility and what it means to feel and regard oneself as human; cross-cultural differences in cognition, affect, and action; and the peculiarities of each individual" (Biehl, Good, and Fleinman 2007: 3). In other words, subjectivity is the way in which individuals define and understand themselves based on a wide variety of external factors and their own "peculiarities". Identities then are reflexive to a degree, formed in relation to a multitude of factors that an individual subject may encounter, including the subject him or herself.

However, it should be noted that while human beings are subjects, "subject" can have a second meaning; that of "abstract entity" which, while not animate or conscious, fluctuates and has an impact on behavioural norms, one example of such being law. In this sense, the concept intersubjectivity "helps us unpack the relationships between two different but vitally connected senses of the word *subject* – the first referring to the empirical person, endowed with consciousness and will, the second, to abstract

generalities such as society, class, gender, nation, structure, history, culture, and tradition that are subjects of our thinking but not themselves possessed of life" (Jackson 1998: 7). While these inanimate subjects may to some degree be intangible as subjects of our thinking, they can and do have a tangible effect on human subjects, even though they too are relational.

In terms of identity, intersubjectivity views "identity as 'mutually arising'– as relational and variable – rather than assign ontological primacy to the individual persons or objects that are implicated in any intersubjective nexus" (Jackson 1998: 7). Intersubjectivity refers both to the awareness that multiple subjectivities exist, and to the shared awareness of symbols. While these two definitions may appear to be unrelated, they are part of the same concept. Intersubjectivity does not refer to a shared experience or an agreement per se, but to the ability to recognize one another as humans – subjects -- who, while they may have different genes, temperament, life histories, and points of view – subjectivities -- are still human. To understand intersubjectivity is in many senses to understand that being human involves many wide spectrums of experience, genetic variation, and belief. It is a mutual understanding, rather than a shared experience of humanity (Jackson 1998, Toren 1999).

In terms of anthropological research, intersubjectivity is the realization that epistemologies exist which, although at odds with the anthropologist's own experience, have their own internal logic which renders them just as useful as the taken-for-granted subjects of thought familiar to the anthropologist. In understanding this, it becomes possible for the anthropologist to understand why and how social and cultural practices

vary, and how such variation makes sense within context. This realization is useful in preventing exoticizing, or othering the participants in anthropological research.

Of course, intersubjectivity is useful within societies and cultures, especially given that societies are not homogenous, nor are all members of a society given the same access, status, or knowledge. Intersubjectivity then explains to some degree the variation within a given society or culture, and perhaps an explanation as to why and how social and cultural practices change over time. While each human is a subject unto his/herself, an additional separation of subjectivity arises from the fact that adopted children and adoptive parents will experience differential treatment within their communities as "the other" and "the norm". Compounding this is the expectation that adoptive parents create a sense of belonging while maintaining their adopted child's heritage despite their own limited experience with this heritage (Honig 2005: 217).

These efforts to create belonging bear much in common with what Willis defines as poetics (2000). Poetics is defined as the seeking or creation of meaning in day-to-day life. Willis addresses this creation of meaning in an increasingly commodified context, while Trawick approaches the very idea of family as a form of poetics (1990). I approach the creating of adoption support groups as a form of poetics stemming from attempts to institutionalize intersubjectivity. While intersubjectivity is used in anthropology as a means to understand the range of human experience and its interaction with different subjects (human and ideological) and with environmental factors, poetics is an intentional effort to understand or make sense of varying subjectivities, ideologies, and environmental factors. Even though poetics also includes attempts to create meaning and

understanding, it is interwoven within existing subjectivities and uses existing ‘material’ in its form of creation.

Although the adoption is shared between parent and child, their experience within that adoptive relationship is individual, as every parent/child dyad is. It is this mutual understanding of the existence of other subjectivities, framed and influenced yet not dictated by subjects of human thinking that creates moments of recognition. It is through a "sharing of subjectivity – intersubjectivity – [that we] create moments of recognition and the intuition that we have 'grasped' the other's point of view, but those moments cannot be proved right or wrong; they remain contestable" (van der Geest 2007: 9). Through the concept of intersubjectivity it is possible to "encompass at once the commonality and the singularity of what it is to be human in any place, at any time" (Toren 1999: 204).

Chapter 5: Transracial adoptions: support groups, prospective parents, parents, and their children

In this chapter I delve more deeply into my fieldwork at *Akoma Ntoaso* and interviews. Following the educational process in which adoptive parents partake gave me the opportunity to witness not only how adoptive parents create social networks, but it also helped me to understand how the education process has been approached by government, educational and support organizations. This in turn gave me the opportunity to learn the common terms and concepts used in these settings. In my interviews I could see how these terms and concepts were internalized and re-enacted by participants. I conducted most of my interviews after I had attended the AFABC workshops *(Building Skills for Transracial Parenting* in Victoria, and *Cross-Cultural Adoption Workshop* in Burnaby) and *Akoma Ntoaso* (also in Burnaby). Although I planned to interview both mothers and fathers when I designed my research, I found I spoke primarily with mothers who had followed the education process from beginning to end, and who then continued their participation in developing the support network.

As a result, my conversations are intensely focused, and reflect the interactions and language circulating within adoptive education and support networks. My research is concerned with a government prescribed educational and social process. My research on this process began with an educational setting, moved into a mentoring group setting, and finally to the understanding and interpretation (or reinterpretation) of this process through my interviews with individuals who have completed their adoptions and attend support and mentoring groups regularly.

For this reason, neither my field sites, nor my interviews are a neutral, or unbiased representation of Canadian parents who adopt black children from the United States. Rather, they are specific to time, space, and association; my study is delimited by the program and process in a number of ways. I am looking at a larger educational and social process, specifically the movement within the educational setting towards a mentoring and support group setting, and then the experiences of individuals who are educated by and involved in this process to some degree. Therefore, this research is specific to a number of factors, including time, place, and association. Time, in that the law requiring an educational component in adoption was not yet 10 years old at the time of my fieldwork. Place in that this law is specific to British Columbia, but also place in the sense that I focused my interviews on families where adopted children moved from one country to another. And lastly association, in that participants were largely self selecting, not only as parents interested in adoption, but in that the mothers I interviewed were actively involved in the mentoring and adoption support group *Akoma*.

Akoma Ntoaso; the heart

> If you want your family to develop relationships with African-Canadian mentors and other African-Canadian adoptive families come along to *Akoma Ntoaso*. At Akoma, the children have a chance to spend time with adults of African/Black/Caribbean heritage who provide role models very different to those that the children see in the media. The children also get time and space to themselves instead of always being a visible minority – it's a comfortable, fun place where they don't have to explain who they are or why their family looks different.
> For parents, it's an opportunity to connect with other transracial adoptive parents and to have fun watching their children play with other African-Canadian children and adults. We would like to welcome your family.
>
> *Akoma Ntoaso* Print Advert

Akoma Ntoaso is the site where I conducted most of my interviews. It is a mentoring group for children of "African/Black/Caribbean heritage" and is recommended as a form of post-adoptive support. As with the AFABC workshops on transracial and cross-cultural adoption, *Akoma* does not cater specifically to families who have adopted black children from America. Rather, it approaches children of African, black, or Caribbean descent who despite having different backgrounds may share a common experience of being different in their communities. In doing so, *Akoma* provides a space where these transracially adoptive children and their families do not feel outside of the norm, creates contacts with adults who may share a racial or cultural background with the children, and teaches adoptive children and families about the many different nationalities, cultures, and traditions of people of African descent worldwide. I viewed this as a form of intentional or self-conscious community, stemming from the self-conscious kinship that Howell mentions in her work on adoptive kinship (2006).

This field site differed in many ways from the AFABC workshops sites for a number of reasons. The purpose of the site and the presence of children were the most obvious. As a support group the tone at *Akoma* was member inclusive, whereas the AFABC workshops focused on the process of education and to a degree, initiating prospective parents. Understandably the presence of children further differentiated *Akoma* from the AFABC workshops. The children attending *Akoma* ranged in age from one year to 15 years, with some older adopted youth returning to the group as mentors. Adopted children of African, black, or Caribbean descent were present, as were their friends and siblings who may be of a different racial background. As with my other field

sites, there were more women than men in attendance at *Akoma*, and no men were present without their spouses (all of whom were women).[49]

Akoma meets monthly at the Burnaby Boys and Girls club. The building itself houses a gym (lower floor), games room (upstairs, windows facing into the gym), a television room (windows facing into the games room), and a kitchen with a service window opening into the games room. Although at first glance, the activities taking place at *Akoma* seemed chaotic, I realized very quickly that the space itself was very strictly divided and that the activities are carefully managed. At any given time, parents could be holding a board meeting in the games room, watching their children, listening to a guest speaker, or holding private conversations in certain 'adults' only spaces, such as the kitchen. Mentors could be guiding activities in the basement, participating in the meetings, but were rarely (if ever) having private conversations amongst themselves. They were often too busy with the children. Children on the other hand were mostly in the gym, or television room, but were not allowed in the kitchen.

While the other rooms served multiple purposes, the kitchen remained a mothers only space, but one which was hierarchical within the group of mothers attending. In the time I spent at *Akoma* I did not see any of the fathers enter the kitchen, nor did any of the mentors. Overall, newer parents tended to watch their children more and were more involved in the activities; however, the women who were most familiar with the group

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[49] There were approximately 15 parents in attendance the first time I went to *Akoma*, three of whom were fathers. All of the fathers attended with their spouses and were heterosexual couples. With the exception of one single mother who did not indicate her sexuality, the rest of the mothers in attendance were in heterosexual marriages. The second time, there were approximately 21 parents; five of whom were fathers attending with their spouses (heterosexual marriage), two women attending were aunts (mothers' sisters). None identified as homosexual parents.

spent time together in the kitchen, and would openly discuss topics not related to the mentoring group here, highlighting the more casual "real life" feeling to the site.

Building rapport at this site was difficult initially, since parents, mentors, and children use this site for their own support, rather than as an educational venue. For this reason, I was concerned about the organizer's plan for me to conduct my interviews during the support group itself. I was unsure if I would be disrupting an official activity (such as a film or board meeting), or if I would be compromising participants' privacy by invading some of the restricted spaces. Because of this, I did not have one set interview space, and depending on the time and interviewee, I recorded interviews in the TV room, the games room, and a hallway by the gym, as well as in front of the building.

I found that in this I participated very little, aside from helping the organizer set up chairs, or holding a child for a mother who needed to use the washroom. I was hesitant to interview participants at this site since I was concerned that doing so would compromise the group as a "comfortable place". By the same token, while I did feel that my participation was limited (likely due to the presence of children) a number of the mothers there were very happy to seek me out for an interview. I took this to mean that although parents were interested in assisting me in my research, they hoped to keep their children separated from it. By taking an active approach and seeking me rather than vice versa, they were able to influence my research while maintaining their children's privacy. When asked whether my interviewing was taking time away from their attendance at the group, participants responded that they either did not have time outside of this setting, or that they felt giving an interview about their efforts was in keeping with their activities on site. Many seemed relieved when I said that at this point in my research I was interested

in understanding the process that parents went through rather than seeking to interview children, even though I did express an interest in doing so in future research. Many participants did say that they felt they were in no position to speak about their children's experience.

By the end of my fieldwork, I got the impression that this field site was more highly orchestrated in terms of my presence than were the adoption workshops, despite my initial impression of chaos. This is part of my data; I am not purely being reflexive about my fieldwork, but am using this reflexivity to make an inference about parenting and support community management. I view this management as beneficial, and in keeping with the ethos of the structured support groups as comfortable places whose main function is to serve the children and families who attend.

In many ways, the management of the support group can be related to my being younger than the adults in the group and the fact that I was not a parent. This differed from the adoption workshops where I was fairly close in age to some participants who hoped to adopt, many of whom were not already parents. In many ways I could be a legitimate participant in the adoption workshops, whereas I could not be a legitimate participant in the mentoring group and parental network. Additionally, the purpose of the workshops was to learn about adoption, making it far more of an inclusive environment for non-parents and for myself, while the mentoring group was to provide a space for adopted children to "not have to explain themselves" and for parents to connect with one another. Such a context therefore must be inclusive of its intended members, or it would risk failing to serve its purpose.

While the mothers I interviewed balanced the opportunity to talk about adoption while maintaining their children's privacy, I had expected more parents to ask why I had chosen to look at adoptions from the United States and was prepared to discuss my reasons for looking at a specific demographic, rather than social category. A few times it was not until I began the interviews that a parent would tell me their child was not from the United States. Many saw the category of African-American as anyone of African descent living in North America, or saw the term black and did not consider the place of birth. They seemed to think a child's place of birth was important to their children themselves (personal identity), but not their coping skills or outward identities. I see this as further reinforcement that although parents and adopted children place a personal importance on their origin (Volkman 2005), most see phenotypical features identified as "race" as being more important, and as possibly having a greater impact on their children's acceptance in to their communities. In sum, they view the larger category of "race" as a potentially greater barrier than place of birth. One mother reinforced the idea that appearance, rather than place of birth (in her example indicated by the presence of an accent) seems to have a more significant impact on belonging in her statement during an interview:

> *My great-grandparents came to Canada from Ireland during the famine. They were very poor, and they still faced a lot of discrimination once they got here. But their children didn't because they could speak without sounding Irish. You can lose an accent, but you can't just change the way you look to fit in.*
>
> Adoptive Mother, early 50s, married, 3 grown children by birth, 2 adopted children

In some respects it would be easy to assume that grouping all people who have some features that may be classed phenotypically as African, regardless of the variation within

this group or the presence of other phenotypical features in combination, indicates under-differentiation or a classification of "us" and "other" on behalf of adoptive parents, *Akoma* and the AFABC. However, I found this classification to be the result of how adoptive children may be "othered", rather than "othering" itself. In this sense this categorization is descriptive, not prescriptive. However, even though it is reactionary, it does serve to recreate existing patterns of belonging, distinction, and even bias.

Interviews

The individual interviews I conducted with parents were illustrative of the language employed throughout the workshops. To address my main research question; how do white Canadian parents who adopt black children from the United States respond to the visible difference between themselves and their adopted children? I used three broad questions for my interviews. These questions are:

- Can you describe what you did to prepare yourself/your family for your adopted child?
- Do you talk to your adopted child about difference ("race", their birth communities, stereotypes)? If so, what do you say?
- Have you, or has your child, experienced attention because they appear different in their adopted community?

I intentionally left these themes fairly broad to encourage more conversation on my participant's behalf, and to avoid projecting my own assumptions and ways of talking about adoption on their experience.

I interviewed a staff member at AFABC (also an adoptive parent), a mentor from *Akoma* (not an adoptive parent) and adoptive mothers who attend *Akoma*, some of whom

were involved with the operation of *Akoma*, some of whom had been involved with AFABC, and others who attended the support group but were not involved with its operation. Five of the six mothers I interviewed had attended AFABC workshops, while the sixth attended parenting workshops in Ontario before moving to British Columbia.

After participating in AFABC workshops for prospective adoptive parents and attending *Akoma Ntoaso* mentoring group I began my interviews. I compared the interview conversations that stemmed from the three main questions and looked for common themes. Once these themes were identified, I compared the adoption literature, workshop materials, and my field notes to see whether there were overarching themes throughout the process of creating adoptive parents, or whether mothers speak about their experiences differently than AFABC or the recommended literature does.

The interviews ranged in time from 45 minutes to two hours. With the exception of the mentor from *Akoma* who did not have children of his own by birth or adoption, all interview participants were adoptive mothers. Of the six mothers I interviewed, five were currently married in heterosexual relationships. Originally I did not intend to discuss different roles or assumed responsibilities that adoptive mothers and fathers have within this group, it was discussed during my interviews, and is included as part of my findings. In the following I briefly illustrate the themes and particular language used in the interviews.

While an in depth analysis of mother and father input in their children's lives is outside of the scope of my thesis, I felt that it did merit some discussion. I cannot say whether there is any difference between fathers' involvement in their children's activities when a child is adopted or when a child is a birth child based on the lower attendance of

father's at *Akoma*. For this reason, the most I can say given the scope of my research and available data is that my thesis is focused on adoptive mothers' efforts to create sense of belonging while maintaining a sense of heritage for their adoptive children.

> *He does come to the support group, but he is a bit busy today.*
>
> *We do go to church and other events as a family, so he is very involved.*
>
> *I like talking to the other moms and I don't have to worry about [my children] while we're here. If my husband was here I wouldn't get the same 'mom talk'.*
>
> Excerpts from interviews

Preparation, difference, and visibility

The following subsection looks specifically at the three research questions, interview participants responses to those questions, and related information.

Can you describe what you did to prepare yourself/your family for your adopted child?

> *Well, after registering for parenting courses, looking at websites, I started taking African dance classes. ... I wanted to meet people, black people, before the adoption was final so that I felt comfortable about it, so I knew more about them than "this is so and so, and he is black" or "and she is from the Dominican", or from "Ethiopia", or "the South".*
>
> Mother, Married, Late 30s, 2 adopted children (1 daughter, 1 son)

> *I made a bedtime story about it that I would tell [my birth child] before reading one of the children's books on adoption. I talked about how we were looking for the other members of our family, and that we all loved each other very much.*
>
> Mother, Married, Mid 40s, 2 daughters, 1 by birth, 1 adopted child

> *I ... hoped to meet more people, more diverse people, not just people who are black, so that no matter where I adopted from my daughter would see that there are so many different kinds of people. Mostly I would say it was because I wanted to meet – different - people, and have a better understanding about them.*
>
> Mother, Single, Early 40s, 1 daughter through adoption

This first question for interview participants specifically addressed the actions that prospective parents took when they knew they were going to adopt, but before their adopted child had entered their homes and family. The two most common themes that responses fell into were expanding and incorporating more variety into a social network, and informing family members about their choice.

When I asked this question in other interviews, I received answers such as this:

I told my mom!
Meet more people (support network)
- *Volunteering*
- *Dance classes*

Read materials, attend classes
Talk with family members (especially children)

A number of participants also discussed how the timeframe of these particular adoptions had an impact on their preparations. Due to the geographic proximity of Canada and the United States, as well as close international relationships between the countries, and some similarity of social structure, adoptions of black children from the United States have much shorter timeframes than do adoptions from countries overseas (Leung 2005: 1). Due to the higher percentage of black children in government care in the United States, these adoptions also occur much faster than domestic adoptions of children who are not labelled as "special needs".

One mother in particular remarked:

> *It was a matter of days, rather than weeks or months. Just over 2 weeks and we were meeting our daughter at the airport in Seattle... It was hard to believe that this is how she came to be ours, I mean, the paint in her room had hardly dried and she was there... As for being prepared, we weren't prepared! But you know, I don't think I'll ever be prepared, and knowing that I am not prepared is probably better for my daughter, for my son, and especially for me, than thinking I am prepared when I really have no real idea... exactly, it is better to know that you don't know!*
>
> Mother, Married, Late 30s, 2 adopted children (1 daughter, 1 son)

Many of mothers interviewed admitted to feeling unprepared despite attending parenting workshops, reading material, and discussing adoption with people in their communities. However, most said that doing so did give them some sense of guidance once their children arrived.

> *I'm going to sound corny and typical, but at the end of the day if I can make sure my children know that they are mine, they are loved, and that they belong, I think I'm ahead of the game. Or I am at least able to sleep at night!*
>
> Mother, Married, Mid 40s, 2 daughters, 1 by birth, 1 adopted child

Once their children were in their homes, participants changed their focus from being prepared to reinforcing the ideas of belonging and heritage. Mothers interviewed discussed at length the many ways that they worked to foster feelings of belonging and relatedness with their adoptive children. One of the most common strategies included prominently displaying family photographs depicting adoptive families engaging in what they saw as typically Canadian activities (camping, picnicking, skiing, and various activities involving nature; many of which were similar to what Signe Howell noted Scandinavian parents saw as Scandinavian activities in her research). These were presented as a reminder, not just to guests, but also to their children that they are family,

and that they belong in Canada. Another method of incorporating adopted children was the creation, or re-creation, of families as multi-cultural. This included integrating elements such as music, food, and artwork into their daily lives and homes.

> *It just makes sense to me that for [my children] to feel like they belong in their home I have to make sure it looks like they live here. So our home reflects our family and now our family is mixed.*
>
> Adoptive Mother, early 50s, married, 3 grown children by birth, 2 adopted children

> *We have plates, wooden shoes, porcelain, flags, photographs artwork, fabrics, you name it.*
> *I want people to know when they come to my house that we are a Canadian family, who happens to be a Dutch, Irish, Haitian, and African-American family too.*
>
> Mother, 2nd marriage, Late 40s, 2 adult stepchildren, 1 child by birth, 2 adopted children

Outside of the home, parents are strongly encouraged to make sure that their adopted children have contact with "people who look like them" (McCreight 2005: 40). Often participating in mentoring programs, or community support groups was used to do this. While this creates additional social support networks, more than one mother viewed it as a way to "*create more family*". However, to avoid an approach that is strictly event based, it is further recommended that adoptive parents find ways to introduce their children to people of African descent in their daily lives.

AL: Do you look for or try to create social network for your daughter?
M: Oh yeah. I started a group for single adoptive parents, lone parents by choice, since I don't think that other groups really see what kinds of issues we have, or needs. I also made contact with a number of groups in town, mostly immigrant groups, and I talk at my daughter's school.
AL: do you talk about adoption?

M: I want to hold workshops on adoption and maybe not on racism yet but on other cultures and other people. The material they have is so biased.
AL: In what way?
M: About adoption.
AL: Is there much material on adoption at –
M: No, there's none.
AL: what about "race" or difference
M: There is more, there are more different kinds of people at her school, but sometimes it's – they have more support, more family. It's just us, and she doesn't get to see dark people, like black or African people in our home.
AL: do you try to create family, in a sense, or make it normal to her to spend time this way?
M: Of course it's going to be normal to her, that's my hope anyway. That we have more realistic contact with other groups of people.

Mother, Single, Early 40s, 1 daughter through adoption

While most participants agree that this would be ideal, many find that they instead divide their children's activities into what they term "cultural events/activities", that is, specific extracurricular activities that exist outside of their day to day lived lives. While it is possible to view the separation of such activities from day to day existence as a half measure, or "cultural tourism", such scheduling appears more and more to be the norm for North American parents in general. Due to the pressures of increased commuting, distance between places of work, school, and home, and the placement of children in structural activities such as organized sports. As one mother remarked, "*be prepared to pretty much live in your car*". While it is tempting to accuse parents of "cultural tourism" or tokenism through this approach, much of this is related to the demands of work and school schedules. In sum, such actions detail a self-reflexive, or self-conscious kinship among adoptive families.

Do you talk to your adopted child about difference ("race", their birth communities, stereotypes)? If so, what do you say?

> *Talking about* "race" *was harder to think about [than heritage], but we seemed to be able to talk about it fairly openly. She tells me she is proud of who she is, and who her family is. Talking about where she was born and her birth family was hard; she has two older sisters, and now a younger half brother.*
>
> Mother, 2nd marriage, Late 40s, 2 adult stepchildren, 1 child by birth, 2 adopted children

> *I was nervous to tell my daughters about slavery. I thought it might be weird since Karla is white and Sandra is black.*
>
> Mother, Married, Mid 40s, 2 daughters, 1 by birth, 1 adopted child

> *I am a bit surprised to hear that he wants to go to the States, he's excited about it. I thought he would be a little more cautious just because of the history there. Not just his family history, but the history of the area - is still tense I think.*
>
> Mother, Married, 2 children by birth, 1 by adoption

In asking mothers whether they talk to their children about difference, specifically difference associated with "race", birth communities, or stereotypes, I realized that they continued to employ the terms heritage and culture as euphemism. By referring to various forms of difference as heritage or culture, they showed the connections that they made in their minds between "race", birth communities, and stereotypes. Specifically regarding "race", throughout these conversations I realized that euphemism employed around the term simultaneously disguised "race" in conversation, while highlighting and revealing stereotypes and assumptions attached to "race".

Discussions with participants about heritage often became conversations about racialization and difference, at times without participants realizing that the term heritage and sometimes the term culture were being used euphemistically in place of "race".

Throughout my interviews, I realized that although participants were using the terminology from the workshops and recommended literature, they were not always using these terms in the same way. However, through their various uses of the term heritage, I began to better understand how adoptive parents confronted their own anxieties about acknowledging and incorporating "race" and knowledge of their children's birth communities, about which they do not have significant first-hand knowledge, into their lives. In doing so, adoptive parents had to consider their own heritages and identities, as well as confront stereotypes they may have regarding the communities and cultures their adopted children were born in.

Heritage could mean artifacts that indicate difference suggesting a connection with people from a different area, class, or background; artifacts and symbols that can be incorporated into a home and family culture (AFABC 2005: 16). However, among my interview participants, heritage also could mean "race", or a child's birth family background or history. Participants discussed how some aspects of their child's heritage were more difficult to talk about, and how their children were interested, disinterested, or involved in creating a family culture through incorporating heritage that may not fit the exact definition provided by the AFABC. It was here that mothers interviewed saw incorporating their adopted child's heritage into their family culture as one way to create feelings of belonging while acknowledging difference. Even in instances where an adopted child rejected their parents' interest in heritage, it remained important for adopted parents to be invested in this (AFABC 2005: 22).[50] Often participants created a story, or

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[50] According to the Raising Healthy Multiracial Adoptive Families; a Question and Answer Guide for Adoptive Parents, it is an adoptive parent's responsibility to “ensure that our children have access to information about their heritages when they want it” (2005: 22), regardless of whether an adoptive child is interested in their heritage or not. Maintaining some connection to heritage is believed to “send a

narrative, in which they would explain to their adopted children how they came to be a part of their family. Although a child may reject a story at certain points throughout their life, these stories about heritage remain important as a means to create identity; "Each stage of life generates new narratives that are always fictions, but they are strong fictions, fictions through which identity is tested, adjusted, and redefined" (Honig 2005: 216).

Through these stories belonging and difference are woven together in a seemingly cohesive way that serve to reinforce family identity, or family culture. While these stories were created for children, mothers indicated that these stories mean as much, or possibly more, to them as parents. Of course, this is not to say that there is only one story the family has about adoption, nor is it to imply that these stories are not contested within the family itself. While my interview participants did not often discuss with me instances where their narratives were rejected or challenged by their children, Honig suggests that "narratives that adoptive parents tell themselves about their children may not coincide at all with those the children tell about themselves" (Honig 2005: 218).

These narratives suggest the dichotomy that Yngvesson identifies between the story of abandonment and the story of roots (Yngvesson 2005: 25); a tension between a child's heritage and their incorporation into an adoptive family. By creating narratives adoptive mothers were attempting to recognize their children's heritage (their roots) while stressing that their adoptive children belong with them. In terms of identity, in addressing roots and adoption in one narrative mothers were addressing "versions of a familiar and powerful (Western) myth about identity as a matter of exclusive belonging and of

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message that our children's heritages are important and permanent parts of our families' lives, not add-ons" (2005: 22).

belonging as a matter of 'an active proprietorship' (Strathern 1988: 135)" (Yngvesson 2003: 27).

This active proprietorship in many ways relates to the efforts made by adoptive parents to create a sense of belonging, and to the AFABC definition of culture, namely the belief that "all children live within the cultures of their families" and "the culture that we foster in our families depends partly on where we live, and partly on what cultural influences we bring into our homes" (AFABC 2005: 16).

> *It was the hardest with my youngest daughter. She's a bit of an old soul I think, but even when she was very young, still in her crib, she would cry and ask, "what happened to my brown mummy? My tummy mummy?". So my husband and I would hold her and tell her about how her tummy mummy made the choice to place her for adoption, so that she could have parents like us to love her and take care of her.*
> *... all kids have questions about this, usually they are a bit older than [my daughter], but you need to have a story for them, so that it makes sense that their mothers loved them, and that is why they are here and have families who love them.*
>
> Mother, married, mid 40s, 2 children by birth, 2 through adoption

While my interview participants put effort towards creating narratives of belonging for their adopted children, some also worked to promote heritage that was tied to their children's place of birth. This indicates further evidence of creating belonging that acknowledges difference. When pressed further regarding whether adoptive parents considered their children's place of birth as a part of heritage, their responses suggested some unease with American culture, stemming from both a geographic closeness and some issues of Canadian identity. In sum, anxieties about the influence American pop-culture, politics, and economic policy have on Canada played a role in this. However,

further anxieties about black culture in America emerged as well, suggesting discomfort with a different culture that is both contemporary and close to home in some regards.

When asked how they would promote their children's heritage, parents responded that they teach their children about the history of the United States. In discussing the history of the United States, common topics includes were the civil rights movement and the Underground Railroad. Specific historical figures, such as Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King were also included. Some noted that they usually did not share certain historical details, such as the practice of slavery in the United States until children are a bit older (usually in upper elementary school). This follows the advice given in the AFABC workshops and Marguerite Wright (1998) about age appropriateness of these details.

One mother shared her experience in telling her daughters (one adopted from the United States and the other her daughter by birth) about the history of slavery in the United States.

> *I was nervous to tell my daughters about slavery. I thought it might be weird since Karla*[51] *is white and Sandra is black. I didn't want it to make them feel like one was better than the other, you know how sisters are, sibling rivalry, or you know, during an argument they might call each other names, they wouldn't mean it. But they should know before someone else says something or they learn in school. [Laughs] After I told them I overheard them playing slaves in the backyard, so – maybe that's alright. I had to have a talk about that with them too.*
> *Of course they knew it [slavery] was wrong. Since they are young I think that is all they need to know about it.*
> *...*
> *I told them positive things too, they both liked learning about Rosa Parks. I think that is a good example regardless of who you are, right? Standing up for yourself, being respectful but being strong.*

Mother, Married, Mid 40s, 2 daughters, 1 by birth, 1 adopted child

[51] Names have been changed.

In my interviews I noticed that through mothers' work to recognize their children's heritage, issues regarding their personal identity as Canadians began to surface. While families attend support and mentoring groups that focus on a broad heritage of people who may be of African descent, I noticed some reluctance to fully commit to discussing black heritages from the United States. It was at this point that a number of stereotypes, in particular that black heritage from the U.S. is chiefly related to music and sports, began to emerge. Parents cited a sensitive or charged history of racism in the United States, or the assumption that Canadians receive a great deal of exposure to American popular culture, as reasons for not sharing specifically American heritage. Others expressed concern over the mainstream images of black cultures in the United States, specifically the perceived excess of American celebrities who are black and the violence and misogyny associated with rap and hip hop, as something with which they took issue. Taken at face value, these anxieties support Honig's observation on the explanatory elements of adoptive children's heritage, namely the idea that adoptive parents prefer these elements to remain "pretty, colorful, distant" (Honig 2005: 217).

While it would be easy (and perhaps in some respects, justified) to assume that in this regard, parents take a "tourist" approach to their children's heritage, and filter out aspects that they themselves are uncomfortable with, this tendency is also to some degree rooted in anxieties over Canadian identity. In respect to an American identity, parents often assume that they do not need to assist their adopted children in fostering this background, as, quoting a participant, "*we are pretty much inundated by American pop culture already*". Other parents assume that their children will feel abandoned, or suffer

from low self-esteem, due to the one-sided adoption policy (Rowe, Brodie, Thalken 2005: 7). These assumptions so far appear to be specific to parents who adopted black children from the United States, as parents I spoke to who have adopted from Ethiopia, Liberia, and Kenya did not assume that their children will not identify, or not wish to identify, with their birth countries, even though they too may share a colonial history or recent unrest. This too lends credence to Honig's criticism that explanatory elements of heritage remain distant.

Earlier in this chapter, I mention that at times people involved in my field sites would not differentiate between places of birth, and would instead focus on "race" or even on "difference" as a homogenous category. During my interviews I was able to gain some insight into the more complex factors at play that may lead to this homogenization. The conversations I had about contemporary black and African-American cultural influences, especially those attached to hip-hop were perhaps the most nuanced.

AL: You mentioned taking West African dance, did you take any dance from America?
M: Like what?
AL: Mmm, well, hip-hop, but also -
M: Oh, no. I'm not – I don't think I would be any good at that.
AL: Has you daughter or son expressed interest in the dance classes?
M: Well, yes, but she wants to do more, younger or more modern [contemporary] dance. Uh, and I don't know how I feel about some of it. My son likes the music, but I don't know if he is old enough to understand the lyrics.
…
M: I think it is too sexualized, I don't like what I've seen in the videos and I don't like what the words say about women.

Mother, Married, Late 30s, 2 adopted children (1 daughter, 1 son)

It is understandable that most parents, adoptive and non-adoptive, have the urge to prevent children from listening to music that may contain offensive material. Other considerations, such as the age of the children involved, factor in such decisions. However, the underlying assumption that inappropriate content is limited to hip-hop or rap is somehow misplaced. Given bias in media reporting, it is understandable that for many unfamiliar with these genres of music, or with contemporary music, it is easy to stereotype all rap and hip-hop as black music, and all black music as obscene, or sexist.

Although I would not draw a direct comparison between traditional West African dances and music and racialized North American hip hop, in the eyes of participants the two were compared to one another. The comparison itself shows stereotypical assumptions. While I am raising this point to highlight a number of underlying assumptions associated with the categorization of heritage and culture, reactions to music and dance based on genres is a topic of analysis in and of itself.

Despite some elements of music and dance making adoptive parents uncomfortable, participants stressed that they also made sure to find positive examples in American history. Like the earlier example of teaching children about Rosa Parks, other aspects of American history (older styles of music such as the blues, or famous athletes) were also discussed with children. Some parents were concerned about stereotyping that can stem from essentializing groups of people, even if the intention is on the surface, positive. One example was provided second-hand during an interview.

> *This happened to a friend of mine whose son is from the states. Apparently a family friend saw her son at a Parent Teacher night and made the remark "well, looks like the football team just got a shot in the arm!". He obviously didn't mean to be, you know, unfair or racist, but she didn't want her son to feel like he had to be good at sports, or that he could only be good at sports.*

Mother, Married, 2 children by birth, 1 by adoption

The stereotyping in this example was explicitly mentioned throughout the AFABC workshops and also in the recommended reading. However, while an awareness of stereotyping and essentializing was expressed throughout the interviews, this is not to say that there was no evidence of stereotyping occurring in the constructions of heritage. Another assumption that stemmed from stereotyping was that adoptive children carte blanche, would not be interested in identifying with heritage and even cultures from their place of birth.

In some cases an interest in pursuing an American identity has been expressed by children themselves. This was evident in an interview, where a mother shared a story about a family trip to Seattle with her son who was born in a Southern U.S. state. While in Seattle the son noticed the displays for the Fourth of July, and "*pretty much begged* [his parents] *in the store*" to let him buy an American flag. The parents agreed, but were surprised when he brought back a six foot wide American flag, and insisted that they fly it at their home (it dwarfed the Canadian flag, which in her words "*made my husband a little uncomfortable*"). After that, her son pinned the flag to the ceiling of his room. At first the mother admitted to being unsure about flying an American flag, but she later had understood that for her son, the country in which he was born is not only part of his heritage in the past tense, but also a large part of his continuing identity. Furthermore, he and other children would choose whether and how they identify and interact with certain aspects of their heritage in their own ways.

Have you, or has your child, experienced attention because they appear different in their adopted community?

One of the primary pieces of advice given to adoptive parents through the education workshops was that "Transracial adoption means that your family becomes "public" because your differences are readily apparent to others" (Hall and Steinberg 2005: 29). According to the mothers interviewed, it was not uncommon for people to make comments or ask questions when they notice that a child is of a different "race" than his or her parent. While this attention is not racist per se, it is racialized and does reflect common assumptions about what it the norm for Canadian families. Mothers reported that even though they may realize an individual is not intentionally being invasive, many taken for granted aspects of family, privacy, and even citizenship are compromised by public perceptions of difference vis-à-vis the category of "race". One woman told me about her experience, shopping in a supermarket.

> *Out of nowhere, this woman comes up to my son and I, and says,* "*Oh. Well, his father must be really, really dark*" *I wanted to say to her,* "*You know, I have no idea, I never got a good look at him*". *Instead I smiled and said nothing.*
>
> Mother, Married, Late 30s, 2 adopted children (1 daughter, 1 son)

While this is an example of extremely invasive behaviour, mothers reported that they did feel they attracted a lot more attention as parents who adopt transracially. Many participants were quick to point out that often the attention is not malicious, but that they do feel they are "on display". As a result, some reported that this created tension within their family.

> *Sandra gets more attention – she is, well she's a little more … she's spectacular looking with her hair and she's so tall, she looks so different, and Karla, she fades*

a little bit, she's more in the background. Everyone wants to know who Sandra is, people don't ask Karla, you know, who did your hair?

Mother, Married, Mid 40s, 2 daughters, 1 by birth, 1 adopted child

This excerpt is an example of the nuanced reaction that an adoptive parent may have to racialized attention. While the attention one daughter receives is not necessarily negative, ill intended, or even racialized per se, it does highlight difference within the family. While differences between siblings whether they are related through adoption or birth can cause tension, the additional layer of racialized difference in this equation. However, the seemingly innocent comment about hair took on additional prominence throughout my fieldwork.

Adoptive children, hair, and creating tangible physical connections[52]

For all transracial families, and families that include children of African descent especially, previously taken-for-granted acts such as hair and skin care gain new prominence, both in terms of availability of care products, and as a potent symbol of difference.[53] While parents were encouraged in the AFABC workshops to learn how to care for their children's hair, and to instil a sense of pride and confidence while doing so, their efforts are framed by a number of factors. These factors include: limited numbers of hair stylists who specialize in this area, absence of awareness of hair and identity politics, and lack of personal experience in caring for this hair type.

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[52] This section under this title has been modified from a presentation I gave at the American Anthropological Association 107th Annual General Meeting in San Francisco, November 22 2008. The paper was entitled Difference, Race, Parents, Children and their Hair, and was presented in the panel Hair, Pubic and Beyond.

[53] Similar themes are discussed in the documentary, Good Hair produced by Chris Rock Kevin O'Donnell, Jenny Hunter, released October 9, 2009.

Adoptive parents, especially adoptive mothers, learn that the same products and styling techniques they are familiar with may result in irritation and even harm to their children's hair and skin. At the same time, they find themselves exposed to previously unknown historic and political factors that shape opinions regarding what is appropriate, desired, and accepted ways of styling hair. The implications of these opinions have an impact on their children's self image and their skills as parents. While it may be considered vain or frivolous to care about hair and hair style to such a degree, hair is highly visible, and therefore the implications of hair cannot, and should not, be ignored.

Bertram Ashe states that, in North America "[those] with their traditionally African features, have always had an uneasy coexistence with the European (white) ideal of beauty" (Ashe 1995: 579). This specific ideal of beauty has a long history, interwoven with ideals regarding "race", class, colonization, gender, and sexuality, to name a few. Notions of beauty themselves extend beyond what is deemed "attractive", and have implications regarding purity, morality, intelligence, cleanliness, and worth. While this narrow category of what is beautiful includes features beyond hair itself, hair and hairstyle "serve as important cultural artifacts, because they are simultaneously public (visible to everyone), personal (biologically linked to the body), and highly malleable to suit cultural and personal preferences" (Weitz 2001: 667). Put another way, in terms of both self-expression and self-regulation "the most easily controlled [physical] feature is hair" (Ashe 1995: 579).

However, after speaking with mothers about this topic, it became clear that the malleability of hair does not make hair, or hair care any less complicated for black adopted children or for their mothers, who must change their habits and view points on

what appropriate hair care and hair style is for their children. In addition to being subject to the history of racist standards of beauty and contemporary exclusion, adopted children may also face the challenge of being considered different both in their communities, and also in their homes.

In the written material given to adoptive parents, it is explicitly noted that "trying to use the same products and styling techniques [that white parents may use] can actually result in harm, such as dry, irritated skin, hair breakage, and even hair loss" (Rowe, Brodie, Thalken 2005: 35). While the sensitivity of hair types typically associated with people of African descent to the types of chemicals commonly found in shampoos and other styling products that seem common place in largely white communities was mentioned in detail, the use of chemical relaxants, straightening techniques, permanents, and other non chemical forms of hair alteration, such as weaves, or hot combs (Ashe 1995: 579), were absent from the materials given to adoptive parents. The attitude most encouraged by the material is expressed through the following statement; "There's no need to try to "fix" their hair. It's as unique and beautiful as your child" (Brodie 2005: 33). However, even though a positive approach to hair types associated with people of African descent was encouraged, there was no explicit conversation regarding the prominence of white standards of beauty. At times, white ideals of beauty were inadvertently reinforced in the advice given to adoptive parents, which warns that transracially adopted children may face unwanted attention "Because the texture and curl of black hair is unique" (Brodie 2005: 33), without noting the range of hair types, acknowledging that tightly curled hair types are not limited nor unique to people of African descent, and perhaps most importantly without asking, unique for whom?

Although parents are warned against "fixing" their children's hair, the styling advice given was still limited in a number of ways. The word "natural" was used; often meaning hair that has been styled into braids, or is cut fairly short. Longer natural styles (the "afro" or the "natural") are also not explicitly mentioned in the literature given to parents, nor are dreadlocks. While these styles can be achieved with a minimum of chemical alteration (which is not to say that the upkeep does not require a great deal of care), such styles of hair are often viewed as political, as described by Weitz, or as unprofessional. The most recent example of such being the remarks made by a young editor of Glamour in August of 2007, where she stated that Afros and Dreadlocks were fashion and corporate faux pas, and inappropriate for the workplace (Stewart 2007).[54] I took the omission of these hairstyles from the literature, and from the majority of my interviews, to mean that while parents are attempting to recognize the value of their children's hair type, they feel the effect of societal pressures to look for a solution to a social environment in which certain hair types are viewed as inappropriate. In some ways, this appears to be tied to notions of mothering; a good mother simultaneously accepts their child's natural hair; while at the same time takes an active role in caring for and styling the hair.

Hair care for typically black hair types specialized within Canadian communities. In the efforts to educate adoptive parents about the additional pressures that adoptive children of African descent face with regards to hair, adoptive support groups (both AFABC and *Akoma*) suggest that parents seek hairstylists who are trained to care for and style black hair types. While these salons are accessible in larger urban centres, not all

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[54] Perhaps as a response to this, in the December 2008 issues, Glamour included a makeover feature in which a young woman was made-over with a "natural".

adoptive families live in close proximity to them. However, problems beyond proximity arise for adoptive mothers who may express some hesitance to have their children's hair styled regularly in a salon.

Many mothers expressed the sentiment that salons, while by and large women only spaces, are spaces for adult women, and not children. Concerns that having their children's hair styled in a salon often may amplify some of the negative attitudes towards black and unattainable notions of beauty were also raised. Children of African descent, particularly girls, may find themselves in a double bind in such an environment. In order to achieve a look that is considered "appropriate" or, when they are older, "professional", they must be willing to commit more time, and if they choose to have their hair styled professionally, more money, than someone with a hair type commonly associated with non-African descent (straight, wavy, etc.). That said, many women, regardless of background, class, or "race" spend significant time and money on hairstyle.

While the lack of salons which cater to the black hair types, the cost, and parental concerns regarding age appropriateness of the space certainly plays a role in the choice for mothers opting to style their children's hair at home, lack of access and cost are not the sole reason doing so. Adoptive mothers are encouraged to style their children's hair for a number of different reasons suggested at adoption workshops, support groups, and in my interviews with parents. Using this as time to bond with the child was cited as being most important. With younger children, it was suggested that creating a hair and skin care routine aids in their adjustment to a new environment (Brodie 2005: 32). The importance of creating a routine in their children's lives is seen to serve multiple purposes; the first being that it aids in adjustment for recently adopted children, secondly

the belief that routine in children's lives aids in their development, and most importantly, because routine creates time to spend with children (2005: 32).

Additional benefits to styling children's hair themselves included and increased effort to be "normal" at the same time that special effort is taken to connect with a child.

> *I want her to feel special when she gets her hair done, but I felt like when I drove into Vancouver with her that she didn't feel special. I don't drive that far to get my hair styled, her friends at school don't, I think she felt weird about it, she would rather be doing something else, you know, at that age.*

Mother, 2nd marriage, early 40s, 1 daughter by adoption

Even when mothers themselves did not feel they had the skills to style their children's hair they still made efforts to reinforce positive self-image and comfort in their own home. The mother in the example below enlisted help from another woman in her community who not only helped her learn to style her daughter's hair, but also helped to reinforce feelings of belonging and of a support network within the home.

> *I met a young woman from Trinidad, and we had become friends when my girl was really small. I asked her about hair, and she agreed to come over and help me with [my daughter]. ... I thought that it was really REALLY important for [my daughter] to see herself and another black woman in the mirror. After she used say, "Mummy, I'm pretty like Heather,[55] right?"*

Mother, married, Late 40s, 2 daughters, 1 by birth, 1 daughter by adoption

Through this type of engagement with her child, one mother suggested that, even though she was aware that she could not know what it was like for her daughter to feel different

[55] Names have been changed.

as a member of a visible minority, she could at least be part of her daughter's experience. While most spoke about the experience as a way to more closely identify with their children, it was suggested that taking the time and effort to style your child's hair at home resulted in greater acceptance of an adoptive child's participation with people who may share a similar "background".

Strathern identifies a child's two bodies, namely the physical body of the child, but also the body representing the parent's (most often the mother's) knowledge. Although adoptive parents and their children do not share the same "blood", they share a body with their children in two senses. By learning to style and care for their children's hair adoptive mothers are able to create a physical bond. Their efforts to connect with their child can be viewed in a tangible manner. This is connected to the second sense in which a parent and child share a body, that of devotion (or neglect) and the application of parental knowledge and values (Strathern 2005: 5). This concept of the body as shared and as symbolic suggest that the body serves as a form of intersubjectivity between child and parent, but also one which is implicated socially.

I argue that the second manner in which parents and children share a body is especially important to adoptive parents whose somatic features differ from their children. Given the amount of advice given to prospective parents addressing public staring, and intrusive questioning (including my participant's own experiences), efforts to show that parents and children belong to one another are especially valued. This serves to show belonging in three areas; interpersonal relationships between parents and children, members of the general public and can lend credence to an adoptive mother's dedication to her children among members of the same visible minority as her children. In this

sense, the actions that create a sense of pride and identity in children (a stronger bond between parent and child) also serve as a reflection of the mother's identity, and her status as a good mother, to different publics. Therefore, a child's personal identity is not only tied to their family's identity, but socially is an indication of their family (particularly their mother's) identity.

> *As a parent, one of the MOST important things is taking care of your children's hair. Especially for girl. When she was little, women at [cultural events] used to inspect her hair, and ask me who did it. When I could tell them that I did her hair, they were always like "Nice work girl! Way to go!". It was the best way to feel accepted by that community, and, you know, it helped my kids a lot.*
>
> Mother, married, mid 40s, 2 children by birth, 2 through adoption

The mother took this comment as evidence that she had moved beyond a cultural tourism, the superficial acknowledgement of difference (AFABC 2005: 35). In her experience, she was taken more seriously as taking part in her daughter's life through styling her hair, her daughter was more accepted at "cultural" events, specifically those where the focus was not on adoptive families. She felt her approach expressed that she was not just using her class privilege to pay someone else to care for her daughter's hair, but showed that she legitimately cared for her daughter, and had a sincere desire to promote a positive self-identity, as well as foster connections with people of the same background as her daughter. The need for this type of association was also commented upon by one of the mentors I interviewed.

> *Parents who adopt children from Eastern Europe enrol their children in dance classes or language classes when they're little. But they don't seek out members of those communities to guide their children. They don't need to. Knowing about their 'culture' is enough, but it isn't enough for them [adopted children of African, black, or Caribbean descent].*

Upon elaboration, he explained that the transracially adopted children also need to learn strategies for being marked as different, and strategies to deal with the inequalities that they may face both as a result of appearing different in their communities, and as a result of systematic discrimination that has been enforced historically, the remainders of which they may still experience today. However, the most important reason he could see was making sure that adoptive children know that they are not "the only ones who look like they do".

The mothers I interviewed approached the question of racialized attention by explaining to their children that people might be curious, and that may lead them to ask questions that are invasive. Regardless of whether the person's actions were motivated by curiosity or malevolence, the point that children do not have to answer questions they don't want to, or share information they do not feel comfortable with was stressed to some degree by all the mothers I spoke to. This approach to racialized attention was also used for other forms of attention that may make children feel uncomfortable that is not necessarily based on "race".

> *All my babies, by birth by adoption, know that they do not have to answer everything people ask. They know they can say, "it's none of your business". I think that is important for all kids.*
>
> Adoptive Mother, early 50s, married, 3 grown children by birth, 2 adopted children

Braiding concepts and experiences together

> We believe multiracial families are enhanced by developing the ability to catch a glimpse of each member's unique vision, deepening and pooling their collective insights, and wondering at the beauty and complexity of the world as seen through the differing prisms.
>
> Hall and Steinberg 2005: 31

From readings for prospective adoptive parents

Throughout my research at the AFABC adoptive parenting workshops, *Akoma Ntoaso* mentoring and support group, my interviews, and the literature recommended by AFABC, it became clear that the ideal adoptive parents serve as highly self-reflexive mediators in their children's intersubjectivity. As mediators, they navigate their child's incorporation in their adoptive families and communities. These incorporations are influenced by a number of factors, such as: the larger global movements of ideas, technology, communications, wealth, poverty and labour (as exemplified by Appadurai's concept; g*lobal flows*); a need to legitimize their "family-ness" as visibly adoptive, mixed "race" families (similar to the parents in Signe Howell's study of International Kinship); and a specific understanding of racism, privilege, and discrimination (namely, something adoptive parents are aware of, but for the most part have not experienced firsthand). In this sense, the situation in which such parents find themselves is similar to that an anthropologist may encounter when they realize that despite their best efforts and intentions to see through the eyes of their participants, their own lived experience and point of view will not ever be the experience and view point of the people they study. However, as with the anthropologist who realizes the limits of their own positionality, adoptive parents work to find ways to expand their points of view while respecting their children's experience even though it may differ from their own. This is most evident in participants' efforts to not only incorporate adoptive children in to their families, but to make the conscious effort to adapt their families to include the heritage and experiences of their adopted child.

These efforts to recognize difference, provide a positive identity, and foster feelings of belonging include attending support groups for adoptive families and regular association with people who may share similar backgrounds or features with adopted children (both in daily life and intentionally as mentors). Although adoptive parents work to involve their adopted children in their community at large, and with adults who "look like them", many are aware that despite these efforts, as a family they will "have more in common with the subculture of adoption than with either of the races or cultures involved" (McCreight 2002: 96). This notion of a subculture bears some similarity to Abu-Lughod's concept of halfies, however in this usage, it is a group that identifies itself as being betwixt and between, rather than an individual.

While the efforts to re-create family as multi-racial and multi-cultural serve to provide a more inclusive environment for adopted children, adoptive parents remain aware that, despite their efforts and intentions, they cannot change the reality that their adoptive children may be viewed as different and racialized, and therefore experience their communities differently from their parents. Participants used a number of symbols to prove kinship, to their adoptive children, to their families, and to the greater public. In addition to the efforts adoptive parents put forth to promote an emotional connection through the process of kinning an adopted child, parents create symbols that legitimize their relatedness, or 'familiness'. In analysing my data gathered from the workshops, *Akoma*, and my interviews, I noticed three major categories of creation emerging. These include: personal identity, understood as promoting a positive identity for adopted children on behalf of the adoptive parent(s); family identity, which involves the creation of an adoptive or multi-racial/cultural/ethnic family identity; and community identity,

involving the intentional creation of support groups, seeking of mentors, or association with other adoptive families and members of the same visible minority as transracially adopted children.

Adoptive parents work to re-create their identity and their adoptive children's identities as multi-racial or multi-cultural. This serves three functions with regards to the adopted children; it recognizes that an adopted child may be identified as different both from their adoptive families and in their communities, provides an identity that acknowledges this difference positively, and reinforces an adopted child's belonging within their adoptive family. In doing so, adoptive parents express a self-conscious kinship, in which difference is acknowledged, and integration familiarized/familialized.

An awareness that their experiences will be different is similar to Willis' suggestion in The Ethnographic Imagination that the best possible position is to tell their story as you see it. Or, as noted by Brenda McCreight, author of Parenting your Older Adoptive Child, "Do not assume that your experience of the transracial or cross-cultural adoption is the same as your child's".

While interview participants and the support group facilitators tended to use the term "identity" in relation to these acts of creation, I find the concept intersubjectivity to more accurately explain their efforts. These acts are intersubjective because of the emphasis placed on understanding that adoptive parents cannot experience what their adoptive children do, even though they may feel the same emotions as their children, or sympathize with them. This is particularly true regarding experiences of racialization and privilege; parents may be aware that racialization and even racism are a reality of their children's lives, or that they themselves are privileged, but they do not occupy the subject

position of someone who is experiencing the inferiorization or antipathy of racism or of someone who is not privileged. Despite this divergence in experience, it is important for parents to listen, to care, and accept their children's feelings. In other words, to understand that their children's experiences, thoughts, and personalities are human even though they may be entirely different from their parent's experiences for reasons related to "race" and privilege.

Despite this understanding that their experiences may differ greatly, adoptive parents are expected to operate as "bridges" connecting adopted children to their family by "kinning" (Howell 2006), to their past lives as part of their identity (Honig 2005), and to their parent's community. This is achieved through an intersubjective understanding of their own and their children's experiences as well as efforts to seek and create meaning; a form of poetics.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This chapter provides an overview of my main conclusions as they relate to my research questions, the concepts discussed in Chapter 2, and my fieldwork. My main research question was, how do white Canadian parents who adopt black children from the United States respond to the visible difference between themselves and their children? My fieldwork itself involved participant observation at two adoptive parenting workshops,[56] participant observation at a mentoring and support group for families of children of "African/Black/Caribbean heritage" (*Akoma* print advertisement), and 7 semi-structured interviews with participants in these groups.

Within British Columbia, responding to difference while incorporating an adoptive child into a family is influenced by international conventions (in particular the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect to Intercountry Adoption), Canada's national policy and ideology of multiculturalism, and parental views regarding what is seen as advantageous to their adopted child's identity. In this sense, adoptive parents serve as mediators in their children's intersubjectivity through their efforts to incorporate difference between themselves and their children into their personal, familial and community identities. After revisiting the context of my research, I summarize my major findings and highlight the implications of this study. Following that, I explain and acknowledge the limitations of my research, and offer suggestions for future research in this area of study.

[56] These two adoptive parenting workshops were Building *Skills for Transracial Parenting* and Cross-*Cultural Adoption Workshop*, both offered by the Adoptive Families Association of British Columbia (AFABC).

Context, belonging and difference, euphemisms and generalizations

Since beginning my fieldwork in February of 2008, there have been two macro-level changes in the United States' political environment. On April 1, 2008 the Hague Convention was entered into force, potentially altering the international adoption of black children from the U.S. November 4, 2008 saw the election of Barack Obama, the first black president of the United States. While the eventual outcome of these two events is yet to be seen, they will undoubtedly alter the national and international political and legal framework in which these adoptions occur. However, the daily practices of integrating a child of a visible minority into a community whose members will see them as different, both from the "norm" in the community and as different from their adopted family, remains.

Adoptive parents, specifically mothers in the case of my research, are considered responsible for providing an ideal family environment for their adopted children. The importance of the family as the ideal environment for "the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children" is emphasized in the preamble to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989: preamble). A number of provisions are suggested in the CRC, and in the Hague Convention regarding how and when it is appropriate to incorporate transnationally and transracially adopted children into adoptive family environments. Key to these incorporations and to my research is the act of creating a sense of belonging for adoptive children in their new communities and families, while recognizing and honouring difference, whether it be difference in birth country/community, visible racialized difference, or both.

This act of creating belonging while recognizing difference is mentioned in CRC articles: 8.1, 20.3 and Hague articles: 15.1, 16.b where there is much discussion of continuing an adoptive child's background or heritage after an adoption is completed. While ethnicity is mentioned as a factor, ìraceî or racialized difference are not specifically mentioned as a consideration. At a provincial level, this incorporation of an adoptive child's difference was conceptualized through a differentiation between the terms heritage and culture. Heritage being defined as "the traditions of an individual's country of origin" (AFABC 2005: 16) and culture as "A learned set of norms, assumptions, attitudes, customs, traditions, communication styles, roles, expectations and organizational structures that are shared among members of a group" (2005: 16).

Through these definitions of heritage and culture, it becomes possible to incorporate heritage, "attributes [that] are fixed" (2005: 16) into culture, something which "changes constantly" (2005: 16) and is actively and self consciously created and shared by its members (AFABC 2005: 16, Howell 2006: 38). Heritage then became shorthand for difference, while culture in this context became shorthand for belonging,[57] or rather for the act of creating belonging and membership within a group. Heritage, through its familialized understanding as static or fixed, becomes alienable and therefore possible to be incorporated into culture. Conversely, culture, unlike heritage, is not alienable and requires an individual's direct presence in its creation and continuation. In terms of belonging, the definition of culture offered by the AFABC stresses "All children live

[57] While culture in its definition used by the AFABC becomes shorthand for belonging, within participant interviews, culture can also unofficially become a euphemism for "race", in particular for elements of "race" that participants felt uncomfortable with. In these cases there was a difference between culture as belonging, and other cultures as potentially threatening (See Introduction, pg 48).

within the cultures of their families, but also within the larger cultures of the communities in which they live" (2005: 16).

However, the differentiation between heritage and culture was not always so clear in practice. The two terms became further complicated in conversations about racialized difference. While the term heritage is often employed as a means to address difference, and more importantly as a means of incorporating difference, it does not explicitly mention ìraceî, or how heritage could be representative of the difference suggested by racialized difference. However, at times it was used euphemistically to discuss "race". Culture, even though it was defined as a way of living shared among a group, was sometimes used to avoid a discussion of "race". However, a distinction between the use of heritage and culture as euphemisms for "race" by participants in this research is important. Heritage was used for racialized difference that participants were comfortable with, whereas culture was used to discuss racialized topics that participants were less comfortable with. While this was not done in a way that implied "race" to be a determinant of heritage and culture, or vice versa, it risked obscuring the historical and present day conditions that led to a certain demographic category of children to be available for adoption internationally. Further, it risked unintentionally homogenizing heritage and culture among different groups identified as black, and denying the possibility that black adopted children may experience differential treatment or racism due to being visibly different within their communities.

Of particular concern in adoption of black children from the United States by white Canadian parents is that white adoptive parents may lack the coping skills and experiential knowledge of racial discrimination needed to adequately prepare their

children for life as a visible minority (Hansen and Pollack 2007: 42; National Association of Black Social Workers 1972; Silverman 1993: 110; Simon and Roorda 2000: 7, 12). In the case of transracial and transnational adoption where belonging and difference are concerns, this presents a challenge to white adoptive parents who likely have not experienced racism firsthand, and who have limited or no substantial firsthand experience with their adopted children's heritage.

In addressing a lack of first-hand experience or involvement with heritage or racism, adoptive parents are encouraged not only to educate themselves about these topics, but also to become reflexive about their own positions as privileged. Namely, they become aware not only that their adopted children may experience discrimination based on visible difference from the norm in their communities, but also that as white Canadians who are able to adopt, they inadvertently are benefitting from social and racial privilege. The adoptive mothers who participated in my research acknowledge that their adoptive children's experience will differ from their own in many respects, while recognizing that their children's experience is as valid and as human as their own.

Reflexivity, "the capacity of any system of signification, including a human being -- an anthropologist -- to turn back upon or to mirror itself" (Robertson 2002: 785), is commonly used in anthropological fieldwork to define the relationship between ethnographer and informant/participant. In terms of the participants in this study, many described their position as adoptive mothers as one requiring reflexivity. This same reflexivity was encouraged throughout the literature and workshops provided by AFABC. Reflexivity then requires recognition of an individual's subjectivity; the individual's understanding of themselves as human influenced by historical and cultural factors

interacting with the individual's personality, which in turn is related to the notion of intersubjectivity; the understanding that multiple subjects exist, and therefore, so do multiple subjectivities.

Subjects can be animate (human beings) or inanimate (legal structures, ideologies), and may even posses multiple subject positions (subjectivities) at a given time (Jackson 1998: 7). Intersubjectivity is an individual's subjectivity in relationship to any and all subjectivities that surround and influence them. In recognizing multiple subjectivities the realization is that one human subject cannot completely understand, nor inhabit the position of another subject. However, the relationship between subjectivities, subjects and the creation of identity can be understood through intersubjectivity as mutually arising, relational, and variable (Jackson 1998: 7).

Mothers who adopt both transracially and transnationally operate as mediators within as series of overlapping, and at times challenging[58] subjects, in the form of fields of consciousness, or as sets of assumptions (Jackson 1998: 8). This includes the macro-level politics of racialization, class, citizenship, transnationalism, and international law, as well as the more localized, micro-level politics of community involvement, community association, identity, and parenting itself. In my research, I found that they were aware not only of the negative effects that racism, racialization, and discrimination have, they also possess an awareness of the global conditions of disparity and privilege that make such adoptions possible. Ideally, the purpose of parents partaking in AFABC

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[58] By challenging, I am referring to the challenge that parents' often face when learning to identify and accept that they are able to adopt because they exist in a position of privilege.

workshops and support networks is to be in a unique position of knowing that they do not know.[59] This means accepting that regardless of their best intentions and efforts, white adoptive parents in Canada will not experience the type of discrimination that their adopted children will, despite living in the same community, the same household, or possessing the reflexivity to recognize their own privilege.

Creating belonging by becoming different

There are many avenues through which adoptive mothers work to seek and create a sense of belonging and heritage for their adopted children. Due to the shared nature of this identity, and its interaction with multiple subjects, environmental factors and ideologies, I view these acts as intersubjective poetics - a seeking or creation of meaning in daily life. Adoptive mothers, using an array of readily available materials recreate their communities, in the process creating their cultural world (Willis 2000: xiv), however, they do so with an intersubjective view; they work to create a cultural world which incorporates their adopted children while recognizing and acknowledging their difference as transracially and transnationally adopted children. This making, or remaking, of their cultural world involves not just individuals and families, but also formalized organizations (AFABC and *Akoma*), supported by government institutions (BC Ministry of Children and Family Development).

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[59] Colloquialism: To know that you do not know is the best.
To pretend to know when you do not know is a disease. Lao-tzu, *The Way of Lao-tzu*
Chinese philosopher (604 BC - 531 BC)

Oftentimes, the efforts adoptive mothers devote to creating a sense of belonging and a sense of heritage for their adoptive children becomes as much about creating a positive multi-racial/cultural/ethnic identity for their family, and a positive parental identity for themselves. These efforts are spread over many different social contexts, and as such represent a series of different subjectivities in mothers, their families, and their adoptive children.

In my fieldwork, I found these efforts to be divided into three often overlapping spheres: *personal identity*, understood as promoting a positive personal identity for adoptive children on behalf of the adoptive mother or parent(s); *family identity*, which involves the creation of an adoptive or multi-racial/cultural/ethnic family identity; and *community identity*, involving the intentional creation of support groups, seeking of mentors, or association with other adoptive families and members of the same visible minority as their adopted children. These exact categories were not used in the workshops, nor were they explicit in the interviews and participant observation I conducted with participants. However, in subsequent discussion participants agreed that these categories made sense to them.

Personal identity; paradoxical narratives and shared bodies

> Perhaps no reflective parent can avoid creating phantom lives for their adoptive child, but they can also be aware of both the plurality and the fictionality of those stories and can accept that their child will invent entirely different and utterly personal fictions of their own, fictions essential to identity.
>
> Honig 2005: 220

> For the mother has to see the child as not only an extension of herself but also an extension of the world, and that she visualizes through specific concepts that link the child to this world.
>
> Strathern 2005: 6

Although creating a sense of belonging while promoting an adopted child's heritage were identified in international convention and adoption group literature as a child's right and as integral to successful adoptive parenting, my research focused on the strategies adoptive parents, particularly mothers, employ to do so. In terms of creating a personal identity for their adoptive children, and for themselves as adoptive mothers, mothers made use of two strategies. The first being creating a narrative that explicitly addresses themes of belonging and heritage, and the second being implicit, perhaps in some cases subconscious, acts of showing belonging through what Marilyn Strathern terms a "shared body" (2005:5).

Throughout the formal adoption workshops, the facilitators recommended adoptive parents create an adoption story for their children, using adoptive parents' recollections of bringing their adoptive child home, and through sharing details of their child's birth family and heritage. Common themes on an interpersonal level included narratives about searching for the adopted child, bringing the child home, and completing a family. Additionally, adoptive parents were encouraged to prepare photographs, letters, and other records of their child's birth mother to share with them, and give them a sense of personal identity. On a larger scale, adoptive parents were encouraged to include references to a child's heritage, which makes this act of storytelling an attempt to create belonging while maintaining connections to a child's birth country/community.

Narratives that suit the paradoxical purpose of creating belonging and recognizing difference, while essential to notions of individual identity also influence and are influenced by efforts to create family and community identities. While the narratives of belonging are largely personal and familial, the aspects of identity creation that address heritage are largely familial and community based. The intentional creation of narratives as a part of identity, and the multiple sources of influence that bear on this indicate that even when the focus is on an individual, identity is "mutually-arising" (Jackson 1998: 7). This mutually arising formation of identity is especially prominent when identity creation is also intentional, or self-conscious. This creation of identity, and meaning through identity suggests that these acts are a form of poetics.

* * *

Strathern identifies a child's two bodies, namely the physical body of the child, but also the body representing the parent's (must often the mother's) knowledge. Although adoptive parents and their children do not share the same "blood", they share a body with their children in two senses. One example if this is learning to style and care for their children's hair, in doing so adoptive mothers are able to create a physical bond in one sense. With specific reference to the research presented here, their efforts to connect with their child can be viewed in a tangible manner. This is connected to the second sense in which a parent and child share a body, that of devotion (or neglect) and the application of parental knowledge and values (Strathern 2005: 5). This concept of the body as shared and as symbolic suggest that the body serves as a form of intersubjectivity between child and parent, but also one which is implicated socially.

I argue that the second manner in which parents and children share a body is especially important to adoptive parents whose children may be viewed as different in a racialized context. A great deal of advice is given to prospective adoptive parents regarding how to react to the increased visibility their family may experience after becoming mixed (McCreight 2002: 90-91, 94). In wording this advice, the recommended literature reinforces the fact that it is not just adoption or appearance that is difference, but rather that "Transracial adoption means that your family becomes 'public' because your differences are readily apparent to others" (Hall and Steinberg 2005: 29). In this sense, the actions that create a sense of pride and identity in children (a stronger bond between parent and child) also serve as a reflection of the mother's identity, and her status as a good mother, to different publics. Therefore, a child's personal identity is not only tied to their family's identity, but socially is an indication of their family (particularly their mother's) identity.

Family identity

> We engage others in the processes of our own becoming.
>
> Toren 2002: 189

> Kinship organization, in the same way, was much more than just 'social structure,' a stable architectural framework through which generations passed. It was also a form of poetics, … a web of deep-seated longings.
>
> Trawick 1990: 7

As the child's body can represent both child and their parent's knowledge, photography, a representation in itself, is often employed to promote a multi-racial/cultural/ethnic family

identity. Participants frequently used visual or symbolic markers of family. As with the mother who stressed the importance of her daughter seeing "*herself and another black woman in the mirror*", the importance of the family (as well as any guests of the family) seeing themselves depicted in photographs as a multi-racial/cultural/ethnic family is considered to be of the utmost importance. The underlying principle of these actions was that visibility leads to authenticity, which in turn leads to acceptance. Howell made note of this in her research on families who have adopted internationally in Scandinavia. She identified these acts as a form of "self-conscious kinship" (2006: 38).

Throughout the adoption process, many families choose to refer not only to the adoption as on that is multi-racial/cultural/ethnic, but also to their family itself as being multi-racial/cultural/ethnic. Rayna Rapp referred to this finding as an effort to "familialize difference" (2008).[60] Adoptive parents understand their efforts as including their whole family, rather than as directed simply at adopted children. This serves to create multiple connections within the family, and is indicative of "kinning" by bringing the child "into a significant and permanent relationship with a group of people that is expressed in a kin idiom" (Strathern 2006: 63).

However, I feel that the mothers who partook in this project have taken this further; rather than ascribing a familial identity onto the adopted child, they have accepted an identity as an adoptive family, and as a family that includes the heritage of the adopted child. This family identity is reinforced through incorporating the adopted child's heritage into the family's culture, often expressed through the narratives that parents create about adopting their child. These narratives express the desire that adoptive

[60] Rayna Rapp made this statement as a discussant at the American Anthropological Association Annual General Meeting in San Francisco, November 22, 2008 in response to my presentation, Adopting Race to Foster Multiculturalism; Crisis of Identity in the Mosaic Family.

parents had for a child, indicating the emotional and psychological value that children have for their adoptive parents. The emotional and psychological value of children, combined with the incorporation of adopted children and their heritage into the families suggests as strong reimagining and recreation of family identity. Under this practice, adopted children not only learn to become a part of an adoptive family. Rather the family learns to become mixed, often identifying as a multi-racial or multi-cultural family.

Community identity

In a country that is officially defined as multi-cultural or a "cultural mosaic" (Chao and Moon 2005: 1128),[61] participants admitted to having personally witnessed discrimination, and to their children being subject to uncomfortable, or at times negative attention based on difference in the greater community. While there are many forms of difference between family members of all types, whether by birth, marriage or through adoption, the visible difference between adopted children and their parents highlighted existing differences in the eyes of their communities. As a result, adoptive parents employ two approaches to creating a community identity. The most common being intentional or self-

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[61] "**cultural mosaic** is presented as a framework to identify demographic, geographic, and associative features underlying culture. An individual's unique collage of multiple cultural identities yields a complex picture of the cultural influences on that person. Developments in chaos and complexity theories are proposed as a theoretical base for study on the complexity of culture at the individual level. Additional developments in network theory serve as a theoretical base for cultural research at the group level. The **cultural mosaic** is described as a complex system with localized structures, linking cultural tiles in ordered and chaotic ways. Research propositions examining multiple cultural identities at individual and group levels are discussed" (Chao and Moon 2005: 1128).

conscious association with other transracial or transnational families, mentoring and play groups, such as *Akoma*.

Throughout the AFABC workshops adoptive parents were encouraged to foster a varied, multicultural social network. This was highlighted in group activities and through guest speakers who spoke about their experiences as adoptive parents and children. The participants in my interviews described a number of ways in which they worked to create a community for themselves and their families. Often they began with more formalized social contexts, such as dance classes, cooking classes, church groups and *Akoma*, and moved to more individualized one on one contact with individuals who they felt they had a rapport with. In these cases, the social connections became friendships and moved beyond an intentional approach or one that was similar to cultural tourism. This made a varied support network a "natural", or even invisible part of daily life.

Visibility and invisibility play complimentary roles when considering the mandate of *Akoma*. In these circumstances a form of invisibility is employed to create an environment where "they don't have to explain who they are or why their family looks different". This group is another form of mediation in that it makes relationship visible, and makes difference (or rather, the negative connotations of difference) invisible. As mediators, parents in these groups are filtering and amplifying various forms of visibility. Through the creation of these groups, the importance of visibility in regard to racialized acceptance and integration gains prominence. While the group is for families that include members of "African/Black/Caribbean heritage", suggesting a variety of birthplaces and cultures, the common factor among these divergent groups is that of "race", or the "unblinkable difference" (Swize 1993).

Self-conscious communities, unconscious euphemism

While *Akoma* caters to children who have diverse backgrounds, they are grouped together based on racialized difference, or rather, being identified as different from the norm but similar to one another due to visible markers of "race". Rather than being an indication of under-differentiation, or a case of essentializing "race", this group operate for two connected purposes. Although the children in this group do not share a common geographic birthplace, or a common heritage, they do have a shared experience in a community where they are marked as different. For this reason, a group where adoptive children and adoptive families are not "the other" is beneficial, not only because it provides a more neutral space for them, but because through contact with adults and other children who have this shared experience they can access "cultural funds of knowledge" or "tool kits" (Majors 2004; 167) that may otherwise be unavailable to them.

In my findings I noted that in my interviews and during participant observation participants would use the terms "race" and heritage or culture interchangeably. While Howell notes that culture was used euphemistically to mean "race" in her research, I found the relationship between "race" and culture to be fairly complex among the mothers interviewed. In beginning my research, I realized that *Akoma* was a support group based around racialized difference, as opposed to heritage or birthplace. From a practical point of view, participants presented support to the idea that perceptions of "race" present a greater barrier to inclusion than birthplace, suggesting that "race" remains the "unblinkable difference". However, while "race" and perceptions of difference were listed as a highly visible marker of difference, participants in my research rarely openly mentioned "race".

However, this is not to say that "race" was not a factor in mothers' efforts to create a sense belonging and reflect heritage for the adopted children. Assumptions about "race" had an impact on how AFABC facilitators recommended incorporating children, and interview responses. Often, when discussing "race" outside of a designated "race conversation", participants would use the terms culture, descent, or heritage as euphemisms.

The very term "race" took on the negative connotations of racism, racialization, and race-based discrimination, and was nearly never used unless an individual was speaking against racism, racialization, or "race"-based discrimination. Even in the advertisement for *Akoma*, the term "race" is not used; instead the advertisement mentions "adults of African/Black/Caribbean *heritage* [italics my own]", "visible minority", and "transracial adoptive parents". While the backgrounds of the adoptive children attending the mentoring group are diverse, they share a common distinction of being considered visibly different, and therefore, a need for support in communities where they are a visible minority.

While Howell suggests that her participants use the term culture as a euphemism for "race", my findings indicate that participants use "race", heritage, and culture as euphemisms for difference. While "race" and culture are defined in the recommended reading for prospective adoptive parents, in conversation both can be used to mean difference. Due to the negative connotations attached to the word "race" the term culture, or sometimes heritage' and descent, is used in its place; however, participants did not equate culture with genetic variation ("race") or as an inborn quality.

Some additional blurring of the use of culture and "race" can be tied to mothers' opinions of American culture. This influences their strategies for creating belonging and recognizing heritage, with many mothers admitting that they did not initially put much emphasis on American culture. This stems from beliefs that Canadians are exposed to American culture on a daily, and perhaps intrusive, basis; and that American culture is based on discrimination towards black people throughout its history. Both assumptions indicate under-differentiation in the assumption that American culture is uniformly white American culture. The result of these assumptions were that participants were often surprised when their adopted children expressed an interest in learning more about American history, and searching out more details on American heritage. Although racialized difference presents a greater barrier to incorporation due to its higher visibility, heritage and recognition of an adoptive child's birthplace appear to be equally important in creating a positive identity for adopted children.

My role: filtered presence, amplified prospects

Mothers worked to create complex and multi-layered personal identities, family identities, and communities to support their adoptive children and themselves. In doing so, they create and fill roles needed to do so. By seeking out other adoptive families, professionals who share "difference" with their children, and mediators who can provide their children with knowledge they may not possess themselves (although they possess an awareness that they do not know) participants have constructed identities for themselves and all who have contact with their children.

As mediators, mothers in this research also served to construct my identity as a researcher. Through their filtering, they came to view me as a prospective adoptive parent, rather than a researcher. This served to give me a legitimate role, beyond the somewhat clinical description of researcher, but also put me in the category of someone safe to talk to. As a prospective-parent my interest could be explained and understood. Additionally, by ascribing me this role, participants could understand how they were to answer my questions. Their approach was that of more experienced adoptive parents advising someone interested in similar adoption. While some did include examples from their and their children's experience, most kept their children's personal details private.

Suggestions for future research

Over the course of conducting and analyzing research in this area many additional questions and avenues of research outside of this project's scope have emerged. I looked specifically at adoptions of black children form the United States by white parents in Canada. The category of black is based on demographic, rather than social categorization. For example, recent immigrants to the United States from Ethiopia are considered to be equally black as African-Americans who may be of mixed black, white, indigenous, and other backgrounds and who may trace their ancestral history in North America before Confederation. However, while this category did not differentiate between geographic location, background, or community association, black children are specifically placed for adoption outside of the United States, and are specifically sought by parents hoping to adopt.

Participants were highly specified by virtue of being, to some degree, self-selecting. Because I followed a formalized path of socialization of adoptive parents, participants ended up being those parents, specifically mothers, who not only adopted from a specific demographic background, but also who remain involved with prescribed support groups. This meant that my research did not include adoptive parents who did not remain involved with support groups following the finalization of their adoptions, meaning that my study is not claiming to be representative of a larger group. Rather, it is a qualitative study of a formalized process of educating prospective-adoptive parents that becomes a support network for adoptive parents and their families. In studying this process, fieldwork, and interviews especially, are only a part of my total research. Further, this research highlights adoptive mothers' efforts and understanding of difference and belonging. Although participants were aware that they did not speak for their adopted children, this study cannot be considered inclusive of the views of adopted children.

However, despite the limitations of this research, future research connected to the themes and conclusions I identified in this thesis was suggested. Recommendations for future research in this area would be:

1. to include the views and opinions of adopted children;
2. to include the views and opinions of adoptive parents who did not follow the formalized support structures following adoption finalization;
3. to include adoptive parents and children from other demographic categories.
4. birth mothers who placed their children for adoption
5. other racialized categories.

In sum, although demographic category, rather than a social category determines to some degree which children are available for adoption, a more nuanced understanding of racialized difference and multiculturalism in Canada could be gained by broadening future research.

Conclusion

In an effort to address this disconnection between their own experience and the experience of their children, adoptive parents accept their privilege and accept that they cannot know what their children experience as a visible minority. However, they can believe their children's experience, and sympathize with them while understanding that they may not be able to empathize. Intersubjectivity, the idea that "shared cognition and consensus is essential in the shaping of our ideas and relations", has specific importance regarding adoptive parents. This importance can be found in their efforts to create personal, familial, and community identities for themselves and their adopted children.

Due to the self conscious nature of this kinship, one framed by discourses of difference, disparity, and legitimacy, adoptive parents in my research serve not only as mediators in their children's intersubjectivity, but as highly reflexive mediators who must filter and amplify the series of cultural signs involved in this complex framework. Despite the efforts employed by adoptive parents to educate themselves about the overlapping and challenging discourses and to recognize their own privilege, they remain in a position of knowing that they do not, cannot, and will not know their children's experience. While this is true to some degree of all people, the adoptive parents who participated in my research are subject to an additional separation from their children's experience due to their children being a visible minority within their communities. As a result, not only are they unable to experience life as their children do, but they cannot offer their own experience, nor fully empathize with their children's experience.

Additionally, parents can work to share their children's experience through sharing their children's story with their children, styling their hair, creating a family identity as multiracial/cultural, and creating a community that includes people who have a similar experience (including members of a visible minority and other adoptive families). By creating such communities it becomes possible for cultural stores of knowledge to be accessed and shared. Most importantly, and most prominently, adoptive parents respond to visible difference by creating belonging through recognizing difference. In other words, they incorporate difference into their lives, and create identities as members of multi-racial and multi-cultural families. To do so they take a position as reflexive mediators in their children's intersubjectivity.

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