

Trans-racial Adoption - A Study of Race, Identity and Policy

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Thesis Summary

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Adoption policy requires that the child's welfare needs must be considered as the priority, and in light of the surplus of available "white" adopters and shortage of "black" adopters, calls for 'trans-racial' adoption to be seriously considered. However, despite their lack of empirical evidence, it is the essentialised and political arguments of the opposers of 'trans-racial' adoption that dominate adoption practice.

This thesis addresses the contradictory and inconclusive research on 'trans-racial' adoption, by providing a firm sociological understanding of racial identity development theory as applied to the 'trans-racial' adoption debate. It shows that the 'trans-racial' adoptees were constantly aware of their racialised differences, and although most perceptions of difference were negative because the adoptees felt alone and saw it as a constant reminder of them not being a 'real' member of that family, some of the adoptees perceived these differences positively. This is significant because it tells us such differences are able to contribute to the adoptee considering themselves to be confident, have high self-esteem and a positive perception of self. Another key finding is that race and the racialised differences brought about by the 'mixed heritage' aspects of the adoption, are significant factors in the adoptees' searches for their birth heritage. Another finding is the adoptees' possession of a 'trans-racial' identity, and how this is a racialised identity that consists of being neither "black" or "white", but "mixed". The thesis argues for the recognition of the valuable insight that the current population of 'trans-racial' adoptees can offer policy debates, and hence calls for their consultation. It also illustrates the value of the life (hi)story approach, in particular the oral life (hi)story interview as a method of data collection when studying the racial identity development of 'trans-racial' adoptees.

The thesis concludes that the racial identity development of 'trans-racial' adoptees is far more complex than existing debates acknowledge. It is something that is socially constructed in an ongoing process, where it is open to modification and negotiation. As such, the thesis is contrary to the idea that individuals need to develop a "black" identity in order to have a positive and healthy sense of self.

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Terminology

Race

The terms race, racial and racialised are usually used in ‘inverted commas’ to demonstrate that they are disputed and socially constructed. However, because the whole thesis discusses this, I did not find it necessary to use the terms in inverted commas throughout the thesis.

My use of terminology corresponds to that currently used by social scientists. Many of these terms are contentious and problematic, and so have been used in ‘inverted commas’ to highlight their problematic status and the ongoing search for a preferable alternative. In particular though, some terms have been reluctantly repeated. Where this is the case, they are used in “quotation marks”. At times, an appropriate note is also provided.

The following provides an outline of the terms used in this thesis:

- The term ‘*trans-racial*’ is used to refer to all those who have been adopted across racial groups.
- The terms ‘*same-race*’ and ‘*in-racial*’ are used to refer to those placed within their own racial group.
- I have used ‘*black African-Caribbean*’ to specifically represent those with recent origins in the Caribbean and/or Africa.
- The terms “*white*” and ‘*white European*’ are used to refer to individuals of recent European descent.
- The term “*mixed race*” is used to refer to individuals whose biological parents are of two different racial backgrounds. In most cases, this refers to one ‘black African-Caribbean’ parent and one ‘white European’ parent.
- The terms “*minority ethnic origin*” and “*black*” are used to refer to those with no recent ‘white European’ origins.
- In referring to people with recent origins in any of the Asian countries and regions, *Asian* is used. At times, *Korean* is used to specifically refer those with recent origins in Korea. When referring to those born in Korea, it is largely the case that these groups are seen as “non-white”. This is reflected in this thesis.

- The term *heritage* is used to refer to an individual's family, culture and racial group. Although these can be seen as collectively common to the make-up of what is referred to as the adoptees' birth heritage, they are not always discussed by this study's adoptees as being so. Therefore where necessary, distinctions are made as to the precise nature of their reference. For example, whether the adoptee is specifically talking about birth family, birth culture or birth racial origin.

When using the term "black", capital letters are often used to signify its status as a political identity. However, in this thesis none of these colour terms are used with a capital letter, except when quoting others. This is because they refer to a varied set of identities and experiences, not just political ones.

The Adoptees

To protect the privacy of the adoptees names are replaced by pseudonyms. These pseudonyms attempt to represent as accurately as possible any cultural or heritage significances of the real names.

When describing the lives and experiences of the adoptees, the language used is carefully selected as to prevent perpetuating the aura of negativity in which they are sometimes used. For example, the terms *birth* or *biological parents* are used in place of *real* or *natural parents*.

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Last, but not least, my deepest thanks and respect goes to all the adoptees who participated in this study. I hope this thesis has done justice to your experiences.

Chapter 1

Introduction and literature review

(1.1) Introduction to the research: ‘trans-racial’ adoption - a study of race, identity and policy

For a variety of reasons, many children cannot be raised by their birth families. This means that many of these children often find themselves in temporary care, whilst waiting to be placed with a permanent alternative family (via adoption or long term fostering). The importance of seeking permanent placements and avoiding long term temporary care is widely recognised as being an urgent necessity, largely because of the perceived problematic effects of long-term temporary care. For example, it is argued that after a life in care “young people in their teens are particularly vulnerable” and in particular report feeling lonely, a lack of support, lack of housing, confusion about their past, and a lack of skills (Marsh, 1999:69). It is clearly vital therefore that permanent care should be secured for these children as soon as possible.

There is a clear and worrying over-representation of “black”¹ (including “mixed race”²) children in care (Ahmad, 1989; Barn, 1993; Frost and Stein, 1989). However, due to the lack of a national data collation of the racial and ethnic background of children in care, it is impossible to give any exact figures³. The adoption of these children by parents of a different race is like any race-related issue, a contentious and controversial area of debate. Within Britain, recent estimates show that the ‘trans-racial’ adoption of “black” (including “mixed race”) children by “white”⁴ adopters is

¹ As outlined in the terminology section, “black” is used to refer to those with no recent ‘white European’ origins. The term is reluctantly repeated in this thesis, and is therefore used in quotation marks.

² As outlined in the terminology section, “mixed race” is used to refer to individuals whose biological parents are of two different racial backgrounds. The term is reluctantly repeated in this thesis, and is therefore used in quotation marks.

³ The Department of Health in 2000 recognised this problem and outlined intentions to start recording and collecting data on “black” and “ethnic minority” service users (Department of Health, 2000c).

⁴ As outlined in the terminology section, “white” is used to refer to individuals of recent European descent. The term is reluctantly repeated in this thesis, and is therefore used in quotation marks.

estimated as representing more than half of all adoptions (Social Services Inspectorate, 1997). This type of 'trans-racial' adoption has particularly attracted a lot of attention by those who either view it as a viable option, or by others who contest it.

Those supporting the 'trans-racial' adoption of "black" children by "white" parents have provided evidence and theoretical arguments to suggest that it does not harm or lead to identity problems for the "black" adoptee. Such support has also been reflected in adoption policy and guidelines. For example, 'Adoption: Achieving the Right Balance' (Department of Health, 1998), The Prime Minister's Review of Adoption' (Department of Health, 2000a), and the '2002 Adoption and Children Act' all note that although consideration needs to take account of all the child's needs, i.e. in terms of knowledge of history, culture and language, these factors should not be regarded as the decisive ones. This is because the child's welfare needs must be the paramount consideration. This means that if exact matches cannot be identified, then efforts to find alternatives should be made.

However, it is the arguments of the anti-'trans-racial' adoption camp with their calls for the practice to be stopped, which continue to dominate actual adoption practice. Although providing some evidence in support of their claims, the opposing camp's call to stop 'trans-racial' adoption have largely been conjecture and underwritten by the argument that "black" children suffer serious identity problems as a result of having been raised in a "white" home, usually away from any "black" culture or social network.

The lack of sufficiently detailed or in-depth research into 'trans-racial' adoption and identity development, means that "the agenda of debate was set by other priorities than discovering what was actually happening in the hearts and minds of those intimately involved" (Cohen, 1994:60). The little research that does exist on the topic is contradictory and inconclusive. Its empirical evidence is problematic and open to interpretation, as the literature review will show. Its theoretical arguments are based more on a political perspective and conjecture rather than a firm sociological understanding. The consequence of this means that there are disparities across Britain in terms of how social work agencies balance the child's welfare needs and the perceived need to be placed with a family of similar racial background.

This thesis seeks to redress this inconsistency by critically examining from a sociological position, the ways in which racial identity development theory has been applied to the 'trans-racial' adoption debate. It also looks at the problematic nature of the presented empirical evidence, and the inadequacies of the research methods previously used to understand the lives of those who have been 'trans-racially' adopted. In doing so, the thesis supports the idea of a changing identity, such as that described by Jenkins:

“identity is not just there, it must be always be established... (and) can only be understood as a process of 'being' or 'becoming' ...it is never a final or settled matter” (Jenkins, 1996:4).

This thesis is based on a research study carried out between the period of 2000 to 2003. However, this thesis does not seek to provide a definite answer to the question of whether 'trans-racial' adoption should be practiced. Rather the intention is to provide findings that would challenge the essentialist and politically based arguments used in the 'trans-racial' adoption debate, as well as inform the wider discussions on racial identity development.

In examining the essentialist ideas about a fixed “black” identity, this thesis does not seek to undermine or rubbish the work of “black” social workers that have worked so hard and come so far to gain positions which allow them to deliver appropriate welfare provision for “black” and “ethnic minority” people. Indeed, this researcher recognises the importance of the role that such welfare workers make⁵, and the significance of “a ‘black professionalism’ beginning to replace a ‘white professionalism’” (Frost and Stein, 1989:106). Rather, this thesis argues that an updated rethink of the “black” identity is required if to represent the lives and experiences of a growing population of individuals who do not wholly identify themselves as either “black” or “white”.

⁵ See the researcher’s other work, for example, Wright, Standen, John, German and Patel, (forthcoming).

Aims and research questions of the study

In seeking to conceptualise a 'trans-racial' identity, this study has three broad aims. The first is to examine the racial identity development of 'trans-racial' adoptees. The second aim is to consider the influence of research on adoption policy. The third aim is to assess the usefulness of the life (hi)story approach in investigating the lives of 'trans-racial' adoptees.

From these aims three research questions emerged. These are:

- (1) What constitutes a 'trans-racial' identity?
- (2) What are the limitations of the existing research, particularly for adoption policy debates?
- (3) What type of research approach and method is best suited to studying 'trans-racial' adoption?

In answering these research questions, this study had a number of objectives. These were to look at the following areas:

- (i) The role of race in the adoptees' lives
- (ii) The adoptees' social relations within society
- (iii) The social relationships adoptees negotiate with their adoptive family and their birth family
- (iv) The adoption policy and legislation
- (v) The levels of adherence to adoption policy and legislation by social work practitioners
- (vi) The empirical evidence presented to support arguments for and against 'trans-racial' adoption
- (vii) The limitations of the empirical evidence
- (viii) The research methods commonly used to study 'trans-racial' adoption and racial identity
- (ix) The limitations of these research methods
- (x) The appropriateness of the life (hi)story approach to studying the lives of 'trans-racial' adoptees

Thesis structure

The remainder of this Chapter critically discusses the theoretical debates and the empirical evidence that have been used in the ‘trans-racial’ adoption debate. In highlighting the problems of these theoretical arguments and empirical evidence, a sociological understanding of the social construction of race and identity development is presented. The tense relationship between adoption policy and adoption practice is also discussed.

Chapters 2 and 3 go on to discuss the methodological issues involved in this study and the research process undertaken in the investigation. Chapter 2 considers the value of the life (hi)story approach to studying this topic, including the interpretation problems involved in using oral life (hi)story interviews. Chapter 3 outlines the pilot study that was carried out, and how it informed on the re-design of the main study. The various issues involved in doing the main research are then given. These include gaining access, ethical issues, confidentiality and anonymity, informed consent, and the recording, transcribing and analysing of the data.

The next three Chapters present the results of the interviews with 6 adults who had been ‘trans-racially’ adopted as children. Chapter 4 presents the data on the ‘trans-racial’ adoption experience and the adoptive family. The impact that the ‘trans-racial’ experiences had on the adoptees’ racial identity development is examined. In doing so a number of areas are discussed. These are being ‘trans-racially’ adopted and feeling different; parents’ tactics for reducing difference; adoptees’ tactics for dealing with perceptions of difference; the families’ approach to racial background; difficulties in the adoptees’ lives; and, adoptees’ views about ‘trans-racial’ adoption. Chapter 5 provides an examination of the role that the adoptees’ birth heritage⁶ played in their self-identification. Here several areas are looked at. These are the adoptees’ knowledge of their birth heritage; search for birth heritage; experiences of birth heritage; and, views of their birth heritage. Chapter 6 looks at the adoptees’ negotiation and development of a ‘trans-racial’ identity. In doing so, a number of

⁶ As outlined in the terminology section, *heritage* is largely used to refer to an individual’s family, culture and racial group. However, where necessary distinctions are made between the three components.

areas are explored in greater detail. These are the adoptees' understanding of their racialised identity; the existence of a "black"- "white" continuum; adoptees' experiences of having a positive or problematic racialised identity; and adoptees' national identities.

In concluding the thesis, Chapter 7 brings together the 5 key findings and arguments of the research. In doing so, it outlines the current context of the debate in terms of the adoptees' experiences. It also re-examines the literature in light of the adoptees' experiences. The future of adoption policy and practice is considered. The Chapter closes by reflecting upon the chosen research design and methodology.

(1.2) A review of the literature: introduction

The bulk of the literature on the 'trans-racial' adoption of "black" and "mixed race" children by "white" families has emerged from Britain and America. Although the two nations have different histories, their debates are based on the same arguments. Both have also produced informative and useful research. For this reason, although this research study focuses on the issues around 'trans-racial' adoption in Britain, at various times it will also draw upon the American literature.

There are several aspects to the 'trans-racial' adoption debate, which separates it from any straightforward adoption debate. These are obviously based upon the racialised differences between the "black" adoptee and their "white" adopters. Firstly, there is the question of whether it leads to the adoptee suffering from identity development problems. Not only because of the obviousness of the adoption, but more so because of the so-called essence of these racialised differences. The second issue follows on from this to question whether it then leads to the adoptee not being able to develop a positive and healthy identity, in particular a positive and healthy "black" identity. The third issue relates to this last point. It questions whether the adoptee will be able to survive in what is essentially seen as racist society in which "black" skin has very little value.

These questions primarily shape the debate about 'trans-racial' adoption, and have been the focus of most of the literature and research on the topic. Hence there have

been numerous studies and accounts given as to whether “white” families have the ability to teach “black” children how to develop a positive “black” identity. Here it is argued that only survivors of racism can teach the coping strategies that are required to tackle the racial discrimination that all “black” people will face at some time in their lives, and that this is done by them being able to pass on information about the “black” history of oppression, struggle and racism, and provide experience of the “black” culture.

Within this racial identity debate, there exists a clear division in opinion. First, there are those who oppose ‘trans-racial’ adoption by arguing that it leads to serious identity development problems for the adoptee who has been denied their “blackness”. Secondly, there are others who support the practice of ‘trans-racial’ adoption by arguing that “white” parents are capable of teaching “black” issues. They also argue that because there are so many “white” prospective adopters compared to “black” ones, they are able to meet the child’s welfare needs i.e. by securing a stable and permanent home sooner rather than later.

A closer examination of the literature surrounding these debates will now be provided.

(1.3) Adoption

Adoption is defined as “a process by which the legal relationship between a child and his or her birth parents is severed and an analogous relationship between the child and the adoptive parents is established” (Department of Health, 1990, paragraph 2). It is difficult to give the precise time in history that the practice of adoption began. What is known, is that it has a long history and took a variety of official and unofficial forms. Many were usually kept secret, from both the immediate community and the adopted child themselves. This was largely due to the stigma surrounding adoption.

However, since the 1970s, there has been a significant change in Britain’s adoption patterns, namely a “sharp reduction...in the number of babies of unmarried mothers being given up” (Parker, 1999:1). Despite this, there still currently remains a significant number children in temporary institutional care, for example it is estimated

that “58,000 children are now looked after at any one time by councils in England” alone (Department of Health, 2000b:4). These children have been removed from their biological families either through co-operation or force, and seek the opportunity for a stable, secure and permanent family life, largely via adoption.

‘Trans-racial’ adoption

According to writers and scholars, and those in the social work profession ‘trans-racial’ adoption is the adoption of children by families who are of a different race to that of the child. For example, Simon and Alstein saw it as “the practice of placing infants and children into families who are of a different race than the children’s birth family” (Simon and Alstein, 1996:5). Although this can work either way, the most common form of ‘trans-racial’ adoption (and the type referred to here) is the adoption of “black” children, in particular those who are ‘black African-Caribbean’⁷, by ‘white European’⁸ families:

“transracial adoption is the adoption of black children by white families” (Turner and Taylor, 1996:262)

This definition has been widely accepted as the most accurate by the majority in the field (Bagley, 1993; Courtney, 1997; Gill and Jackson, 1983; Small, 1986).

The history of ‘trans-racial’ adoption in Britain is particularly difficult to trace. This is largely due to the lack of early official records about its frequency or pattern. What is known is that ‘trans-racial’ adoption grew in the mid-1960s and increased in the 1970s, due to a decrease in available “white” babies (Gill and Jackson, 1983:2-3).

In the 1980’s, the opposition to ‘trans-racial’ adoption by “black” groups increased dramatically. As a result of this increase, calls were made to stop the practice, by groups arguing that it was harming “black” childrens’ identity, whilst also depriving the “black” community of their children, and hence their legacy. Alongside such opposition, groups began to develop, which dedicated themselves to finding “black”

⁷ As outlined in the terminology section, ‘black African-Caribbean’ is used to specifically represent those with recent origins in the Caribbean and/or Africa. The term is problematic and used in inverted commas.

⁸ As outlined in the terminology section, ‘white European’ refers to individuals of recent European descent. The term is problematic and used in inverted commas.

families for “black” children, for example, ‘Black and in Care’ (1984) and ‘Islamic Fostering Service’ (2004). This was a response, which was also partially aimed at the claim that there were not enough “black” families coming forward to adopt these “black” children. For example, it is estimated that in Britain, “20 per cent of children with an ‘adoption plan’ are from black or minority ethnic backgrounds” and that “89 per cent of adopters are white couples” (Tizard and Phoenix, 2002:79). It is not surprising then to see ‘trans-racial’ adoption occurring on the following scale:

“in 1995, 24 per cent of the adoptions recorded by local authorities and 6 per cent of those reported by voluntary agencies were ‘transracial’ placements” (British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering, 1997, referred to in Tizard and Phoenix, 2002:81)

The adoption of “mixed race” children

In debates about the ‘trans-racial’ adoption of “black” children by “white” parents, “mixed race” children adopted by “white” parents, have largely been defined as “black”. In discussing his disapproval of the term “mixed race” and his preference for the term “mixed parentage”, it is argued that the vast majority of African-Caribbean people have some “white” ancestors somewhere in their genealogical history, and they only differ from today’s population of “mixed race” people in respect of what time that mixture occurred. Small then went on to argue that the inclusion of “mixed race” children under the term “black” is therefore necessary because today’s majority (“white”) society sees and discriminates against anyone who has “the slightest taint of black” (Small, 1986:92).

Of the six adoptees interviewed in this study, three were of “mixed race” (a “black” parent and a “white” parent). Another adoptee strongly suspected, although they could not say for certain, that they were also of “mixed race” (probably having a ‘black African-Caribbean’ parent and a ‘white European’ parent). However, this study recognises that the ‘trans-racial’ adoption experiences of “mixed race” children are likely to differ from those ‘trans-racial’ adoptees born to two “black” parents. This is because “mixed race” children are racialised differently and identify themselves differently. For example, a study by Tizard and Phoenix (2002) found that although young people of “mixed-parentage” recognised their “black” heritage, they

were reluctant to identify themselves as wholly “black” because to do so would ignore their “white” parent and heritage. The young people therefore emphasised their “mixed” identity. Similar findings were reported by Alibhai-Brown’s sample of “mixed race” people (2001). The young people in Tizard and Phoenix’s study went on to state that in viewing themselves as having a “mixed” identity meant that they saw themselves as another racialised group who were still subject to racism (Tizard and Phoenix, 2002:236).

Therefore, although the ‘trans-racial’ adoption of “mixed race” children and “black” children both involve a movement across racial boundaries, a distinction remains between them in terms of the types of boundaries that they are moved across. This means that although the ‘trans-racial’ adoption of “mixed race” children and “black” children is often discussed together in this thesis, there are times in the study where a distinction of the two is required. Where this is the case, a distinction and a separate discussion is given.

Intercountry adoption

Intercountry adoption is the practice of adopting a child from another country. Usually the main pattern of such adoption sees “the export of children from poor countries to rich ones” (Frost and Stein, 1989:106). There is no international law regulating adoption of this type, meaning that what happens between the two countries depends upon a ‘bilateral agreement’ (Triseliotis Shireman and Hundleby, 1997:197).

It is estimated that on a global scale, over 30,000 intercountry adoptions take place every year (Selman, 2001). Of this number, it is difficult to say how many Britain is responsible for taking-in. This is blamed on inaccurate statistics on official intercountry adoptions, and an inability to monitor unofficial ones. The Government’s Explanatory Notes for the ‘Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Act 1999’, claims that:

“there are currently over 300 adoptions each year of children from overseas by adopters living in the United Kingdom...there are approximately 100 other cases each year where people avoid the adoption procedures and bring children to the UK without approval”

(Department of Health,1999b, sections 4-5).

However, in his meticulous investigation of statistics, Selman demonstrated that “the number of intercountry adoptions is much higher than many recent estimates...and is now at its highest ever level in global terms” (Selman, 2001:18).

The debates around intercountry adoption share some similarities with those in the ‘trans-racial’ adoption debate. Bagley, Young and Scully outline these areas of controversy. Firstly, there is the view that intercountry adoption leads to identity problems for the children involved. This is because as well as having to adjust to a new (national) culture, it is predicted that they will face racial discrimination, marginalisation and identity conflicts as a result of the differences. The next criticism levelled against intercountry adoption is that it means the removal of “a potentially productive population who could assist in that country’s development” (Bagley, Young and Scully, 1992:172). The third view is that the money spent on intercountry adoption should instead be spent on helping to develop the sending country and assist its population. A fourth criticism levelled against the practice of intercountry adoption is that it leads to some cases of the stealing and kidnapping and selling of babies on the black market, or by profit-making agencies. A fifth view is that some sending countries may see intercountry adoption as a solution to the problem of ‘unwanted’ children as opposed to providing in-country help of family support.

This last charge has in particular “been levelled against Korea” (Bagley, Young and Scully, 1992:173). Korea has developed dramatically within the past 30 years. Yet despite this, it still has the reputation of being known as an orphan exporting country. This is largely because “Korea continues to be a sending country with one of the highest rates of intercountry adoption” (Selman, 2001:18). The ‘export’ of Korean babies in this way is still a lucrative business. For example, one estimate is that Korea is still sending an average of 6 orphans overseas each day (Hong, 1999). Another estimate is that since 1955, over 120,000 Korean born children have been placed for adoption in other countries (Selman, 2001).

There are several reasons as to the high number of Korean intercountry adoptees. To start with, in Korea, especially South Korea, the adoption business perpetuates itself,

because rather than simply addressing the discrimination against unwed mothers and orphans, intercountry adoption serves as a sort of safety valve for the social problems of unwed mothers and abandoned children (Rothschild, 1988; Selman, 2001). Additionally, Korean adoptees bring in a much-needed hard currency. This relieves the government of the costs of caring for the children, which would be a potentially high drain on the budget. It also helps with population control, an obsession of the Korean government (Rothschild, 1988). Another factor is that the Korean society's aspirations include being able to go abroad, or to send family members abroad to study, and to have a better life. The political situation of the country also increasingly endorses this view, which permeates the Korean personality. Therefore, in terms of intercountry adoption, the philosophy goes that 'the parent sends the child abroad because they love the child'.

Every year, Korea welcomes back only a few of the babies it has sent abroad for adoption since the end of the Korean War. However, returning as adults, the adoptees encounter a contradictory reception. They are met by a culture that continues to adopt out children, yet at the same time they are overcome with guilt for having sent the returning adoptees away and are enthusiastic to educate them about Korea. Some Koreans even urge these foreigners to become Korean - it is, after all, they say, their biological heritage. On the other hand, although Korean society has the view that biological links bind all Koreans, in a cultural context, it also views the raising of someone else's baby - even if Korean - as shameful and unacceptable (Baker, 1997). Since 1989 the Korean Ministry of Social Affairs outlined their plan to reduce the number of Korean born children sent out to other countries for adoption. However, in 1998 Korea's number of intercountry adoptions was "still above 2,000 a year and domestic adoptions below 1,500" (Selman, 2001:18).

The adoption of children born in the Seychelles also accounts for a large number of the total of intercountry adoptions. However, the available literature on children who are born in the Seychelles, and then placed for inter-country adoption is poor to say the least. This suggests that unlike Korea, who at least acknowledge and have begun to address their history of sending Korean born children abroad for adoption, the Seychelles continues to underplay its contribution to the global adoption market.

Although an intercountry adoption sees a movement across national boundaries, like ‘trans-racial’ adoption, it also involves a movement across racial boundaries. Therefore, features from the intercountry adoption literature is included in the study’s general discussion of ‘trans-racial’ adoption. However, it is recognised that there are times in the study where a distinction between the ‘trans-racial’ adoption and intercountry adoption is necessary. Where this is the case, the required distinction is duly made.

(1.4) Race: a sociological understanding

This study focuses on aspects of racial identity development. Although, many prefer the term *ethnicity* to race, a clear boundary can be drawn between the two. Namely, racial boundaries are primarily drawn on the basis of physical markers, as oppose to ethnic boundaries which are primarily drawn on the basis of cultural markers (Pilkington, 2003:27). And, although the two may overlap in some instances, debates about ‘trans-racial’ adoption and identity development continue to primarily focus on the racialised differences between the adoptee and the adopters. It is for this reason that a consideration of race is given, as oppose to a consideration of ethnicity.

Although all sociologists agree that race is something that is socially constructed as opposed to being naturally given, there is some dispute as to the status of the concept of race. Many see race as “a crude biological concept which is sociologically meaningless” (Rex quoted in Bagley, Young and Scully, 1992:71). It is argued that this is because the term “reflects and perpetuates the belief that the human species consists of separate races” and therefore “can deflect attention from cultural and religious aspects” of identity (Runnymede Trust, 2000:6). Hence many sociologists have rejected the term. To demonstrate this they have either highlighted its “contested character” by using it in inverted commas, or stopped using it altogether (Mason, 2000:8).

However, other sociologists point out how race “remains a legitimate concept for sociological analysis because social actors treat it as real and organise their lives and exclusionary practices by references to it” (Mason, 2000:7). Many sociologists, therefore take the view that although there are no such thing as races, “large numbers

of people behave as if there are” and it is this that sociology must examine (Mason, 2000:8).

The following is by no means an exhaustive discussion on race. The topic is far too broad for that to be possible here. It does however attempt to cover the most important areas that are relevant to this research study. This being the social construction of race, and the division of races into polarised “black” and “white” groups.

To appreciate the current sociological understanding around race, a brief discussion of the ‘race science’ and the lay use of the term is required.

By the mid nineteenth century, the discipline of ‘race science’ had emerged “which characterised human diversity as a division between fixed and separate races, rooted in biological difference and a product of divergent heritages” which then became linked to “a notion of hierarchy in which all differences, both of history and future potential, were seen as a product of biological variation” (Mason, 2000:6). Such understanding filtered through to the everyday common-sensical usage of the term, which created boundaries between groups of peoples and distinguished these groups on rather a crude biological basis of colour, where-by “white” equals good and pure, and “black” is associated with evil (Mason, 2000; Tizard and Phoenix, 2002). Such associations are still widely used, for example, with the phrase ‘the black sheep of the family’. These such negative connotations surrounding the term “black” continue to be associated with “having undesirable qualities which prompt others to adopt strategies of exclusion and avoidance” (Britton, 1999:134).

As a result of these ‘race science’ arguments and of the assumptions about race in everyday common-sensical society, race developed as a means for creating boundaries and hierarchies. These then became “a means for states to achieve their goals of domination exploitation and extermination” (Guillaumin, 1999:355). This was sharply questioned when the discipline of sociology began to recognise how race was a concept to which people were “assigned” and which was then used to ‘create’ groups of people who either suffered racial oppression or a privileged position in society (Ignatiev, 1995:1). Sociologists therefore became interested in this process of

racialisation - that is the social processes by which a population group is categorised as a race and the effects of this assigned label. In studying race and the process of racialisation, sociologists are concerned with examining the causes and consequences of the socially constructed division of population groups according to what has been referred to as their race - whether this is something that has been self-assigned or allocated by others.

This research study focuses particularly on the social construction of race and “blackness”. It uses the Social Constructionist perspective and in particular the Symbolic Interactionist theory to view race and “blackness” as labels that are socially constructed by an ongoing process between the (i) individual, (ii) the individual’s social contact with other individuals, (iii) how the individual thinks others perceive him/her, and (iv) the individual’s social environment. The study therefore rejects the idea that race and “blackness” are natural categories. Instead it supports the ideas of Britton, who in her study of collective racialized⁹ identities argued that:

“having a non-white skin colour does not indicate a related uniform experience specifically because, first skin colour accounts partially for processes of racialization and, second, defining oneself and being defined as black is always, to a certain extent negotiable...the common-sense prioritizing of skin colour as the key to explaining the racialized social world tends to disguise the complexity of processes of racialization”¹⁰ (Britton, 1999:152).

Sociological understanding of the construction of race and “blackness” has focused on the polarisation of “blackness” and “whiteness”. It has found that over time, the polarisation of race in this way has been justified through a variety of means. This includes references to religion, politics and the so-called ‘race science’. For example, Dyer discusses the polarisation of “blackness” and “whiteness” and how “non-white”¹¹ people “became seen as degenerative, falling away from the true nature of the (human) race” (Dyer, 1997:22). Dyer stated that these views were justified by

⁹ Britton’s use of the term sees the ‘s’ being replaced by a ‘z’. However, this modification does not alter its meaning.

¹⁰ Britton uses the term “non-white” here to “refer to any racialized group that does not fit the socially constructed norm of whiteness” (Britton, 1999:153).

¹¹ Dyer’s term.

references to religion. For example, Johan Boemus in 1521 proposed that all humans 'descended from the sons of Noah, these being Ham, Shem and Japeth, and argued that the descendents of Ham degenerated into "blackness", whereas those civilised descended from Shem and Japeth, and so remained "white" (Fredrickson in Dyer, 1997:22).

For sociologists however, "black" and "white" are socially constructed via a power relationship in society where being "white" equals privilege and superiority, and being "black" equals disadvantage and discrimination. They therefore can be seen as socio-political concepts in that their meanings and usage are based on ideas that are developed and maintained in social human interaction through dialectical and behavioural processes.

There has been sociological work, supported by actual psychological and scientific tests, which show that humans are not divided into biological races¹², and which also disprove dated ideas around the so-called problematic nature of "black" people, i.e. as having poor IQ levels, a proneness to violent behaviour, untrust-worthiness and sexual promiscuity. However, dated ideas continue to dominate and show themselves in a variety of discriminatory practices and attitudes. In suggesting reasons for this, many have pointed to intentional and unintentional racism and discriminatory practices (by both "black" and "white" groups), which mean that a power in-balance between "whiteness" and "blackness" (and indeed within each) continue to exist and perpetuate itself.

There are serious problems in the effects of the social construction of "blackness" and "whiteness" in this way. Firstly, because of the way in which "black" and "white" are held as distinct separates, which means that all those who do not want to or feel as if they wholly belong to one or the other, are then marginalized or deemed to have identity problems. For example, this is often the case for those people who are "mixed race" who are frequently marginalized or deemed as having psychological, emotional

¹² Tizard and Phoenix argue that "when genes have been mapped across the world it has been found that trends in skin colour are not accompanied by trends in other genes...85 per cent of genetic diversity comes from the differences between individuals of the same colour in the same country, for example, two randomly chosen white English people" (Tizard and Phoenix, 2002:2).

and social problems as a result of their supposed conflict between being raised between two distinctly different racial groups. Secondly, the polarisation means that there is unequal treatment of groups at the hands of another. For example, Owusu-Bempah and Howitt argue that “black” people continue to be seen as “flawed psychologically, morally and socially” (Owusu-Bempah and Howitt, 2000:95), not only as individual “black” people, but in terms of their cultures and family life, and indeed every aspect of their lives. This leads to the third problem of “white” being accepted as the norm against which everything is then measured against, although unable to be superior than it. As Dyer argues, “in other words, whites are not of a race, they’re just the human race” (Dyer, 1997:3). Here, the idea that “black” people have culture, and “white” people have civilisation is perpetuated and it is this perpetuation that needs to be challenged and changed (Khan in Ely and Denney, 1987:12).

Clearly, Dyer argues that we need to look at the construction of “whiteness”. However, I suggest that we also need to do so alongside or in parallel with an updated (re)consideration of the social construction of “blackness”. Therefore not only do we need to look at the construction of “whiteness” and “dislodge it from its centrality and authority” (Dyer, 1997:10), but we also need to question the politicised essentialist ideas around “blackness” that have dominated (and limited) debates. Hence, as well as this research study rejecting the idea that race and “blackness” are natural categories, the existing usage of the term “black” and the ideas around notions of “blackness”, within society, politics, sociology and so on, are also contested and re-examined.

Sociological discussions around the concept of “blackness” have seen some sociologists, such as Small using the term “black” to refer to a supposed “common experience of Afro-Caribbean and South Asian people who are the subject of racism and their collective will to struggle against it” (Small, 1991:62). Although Small and others like him, recognise that there are other groups who experience discrimination, i.e. the Irish, race is considered by Small as it ‘relates to the more visible groups’ because the experiences of those visibly “black” is harder than those not visibly “black” (Small, 1991:62).

The problem here is that Small, and others sharing this view, fail to consider how the “black” label or concept of “blackness” is rejected by those very people he assumes to be “black”. As Cohen points out, this is because having been initially reduced to being ‘a biological category’, “blackness” is “then reconstructed as a ‘political colour’ so that it can be magically expanded to include a large number of honorary blacks...on the grounds that they have a long and honourable history of resisting racism” (Cohen, 1994: 59). Modood (1994) has highlighted how the “blackness” concept actually harms British Asians¹³ because of how such homogeneity is imposed. It is important to note that Modood does not actually so much criticise the concept of “blackness” but rather he criticises that of the ‘assumed homogeneity’. For Modood, the problem is that British Asians suffer from a form of ‘doublespeak’ which labels them “black” depending on the convenience or politics of the speaker/writer and not on the Asian in question. They therefore suffer from ‘false essentialism’ because “black” for Asians refers to features from African-Caribbean history and their experiences are assumed to fit in or be the same as these. Modood also argues that the “black” homogeneity also means marginalisation for British Asians because for them “black” is no more than a political colour that is imposed upon them, with other areas being neglected, for example for the majority of British Asians religion is central to self-definition (Modood, 1994).

Similarly, MacanGhaill refers to the work of Back (in MacanGhaill, 1999:62) to highlight how the current usage of the term “black” is not suited to the UK “black” or ‘south-Asian’ (or other “minority ethnic origin”¹⁴) populations because the ideas around “black” identity has its roots and significance in the African-American Civil Rights and “black” Power movements in 1960’s America. As a result the homogeneous application to members of the British “black” and ‘south-Asian’ (and other “minority ethnic origin”) population is inaccurate, and this inaccuracy is also offensive. The inaccurate reference is also a hindrance to any real progression. This is

¹³ As outlined in the terminology section, *Asian* is used to refer to those with recent origins in any of the Asian countries. Here, Modood uses the specific term *British Asians* to refer to those individuals with recent origins in south Asia, now living in Britain.

¹⁴ As outlined in the terminology section, “minority ethnic origin” is used to refer to those with no recent ‘white European’ origins. The term is reluctantly repeated in this thesis, and is therefore used in quotation marks.

because a particular populations' history is not being accurately recognised, recorded or respected.

This study adds to the critique of "blackness" as a racial identity. It carefully examines the notion of "blackness" as a fixed description for a particular set of peoples' collective identity, shared cultural history and common set of experiences. In doing so, it offers a critique that is based on a firm sociological understanding, as opposed to arguments derived from a political perspective.

(1.5) Identity

This research study views identity development and racial identity development as something that is largely, although not wholly, socially constructed. In doing so it views racial identity as being shaped by social relations, whilst also acknowledging that to some degree, an individual's biology plays some conditioning role.

In looking specifically at the development of a "black" racial identity, many theories have "attempted to explain the various ways in which blacks can identify (or not identify) with other blacks" (Helms, 1990:5). Here, the possession or development of a positive and healthy "black" identity has been measured by (i) racial group preferences; (ii) racial self-identification; and (iii) knowledge/awareness/experience of one's own racial group. For example, Kenneth and Mamie Clark (1939, 1940, 1947, 1950) used dolls to test "black" children's racial preference and racial self-identification. In their (1947) study the Clarks presented two-hundred-and-fifty-three 3-7 year old "black"¹⁵ children with dolls that were identical in every way except skin colour. Two dolls were brown and had black hair (which the Clarks referred to as "coloured"), and the other two were "white" and had yellow hair ("white") (Clark and Clark, 1947:169). In attempting to measure racial preferences, the Clarks asked each child to give them 'the nice doll', to which 150 chose the "white" doll. Each child was then asked to give the researchers 'the doll that looks bad', to which 149 chose the "black" doll. To measure racial self-identification, the Clarks asked the children to

¹⁵ Although referring to all the children as "black", the Clarks actually divided them up according to skin shade; "light" if the child was "practically white"; "medium" if the child was "light brown to dark brown"; and, "dark" if the child was "dark brown to black" (Clark and Clark, 1947:170).

give the researchers 'the doll that looks like you'. In response, 166 children chose the "black" doll and 85 chose the "white" doll. From this, the Clarks suggested that the "black" children had low self-esteem because they had negative views of "black" people and inaccurate views of themselves. The primary reason for this was because they internalised "white" people's negative views of their "black" race. The identity confusion was therefore, seen as a result of them having denied their own colour.

This type of test (using either dolls or photographs) was repeated by others. For example, Johnson, Shireman and Watson (1987) used the Clark doll test with a sample of adoptees between 4 and 8 years old. The sample contained 42 'trans-racial' adoptees and 45 "Black"¹⁶ adoptees who were adopted by "Black" families. They found that at age 4, the 'trans-racially' adopted "Black" children had a greater awareness of their race (i.e. they had correctly identified the doll as having a race similar to their own) and had a greater preference towards dolls of their own race at an earlier age than the 'same-race'¹⁷ adopted "Black" children. However, at age 8, both groups of adopted children were found to have expressed similar levels of awareness and preference. Some argue that this study, and others finding similar results, showed a drop in the number of "black" children who were misidentifying themselves as "black" because of the positive contributions made by the "black" civil rights movement. Others say because it is due to the use of more accurate and realistic dolls or photographs. However, Tizard and Phoenix (1989) point out that significant amount of studies measuring racial identity and self-concept levels, have still found that "a substantial proportion of young "black" children continue to say that they prefer, or would prefer to be like, the "white" doll/photograph" (Tizard and Phoenix, 1989:429).

Looking at "black" racial identity development, Cross's 'Nigrescence model' (1971) outlined a view of the developmental process by which a person 'becomes black'. In this sense the "Black"¹⁸ identity "is defined in terms of one's manner of thinking about and evaluating oneself and one's reference groups rather than in terms of skin

¹⁶ Clarks' use of a capital letter.

¹⁷ As outlined in the terminology section, 'same-race' is used to refer to those placed within their own racial group. The term is recognised in this thesis as problematic, and is therefore used in inverted commas.

¹⁸ Cross's use of a capital letter.

colour per se” (Helms, 1990:17). The model aimed to separate those aspects of “black” identity development, which resulted from racial oppression, from those which occurred “as a normal part of the human self-actualization process or the need to be the best self that one can be” (Maslow in Helms, 1990:17). Hence, according to the model, an over-identification with “White”¹⁹ culture was not only seen as unhealthy, but also a consequence of an identity crisis. Helms (1990) and Maximè (1986) each provide good outlines of Cross’s 5 stage model. The first stage was the ‘pre-encounter’ stage. Here the “black” individual has a ‘euro-centric’ (“white” orientated) view. They identify with “white” culture, whilst rejecting or denying their membership in “black” culture, and even denying the existence of racism. Some may even develop anti-“black” attitudes. The second stage of the model is the ‘encounter’ stage, where the “black” individual has an actual experience of racism, that is so strong that it forces them to reinterpret their world. They reject their previous identification with the “white” culture and instead seek identification with “black” culture. Next is the ‘immersion-emersion’ stage. Here the “black” individual completely attempts to identify with “black” culture and debase “white” culture. In the fourth ‘internalisation’ stage, the “black” individual successfully internalises “black” culture. In the final fifth stage of the model, the ‘internalisation-commitment’ stage, the “black” individual continues to internalise “black” culture, but additionally fights general cultural oppression for example, by becoming involved in “black” groups or in “black” community issues, (Helms, 1990:12; Maximè, 1986:108).

However, when looking at these “black” racial identity theories and models, one must consider the place it allocates for those who are “mixed race”. According to these theories and models, it is argued that there should be no difference made between children who are “black” and children who are “mixed race”. Small provides some ideas as to possible reasons for this. Firstly, it is argued that “when most people use the term ‘mixed race’ they do not mean a child of Indian and African parents, nor a Chinese and a person of African descent, they generally mean the child of a white person and any other person who is not white ... (and) in this society, any child who has the slightest taint of black is seen by the majority as black...for those children there are no ‘in-betweens’”. Secondly, the term “mixed race” itself is deceptive because it leads “transracial adopters to believe that such children are racially distinct

¹⁹ Cross’s use of a capital letter.

from other blacks. Consequently, they may neglect the child's need to develop a balanced racial identity and thereby a well-integrated personality". Thirdly, "many black people find the term 'mixed race' derogatory and racist because they feel it is a conscious and hypocritical way of denying the reality of a child's blackness" (Small, 1986:91).

However, others (including this researcher) disagree with the labelling of "mixed race" people as wholly "black". For example, in reporting part of a wider study, Tizard and Phoenix looked at the racialised identities of 58 young people of mixed "black" and "white" parentage, to whom they refer to as people of "mixed-parentage", from in and around London. Of the young people, 60% lived with both parents; 12% with a single "black" parent, or a "black" parent and a "black" step-parent; and, 28% with a single "white" parent, or a "white" parent and a "white" step-parent. The authors found that "people of mixed-parentage do not always wish to be viewed as 'black' – even though they are likely to share experiences of racism with black people". This is partially because to define themselves as "black" would involve them denying their white parent (Tizard and Phoenix, 2002:219). Similar results were also found by the sample of "mixed race" people in Alibhai-Brown's (2001) study. It is therefore argued that "mixed-parentage" people "have independent viewpoints" due to the "mixed" race status of their birth, and often they used a special term to reflect this "mixed-parentage", such as "half-caste" and "mixed race" (Tizard and Phoenix, 2002:219-221).

Based solely on theory and presented with an absence of empirical evidence, the idea of "mixed race" people having such independent viewpoints was raised by Robert Park in 1928 and later developed by Everett Stonequist in the 1930s.

Park argued that certain individuals are 'predestined to live in two cultures and two worlds' (Park in Tizard and Phoenix, 2002:43). In discussing this type of person, whom Park called 'the marginal man', the case of "mixed race" individuals was referred to, although today the concept also extends to 'trans-racial' adoptees. Park argued that although 'the marginal man' was condemned to a life of living between "two diverse cultural groups" and hence develop "an unstable character" (Park, 1928:881), the position also brought with it the benefit of 'the marginal man' having

the unique experience of being able to “fuse” the two cultures and ‘widen their horizon’ (Park in Tizard and Phoenix, 2002:43).

Stonequist (1937) developed Park’s ideas. However, he instead argued that the ‘the marginal man’ faced serious psychological difficulties (see figure 1.1), as a result of being torn between the two opposite cultures:

“the individual who lives in, or ties of kinship with, two or more interacting societies between which there exists sufficient incompatibility to render his own adjustment to them difficult or impossible. He does not quite ‘belong’ or feel at home in either group” (Stonequist, 1942:297)

Figure 1.1 – The marginal man’s psychological difficulties (Stonequist)

Phase 1	The individual lives out a life in which they are not conscious or only slightly aware of their difference from the dominant “white” racial group.
Phase 2	The individual encounters a crisis where they are rejected and realise that the dominant racial group views them as inferior. It is now that they become aware of their marginal position. It is at this stage that ‘the marginal man’ experiences psychological maladjustment. At it minimum this leaves the individual with a feeling of isolation, but at its most severe it sees the individual feeling a sense of despair.
Phase 3	The ‘marginal man’ tries to escape from this marginal position. They do so by either (i) passing themselves for “white” by becoming absorbed in the “white” culture, or (ii) integrating themselves wholly into the “black” culture. However, some individuals may opt for remaining in their marginal position. If they do, they are very likely to face isolation and rejection by both “white” and “black” groups. Although some individuals may be able to live in such a position with little difficulty, the majority will face despair and subsequent behavioural problems commonly associated with psychological difficulties.

(Stonequist, 1937; Stonequist in Tizard and Phoenix, 2002:44)

However, negative views about the problematic nature of “mixed race” people continue to exist. As a result, the essentialist views about “mixed race” equalling

“black” continue to prevail. In their study of “mixed race” adolescents’ construction of race, Harris and Sim examine three perspectives that have tended to dominate racial identity development debates. The first is the essentialist perspective outlined above, which views race as a biology and as something that is naturally given. The second, the social constructionist perspective, offers a critique of the essentialist perspective by arguing that the “boundaries of racial groups vary both over time and across social contexts”. Hence the social constructionist perspective argues that “people need not have a single racial identity that they carry with them from birth to death (but) rather people may be born one race, live as a second race, and have yet a third racial identity at death” (Harris and Sim, 2000:4-5). According to social constructionists then, race is assigned depending upon (a) whether the individual identifies themselves, or has their racial identity defined by someone else, (b) their ancestry, whether this is real or as usually the case, imagined, (c) the context in which they find themselves, for example, the other(s) race, ideology, familiarity with the individual, racial composition of the context, etcetera, and (d) their own personal history. The third perspective outlined by Harris and Sim (2000) is that of the ‘folk’ perspective. This is “defined as the everyday understanding of race that exists in society...(it) is a combination of the essentialist and social constructionist perspectives, though for historical reasons it tends to be more heavily influenced by the essentialists” (Banton, in Harris and Sim, 2000:6).

This study examines racial identity development from a social constructionist perspective. It argues that the boundaries of racial groups are subjective and fluid and that racial identity development is socially constructed in trans-actions which occur at and across permeable boundaries of group classification (Jenkins, 1996). Therefore, racial identities are actively and creatively produced by human beings in their everyday social interaction and can be best understood as an “ongoing synthesis of (internal) self-definitions and the (external) self-definitions of oneself offered by others” (Jenkins, 1996:20). Such a social constructionist perspective therefore moves away from the essentialist ideas of racial identity being something that is wholly naturally given. In particular, the use of this perspective in this study involves a construct of identity based on the works of Symbolic Interactionists George Herbert Mead (1995), Herbert Blumer (1969) and Erving Goffman (1982). The Symbolic Interactionist theorisation of the ‘self’ being developed in ongoing social

communication and symbolic interaction is used to guide the theorising of racial identity development. This means there is an emphasis on the importance of the negotiation of racial categorisations found in the language, meanings and symbols of human symbolic communication, and how such racial categorisations are constantly being negotiated and (re)negotiated. To understand this process, a consideration of the Symbolic Interactionist theorisation of identity development is now given, which is then followed by its application to the theorisation of racial identity.

Mead (1995) argued that the construction of 'self' is a social process. It is something that "is structured from the outside to the inside, (and) reflects the structure of role models, games, rules, generalized others, and the institutions in the individual's social world" (Baldwin, 1986:112). As such, "the self...is essentially a social structure, and it arises in social experience" (Mead, 1995:367). This is because of "the human capacity to be reflexive and take the role of others" (Macionis and Plummer, 2002:156). For Mead then, "the individual possesses a self only in relation to the selves of the other members of his social group; and the structure of his self expresses or reflects the general behaviour pattern of his social group" (Mead, 1995:373). As the human social self is seen as inseparable from wider society, this means that the community has some degree of power over the individual's formation of social self and the way in which they identify themselves, because "the individual takes...the organised social attitudes of the given social group or community" (Mead, 1995:370), and absorbs them into their own self.

In addition to this, individuals are seen as having 'multiple selves', because "we carry on a whole series of different relationships to different people...(and) we divide ourselves up in all sorts of different selves with reference to our acquaintances" (Mead, 1995:368). However, in suggesting this, Mead disputes the idea of there existing any sort of identity conflict. For example Mead argued that "we can discuss politics with one and religion with the other (because) there are all sorts of different selves answering to all sorts of different social reactions" (Mead, 1995:369). This means that we are not only just one person, but rather that we can be different people at different times. Although at times, this may produce contradictory selves, this is never the less viewed as perfectly normal and healthy. For example, Kathleen Hall collected several stories given by 2nd generation British-Sikh teenagers growing up

in Leeds. Hall used the example of 2nd generation British-Sikh individuals to illustrate how cultural identity formation is an ongoing process. Hall found that the British-Sikh teenagers' construction and negotiation of alternative ways of being a British-Sikh teenager in modern England was based on "a compromise" which had been the result of them having negotiated multiple forms of identity that were available to them in their homes and communities. This had meant that the British-Sikh teenagers "act and react, fashioning their identities creatively, within the ambiguous space in between their British and Sikh selves" (Hall, 1995:258).

In the development of social life and individual identity, Mead emphasised the importance of how individuals negotiate 'language' and 'symbols' that are presented in everyday social relations. These ideas were developed by Herbert Blumer (1969), who stated that the theory of Symbolic Interactionism consisted of three key concepts. These were 'meaning', 'language', and 'thought'. Meanings referred to the way in which humans naturally assign 'meaning' to people and things, and then act accordingly. This is a central principle of the understanding of human behaviour according to the Symbolic Interactionist theory. The next concept is that of 'language' which is the source of 'meaning'. This is because 'language' gives humans a means by which to negotiate 'meaning' through 'symbols'. The third concept is that of 'thought', which refers to the individual's ability to take the role of the other(s) during social interaction. As 'thought' is a mental dialogue that requires role taking, or imagining different points of view, this then allows the individual(s) to develop their own understanding of the other(s) and of their own self. This is where Mead's ideas about the 'I' and the 'Me' emerge. The 'I' is the active portion of the self, capable of performing behaviours and the 'Me' is the socially reflective portion of the self, providing social control for the actions of the 'I'. The combination of the 'I' and 'Me' equals the self. It is important to recognise that according to the Symbolic Interactionist theory, the self is seen as a process as opposed to a structure because the 'I' acts out action and the 'Me' defines the self as reflective of others as a result of the action (Mead, 1995).

Erving Goffman (1982) further developed Blumer's ideas around Symbolic Interactionism, by highlighting the importance of symbols and rituals in everyday life. Goffman looked at what he called 'the interaction order'. This is "what we do in

the presence of others” (Goffman, 1982:2). In his analysis, Goffman used the metaphor of the theatre to argue that individuals ‘perform’ roles, and the individual’s ‘performance’ can be seen as a ‘presentation of their self’, that is the individual’s attempt to create a specific impression in the minds of others (Goffman, 1982). However, according to Goffman, individuals not only ‘perform’, but they also watch from the audience, meaning that they are also able to observe performances. In terms of this research study, Goffman’s illustration of the deeply textured way in which societies are ordered through an array of human social interactions, helps to highlight the Symbolic Interactionist theorisation of individual behaviour being dependent upon and influenced by other individuals in a network of social interaction where symbolic communication lies at the heart of explaining individual identity and social life.

This study uses the Symbolic Interactionist theorisation to argue that racial identity is developed in an ongoing process of social interaction, where the individual negotiates a racial identity that reflects their immediate social environment. This racial identity will be one that the individual feels most appropriately fits in with and reflects the shared norms and values of that environment, as well as being one that they feel most comfortable with. The flexible nature of the racial identification process also means that the individual is also able to construct themselves multiple racial identities, each able to modify and adapt to a variety of sub-settings within society. For example, at certain times they will be required to lean more towards a particular racial identity, and at other times towards another. The requirement to do so will be largely based upon the other social actors and the significance/meanings attached to a particular racial identity within that sub-setting.

Clearly then, the application of the Symbolic Interactionist theorisation of identity to understanding racial identity development allows an appreciation of not only the social constructed status and negotiated creation of racial identity, but also to understand its complex, diverse and fluid nature.

(1.6) Adoption policy and legislation

The first law on adoption (in England and Wales) was introduced in 1926. Under this

Act, adoptive parents could, and usually did pass off adoptees as their own biological children. This was largely because of the stigma that surrounded adoption (Howe and Feast, 2000). In 1950 the Adoption of Children Act was introduced. This emphasised a 'fresh start' view of adoption in terms of the relationship between the adoptive parents and the adoptees. As such it still seemed to be surrounded by the stigmas of previous adoption law. The 1958 Adoption of Children Act "brought an interest in extending adoption to those children previously considered beyond its scope, whether on grounds of their age, disability or racial background...(who) became known as 'hard-to-place', simultaneously indicating both the possibility and difficulty of their adoption" (Kirton, 2000:7). The 1976 Adoption of Children Act which outlined the 'freeing' of children waiting to be adopted, was later amended by the 1989 Children Act. This required a recognition of 'religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background' in respect of child care decisions, and at the same time emphasised the detrimental effects of lengthy delays.

When coming into office in May 1997, the (New) Labour Government, vowed to review adoption legislation. In 1998, a report 'Adoption: Achieving the Right Balance' (Department of Health, 1998), noted that consideration needs to take account of all the child's needs, and although knowledge of history, culture and language are significant factors, they should not be regarded as the decisive ones. It went on to state that if exact matches could not be identified, then efforts to find alternatives should be made. In referring to the report in November 1998, Paul Boateng, the then Health Minister, said that "the rules should make it easier for transracial adoptions to take place" and that the time was now right "to end misguided practices" so although social services should try and match adoptees with adopters of similar backgrounds, they "should not be the determining factor" (Paul Boateng quoted in BBC News, 1998:2). The Health Minister emphasised the report's message that "it is unacceptable for a child to be denied loving adoptive parents solely on the grounds that the child and adopters do not share the same racial or cultural background" (Department of Health, 1998:4).

In 2000, 'The Prime Minister's Review of Adoption' document (Department of Health, 2000a) supported the 'Balance' report when it stated the need for a new approach which places all the needs and rights of the child at the centre of the

process. Following this, the '2002 Adoption and Children Act' was introduced. This implemented the proposals of the 2000 White Paper 'Adoption: A New Approach' (Department of Health, 2000b), by similarly calling for the child's welfare to be the paramount consideration in issues relating to adoption.

On the whole then, adoption legislation and policy seems to emphasise that although the child's race, ethnicity, culture and language of his/her birth community are important factors for consideration in placements, they should not exceed the child's welfare rights and needs to be placed in a secure and loving home.

(1.7) The 'trans-racial' adoption debate

The theoretical debates and empirical evidence presented in discussions around the practice and effects of 'trans-racial' adoption have been largely provided by opposing sides of the debate. On one side there are those who view 'trans-racial' adoption as problematic and harmful for "black" children. On the other side there are those who view it as being of no major problem for the "black" child, or at worst leading to minor difficulties for the "black" child, but providing a very feasible alternative to pro-longed temporary care.

The opposition to 'trans-racial' adoption

The theoretical debates provided by the opposition camp, have been based around concerns of identity development. For example, claims have been made about the "black" child suffering from poor identity development, from low self-esteem, and from a hatred of their own "black" self (Small, 1991).

In providing an outline of theoretical arguments used by the opposers of 'trans-racial' adoption, Ballis Lal states that the opposition tends to be based on the 'essentialist' view that there is one clear and authentic set of "black characteristics" which are unique to all "black" people and which do not alter across time. According to this 'identity essentialism' model, not only does "one facet of a person, such as race... 'trump' all other conceptions of selfhood" but "it also determines experiences and life chances" (Ballis Lal, 1999:56-57). The model also "emphasises the benefits

of knowing who you are as a consequence of either biological descent or socially constructed attributes such as race, and of participation in collectivities organised around an essentialist identity” (Ballis Lal, 1999:57). This means that the “black” adoptee’s ‘primary identity’ is the “black” one, which is pre-fixed and determines the experiences of the individual. It also means that the “black” adoptee needs to be placed in an environment that can nourish this “black” identity’, namely a ‘same-race’ (“black”) placement. In providing a critical view of these essential arguments, Cohen argues that such a ‘genealogical model’ of (“black”) identity as an essential birthright or inheritance was based on the notion that a failure “to possess an authentic sense of selfhood” would mean to “lack a core personality – to be deprived of a meaningful sense of roots” (Cohen, 1994:59). The essential “black” identity model is also referred to by Ahmad (1990), and Dutt and Sanyal (1991), who argue that ‘identity deficits’ in a “black” adoptee can be caused by the ‘undermining’ effect of ‘trans-racial’ placements (Ballis Lal, 1999:56).

In reporting the findings of a small study and reflecting upon his own experiences as a social worker and as a “black” person, Small argues “the black experience is unique” (Small, 1991:65). Small went on to argue that for ‘trans-racially’ adopted “black” people a denial of their true unique “blackness” causes them serious identity conflict and makes them unable to deal with the racism that they will inevitably face from both “black” and “white” communities, both of which will make them feel as if they do not belong.

In reply to questions surrounding the idea of a *true* “black” identity, opposers maintain that there are two reasons why this true “black” identity can be seen as essential and unchanging. It is firstly, “appointed by nature” (Singer in Weeks, 1993:15), or based upon a “genealogical categorisation of race”, which is “concerned with origins and lineages of reproduction” as Dyer (1997:20) in his discussion about “whiteness” identifies. Secondly, it is one that is determined by attributes about race and “blackness” that are socially constructed upon ideas about group preservation or “historical forces” (Harris, 1995:7). For anti-‘trans-racial’ adoption groups then, this is interpreted as meaning that the “black” identity must be lived and realised in order for “black” people to survive in today’s racist society, as Small states, “if a healthy personality is to be formed, the psychic image of the child must merge with the reality

of what the child actually is. That is to say, if the child is black (reality), he or she must first recognize and accept that he or she has a black psychic image” (Small, 1986:88).

The opposition to intercountry adoption is also based on similar arguments. In outlining these, Tizard states that the opposition “both from the third world and from some western social workers” is based around several arguments. The first is that intercountry adoption substitutes a “new form of colonialism, with wealthy westerners robbing poor countries of their children, and thus their resources”. Another argument is that the child who is intercountry adopted “will lose access to their own culture and their roots” which subsequently will lead to them having a “confused identity”. Thirdly, this ‘identity confusion’ will be worsened by the fact that they “will be exposed to racism” that they “would not have met in their own country” (Tizard, 1991:746).

Abdullah (1996) argues that adoption of this type is another form of “black” communities serving the “white” communities. In referring to the work of Grier and Cobb, Abdullah suggests therefore “the culture of slavery was never undone” and asks if adoption of this type is in fact “a continuation of the 500 years of raids on “black” families?” (Abdullah, 1996:259).

Opposers of ‘trans-racial’ adoption include ethnic community leaders and organisations, social workers, and some academics. The strongest opposition comes from the American organisation, the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW). At the NABSW 1971 conference, William T. Merritt, the NABSW president said:

“Black children in white homes are cut off from healthy development of themselves as Black people” (Merritt in Simon and Alstein, 2000:38).²⁰

Later Mr. Merritt claimed, “Black children who grow up in white families suffer severe identity problems” (Merritt in Simon and Alstein, 2000:38). Today, the position of the NABSW firmly stands the same as it did then. Their main concern is that “black” children do not lose their racial and cultural identity by being reared in

²⁰ Merritt’s use of a capital letter.

a “white” home (NABSW, 1994; NABSW, 2002). In Britain, the equivalent to the NABSW is the Association of Black Social Workers and Allied Professionals (ABSWAP). One of its members, John Small outlined the group’s position on ‘trans-racial’ adoption. It was argued that the placement of the “black” child in a “white” home leads to the adoptee failing to develop a sense of “black” identity, failing to develop survival skills, failing to develop cultural and linguistic attributes to function fully in the “black” community, developing a negative self-image and poor self esteem, and instead developing a “white” identity which would lead to problems in the real world (Small, 1991:66).

There is very little research to support the arguments of opposers such as those mentioned above. Of the studies that do exist, problems in the value of birth origins, experiences of racism, feelings of being different and self-rejection have been highlighted. In following-up a previous study where the experiences of 24 adopted children were looked at, Tizard interviewed 6 “mixed race” adoptees and their “white” adoptive parents. Tizard found that 4 of the families who had ‘trans-racially’ adopted had failed to (yet) tell the child about his/her ethnic background. One adoptive mother of a “mixed race” child was even concealing the fact that he was “coloured”²¹ and had a West-Indian father (Tizard, 1977:181).

Dagoo, Burnell, Fitsel and Reich using data from a series of 6 focus group meetings for adults who had been ‘trans-racially’ adopted, found that those raised in a racially mixed family environment and community did not feel as different and conspicuous as those raised in a “white” environment. All the adoptees also said that the ‘trans-racial’ adoption had led to them being seen as different and meant a problematic childhood, because it drew negative attention in a world where their dark skin was not valued. However for several of those who did have early contact with other “black” people, this had brought the realisation that they were outsiders as they felt a sense of un-belonging. Hence they had neither felt themselves to be a full part of their “black” birth community nor of their “white” adoptive community (Dagoo, Burnell, Fitsel and Reich, 1993:2).

Similar results were also found by Shekleton (1990) who carried out group-work with

²¹ Term used by respondent in Tizard’s (1977) study.

6 “black” ‘trans-racially’ adopted adults, and found that although participants were told at an early age that they were adopted, for most the subject was then never mentioned again by their parents. This sometimes led to adoptees feeling that something was wrong with being different. This was then reinforced by name calling and bullying at school, and the “white” siblings distancing themselves from adoptees in public. During adolescence, the ‘trans-racial’ adoptees had experienced feelings of isolation in their adoptive homes and being trapped in their “blackness” and difference, which led to either self-rejection or a rejection of their (adoptive) parents. Feelings of ‘not being good enough’ and ‘being different’ also sometimes made socialising difficult for adoptees. As adults, the ‘trans-racial’ adoptees had feelings of fear of their fragile “black” image being questioned or challenged either by “black” or “white” people and a feeling of shame at recognising racist and stereotypical attitudes in themselves towards other “black” individuals.

Tizard argued that such attitudes reflect how the adoptees are ‘denying a part of themselves’ (Tizard, 1991:753), which Feigelman and Silverman (1984) found was associated with feelings of being ashamed of one’s origins. This was due to several reasons, and included the adoptee’s feelings of difference and a desire to fit in with the adoptive family, their experiences of racism, their feelings of rejection and the hostile attitudes they had harboured towards their country of birth or towards their birth parents for sanctioning the adoption (Feigelman and Silverman, 1984; Tizard, 1991).

In reviewing the theoretical, policy and practical issues surrounding adoption, Triseliotis Shireman and Hundleby (1997) make the observation that the research evidence suggests that during early childhood, the adoptee’s positive self-esteem and self-concept levels is not based on an essential notion of “blackness”. Rather it depends upon the quality of the parenting provided by the adoptive parents. For example, the degree to which the adoptee experiences sensitive parenting in childhood and at the same time is prepared for the negative experiences that they are likely to experience into adulthood, helps the adoptee to develop a positive self-esteem. However, Triseliotis et al found that as the adoptee grows older, they move away from such parental protection and are more influenced by the attitudes of their wider community. If such attitudes are ‘hostile and rejecting’ they have ‘devastating’

effects on the adoptee's self (Triseliotis et al, 1997:193-4). Here Triseliotis et al point particularly to the studies of Dalen and Saetersdal (in Triseliotis et al, 1997:193) and Rorbech (in Triseliotis et al, 1997:193) which found that although the adoptees were well adjusted in childhood, as adults they were marginalized and felt more discrimination. This emphasises the necessity and the importance of sensitive parenting in childhood and beyond.

Similar arguments were made by Thoburn, Norford and Rashid (quoted in Department of Health, 1999a) in their study of 297 children of "ethnic minority origin" who had been adopted or placed with permanent foster parents between 1979 and 1986, 71% having gone to a "white" family. Data on the children had been gathered from records obtained 10 years after the placement had been made. In-depth interviews were then carried out with 38 sets of parents of 51 young people (at least half of these were in families which had at least one parent of "minority ethnic origin") and with 24 of those young people themselves. These interviews were carried out between 12 and 15 years after the placement had been made. The authors found that the 'trans-racial' placements were no more likely than the 'same-race' ones, to have broken down. However, whilst most of the "black" 'trans-racial' adoptees had said that they had learned much from their "white" parents, some argued strongly for 'same-race' placements. This was because they felt they had suffered "additional stress as a result of losing contact with their racial and cultural origins as well as their birth families" (Department of Health, 1999a:159). Thoburn et al argued that "placement with a family of a different ethnic and cultural background should be unusual and should be based on specific reasons in individual cases" (Department of Health, 1999a:159).

The support for 'trans-racial' adoption

The case in favour of 'trans-racial' adoption is largely derived from empirical research. Such evidence has found that differences in identity development do exist between 'trans-racially' and 'same-racially' placed "black" adoptees. However, such differences are minor and have very little negative effects. For example, Feigelman and Silverman sent out 1100 questionnaires to adoptive families in an original national survey in 1975, of which 737 responded. In 1981 they carried out a follow-

up survey with 372 of these families. In the analysis Colombian, Korean, Afro-American 'trans-racial' adoptees were compared to the same ethnic groups in 'same-race' placements, and also with "white" children in 'same-race' placements. Feigelman and Silverman found that "the adolescent and school-aged 'trans-racial' adoptees were no more poorly adjusted than their in-racially adopted counterparts" (Feigelman and Silverman, 1984:588), and so argued that there is very little empirical evidence to show 'trans-racial' adoption to be damaging to the racial identity, racial awareness and self-esteem of the 'trans-racial' adoptee. Therefore 'trans-racial' adoption was favoured as an effective policy.

Similarly, Zastrow compared 44 "white" couples who had adopted a "black" child with 44 "white" couples who adopted a "white" child. Information was obtained via interviews with adoptive parents and by reading adoption records that were held by the adoption agency about the families. Zastrow found that the 'trans-racial' adoptive parents "reported considerably fewer problems" related to the child's race than was expected to be the case (Zastrow, 1977:81).

Simon and Alstein (2000) carried out a 20-year study (from 1971 to 1991) of "black", Korean, Native-American, Eskimo and Vietnamese children adopted by "white" couples in the mid-western US. In 1971, the personal interviews with 4-7 year olds and their parents, and the use of the Clark doll test found children to have accurate racial self-identifications with no preference for "white" characteristics, or negative reactions to "black" identity. In 1979 mail questionnaires and telephone interviews with several parents in the original sample revealed family tensions. In the 1983-84 personal interviews with children and parents, it was found that such behaviour had stopped. The researchers also asked children to complete a self-esteem scale questionnaire. The results showed that no one group of respondents manifested higher or lower self-esteem than the others. In 1990-91, the adult adoptees and their parents were again interviewed. The authors found that there was no difference in levels of family integration. They concluded that in general 'trans-racial' adoptees grow-up well adjusted and that 'trans-racial' adoption can serve the child's best interests because, as their results showed, the 'trans-racial' adoptees felt loved, secure and comfortable with their racial identities.

In a British follow-up study, Bagley used several measures of mental health and adjustment questionnaires to measure the adjustment and identity of 27 “Afro-Caribbean”²² and “mixed race” children adopted by “Caucasian” parents and 25 “Caucasian” children adopted by “Caucasian” parents. Bagley found that “although the outcomes for the transracially adopted group are likely to be different in identity terms from Afro-Caribbean children brought up in same-race families...these children seem well prepared by transracial adoption to participate effectively in a multi-cultural, multi-racial society” (Bagley, 1993:285).

In a previous study, Bagley and Young (1979) had examined the ‘adjustment and achievement levels’ of 3 “black” and 27 “mixed race” children adopted by “white” parents. The authors compared this group of ‘trans-racial’ adoptees with three other groups. These were (i) 30 non-adopted “white” school peers of the ‘trans-racially’ adopted children, (ii) 24 “mixed race” children who had been in care and who had not been adopted, and (iii) 30 “white” children who had been adopted by “white” parents. Bagley and Young found that the ‘trans-racial’ adoptees had an excellent adjustment in comparison with the other three groups, and found that the general outcome of ‘trans-racial’ adoption is more favourable if families have positive attitudes to, and links with the “black” community or if they live in a multi-racial community. Therefore, the authors concluded that ‘trans-racial’ adoption should be considered as an option for children who cannot be same-racially placed.

Using a standardised questionnaire and semi-structured interviews to measure health, behaviour at school, social adjustment and self-esteem, in a study with a sample of 36 “black”, Asian and “mixed race” children in “white” families, living in Britain, Gill and Jackson (1983) also found ‘trans-racial’ adoption to have positive outcomes. However, unlike Bagley and Young’s (1979) findings, Gill and Jackson’s “black” ‘trans-racial’ adoptees in fact had little contact with members of the “black” community. For example Gill and Jackson found that 60% of “Caucasian” adoptive parents with “black” adolescent children had no “black” friends, and their children likewise had few contacts with other “black” adolescents. In fact the adoptees “saw themselves as white in all but skin colour” (Gill and Jackson, 1983:81). Yet despite this, Gill and Jackson found that the majority of the ‘trans-racially’ adopted children

²² Bagley’s term.

had good levels of self-esteem and showed very few signs of behavioural maladjustment and so they concluded by arguing that for the short-term at least, 'trans-racial' adoption can be successful.

However, despite similar positive findings about the relative success of 'trans-racial' adoption, some authors have suggested caution in its use. For example, in studying the self-concept scores, family relationships and school progress of a sample of 30 "black" 'trans-racial' adoptees and 30 "black" 'same-race' adoptees, McRoy and Zurcher found 'trans-racial' adoptees to have strong family bonds and satisfactory school progress. In addition, the authors found there to be no differences between the 30 'trans-racial' and the 30 'same-race' adoptees in self-concept scores. However, the authors also found that only 30% of the 'trans-racial' adoptees identified themselves as "black", and argued that this was because adoptive parents were failing to 'equip the black transracial adoptee with the necessities that are required to becoming bi-cultural' and the tendency for them to have problems of misidentification due to growing up in "white" communities (McRoy and Zurcher, 1983:139). As a result, McRoy and Zurcher emphasised caution in practicing 'trans-racial' adoption. This again demonstrates value and indeed the power of sensitive parenting, that is the ways in which adoptive parents prepare the "black" adoptee for the racism they are likely to face in wider society.

Similarly, in one phase of Johnson, Shireman, and Watson's (1987) longitudinal study, where 42 "black" 'trans-racial' adoptees and 45 "black" 'same-racially' placed adoptees were studied, it was found that 80% of the 'same-race' adoptees identified themselves as "black", compared with 73% of the 'trans-racial' adoptees (which contained more children who were "mixed race" or fair-skinned). However, despite this positive finding, Johnson et al saw the 7% difference as significant enough to emphasise that the 'trans-racial' adoptees' racial identity development and self-identification as "black" is being surpassed by 'same-race' adoptees, and that because of this, alongside the fact that the 'trans-racial' adoptees were being brought-up in "white" communities and having little contact with "black" people, 'trans-racial' adoption should be approached with care.

Adoption practice

The legislation and policy on adoption emphasises the importance of securing the welfare needs of the child and has stated that race should not prevent an adoption from occurring, (Department of Health, 1998). However, policy and practice still do not correspond with each other. For example, in response to Paul Boateng's comments regarding the 'Balance' report, mentioned earlier (Department of Health, 1998), Felicity Collier, the Director of the British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering, said that although she "welcomed" the guidelines, she nevertheless "warned against taking the section about race and culture out of context, because placement in a family of similar ethnic origin and religion was often most likely to meet a child's needs, (and) many adults who were transracially adopted as children speak of feeling isolated and confused about their racial identity" (Felicity Collier quoted in BBC News, 1998:3).

In practice then, 'trans-racial' adoption is somewhat of a rarity. Owusu-Bempah and Hewitt argues that this is a problem because the ethos around this practice seems to "pathologize and marginalize these children from mainstream professional provision (because) black children's emotional, educational, social and psychological needs" are simply being defined "solely in racial terms, irrespective of their true causes" (Owusu-Bempah and Hewitt, 2000:110).

Another problem is that children are having to wait longer in care whilst a 'same-race' placement is sought, (Children First in Adoption and Fostering, 1990). Goldstein and Spencer (2000), who looked at the existing research on the family placement of "black", "minority ethnic" and "white" children, argued that racial matching is taking longer to implement because of the lack of available "black" families willing to adopt.

However, the work undertaken by one British organisation called 'New Black Families' contradicts this argument and has instead demonstrated that with genuine efforts in recruitment, "black" families can be found for "black" children (Small, 1982). Hence it is argued that the real problem is that prospective "black" adopters are being measured against a "white" norm, or what Park and Green call "a euro-

centric standard of measurement” (Park and Green, 2000:15), which deems “black” families in general as unsuitable. In looking at the literature on child care and “ethnic minorities”, Ahmad (1989) makes the same point. It is also argued that the ‘traditional methods of long term and informal fostering’ prominent in African communities²³, are not recognised as successful methods of child-care (Sunmonu, 2000).

(1.8) Limitations of the research

There are both limitations with the theoretical arguments and the empirical evidence presented in the ‘trans-racial’ adoption and racial identity development debate. The key problem with both these threads of the debate is that it assumes that “black” ‘trans-racial’ adoptees who identify more closely with their adoptive parents’ “white” heritage, as opposed to their birth parents’ “black” heritage have an identity problem. An examination of this, and the other flaws of the empirical evidence will now be considered.

A critique of the theoretical arguments

There are a number of problems with the theoretical underpinnings of the arguments used especially by the opposers of ‘trans-racial’ adoption.

Firstly, their argument is based on the importance of developing a “black” racial identity, which is seen as an essential identity. As such, the perspective offers a somewhat narrow view of racial identity development and the experiences of individual “black” ‘trans-racial’ adoptees. This is because it assumes that *being* “black” is a primarily genetic and biological *truth* and the basis upon which identity is formed and lived relations in society are based. It also assumes that any societal influences on this “black” identity development is tied to ‘resisting’ and ‘surviving’ stereotypical notions about “blackness”, which are perpetuated by a racist society. For those opposing ‘trans-racial’ adoption, these ties to biology or socially constructed attributes about race mean that only full “participation in collectivities organised

²³ A U.S. study revealed that 90% of African-American children born out of wedlock are informally adopted within the African-American community (Hill, 1977).

around an essentialist identity” (Ballis Lal, 1999:57), in other words a ‘same-race’ “black” placement, would lead to a successful, positive and healthy identity development for the “black” adoptee. By taking such a restrictive view, the full complexities of the debate are not considered, i.e. what does “blackness” as a racial identity actually mean today in a society, which contains so many racially mixed individuals?

Secondly, these theoretical arguments are heavily based on conjecture, assumptions and theory, meaning that they “do not generally take the form of detailed reference to research findings” (Kirton, 2000:64). These arguments therefore lack “empirical confidence” (Cohen, 1994:60). For example Ahmad (1990), Dutt and Sanyal (1991), and Maximè (1986), all provide excellent discussions about the development of a “black” identity, but the scientific status of their arguments is significantly lessened by the lack of empirical research to support their arguments.

Thirdly, the individual unique identities of the population of ‘trans-racial’ adoptees are ignored and undervalued. This is because the ‘trans-racial’ adoptees are being misidentified by being seen as a particular type of “black” individual. For example in their 20 year longitudinal study, which began in 1971, looking at 206 adoptive families where the adoptee was “black” or of other “minority ethnic origin” (in the 1971 phase of the study) to 83 of these same families (in the 1991 phase of the study), and which used a combination of a variety of research methods, including questionnaires and in-depth interviews, Simon and Alstein (1996) found that the ‘trans-racial’ adoptees in their current (1991) study “stressed their comfort with their black identity and their racial awareness that they may speak, dress and have different tastes in music than inner-city blacks, but that the black experience is a varied one in this society and they are no less black than are children of the ghetto” (Simon and Alstein, 1992:20). Indeed as Macey recognises in her analysis of the theoretical and empirical underpinnings of “black” ‘same-race’ adoption policy and ‘trans-racial’ adoption, when opposers of ‘trans-racial’ adoption speak of “the need for black children to develop a black identity, the question of *which black identity?* must also be examined” (Macey, 1995:482).

This is true of hybrid racial identities across society, which today are “increasingly

becoming the cultural norm...a new generation in which purified notions of 'Englishness' or 'blackness' are a standing joke" (Cohen, 1994:72). Therefore, there is the critique that opposers using such theoretical arguments against the practice of 'trans-racial' adoption hold a view that is a "distortion of the reality of social relations in contemporary society" (Macey, 1995:473). As a result, this means that such 'trans-racial' adoptees who do not wholly identify themselves as "black", are then being marginalized. Here they are being seen as misfits of "black" society. For example the NABSW crudely characterised these types of adoptees as 'oreos - black on the outside, and white on the inside'²⁴ (NABSW in Simon and Alstein, 1996:19).

As Alibhai-Brown notes, another problem in how the 'trans-racial' adoptee's "black" part is "privileged above all other identities" (Alibhai-Brown, 2001:177), is that there is a restriction placed on how the adoptee may primarily choose to identify themselves. This is all the more a problem for "mixed race" adoptees who are 'trans-rationally' adopted. For example, Tizard and Phoenix found that less than half of their sample of "mixed-parentage" people thought of themselves as "black", but rather the majority thought of themselves as "mixed" because they had both "black" and "white" parentage (Tizard and Phoenix, 2002:220). However, because of the lack of recognition given to the unique identities of "mixed race" people, they continue to be mis-labelled, mis-identified and silenced. They are defined as "black" and so deemed to have the same types of identity difficulties as children of two "black" parents when adopted by a "white" family. As the authors rightly recognise, there not only needs to be an evaluation of the 'trans-racial' adoption debate as a whole, but in addition a serious re-consideration of the defining and placement of mixed parentage children.

In reviewing the research on intercountry adoptees, who are also 'trans-rationally' adopted, Tizard makes a similar critique. Tizard argued "most studies do not explore the extent to which the young people assign themselves a mixed cultural identity, but ask them to choose between their adopted and original identity" meaning that the research evidence is 'patchy and incomplete' (Tizard, 1991:754).

²⁴ 'Oreos' are American sandwich cookies. They are made up of a white sugary paste, which is squeezed in between two thin chocolate flavoured biscuits.

A critique of the empirical evidence

There are problems with the research methods used for studies on both sides of the debate. Those which have used longitudinal studies, namely Bagley and Young (1979), Feigelman and Silverman (1984), Gill and Jackson (1983), Howe and Feast (2000), Simon and Alstein (1996;2000), and Tizard (1977), have the benefit of allowing the researcher to examine a child's long-term growth and development. However, they are problematic due to a loss of contact between researchers and some of the original sample. This may lead to the pushing of the results towards more favourable conclusions about 'trans-racial' adoption, because it is possible that the families who dropped-out are precisely those families encountering difficulties and did not want to admit it or be blamed for inadequate parenting. For example, Simon and Alstein's original 1971 study, had 157 'trans-racially' adopted children participating, of which, only 55 were followed-up in 1991. No analysis was undertaken into this non-response issue.

The survey methods, as used by Feigelman and Silverman (1984) have the advantage of allowing a sample to contain a large number of participants, from which a varied response can be obtained. However they also have the problem of sample bias in who responds/completes the survey that has been sent-out.

The cross-sectional design surveys, as used by Zastrow (1977), also have the advantage of providing a range of multiple responses, but they have the problem of only providing a 'snap-shot' of a 'trans-racial' adoptee, the adoptive family or of the adoption, at one point in time. This means that they cannot reveal information concerning how the adjustment of 'trans-racial' adoptees to his/her environment changes over-time. Instead it can only speculate on outcomes. Also they tend to measure 'trans-racial' adoptees' 'adjustment' or 'maladjustment' according to parental responses, which is a problem because parents may not be fully aware of problems, or may lie or be reluctant to admit difficulties.

The focus group methods which seek to collect reflective accounts of one's life, as used by Dago et al (1993) and Shekleton (1990), avoid the 'snap-shot' problem that cross-sectional design surveys present, and they also allow the adult adoptees to talk

for themselves about their lives and experiences, unlike most longitudinal and survey methods. But in the studies carried out by Dago et al (1993) and Shekleton (1990), focus groups were used to collect the data about adoptees' lives. This is a problem because there is a tendency for the sample to share the same views and experiences. For example this is illustrated with the above two studies which both used a post-adoption support group for adoptees experiencing difficulties, as their sample.

In particular, many of those studies supporting 'trans-racial' adoption have particular problems with the cautionary conclusions that they have reached, despite their rather positive evidence. For example, despite positive findings about the practice of 'trans-racial' adoption, some have emphasised that it should only be practiced as an alternative (Bagley and Young, 1979; Johnson, Shireman and Watson, 1987), or as a temporary solution, (Gill and Jackson, 1983:140). This is because of expected problems that adoptees may experience, in particular growing up in predominantly "white" communities where there are limited opportunities for interaction with "black" individuals which may then lead to problems of misidentification (Johnson, Shireman and Watson, 1987; McRoy and Zurcher, 1993).

Clearly then even for those supporting 'trans-racial' adoption there has been a tendency to emphasise the necessity of developing a healthy "black" identity, which has meant that flawed ideas about what constitutes this "black" identity are still being used to measure the success of 'trans-racial' adoption. There are two consequences of this. Firstly, the debate has not been brought forward to consider the current meanings about race, for example, the way in which individuals today choose to use "black" as a description. Secondly, studies demonstrating the success of 'trans-racial' adoption in terms of meeting welfare needs have been ignored. Johnson, Shireman and Watson are a good example of this second point. They found that 'trans-racial' adoptees had 'a close family life' and 'a strong support system', yet they argue that the 'trans-racial' adoptees' developmental patterns of racial identity differ from those in all "black" homes because they tended to live in all "white" communities and had little contact with "black" people, and therefore "an all black home is preferable" (Johnson, Shireman and Watson, 1987:52).

Another problem of the empirical evidence, is that findings on 'trans-racial' adoption

and identity development produced by previous studies usually consisted of a sample of adoptees who had a 'closed adoption', i.e. loss of all contact with birth family members. However, because 'open adoption' is now the standard, meaning that adoptees are more likely to maintain some links with their birth parents, "such changes limit the relevance of earlier studies" (Tizard and Phoenix, 2002:62).

This study advances on the existing body of research because it considers racial identity development from a sociological perspective, as opposed to an essentialised and political one. Therefore, rather than producing findings that are grounded in taken-for-granted pre-conceived ideas, this study provides an understanding of racial identity development as a process that is socially constructed.

(1.9) Summary

In this Chapter I have reviewed the literature and empirical evidence on 'trans-racial' adoption and racial identity development. In particular, the contribution of existing arguments has been evaluated. In doing so, a critique of "blackness" as an essential fixed homogenous identity has been offered, by using the Social Constructionist perspective and in particular the Symbolic Interactionist theorisation of identity to view racial identity as something that is created in an ongoing process of social negotiation between the individual and others in society. I have also shown how my research contributes to the debates. For example, in place of existing arguments that derive from a political perspective, this study provides a sociological understanding of racial identity development as an ongoing social process that is continually being negotiated. The Chapter also highlighted the methodological drawbacks of existing research.

In the light of these drawbacks, the next Chapter goes on to highlight the use of the life history approach to studying 'trans-racial' adoption and racial identity development. In particular, the methodological issues involved in its use is discussed.

Chapter 2

Methodological issues

(2.1) Introduction

This Chapter considers the usefulness of the life (hi)story approach and in particular its qualitative research method of oral life (hi)story interviews to studying 'transracial' adoption and racial identity development.

The Chapter closely examines a number of key methodological issues involved in the use of the life (hi)story approach and method. Firstly, in terms of the interpretative framework, in particular how communication is developed, negotiated and transmitted between the adoptee and myself in the interview process and how this therefore shapes the presented life (hi)story. Another methodological issue that is examined in the Chapter relates to the defining of roles in the interviewing process, for example the researcher (myself) and the researched (adoptee), and the type of relationship developed during this study. An examination is also given of the way in which the key components of my identity influenced my underlying philosophical assumptions of the adoptees' narratives. A consideration is also given to the way in which commonalities and differences between the researcher and the researched influenced the interview process, and so how these aspects needed to be carefully considered in order to limit the degree to which this researcher shaped the adoptees' life (hi)story. Other influences on the interviewing process are also considered. These are the researcher's physical demeanour and presentation; the researcher's personality; and the physical setting in which the interview took place. Another methodological issue considered is the process of interviewing, in terms of achieving an appropriate balance between talking and listening. The fifth methodological issue covered discusses the editing and interpretation stages of the data analysis, in terms of presenting the adoptee's life (hi)story in a 'true' and accurate form, which would allow a sociological analysis to be made.

(2.2) Choice of method and approach

This study places a great deal of emphasis upon the value of in-depth and detailed data to understanding the life experiences of those who have been ‘trans-racially’ adopted. From the outset then, a qualitative approach to the data collection process was favoured over a quantitative approach. Other studies on adoption and identity have also used qualitative methods. For example, Johnson Shireman and Watson (1987); Simon and Alstein (2000); Thoburn, Norford and Rashid (2000); Tizard (1977), and Zastrow (1977), all used interviews of some sort. Similarly, Dagoo et al (1993) and Shekleton (1990) used focus group meetings. However, although these studies demonstrated the appropriateness and value of the qualitative approach generally, my specific choice of method and approach had distinct advantages, which will now be explored.

The life history approach and its qualitative research method of oral life history interviews offered a number of advantages in researching the racial identity development of ‘trans-racial’ adoptees. To begin with, the approach allowed a greater level of insight to be obtained “into the inner life of the person” (Burgess in Armstrong, 1987:8). This is because “if we want to know the unique perspective of an individual, there is no better way to get this than in that person’s own voice” (Atkinson, 2002:124). As such, the adoptees were able to provide an understanding of the “central moments, critical incidents, or fateful moments” which have surrounded their thinking, behaviour and social life experiences (Sparks in Hatch and Wisniewski, 1995:116). This then allowed me to understand their interpretation and ‘subjective reality’. As Becker noted:

“to understand why someone behaves as he does you must understand how it looked to him, what he thought he had to contend with, what alternatives he saw open to him; you can understand the effects of opportunity structures, delinquent subcultures, social norms, and other commonly invoked explanations of behaviour only by seeing them from the actor’s point of view” (Becker, 1970:64).

The life history approach and its research method of oral life history interviews

allows such subjective understanding to be gathered. This is because by seeking to comprehend the 'subjective reality' of the adoptee's understanding, we are shifting away from an orientation that advocates the mere collection of facts and observations. This means that the meanings attached by the adoptees in their understanding, interpretation, negotiation and response to their life experiences, is being provided, as oppose to simple descriptions of experiences and their effects.

Definitions of life history research have been provided by a number of key authors in the field. For Robert Atkinson, there is "very little difference between a life story and a life history" because both refer to "the story a person chooses to tell about the life he or she has lived" (Atkinson, 2002:125). Ken Plummer agrees with this description by stating that a life story is "an account of one person's life in his or her own words" (Plummer, 2001:18). In this research study, the interpretive framework places a great deal of importance on highlighting how both the adoptees' and researcher's selves affect the interpretation, construction and presentation of the life history/story. There is therefore an insistence that any presented life history and life story will both always involve some sort of reflexive construction of social life experiences. It is precisely for this reason that in this study, I have chosen to use both terms together in the following way: *life (hi)story*.

In terms of life history and oral history however, Atkinson argues that there are differences. These are usually about 'emphasis and scope' in that oral history usually "focuses on a specific aspect of a person's life" where-as a life history "is a fairly complete narrative of an individual's entire experience of life as a whole, highlighting the most important aspects" (Atkinson, 2002:125). However, one obvious, yet surprisingly under-emphasised difference between life history and oral history, is that the latter is spoken in a verbal communication of the life history. The spoken life history brings with it the possibility of allowing adoptees to self-reflect in a distinctive deeper way. For example, instead of being restricted to (non-verbal) self-reflection that is not articulated, they are verbally communicating their reflective thoughts as they (re)construct them. This allows the researcher to hear how the interviewee is interpreting and negotiating their social life experiences. In this sense then, the oral part of the life history method is important to this research study, and it is for this reason that the definition used will incorporate the term *oral* into its usage:

oral life (hi)story. This is the description used from here on.

With the emphasis being on the telling of an account or history, some refer to oral life (hi)story as a personal narrative or oral narrative. Personal narrative refers to an account of one's life experiences, and oral narrative usually refers to the same account, but delivered in verbal communication. An oral life hi(story) can be seen as presenting itself as a particular type within the broader class of narratives, which means that whilst oral life hi(story) is a narrative, not all narratives are a form of life hi(stories) (Walker in Hatch and Wiseniewski, 1995:114). However, it can be argued that an oral life (hi)story and a narrative are largely similar because they "both rely on stories, subjective accounts, and on meanings as they are constructed by individuals in situations" (Ayers in Hatch and Wiseniewski, 1995:114). It is for this reason that the term *narrative* will also be used henceforth.

Plummer's (2001) work on the variety of life stories provides a useful means of defining and explaining this research study's use of oral life (hi)story. Plummer argues that there are a number of varieties of oral life (hi)story types. Firstly, there are long or short accounts, there are ones that are naturalistic, researched, or reflexive, and finally, in referring to the work of Gordon Allport (in Plummer, 2001:26), there are those that are comprehensive, topical or educated. Following this list, the oral life (hi)story used in this research study can be described as *short* because the data was "gathered through in-depth interview" using 'gentle probes' and having a 'focus'. It is both *researched* and *reflexive* because the life (hi)story was "specifically gathered by researchers with a wider usually social science goal in mind". For example, the use of oral (hi)story allows a way of bringing "life stories into being that would not have otherwise happened in everyday life", and it is also reflexive in that there is an awareness that the (hi)stories "bring with them... their own construction and writing" because they "become self-conscious". Finally it is both *topical* and *comprehensive*. It is topical because it "confronts a particular issue", and it is also comprehensive because it aims to "grasp the totality of a person's life... from birth to their current moment (and) tries to capture the essence of the development of a unique human being" (Plummer, 2001:24-34).

(2.3) The interpretive framework in oral life (hi)story interviews

The life (hi)story approach and one of its qualitative methods of oral life (hi)story interviews allows an understanding to be gathered about the ‘trans-racial’ adoptees’ racial identity development and the ways in which their social life experiences informed upon this development. For example, it allows me to explore in some depth the use of ‘symbolic communication’ in social interaction from the view-point of the social actor for whom the meaning was ‘symbolic’. Using oral life (hi)story interviews allows adoptees to talk about their experiences of growing up in a ‘trans-racial’ placement, and to consider how these social experiences informed upon their sense of self and in particular, upon their racial identity development. The oral life (hi)story interviews also have the advantage of being able to “reveal a matter of importance” about the adoptees’ understanding of the meanings that are attached to action and behaviour (Yow, 1994:94). It does this by allowing the researcher to gain some understanding of the actor and their social world.

However, in a study that uses the life (hi)story approach and the in-depth qualitative method of oral life (hi)story interviews, it is important to think carefully about how both the researcher and respondent think about each other and themselves. This is because it has a role in the adoptee’s creation of a presented life (hi)story and the researcher’s interpretative framework surrounding that presented life (hi)story. It was therefore necessary to explore how the symbolic communication being developed, negotiated and transmitted between the adoptee and myself, plays an enormously significant role in the life (hi)story being given. For example, how the presented narrative is dependent upon the unfolding of both our identities and the ways in which we reflexively positioned ourselves in relation to the other. Being a mid-twenty-something, working class, female, British-born Indian researcher then, not only affects the adoptees’ presentation of their life (hi)story, but also how I receive, negotiate and transmit my understanding of it. The role of these identities cannot be removed, although, their influences can be significantly reduced. Therefore, it must be understood that the adoptees’ presented life (hi)story is not one true account of their social life experiences. Rather it is *a version* of the their truth, which has been constructed and (re)negotiated according to (i) the adoptee who is telling their life (hi)story; (ii) by myself (as researcher) who is gathering the life (hi)story; and (iii) the

reflexive communication that is being negotiated and constructed between the adoptee and myself. As such, it is important to recognise and account for the existence of different interpretative frameworks in this research study. This is done in section 2.8.

(2.4) Defining roles: the researcher and the researched

In referring to the works of Adler (in Plummer, 2001:209) and Gold (in Plummer, 2001:208), Plummer discusses the relationship between the researcher and the researched. Using a 'continuum of involvement' Plummer argues that four types of roles can be distinguished. The first of these is 'the stranger role' where "there is nil direct involvement of the researcher with the life" that is being researched. Next is the most common role, 'the acquaintance role', where "the life historian...enters a person's life for a brief interview and then departs" meaning that the actual contact is "defined entirely as a professional interview". Thirdly there is 'the friendship role' which "can result in the individual becoming a close and intimate friend over the period of time". However this type of relationship can create tension between the professional research role and friendship commitments and can also lead to "false intimacies, fraudulent friendships, a deceptiveness over equal relationships, and a masking of power" (Kirsch in Plummer, 2001:210). Finally, Plummer suggests a more controversial role, that of 'the lover role' where there are "hidden dimensions of romance, passion and sexuality" in the relationship (Plummer, 2001:209-212).

Before any contact was made with adoptees for the research study, I thought very carefully about the type of relationship that could develop between the adoptees and myself, and the type of relationship that should develop. I quite naively expected that I could take on the role of a friend to some of the adoptees. This was because I could not understand how I could succeed in carrying out very long interviews with people in their homes, talking about quite personal aspects of their lives without being a friend. However, in trying to pursue such a 'friendship role' (Plummer, 2001:210), I became aware that doing the interviews in this way is very problematic. This is because apart from having an interest in their lives as 'trans-racial' adoptees, and some other commonalities, for example, same gender, similar age, being from the same city, and of course both being labelled as "black" or of "minority ethnic origin",

there is still nevertheless no real common ground or to be honest, any genuine desire to become friends, that is in the sense that Plummer (2001) refers to. Indeed the thought of having to force or fake a friendship with the adoptees did not appeal to me, both personally and ethically, and it is likely that this was also felt by the adoptees. However, this is not to say that I was not friendly with adoptees, as illustrated by the way in which the actual type of relationships that emerged with all of the adoptees took the form of Plummer's 'acquaintance role' (Plummer, 2001:209).

Upon completing the interviews, I became aware of another important aspect in the role defining process, that of power and academic background. At the start of the research, I thought carefully about how to present my research and myself to the participating adoptees in the initial stages of contact. I decided to be professional, semi-formal and friendly. Upon completion of the interviews, I was left with two thoughts. Firstly, I am now able to appreciate that although such an initial professional and semi-formal approach is quite well suited to the seriousness of this research study, it was nevertheless an approach that can only be used in the initial stages of contact, because it needs to be made flexible as to adapt to suit the adoptee. For example, after the first 10 minutes of contact, it became clear to me that for some of the adoptees (*Natasha* and *William*), I needed to be less formal and more friendly because they appeared to be quite overwhelmed by the depth of this study. Secondly, one particular set of interviews with one of the adoptees (*Julie*), made me become aware of how my academic background could not only be seen as threatening, but more-so could be perceived and utilised by the adoptee as a basis upon which an exertion of their power and control is exercised. For example, *Julie* seemed to have a particular concern with my abilities to do this research, which is illustrated by how she contacted my research supervisor prior to the interviews to discuss my capabilities to do the interview. Indeed, in the feedback session, *Julie* (in talking about the transcript of her interviews) herself admitted: "*my first response was...to go through it and to actually start marking it*" (*Julie*). Similarly, *Julie* spent a considerable amount of time having thought about the research, this researcher and the presentation of her narrative. Hence the reader may notice in later sections of this Chapter, *Julie* takes up a lot of space in the discussions about the interviewing process. Although I appreciated *Julie's* very thoughtful feedback, I did have to put it in perspective. This is because although I need to be careful to consider *Julie's*

feedback, I needed to ensure that these exchanges with her do not dominate my views of her narrative, my role as a researcher or my views of other adoptees' narratives.

(2.5) Negotiating commonalities and differences

Being free from bias is very difficult, if not impossible, to achieve in a research study which uses the oral life (hi)story method. This is because there are a number of components that can make up the researcher's self (i.e. their identity) and come into play at various times, and to various degrees. As a result, one must acknowledge these components of identity and consider the effects that they may have had on how the adoptees see me and talk to me. Therefore, this study appreciates Harding's suggestions of the need to develop my own 'strong objectivity' (Harding, 1991:119). This is the requirement of the researcher to state their ideological position, in terms of their political ideas and social biases of the subject being studied in order to consider their effect in the creation of knowledge about that subject. This means that I need to carefully consider not only how various components of my identity affect the adoptees' construction and presentation of their life (hi)stories, but also how the components of my identity affect my own interpretation of the narratives. Doing so is very important in a study such as this because it allows a truer account of the adoptees' negotiation of a racialised identity to be studied.

There are a number of components to my identity, i.e. that I am mid-twenty-something, working class²⁵, female, of "minority ethnic origin" and a British-born Indian. These components of my own identity undoubtedly affected the adoptees' own construction, negotiation and presentation of their life (hi)stories. This cannot be avoided, it is an inevitable part of the research process that the use of the life (hi)story method especially brings with it. However, that is not to say the effects of these identity components upon the adoptees' narratives cannot have been limited. Indeed, by recognising these likely influences and accounting for them in my interpretive framework, I am able to reflect upon the ways in which my own self affected how adoptees' choose to consciously or un-consciously construct themselves and their social life experiences.

²⁵ Class here is measured according to income, wealth, occupation, education and housing/neighbourhood.

As a mid-twenty-something, working class, female, of “minority ethnic origin” and a British-born Indian, I share at least one of these commonalities with each of the adoptees interviewed in this research study.

A key relevant component of my identity was my relatively young age. This was only really a concern raised in this research study, when I was required to answer one of the adoptees’ questions about my relatively young age and level of academic background, in terms of my qualifications to carry out research in an area such as this. However, despite this I felt a great deal of confidence in my own abilities to carry out this research study in a professional and mature way. I knew what I was doing, and had plenty of research training in preparing to do the research. I had therefore not really taken into account the effects that my age would have on how adoptees saw me and made their interpretations about their social life experiences, let alone how being 24 years old would affect my own interpretive framework. I found that being young was an advantage in several of the interviews. For example, some of the adoptees who were of a similar age (in their late teens and early twenties) said that they felt it easier to talk to a person who was of similar age. This was because it was felt that I had a shared understanding of what it means to be a young adult in current times. As such these adoptees said that they talked to me with relative ease and comfort.

However, being a young age was a difficulty for at least one of the adoptees. This emerged during the interviews, when I was questioned about my ability to appreciate and understand some of the social life experiences of one of the adoptees (*Julie*), who was in her mid-forties. It was only really then that I had begun to think about the effects of my age on my understanding of adoptees’ life (hi)stories. As such, questions began to arise about whether a deeper level of understanding would have been obtained if I had been an older researcher. Indeed the afore-named adoptee (*Julie*) certainly felt that the age differences meant that I could not fully appreciate her experiences: *“on several occasions it felt that you had not got what I said or your response felt quite a bit innocent, and I honestly believe that comes down to the age difference”* (*Julie*), and *“I can tell that this work was produced by someone young. Some of the interpretations lack depth”* (*Julie*). I am not able to answer whether age differences did contribute to a lack of understanding, although it is likely that they

may have done. However, a limited understanding in this sense is not to say that there was a limited sense of appreciation of the significance of the experiences. As such then, in questioning the degree to which age differences contributed to my analysis, I am unable to provide a certain answer, only speculate on it and take it into account in terms of my interpretation framework.

A second component of my identity is that of class. In terms of identity, being working-class is very important to me. It is a key determinant in my life experiences and life decisions, and in how I interpret what I see around me. As a research student with an Indian heritage, many have assumed that I am from an affluent middle-class Indian family²⁶. When I correct this assumption, people are quite surprised to hear that my parents are of a working-class background. The point is that I am usually assumed to be one type of person in terms of class, where in reality I am another. Although making this distinction is very important to me, it is not one that I felt I needed to make to the adoptees in this research study, who at the end of the day, were being asked to discuss their racial identity development. Although saying this, I was aware of the possibility of the adoptees making this assumption. For example, whilst interviewing one of the adoptees, I discovered that his emphasis on being “black” ran in parallel with his identity as a working-class individual. During the interviews I felt that it was quite easy for me to keep my own pride and views away from his then narrative presentation. For example, at no time did we directly or indirectly talk about my own class, let alone my feelings about being from a strong working class background. However, despite this I am unable to say with certainty the degree to which this adoptee did not make assumptions about me being working-class and partially construct his own experiences accordingly.

A third component of my identity is that of gender. When discussing the ideas around ‘strong objectivity’, Harding (1991) argued her case from a Feminist Standpoint theory. This approach sees women as a socially constructed subordinate group, and argues that because of this, they are in a better position to arrive at an adequate

²⁶ The assumption that the vast majority of Asians in higher education are from an affluent background derives from how in the middle of 19th Century Britain, a growing number of Indians from wealthy families began arriving in Britain to study (Visram, 2002). Hence the presence of Indians in the British education system was associated with their wealth.

representation of social reality than men, who are seen as too caught up in their project of control to obtain a truer picture of reality. Harding sees this advantaged position that women have as bringing an opportunity to “produce empirically more accurate descriptions and theoretically richer explanations” (Harding, 1991:119). For example, Yow’s discussion of the research on gender and communication, found that female interviewers possess a number of positive characteristics particularly useful for interviewing. These include how “women are more likely than men to say things that encourage responses” and “use positive minimal responses, such as ‘mm hmmm’, that indicate ‘I’m following you’” (Yow, 1994:131). However, research has also found that women are more hesitant than their male counterparts, to disagree or challenge comments, because they feel that doing so may destroy any rapport that may have been built (Yow, 1994). Initially I did not expect that my gender would affect the type of data that my research would generate, let alone using it to produce the ‘more accurate and richer’ data that Harding emphasises. Upon reflection though, I do believe that for obtaining the data, being a woman did open some doors to experiences that (both male and female adoptees) would otherwise have left closed to a male interviewer. For example, some of the adoptees seemed more comfortable in telling me about their most inner feelings and experiences. In particular, how two adoptees were able to talk in-depth about their experiences of abuse. One of these adoptees (*William*) was a young man, who talked in some detail and with some genuine emotion about his feelings and the effects of the name-calling that he had experienced. For example, at one stage he even wiped away some tears. It is likely that a male interviewer would have been less successful in accessing this depth of understanding and emotion from this particular adoptee. Another adoptee (*Natasha*), told me that she felt she could tell me more because I was a woman, because she felt I could ‘appreciate’ and ‘understand’ what being a woman meant. *Julie* also specifically stated that she felt it easier to talk to another woman: “*I think (you) being a woman makes it easier as well...because it’s probably easier to describe these things when you’re not having to describe them to a bloke*” (*Julie*). However, in light of issues around traditional gender roles and masculinity, I do wonder whether the male adoptees would have felt more comfortable with a male interviewer, with whom they may have had a shared understanding, and not felt as if they would have had to explain, or as they may see justify, every aspect of their male perspective to this female interviewer.

A fourth component of my identity was that of racial background, in particular my “non-whiteness”. In choosing to identify myself as a British-born Indian, I feel it is a term I am most comfortable with and one that currently best describes my historical, cultural and racial set of experiences. It is an experience that is distinctly different to that of being “black”, which is an experience that nearly always refers to people of recent African-Caribbean descent. This distinct difference is discussed in greater detail in later sections of this Chapter. Despite this difference, I am usually classed as “black”. This was also experienced by the adoptees. From the outset of this research study though, I knew that it was vital that my own views about “blackness”, should not shadow adoptees’ construction of their life (hi)stories. I therefore carried out a number of measures to help ensure that I could do this with full success. For example, I chose not to overtly state my views and discuss my own experiences in aiming to limit my intrusion on adoptees’ narratives. Realistically though, I cannot be wholly certain of how my own self affected how adoptees constructed themselves and their social life experiences whilst in my presence. However, in the feedback sessions that took place after the interviews, some of the adoptees did discuss or make suggestions as to how they saw my race and the effect this had on the presentation of their narratives. For example, one adoptee had said after the interviews that she probably would not have given her life (hi)story if I had been a “white” researcher, because she thought that *“it’s much easier to have these conversations with people who are non-white...I suppose I do have a set of assumptions which mean that maybe I don’t have to explain things in too much detail because I’m explaining them to somebody whose probably got a greater understanding because they are likely to have been there”* (Julie). Clearly then in Julie’s case, me being seen as “black” or of a “minority ethnic origin” was important in that it enabled me to access her life (hi)story, and as such she spoke to me as a(nother) “black” person, assuming there to be a shared understanding of some of her experiences. And, although this shared understanding supports a “black” essentialist viewpoint, which this study questions, the adoptee’s assumption brought with it a deeper access to information, which was seen as an advantage to the study.

Away from these shared identities, were two distinct differences that separated my self with the adoptees.

The first of these differences is that I am not ‘trans-racially’ adopted. Instead I was raised by both my birth parents, with my two birth siblings, and surrounded by numerous members of my extended birth family. However, for those who did not know me, my name (*Tina Patel*) could be interpreted as belonging to someone who was ‘trans-racially’ adopted. For example, *Tina* could be a Christian adoptive name, and *Patel* a birth name that I may have chosen to revert back to and use. Considering how this name appeared in all the advertisements and introductory information leaflets used in the sample recruitment process, may have enabled the adoptees to guess in advance that in some way I was of a “minority ethnic origin” biological heritage. Indeed when having initially met the adoptees, one of their first questions had been if I was a ‘trans-racial’ adoptee myself.

The second difference was one that existed between four of the adoptees and myself. These four adoptees had all been seriously abused, either verbally, mentally or physically, because of their colour and/or the ‘trans-racial’ aspects of their adoption. As someone who had never experienced such serious abuse, I felt that despite my genuine attempts, I could not empathise, help or show a deeper understanding of their experiences, apart that is, from my usual sympathetic interest, my anger at the perpetrators, and my admiration at the adoptees’ survival of their abuse.

(2.6) Other influences on the interviewing process

There are three other areas, which very likely affected the interviewing process. These were (i) the researcher’s physical demeanour and presentation, (ii) the researcher’s personality, and (iii) the physical setting in which the interview took place.

The first two areas directly related to my own presentation to the adoptees during the interviews. As researcher of this study, it is important to ensure that I present myself as a friendly researcher with the genuine desire to do undertake the study. Presenting myself in this way was not particularly challenging, largely because that they are parts of this researcher’s everyday persona. My style of dress was kept simple, comfortable and non-provocative, as to reflect my status as a professional and

friendly researcher.

Presenting myself as a serious and professional researcher was at times easy and at other times quite difficult. This is because despite my original expectations, in practice, it was not as easy to be so clear-cut and rigid across what were in effect six very different interviews. For example, in some of the interviews I was able to be the highly empathetic and professional interviewer. However, at other times I had to (re)negotiate this image of myself to suit the different social setting and space that had been presented before me. For example, I had to soften the professional lines and be less formal and threatening.

The next area affecting the interview process related to the physical setting in which the interview took place. When arrangements for interviewing were made, adoptees were also asked about their preferences of where they would like to be interviewed. The emphasis on the adoptee choosing a location was important because they were being asked to talk about their lives, and so it was felt that for them being in what they would see as a safe, comfortable and familiar environment, in other words, what could essentially be seen as their territory, would mean that they would be able to feel as if they could talk more freely in an in-depth way.

Three of the adoptees chose to be interviewed in their own homes. The reasons they gave for this was that it was more convenient for them me to visit them. Another adoptee asked if she could be interviewed at the University, because she was in the process of moving house, and felt that she could relax more at the University, away from the disruption of her house move. One adoptee asked to be interviewed at his local café, next to his place of work. Again, this was for reasons of convenience, because he could only find time to be interviewed during his lunch breaks. Another adoptee requested that they should not be interviewed in their own home, because they did not want their adoptive mother to know that they were being interviewed. It was quite difficult to find another suitable location, which we both knew, and which would allow privacy, as well as have the facilities for a tape-recorder to be plugged in, and so as a result, these interviews took place at a privately owned property belonging to a family member of mine. All the above locations provided comfort, privacy, tea/coffee making amenities, and the facilities for a tape-recorder to be used.

They were also secure locations for myself, because I had felt comfortable and fairly safe in a situation which essentially saw me meeting with a virtual stranger.

(2.7) The process of interviewing: talking and listening

In terms of the interviewing process, my interpretive framework is informed by Franklin's three interview models. The first model is 'the information extraction model'. This model "sees the interview as a situation where the interviewer extracts from the interviewee, an articulation of feelings, ideas, and/or knowledge". It sees the interviewer as 'taking the active role of question-asker' and the interviewee 'taking the passive role of respondent'. The interviewer is not seen as responding substantively to what the interviewee says, and is only 'friendly enough to facilitate the information-extraction process'. The second model, 'the shared understanding view', sees "the...interview as a situation in which the interviewer attempts to gain understanding of how the interviewee experiences aspects of her own life and/or the world of objects and other persons". As such the interview is seen as 'an interpersonal situation' where "the interviewer's characteristics (and) sensitivity...are likely to affect what is said". However, this 'interviewer effect' is not seen as negative, but as necessary because the interview process 'not only brings forth meanings' but also sometimes 'newly forms them' due to the 'sharing' between the interviewer and interviewee. The third model, 'the discourse model', "assumes that both interviewer and interviewee have active roles in what transpires", in that the interviewer "enters into a conversational mode, and responds to the interviewee's questions, perhaps even talking about their own experiences". This similarly means that whilst there may be a pre-existing focus for the interview, the "exploration of new themes that arise in the exchange" are allowed and encouraged (Franklin, 1997:100-104).

Before I carried out the interviews, my initial thoughts about interviewing lent towards Franklin's 'information extraction model'. This is because I viewed the task of interviewing as a situation where-by the interviewer extracts information from the interviewee about their social life and experiences. However, whilst interviewing and reflecting upon my epistemological position of how knowledge (or a version of a truth) is viewed as something that is not only obtained, but something that is also created in the research process by both the research participant and the researcher, I

found that my interviewing began to loosely fit with the 'shared understanding model'. This is because I began to realise that my own self was not only affecting the adoptees' construction and presentation of their social life experiences, but that it was also affecting my interpretation framework of the offered (hi)story.

However, caution on three levels was also given in recognition of the influence of the 'shared understanding model'. Firstly, this was in terms of the degree to which the interviewer's 'presence and necessary participation' is acceptable in the constructing and negotiating of what is (or at least should be) at the end of the day, the adoptees' life (hi)story (Franklin, 1997:102). For example, although I recognise that my own self was undoubtedly influential in the adoptees' construction and presentation of their social life experiences, I do not share Franklin's easy and uncritical acceptance of 'sharing' being a positive thing. Instead I support Harding's (1991) recommendations of an implementation of a 'strong objective' approach to my interpretation framework by not only openly acknowledging my influence in the knowledge that is being constructed, but also in my theorisation and presentation of that knowledge. Secondly, I am curious as to whether there was an actual 'shared understanding', because after-all, although there may have been some broad similarities between the adoptee(s) and myself, (for example, in terms of age, gender, background, etc.) this does not necessarily bring with it an assumed understanding of how that commonality was experienced and interpreted by the other. Hence, although there may be an understanding, there is not always a *shared* understanding. Thirdly, although I initially viewed the interview as a session loosely based around the 'information extraction model', and then around the 'shared understanding model' (Franklin, 1997), this does not necessarily mean that the adoptee saw it in a similar way. I realised this on hearing a passing comment made by one of the adoptees (*Julie*) who said in reference to the interview session: "*(let's) proceed with this debate, it's not a debate it's an interview, it feels like a debate...*" (*Julie*).

When asked about how they felt about talking in the interviews, nearly all of the adoptees said that they were surprised at how much they could actually talk. For example, one adoptee (*Julie*), said: "*gosh! I can talk about myself!!*" and referred to this as her "*outpourings*" (*Julie*). Some adoptees felt it beneficial to talk about their lives, in particular their adoption. For example, *Robert* said: "*it's been good to talk*

about actual things that you sort of take for granted...I've sort of clarified things in my head about what I've experienced" (Robert); and similarly Natasha said: "I felt that I could open up and express my feelings...it's actually quite nice...it's made me realise a few things as well...it's made me that little bit more confident, having talking about it openly with someone, probably, well yeah, for the first time" (Natasha). Some of the adoptees also discussed how they perceived themselves as readers of their own narratives. Here, some of the adoptees said that they felt like a third person whilst reading their narrative. For example, Natasha said about her life (hi)story narrative: "it felt as if it was me reading it, but it did feel as if it was someone else's story, but that they had very close links to myself, almost like a twin. But...I could see it was me. I knew it was me" (Natasha). Another adoptee (Robert) found it "interesting...to have it all laid down in black and white" (Robert). One adoptee (Julie), found the experience of reading one's own narrative (in the form used in this study, i.e. as words were spoken, with the hesitations left in, and with no corrections made to false starts), as "hard to read and make sense (of)" (Julie), which meant that for her, it was "a bit of a shock" (Julie) and "horrible to see yourself represented like this" (Julie). However, none of the adoptees said that they had felt that the interviews had any serious negative effects, which is why they continued with it until its completion.

(2.8) Editing and interpretation

Oral life (hi)storians consider the editing and interpretation stages as significant stages of the analysis. When editing, Plummer emphasises that it is important to "get your subject's own words, really come to grasp them from the inside, and then yourself turn it into a structured and coherent statement that uses the subject's words in places and the social scientist's in others but does not lose their authentic meaning" (Plummer, 2001:177). However, although editing in this way can be seen as a part of the larger quest to collect in-depth data and understand the 'subjective reality' of the individual's social life world, it still nevertheless constitutes a form of reworking and rewriting to prepare the raw data for presentation of some sort.

The problem of this for this particular research study, is that it led me to ask myself questions about whose (hi)story is being told and how much I had 'intruded'

(Plummer, 2001:176) upon the adoptees' (re)presentation of their life (hi)story. I accept that my interpretive framework needs to take account of my self and the ways in which I, as a mid-twenty-something, working class, female and British-born Indian, could inform the construction, negotiation and presentation of the adoptees' social life experiences. However I can not say for sure in what ways and to what degrees the components of my identity affected each of the six adoptees' construction. For example, would being a female interviewer make another female adoptee more or less inhibited in telling me about their life? Similarly, how would someone who may not see themselves as "black" talk about themselves to someone they may see as "black". Although undoubtedly, each of the components of my identity affected each of the six adoptees in different ways and to different degrees, one cannot say for sure their precise effects, only to acknowledge them and to theorise about them in the interpretation and presentation of the adoptees' life (hi)stories (Harding, 1991).

In asking how much interpretation should be done to the original text of a life (hi)story, Plummer recognises four approaches that have been used. The first is that some narratives are left without interpretation, but presented in their pure form. Others are 'framed' by the interpretation by being surrounded by a commentary through-out the narrative. Thirdly, is the standard practice of having an interpretation in a commentary at the end of the document. Finally, "there is the more marginal case where the life history subjects do not 'speak for themselves' at all but are to be found within the story of the social scientist" (Plummer, 2001:178).

This research study adopted a modified version of the approach that frames the narrative with the investigator's analysis through-out the narrative. This modified version saw each of the adoptees' life (hi)story accounts being organised into themes and categories and then 'framed' with my interpretation. Although it is recognised that my interpretation framework brings with it problems around my intrusion onto the adoptees' life (hi)story, the modified 'framing' method is utilised because it is the most suitable way in which six 'trans-racial' adoptees' life (hi)stories can be presented and compared, with a minimal amount (compared to other methods) of intrusion by the researcher.

In discussing the editing of narratives, Franklin emphasises the importance of recognising the “distinction between the interviewee’s narrative and the interviewer’s narrative...the interviewee’s presented narrative as the ‘primary narrative representation’ and to the investigator’s narrative construction as the ‘secondary narrative representation’” (Franklin, 1997:109). Franklin states that because the latter may affect the first, careful control must be practiced so as to limit the danger of a ‘co-construction’ of a narrative, which could deafen the ‘distinct voice’ of the individual’s ‘primary narrative representation’ (Franklin, 1997:111). In trying to avoid the adoptees’ life (hi)story being overtaken by my own ideas, theories, expectations and experiences, a number of measures have been taken. These include theorising about the ways in which my own self may affect the adoptees’ presentation of their life (hi)story and my interpretation of it.

Taking into account Franklin’s (1997) and Plummer’s (2001) ideas about editing and interpretation, I have developed my own approach to the editing and interpretation of the life (hi)stories in this research study. In this approach, the adoptees’ *original* understanding, that is, their understanding of the situation at the time of their occurrence was seen as impossible to access. This is because these were feelings and thoughts that could only be captured in their pure essence at their precise time of original occurrence, i.e. as they were happening. The adoptees’ recollection and discussion of these past experiences, thoughts and feelings, including how they felt and thought about them during the time of interviewing, was seen as the *primary interpretation*. This stage acknowledged that the interviewer’s self to a degree and in various ways, played a role in how the adoptees constructed, (re)negotiated, and presented their accounts. The interviewer’s interpretation and re-presentation of the adoptees’ life (hi)story during the interviews, for example, “so what you’re saying is that...”, is seen to as the *secondary interpretation*. The amendments given by the adoptee to this last interpretation, is seen to as the *tertiary interpretation*. The interviewer’s understanding and ‘re-interpretation’ following the feedback from the adoptee is identified as the *fourth interpretation* (see figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1 – Editing and interpretation

(1)	Transcribe interviews. Leave in all meaningful hesitations and all false starts.
(2)	Frame the transcript. Use wide margins to surround it with initial note-form analysis commentary.
(3)	Go over transcripts of each adoptees' life (hi)story separately and (i) pick out themes, (ii) organise comments into categories, (iii) identify any other significant information.
(4)	Go over transcripts. Identify commonalities or distinct differences.
(5)	Distinguish between each adoptees' primary interpretation, and their secondary interpretation.
(6)	Consider the transcript in light of the tertiary interpretation.
(7)	Consider the transcript in light of the fourth interpretation.
(8)	Consider the transcript data in light of arguments used in the debates and the theorisation of racial identity development.

(2.9) Summary

This Chapter highlighted the usefulness of the life (hi)story approach and its qualitative research method of oral life (hi)story interviews to studying 'trans-racial' adoption and racial identity development. This being its ability to provide a deeper insight into the life of a person, and to gain access to that person's interpretation and subjective reality. The Chapter then closely examined the methodological issues involved in studies, which use the life (hi)story approach and method. The first of these methodological issues evolved around the interpretative framework. This is how developed, negotiated and transmitted communication between the adoptee and myself in the interview process shapes the presented life (hi)story. A second

methodological issue related to the defining of role in the interviewing process, for example the researcher (myself) and the researched (adoptee), and the type of relationship developed during this study. The third methodological issue is the way in which commonalities and differences between the researcher and the researched influenced the interview process, and so how the components of my identity needed to be carefully considered in order to limit the degree to which this researcher shaped the adoptees' life (hi)story. The Chapter also considered other influences on the interviewing process, namely the researcher's physical demeanour and presentation; the researcher's personality; and the physical setting in which the interview took place. A fourth methodological issue considered is the process of interviewing itself, in terms of achieving an appropriate balance between talking and listening. The fifth methodological issue discussed the editing and interpretation stages of the data analysis, in terms of presenting the adoptee's life (hi)story in a 'true' and accurate form, which would allow a sociological analysis to be made.

Having considered the methodological issues involved in using the life (hi)story approach, the next Chapter goes on to discuss the actual execution of the research.

Chapter 3

The research process

(3.1) Introduction

This Chapter outlines the process of carrying out the research. The first part describes the pilot study. The second part discusses the main study. This is the sampling process and ethical considerations, and the data collection process, including the recording, transcribing and analysing stages.

(3.2) The pilot study

A pilot study was carried out not only as a test run for the main study, but also as a practice for testing my own skills as a life (hi)story researcher. This was considered to be very important for the study, because it would allow me to finely tune my research skills in a fairly safe and useful session. In having completed the pilot session, I was able to appreciate the value of having undertaken the pilot interview, in that it was very informative. This is reflected in the detailed discussion given below.

Before carrying out the pilot study, I devoted some time to developing my skills as an oral life (hi)story interviewer. This involved firstly, reading the literature and watching videos offering advice on how to do in-depth interviews, and secondly, seeking advice from other researchers at the University who had used the oral life (hi)story interview method. I also decided to have an observer sit in on the pilot interview and observe my skills as a life (hi)story interviewer. This is because they would then be able to observe the progress of the interview and provide feedback on my interviewing techniques. I will discuss how this benefited my research preparation in more detail below.

The actual pilot session lasted 3 hours and 20 minutes, which included breaks totalling approximately 25 minutes. Although the pilot adoptee was informed about her right to take and request breaks whenever she wanted to during the interview, 4 ten-minute breaks were nevertheless built into the interview schedule. Doing so

meant that there would be some sort of reminder as to when a break should be taken. In this time most of the topic areas outlined in the interview schedule were covered quite thoroughly. However, upon reflection, a 3 hour and 20 minute session was far too long, which led to both the adoptee and interviewer, feeling very drained, exhausted and consequently not as alert towards the end of the session. It was therefore decided that for the main study then, the interview would be divided into no less than 2 sessions, with each session lasting no more than 3 hours each. These sessions would be carried out over a four-week (or so) period. It was expected that doing this would significantly reduce problems of tiredness and non-alertness.

Taking this into account, the main study interview sessions ended-up being divided in the following way:

Figure 3.1 – Division of interviews

Adoptee	Interview session (1) (minutes)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Feedback session	Overall number of sessions	Overall length of sessions (minutes)
William	100	150	25	X	30	4	305
Robert	105	75	X	X	35	3	215
Julie	180	180	X	X	180	3	540
Alison	180	180	X	X	X	2	360
Natasha	120	150	65	45	50	5	430
Hee Yun (Pilot)	200 (Pilot session)	200	125	X	65	4	590

A visual aid in the form of an A3 sized interview schedule was used as a way of

keeping the interview session in some sort of order. This set out the discussion areas and their allocated time slots. A scaled-down copy of this can be found in appendix-I. The adoptee had not seen this schedule prior to the interview, although she was informed about the areas that would be covered in the interview. Upon reflection, the use of a visual aid in this way was inappropriate. In terms of size, the A3 sized copy was impractical to write on during the session, primarily because it was too big. However, it was at times useful in terms of acting as a loose guide for both the adoptee and myself. Because of the schedule's overall usefulness, a smaller (A4) sized schedule was used as a visual aid in the main study. This was far more practical and manageable. In addition to this, the adoptee was sent an interview schedule two weeks before the actual interview session. This allowed them to think in more detail about the topic to be covered before-hand and make notes about what they would like to talk about if they wished. The adoptees in the main study used the interview schedule as a loose guide for narrating their life (hi)story. This meant the adoptees were not tied to the schedule, but instead used it in their own way where they concentrated on the areas they deemed more significant in their own lives. The use of the interview schedule in this way gave the adoptees the freedom to direct their own narrative presentation. In a study which uses the life (hi)story approach and advocates the direct consultation of adult 'trans-racial' adoptees, such flexible use of an interview schedule is important.

For reasons of accuracy and efficiency, the pilot interview session was also tape-recorded. This allowed the information to be retained, whilst I concentrated on maintaining my communication with the use of appropriate posture, eye contact and gestures. It also freed me from the responsibility of having to make notes in the interview. The interviewee was informed in advance that the interview would be tape-recorded, and had consented to its use. The interviewee later said that although she was aware of the tape-recorder during the first few minutes of the interview, this awareness disappeared for the remainder of the interview. On a practical basis, the use of a good quality tape-recorder ensured that the tape-recording was clear. This also increased accuracy.

A few weeks before the pilot study session, it was agreed by the adoptee and myself that the interview would be conducted at her home. The interview took place in the

respondent's kitchen. This proved to be quite difficult because it was quite small and meant that the tape-recorder could not be placed in between the two of us because there was no room or nearby electric socket to plug it into. This meant that it had to be placed to the side of us. This was a slight problem because I was not able to see when the tape was drawing to an end, and meaning that I was often forced to move away from my seat in order to monitor tape counter levels. Although doing this did not seriously interfere with the interview session, it was an inconvenience. This experience made me ensure that the adoptees in the main study were informed of the need to do the interview sessions in a suitable location, i.e. a location that is quiet, private, comfortable, and contains the facilities (a near-by electric socket) for a tape-recorder to be plugged in.

Before I did the interview I was a little concerned about the issue of self-disclosure and how much I should reveal about my own experiences. However these concerns were not relevant in the pilot interview session as the adoptee talked freely without the need to ask me questions about myself. Nevertheless, I was aware of the need to be aware of these concerns when conducting the main interviews.

Immediately having completed the pilot interview, I felt that I could have been a little more firmer in the timing of the interview. This is because the interviewee strayed from the subject quite a few times, and it was a while before I was able to direct her back to the interview schedule. However, once I had transcribed the interview, I had found that (most of) these stray comments were quite informative and important. This is because it was a representation in some form or another of what is significant to the adoptee. It therefore supported one of the beliefs of this research(er), this being to empower the 'trans-racial' adoptees' by providing them with some sort of arena in which their voices could be heard. I therefore viewed the way in which the adoptees strayed away from the pre-set agenda useful and allowed it to continue in the main study.

A third party sit-in observer was used in the pilot study. The purpose of this was to attempt to provide feedback on my interviewing skills, especially as a life (hi)story interviewer. Several points were made about my techniques of interviewing by the observer. Firstly, because I talked to the interviewee a few times prior to the interview

session, the observer thought that there was a tendency for me to anticipate answers from the adoptee and that this then tended to lead me to ask some leading questions and showing that I had opinions on what the adoptee was saying. The example given by observer was when I said to the interviewee, *'you seem to be saying that...'* rather than, as the sit-in person suggested, *'can you summarise what you are saying here?'* Upon reflection, I do agree that I did anticipate some of the answers that the adoptee would probably give. However, thinking back on the session and after listening to the tape-recordings of the session, I do not think that this anticipation of likely answers led me to ask leading questions. For instance, with the example that the sit-in person gives, *'you seem to be saying that...'*, this type of clarification question was specifically asked because rather than asking the respondent to summarise what they had just spent the last 20 minutes talking about, it allowed my understanding of their narrative to be presented, and then confirmed or corrected by the adoptee. Next, the observer felt that my physical demeanour at the early stages of the interview session was quite hostile and closed. The example given is that my arms were crossed across my chest, something that I was not aware of. However, it did not seem to affect the adoptee's willingness to give her narrative, a point also agreed by the observer. Thirdly, the observer noted that the information I required was set in the interview schedule in a chronological format, and that this was difficult to keep to in the interview session because the respondent tended to go from one subject to the other in a non-chronological way. Although I also noted this during the interview sessions, it did not worry me too much because the complete narrative covered all categories.

As a whole, the pilot study proved to be a very useful, indeed invaluable experience. It also provided an in-depth narrative. I had initially decided that the adoptee interviewed for the pilot study would not participate in the main research. This was because I appreciated how difficult it was to find a sample of suitable participants, and I wanted to ensure that I would be able to do the main interviews professionally. I initially believed that this would have been lessened if one of the respondents in the main sample had seen me practicing my skills on them.

However, after discussions with my supervisor, it was decided that the pilot study interview should form part of the main study sample. This was because the quality of the data was so good that I felt it would benefit the research study if it could be

included. This was possible to do because even though the pilot study highlighted problems that needed to be changed in the main study, such problems were minor and easily ironed-out, meaning that the pilot study and the main study interviews were still able to share the same status. It was important however, to obtain consent from the pilot study respondent to use the data in the thesis. This was because although consent forms were signed at the start of the pilot study interviews, they were done so on the understanding that it was for practice purposes only and that none of the data collected would be used in the final thesis.

Upon explaining the situation to the adoptee, and making a request to carry out more interviews with her, the pilot study adoptee agreed to taking part in the main interviews, and to the pilot data being used in the final thesis, although she did request that some restrictions be placed on certain data, of which I agreed.

Doing the pilot study made me more aware of the issues that are most prominent in doing qualitative interviews, and in particular oral life (hi)story interviews. These include the importance of establishing a relationship where personal information can be freely given; being able to listen to the narrative and not constantly interrupt the adoptee, because it can be very off-putting for them; achieving a balance between disclosing and limiting information about oneself to the adoptee; the using of physical gestures more appropriately as an invitation for more information or as a request for clarity of details. The timing of these gestures and the type of gestures used is very important; being aware of the line between information that is obtained for the research, and information that is being sought to satisfy my personal curiosity, and keeping on the right side of that line; using prompts appropriately and at the correct times; using probes at the correct times; being able to read between the lines; looking for inconsistencies as the narrative progresses and being able to re-direct the interview as to fill these gaps; and, acknowledging how power relations, including differences in ages, gender, social status, and so on affect the narrative, (Denscombe, 1998; Harding, 1991; Robson, 1998; Sikes, 2000). This has been covered in Chapter 2.

(3.3) The main study

In using the feedback and experience of the pilot study, the main study and sample frame was designed in a way deemed most appropriate for a study of this nature and size.

Reflective diary

The design of the main study had been moderately refined in one key way. This was the introduction of a reflective diary. It was decided that the adoptees would be given a reflective diary in which they could record their thoughts about their lives and about the whole research process. A research tool of this type is seen as very important because it meant data was not being restricted to the confines of the interview sessions, because adoptees were able to make written discussions and explorations (of some sort or another) whenever they wanted to. The adoptees were told that the reflective diaries were to be used in conjunction with the research topic, and apart from this specification they were free to use it in whichever way they chose. They were also told that although the diaries would benefit the research, they were not obliged to return them – but that this should be something for them to decide after the interviews were completed.

When the interviews were completed, I found that one adoptee had not used the diary. This was because they said that it was not a practice they were familiar with and along with the time constraints they faced due to other aspects of their life, they were unable to make any real use of it. However, five of the adoptees used the diary in some way or another. For 3 of these 5, the diary provided additional data about the adoptees' interpretations of their life experiences. For the other 2 adoptees, even though the diary was not returned, they said that it helped them to think about discussion areas to raise in the interview sessions.

The use of the reflective diary was largely seen as an advantage because it allowed the majority of the adoptees' to think more about their experiences. This positively informed the interview sessions because the adoptees were also better prepared to discuss the subject areas being covered in the study.

Sampling and gaining access

A truly representative sample is very difficult to produce for the majority of research studies in the social sciences. This is because of the diversity of backgrounds, experiences and views of the researched population. Although it was felt that the adoptees' experiences would in some ways be compared to one another, this study emphasised that this would not be a comparative study. It was therefore stated from the outset of this study that a comparative sample was not sought. This is because the study did not focus on comparing the lives, experiences and identities of a sample of identical 'trans-racial' adoptees. This has already been well-covered in the literature. For example by Bagley (1993), Bagley and Young (1979), McRoy and Zurcher (1983), and Johnson, Shireman and Watson (1983). Rather, this study wanted to take a randomly selected small sample of individuals who had been 'trans-racially' adopted, and then seek to understand how their social experiences had informed upon their racial identity development. Therefore, in the process of selecting a sample, the first question asked was *'were you 'trans-racially' adopted?'*, as opposed to say *'were you 'trans-racially' adopted, and if so, have your experiences been negative or positive?'*

This study acknowledges the importance and value of interviewing children, and supports the work of those who have provided a strong and convincing case for the necessity of involving children in research that affects them. For example such as the work of Thomas, Beckford, Lowe and Murch (1999), and Christensen and James (2000) who also provide guidelines on how to best do this. However, Roberts (2000) who also recognises the importance of researching children and child participation in research, highlights the ethical issues of doing so. Roberts argues that some "young children (and indeed many adults) may not always have the judgement to know what the consequences will be of exposing their feelings...children participating in research...may (therefore) well suffer distress" (Roberts, 2000:228). Taking into consideration these arguments and the nature of this research, i.e. to gain a deeper insight of the adoptees' whole life, a decision was made not to interview children. This is because it was felt that the topic was so emotional and likely to have a strong impact on children (many of whom who would have already faced disruption and

troubled backgrounds).

In light of how the life (hi)story method was going to be used to obtain data about the adoptees, it followed that the oral life (hi)story interviews would produce a somewhat lengthy and very detailed narrative from the adoptees about their life experiences. For a research project of this nature and size, I needed a sample frame that was both practically manageable and contained a varied set of experiences in order to generate information for a detailed analysis to be made in light of the debates within literature and policy. It was viewed that a sample of more than 2 and less than 10 'trans-racial' adoptees would be able to meet these requirements.

I acknowledged at the outset of this research the difficulty of gaining access to a sample of 'trans-racially' adopted adults who would be willing to talk on a voluntary basis about their experiences at some length and in some depth. Apart from the usual word of mouth approach to meeting adoptees, other attempts made to meet adoptees included making contact with organisations with interests in this area, and placing advertisements in various journals and magazines:

(1) Groups and organisations (2001/2002)

The following groups and organisations were contacted:

- Association of Transracially Adopted and Fostered People, London
- British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering, Leeds
- After Adoption, Manchester.

(2) Advertisements (2001/2002)

Advertisements were placed in the following:

- 'Community Care'.
- 'Adoption UK'. A copy of this advertisement can be found in appendix-II.

A combination of these approaches proved to be quite positive and as a result, a total of 14 'trans-racial' adoptees responded. All these 14 adoptees were sent an information sheet providing further details about the research. A copy of the information sheet can be found in appendix-III. Of the 14, six did not want to participate. Reasons given included time restrictions, lack of interest and other (undisclosed) personal constraints. Another two adoptees did not fit the sample criteria (outlined below), in that one was too young to participate and the other was

due to move to the US in the coming months. This left me with a final sample of six 'trans-racial' adoptees. This sample generated a total of about 40 hours (over 600 pages of transcript) of in-depth information covering the lives of six 'trans-racial' adoptees who had 193 years worth of experiences between them.

The study sought to understand a variety of 'trans-racial' adoption experiences, and to use these experiences to critically assess existing literature and policy. This meant that the sample was not representative in that adoptees were not selected on the basis of whether their experiences had been positive or negative.

The adoptees were required however, to meet certain criteria. The first requirement was that the adoptees needed to have been 'trans-racially' adopted, in particular be "black" or "mixed race" (i.e. "black" and "white") by birth, and adopted into a "white" placement by non-family members. This represented the vast majority of 'trans-racial' adoptions. The second requirement was that the adoptees needed to have been currently living in Britain, with a preference for having done so for a substantial period. This is because the study sought to look at the British notion of race and "blackness" or "non-whiteness", and inform British adoption policy and practice. Finally, the adoptees needed to have been a minimum of 18 years old. This is because it is the age where-by individuals become legal adults. There was a preference for the adoptees to be of a variety of ages as to provide a more varied range of experiences. Consequently, the ages of the adoptees in the final sample were 21; 22; 26; 40; 41; and, 43. However it is recognised that the differences in the respondent's ages is significant to their presented life (hi)story. This is because each had grown up in a particular political context and thus situated their construction of racial identity within that context, i.e. those mentioned included the emergence of the National Front; growth of the British National Party; Enoch Powell and the 'Rivers of Blood' era; 1980s race riots; and so on. Similarly, differences in ages meant differences in the lengths of time that each adoptee had to deal with the intensity of such key events and political contexts, i.e. some of the older adoptees had 20 years or so to deal with issues in comparison to the more younger adoptees, who may have only had several years or so of having to deal with very similar issues. As gender had not been a key variable in this research study, no specific criteria had been followed. As a result, the final sample contained 4 female adoptees and 2 male adoptees, which was an uneven

gender split but viewed as acceptable.

Before carrying out the main study, I carried out semi-structured interviews with two social workers from the Child and Family Unit of the South Yorkshire Social Services Department. These interviews were designed to provide me with some background information about the practice and policy implementation of 'trans-racial' adoption guidelines. Although these interviews were informative, I chose not to interview any other people involved in the 'trans-racial' adoption process, such as the adoptive parents, the caseworkers, siblings, etc. This is because I wanted the adoptees to be given the full opportunity to talk about their experiences using their own voices, as existing research has not adequately recognised the value and importance of allowing the adoptees' voices to be heard, as illustrated by the way in which they have instead used parental or teacher assessments as a prime source of data collection, see for example the works of Bagley and Young (1979), Feigelman and Silverman (1984), and Feigelman (2000).

The final sample

A number of measures were taken to protect the anonymity of the adoptees participating in this study. Despite this, the very nature of the life (hi)story method means that details about participants cannot always be coded, omitted, or carefully described so as to avoid identification. Hence the reader may notice that the information given about the adoptees is necessarily detailed. In terms of confidentiality and anonymity issues, the implication of this detailed information is discussed in section 3.4.

The following six adoptees made up the final sample.

Alison Ridley

At the time of interviewing, *Alison* Ridley was female, 40 years old and living in Worcester. *Alison* had been born to a 'white European' mother from Ireland and a 'black African-Caribbean' father, who at the time had been living in the London area. Having received no support from her own parents and the baby's birth father after *Alison's* birth, her birth mother reluctantly abandoned her on a train, a decision she

immediately regretted. However, *Alison*'s birth mother was unable to get her daughter back because the abandonment had meant that she had committed a criminal offence. *Alison* then went into foster care and spent nine months with a family. A month later the foster mother fell pregnant so *Alison* went back into foster care. It was then, at the age of 16 months, that her adoptive parents fostered her. At eighteen months, *Alison* was adopted by her foster parents. In *Alison*'s adoptive family, there were already three boys, who were all older than *Alison* and the biological children of her adoptive parents. The adoptive family were all 'white European' and lived in a "white" middle class village in England. Whilst growing up *Alison* received no cultural input of her birth heritage. *Alison* contacted members of her birth family when she was in her mid-twenties. Overall, *Alison*'s experiences in her adoptive family were positive.

Katherine Hee Yun Muller

Katherine *Hee Yun* Muller was female, 26 years old and living in Sheffield. She preferred to be called *Hee Yun* (part of her birth name which was incorporated into her adoptive name by her adoptive parents). *Hee Yun* was born to a Korean mother. The racial background of her birth father was unknown, although *Hee Yun* strongly suspected that he was also Korean. *Hee Yun* was placed into an orphanage soon after her birth, and then put up for an intercountry adoption, where, at the age of three she was adopted by a German family. The adoptive family were all 'white European' and lived in a predominantly "white" area of Germany. Although there had been some Turkish families living in the area, there were no other Koreans. *Hee Yun*'s adoptive family already had a son, who was older than *Hee Yun* and who had been a biological child. *Hee Yun* wanted to search for her birth mother in her youth, but had been seriously restricted by the poor record keeping of the orphanage and Korea's history regarding the stigmatisation of single mothers. *Hee Yun* received no cultural input of her birth heritage whilst growing up in her adoptive family. *Hee Yun*'s experiences in her adoptive family was largely positive, although she suffered some serious problems during her teenage years, which was related to her having been an intercountry adoptee and having no access to information about her birth family.

Barbara Julie Shepherd

Barbara *Julie* Shepherd, who preferred to be called by her middle name (which was been part of her birth name), was female, 43 years old and living in Bristol. *Julie* had

been born to a 'black African-Caribbean' mother (who may herself have been "mixed race") and a 'white European' father. Her birth mother was unable to care for her, and privately placed her for temporary foster care with a 'white European' couple, when *Julie* was about 2 years old. This later changed to a full adoption. *Julie* had been an only child in her adoptive family, and grew up in a predominantly "white" village in England. *Julie* had no interest in her birth family and received no cultural input of her birth heritage whilst growing up in her adoptive family. Overall, *Julie* had felt that she had a positive experience in her adoptive family.

Natasha Sue Agatha Dionne Baldwin

Natasha Sue Agatha Dionne Baldwin, (Agatha Dionne being two parts of her birth name), was female, 22 years old and living in Sheffield. She had been born to a "black" mother living in the Seychelles. The racial background of her birth father had been unknown, although *Natasha* was sure that he was not "black", but possibly 'white European'. *Natasha* was adopted by a British family when she was about 6 months old. Although the adoptive parents spent a lot of time travelling around the world with their work, when in England they lived in a predominantly "white" area. *Natasha's* adoptive parents were "white" and already had 5 biological children, who were all older than *Natasha*. This family was also a step-family. Three of the biological children had been from the adoptive mother's previous marriage. These children were also "mixed race", because their birth father was 'black African-Caribbean'. The other two of the biological children were 'white European', and from the adoptive father's previous marriage. *Natasha* received no cultural input of her birth heritage as a youngster growing up in her adoptive family. She was curious about her birth family and the circumstances surrounding her birth, but failed to actively seek information because she feared upsetting her adoptive parents. Overall, *Natasha* had felt that she had a positive experience growing up in her adoptive family.

Robert Danjuma

Robert Danjuma (Danjuma being his birth father's name) was male, 41 years old and living in Nottingham. His birth mother was a 'white European' woman from Ireland, and his birth father a 'black African-Caribbean' man from Nigeria. The birth mother had gone to a Catholic mother and baby home, and at six weeks old, *Robert* was

fostered. He was then fostered another two times, until he was adopted, at the age of 2 years old, by an Anglo-Irish Catholic family who were living in a predominantly “white” working-class area of London. The adoptive family already had five biological children, who were all older than *Robert*. Despite there having been no cultural input of his birth heritage, *Robert* recalled having a positive childhood in his adoptive family, where he felt as if he was treated as a biological child. *Robert* decided to search for his birth family in his twenties, in an attempt to develop his “black” racial identity.

William Harris

William Harris was male, 21 years old and living in Wolverhampton. He was born in the West-Midlands to birth parents who were both ‘black African-Caribbean’. *William* was abandoned in a hospital soon after his birth, by his birth mother. He was then adopted by his ‘white European’ adoptive parents, who separated soon after the adoption was made, meaning that *William* was also raised in a female headed single-parent family. *William* had 2 older siblings in his adoptive family, who were both the biological children of the adoptive parents. The area in which *William* had grown up had been predominantly “white”. He received no cultural input of his birth heritage as a youngster. *William* contacted his birth family, who were still living in a near-by town, when he was 20 years old and largely had negative experiences with them. *William* found growing up in his adoptive family difficult, although he recalled some positive experiences.

All the adoptees in this study were adopted by parents whose racial origin was different to that of their own. However, there were additional factors that made each of the adoptees’ circumstances unique. These unique differences are outlined in figure 3.2.

Although these variations are also taken into account, the common and overriding guiding theme for this study is the ‘trans-racial’ aspects of all the adoptions.

Figure 3.2 – Adoptees’ backgrounds

	Alison	William	Julie	Robert	Natasha	Hee Yun
Of “black” heritage by birth		●				
Of other “minority ethnic origin” heritage by birth, i.e. Korean*						●
Of “mixed race” heritage, i.e. ‘white European’ and ‘black African-Caribbean’	●		●	●		
Likely to be “mixed race”*					●	
Born in Britain	●	●	●	●		
Born outside of Britain					●	●
‘Trans-racially’ adopted	●	●	●	●	●	●
Intercountry adopted					●	●
Private adoption			●			
Orphaned at birth*						●
Abandoned at birth (in public place)	●	●				
Raised by racially mixed adoptive family					●	
Raised by single-parent adoptive family		●				
Raised by step adoptive family					●	
Only child in adoptive family			●			
Siblings in adoptive family	●	●		●	●	●
Only non-biological child in adoptive family	●	●	●	●	●	●

* Although this could not be confirmed

(3.4) Ethical issues

All research must ensure that the participant’s social, mental, physical or psychological welfare is not harmed. In looking at how to do so in social research, Plummer argues that there are two broad positions. The first is that of the ‘ethical absolutist’ position. This position seeks the establishment of “firm principles which should guide all social research” (Plummer, 2001:226). The ethical principles are usually encoded in charters, for example such as that provided by the British

Sociological Association (BSA), which “are seen as absolutely necessary to protect both the community and the researcher” (BSA, 1998:226). Plummer refers to the work of Kirsch (in Plummer, 2001:226-227), who outlines this view as requiring researchers to obtain informed consent; ensure that participation is voluntary; make sure that participants are aware of the risks and benefits involved; protect the confidentiality of participants; ensure participants’ well-being and reputations are guarded; and to ensure the equitable selection of participants. The second position outlined by Plummer is the ‘situational realist’ position, which “suggest that the ethical dilemmas of the social scientist are not ‘special’ but coterminous with the problems of living in everyday life...there can be no fixed and absolutely binding guidelines”. Therefore “ethics have to be produced creatively in the concrete situation at hand” (Plummer, 2001:227).

The Department of Sociological Studies at the University of Sheffield, uses the BSA guidelines for its ethical review and governance. Before the interviews began, I studied the BSA ‘Guidelines of Ethical Practice’ closely, and felt that I could follow it in full. In particular, I think that the BSA’s emphasis on “professional integrity” (BSA, 1998:1) is vital in a research study like this, which involves a large degree of intrusion into the lives of its participants.

Due to the ‘interpersonal’ features of the interviews in this study (Franklin, 1997:102), the significance of flexible and negotiated ethics, such as those outlined by the ‘situational realist’ position (Plummer, 2001:227), is understandable. However, this was not the case in this study. This is not to say that I do not believe that in some studies the second position is relevant, rather that in this research study, my adherence to the BSA guidelines was strong, and the need to ‘creatively produce ethics’ (Plummer, 2001:227) as the interviews unfolded was unnecessary. For example, an illustration of my strong adherence to the BSA guidelines and its suitability in this study is the guidance it gave on the importance of the researcher maintaining “professional integrity” in terms of having “a responsibility both to safeguard the proper interests of those involved in or affected by their work, and to report their findings accurately and truthfully” (BSA, 1998:1). In order to do this, I used these guidelines to create appropriate boundaries of involvement and detachment, which proved to be very useful whilst dealing with the adoptees’

discussions of personal issues, such as experiences of racism and bullying. If I had favoured the option of reflexively responding to these personal issues as given in the narrative by using the 'situational realist' position (Plummer, 2001:227), my ability to be so professional, as well as cope with the information, would have been significantly reduced. This would not only have been harmful to the credibility of the research findings and myself, but more importantly it would have had problematic consequences for the adoptee.

Confidentiality and anonymity

Although the aims of my research study do not specifically require the identity of participants to be kept confidential, as a researcher I have an ethical responsibility to protect the confidentiality of participants through such means of safeguarding anonymity. This is outlined by the BSA's 'Guidelines of Ethical Practice' (1998).

At the outset of this study, a guarantee of confidentiality was given on all information leaflets that were distributed to possible participants. It was based upon this information that responses were received, and so I was held to this guarantee. Therefore, protecting the confidentiality, through safeguarding the anonymity of participating adoptees in this way is very important. This is an important ethical responsibility. It is also in the practical interests of the researcher, because the findings of this research, any future research or the reputation of the researcher could be impaired if it was thought that a participant's confidentiality and anonymity had not been protected (Jackson, 1995).

It is vital that issues of confidentiality and anonymity conformed to the Data Protection Act (1998). In terms of this research study, this required all computerised personal data and any personal data held in structured manual files to be processed, i.e. including collection, use of, holding, disclosure, and destruction, in a way which protected those to whom it concerned. As a controller of such personal data, this researcher, needed to ensure that personal details about adoptees, including the recordings and transcripts of their interviews, were fairly and lawfully processed, accurate, kept secure, and destroyed when no longer needed.

A number of measures were carried out in aiming to ensure confidentiality and safeguard anonymity in accordance to the Data Protection Act (1998). Firstly, pseudonyms were used to anonymise the identity of adoptees. However, because for some adoptees their names were important to how they saw themselves, i.e. in terms of what they meant, where they originated from, and so on, the replacement names given to adoptees were ones which were from the same country of origin or cultural background as their real ones. Next, certain details were coded, omitted, or carefully described as to avoid their identification. These were used as and when necessary, in order to keep details, which may identify the adoptee, confidential. Similarly, copies of the transcripts of tape-recorded interviews were edited and certain details, that may have identified the respondent, were 'blacked out'. Finally, all details about the adoptee, including personal details, contact details and the original copies of the tape-recorded interview sessions and non-blacked out transcribed copies of the interview sessions were locked away at a secure location.

However, despite having taken these key steps and adhering to BSA guidelines in order to protect the anonymity of the adoptees, the use of the life (hi)story method brings with it an increased risk, of identification, albeit a small one. I had realised this upon analysing the adoptees narratives, and because I had initially guaranteed anonymity to the adoptees prior to the interviews, I was obliged to inform them of this small risk before proceeding to write up my findings. Informing the adoptees' of this small risk was sought via written and oral notification. Upon doing this, it was acknowledged and accepted by all the participating adoptees that, despite the best efforts of this researcher to completely anonymise all identifiable details, the information provided about them is still nevertheless very in-depth. This means that there is a very small risk that the adoptees may be recognisable to anyone who knows them.

Informed consent

Informed consent is an essential element of good research. It is important that such consent has been entirely voluntary and based upon the participant having been informed of what the research is about, who is undertaking it, who is financing it, why it is being undertaken, how it is to be disseminated, and their rights to withdraw

from the research at any time. According to the Data Protection Act (1998) informed consent is also required for the processing of any sensitive personal data, for example, the adoptee's ethnic origin, political opinions, religious beliefs, health, sexual life, and criminal history, in that the research participant's needs to have been given their explicit consent to the processing of such data. In this study, a consent form was used to inform the adoptee of this information and also to act as an official record of their voluntariness to participate.

The consent form designed and used in this research study provided the adoptee with my contact details; the contact details of my supervisors; details about the research aims, including who it was funded by, the purpose of the study, and the research design of the study; information about the ethical issues involved in this research study, these being the adoptee's participation rights, confidentiality and anonymity details, and the dissemination intentions of the data obtained in the course of the interviews and research. These details adhere to the BSA 'Guidelines of Ethical practice' (BSA, 1998). A copy of the consent form can be found in appendix-IV.

Protection policy

The protection of the adoptees' health and well-being is an important part of any study. It was felt that due to the research method that was being used in this study, it was possible that the adoptees could face emotional difficulties. This is because they were essentially spending a considerable amount of time recalling past experiences, some of which may have been distressing for them to have lived through. Indeed causing distress to a respondent in this way can also have an upsetting effect on the researcher. The possibility of such an occurrence had to be seriously considered.

A protection policy for both the researched and the researcher was therefore established before any contact was made with the sample. This policy was underlined by the fact that my role in the research study was that of a sociological researcher, and not a counsellor or psychotherapist. To emphasise this is not to mean that I had not any concern if the adoptees' wanted to talk to me about any difficulties they were experiencing as a result of the research, but rather that I was not formally trained to take on the role of a counsellor or psychotherapist. This protection policy provided a

number of measures aimed at significantly reducing any harm that may be caused to all those involved in the research.

Prior to undertaking the interviews, I decided to provide adoptees with the contact details of 6 reputable adoption groups and organisations that specialised in offering those involved in adoption professional help, support and advice with adoption related issues. I gave this information in the adoptees' copy of the consent form. I also informed adoptees that if an occasion occurred where I was made aware of certain types of information, I would have to discuss it with my supervisor and then decide what further action to take. For example, this included certain criminal acts such as those which are seriously violent or sexual in nature, and so on, and any other acts that could be viewed as harmful to the adoptee themselves, such as self neglect, self abuse, etc.

The protection policy also included strategies on protecting my own well-being. This involved establishing a small support network in which I could discuss any emotional difficulties I faced whilst carrying out the interviews. The support network consisted of a counsellor from the University's Counselling Service, and my two research study supervisors. I used this support network in different ways and at different times. I was in contact with both my research supervisors on a regular basis through-out the interviewing process, and had been able to discuss matters as and when they occurred. However, although I had experienced a particular difficulty with the emotional after-effects of doing one of the interviews, I decided to talk with the counsellor about this (whom I met on a total of two occasions). This was because I felt that the problem had been a difficulty for my self and as such felt that the counsellor was the more suitable person to discuss this with.

(3.5) The interview schedule

The schedule used in the pilot study was slightly modified to include additional topic areas to be covered in the interviews. This modification was based on the fact there was some areas that were very important to the pilot adoptee's life, which I had not accounted for in the pre-modified interview schedule. These new areas were viewed as ones that were very likely to be applicable to the experiences of all the 'trans-

racial' adoptees, and considered to provide an even deeper insight into their experiences and negotiation of a racial identity. The areas that were added to the main study's interview schedule were:

- Any experiences of birth identity before adoption.
- Experiences of racism. How you dealt with it. How it affected your thinking and behaviour.
- Becoming part of the family. Feelings of Similarity and difference.
- If and how your adoptive family tried to accommodate for your birth background. How successful or appropriate this was.
- Inclusion and exclusion. Feelings of belonging. Coping strategies. Choices.
- Do you feel as if something is missing from your life. What. How. Steps taken to resolve.
- Feelings of loss of birth identity.
- Inclusion and exclusion. Feelings of belonging.
- What do you see as typical and commonly used 'black stereotypes' and 'white stereotypes'. Why. What stereotypes have other people placed upon you and how have you responded to these stereotypes.

The modified interview schedule was divided into 4 areas, these being (i) birth and pre-adoption childhood; (ii) being adopted and post-adoption childhood; (iii) teenage years and mid twenties/thirties/forties; (iv) present day. Each of these contained sub-areas. A copy of the interview schedule as used in the main study, can be found in appendix-V. The schedule proved to be a very useful way of providing prompts for discussion in the interview, and because the adoptee was sent a copy of the schedule about two-weeks prior to the interview session, it allowed them to think about what they would talk about.

(3.6) Recording the data

For reasons of accuracy in the data collection process, the tape-recording of the interview has been a necessary part of oral life (hi)story interviews. For all of the interviewees, the tape-recorder was not seen as a problem and was something that was easily forgotten about. For example, as one adoptee in this research study said: "*I felt I could easily ignore the tape recorder*" (Natasha). The use of a tape-recorder

also provided the opportunity to spend time going over the material listening for information that was not initially picked up on in the interview sessions, for example, the repeated use of certain words, long hesitant pauses, and so on. However, in the case of one adoptee (*Julie*), there were certain speech patterns, i.e. a lisp, which even the tape-recording could not make any more clearer. In this instance, the adoptee was re-visited and asked to clarify.

If as an interviewer, I was to leave the tape-recorder on after the ‘official’ interview has been done, the interviewee may relax more and make some ‘off the cuff’ comments, which would be recorded. However, this type of approach is seen as not only deceitful, but harmful to the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee (Miller, 2000:87). For these reasons, a clear cut-off point was illustrated by the turning off of the tape recorder after the interview ended. When any comments were made after this has been done, which I felt would be useful to the study, I made a request to the interviewee asking if that comment could be repeated for the benefit of the tape-recorder and discussed at the next interview.

(3.7) Transcribing and analysing the data

In referring to the work of Mishler, Poindexter argues that transcribing the recorded interview is “more than a routine technical procedure; it is an interpretive process in itself, an important decision regarding how to present and ‘re-present’ an interviewee’s story” (Poindexter, 2002:61). The process of transcription, in terms of its relationship to analysing the data, must therefore be given careful consideration. As Plummer acknowledges, “the aim is to make the transcript as readable as possible – without losing its meanings” and so some editing in transcription is usually needed (Plummer, 2001:150). However, to limit the danger of the researcher imposing themselves too much on the transcript, Plummer also recognises that when “the data is finally ‘transcribed’, it is usual then to show it back to the ‘subject’, so that their feedback can be given” on the researcher’s interpretation (Plummer, 2001:151). In this research study, transcribing the interviews allowed me to analyse the narrative by making notes on the transcript about my understanding of the adoptee’s identity construction and social experiences. A copy of this transcript was then given to the respondent to make additional clearer notes or to correct my understanding of their

narrative. However, having transcribed about 40 hours worth of tape-recorded interviews, I became more appreciative of the difficulties associated with transcribing, namely, its painstaking and lengthy process. As a whole though, transcribing allowed me to become more deeply absorbed in my data, and as such was very beneficial to this study.

In analysing the large volume of data, it is important to remain faithful to the adoptees' narratives. I did this by leaving in all the meaningful hesitations, false starts and pauses in the interview transcripts. I then made my analysis notes on paper copies of these transcripts. In examining the accounts presented in the narratives, I was careful to make sure that the comments that were presented in the results Chapters, had been given in their (as far as feasibly possible) full context, as oppose to a few words or a few sentences being given. As a result, sections of the adoptees' narratives that have been presented in the results Chapters are quite lengthy. However, this has helped to ensure that the words have been accurately presented in the context in which they had been discussed in the interviews.

In practical terms, coping with the actual bulk and volume of the data was not easy. Although hard electronic copies of all the transcripts and analysis notes were kept in secure files on my personal computer, paper copies of all these transcripts and notes were also made. I found it easier and of more use to make notes by hand on the paper copies of transcripts. The use of different coloured pens, markers and stick-it notes helped to categorise and mark themes.

After the main interviews, a feedback session was carried out with adoptees to discuss any points that emerged from the transcript analysis. This feedback from the adoptee corresponds loosely to two of four methods that Miller discusses, these being the 'sight and comment on transcript accuracy' and 'sight and comment on interpretation' (Miller, 2000:84). Both of these approaches emphasise how the respondent is given the opportunity to go over, read, correct, and provide additional comments and explanations to the way in which the narrative has been understood and interpreted by the interviewer. The feedback sessions in this study, also allowed adoptees to disclose their feelings about the research(er). This type of feedback was important because it would provide clarity on my original perceptions of my relationship with the

adoptees, which then provided additional information on how the adoptees saw me, and consequently constructed themselves and their experiences.

At the start of the research, all the adoptees were informed about the need to carry out a feedback session after the completion of the main interviews. All the adoptees had agreed to this. However, when the time came to carry them out, a face-to-face feedback session visit could not be carried out with one adoptee (*Alison*). The reason given was that the adoptee could not give the research any more of her time. I believe this to be the case because although there were several e-mail correspondences and telephone calls arranging a date, and even an actual visit, the adoptee had to cancel all these because of time-constraints and other commitments. As a result, *Alison's* feedback was provided to me by e-mail. This was not the preferred method of collecting feedback from the adoptee, in comparison to a face-to-face meeting. This is because having done the other feedback sessions in person, I was able to appreciate more the adoptees' reflection of my analysis, i.e. through the use of language tone, physical gestures, and so on. However, although not ideal, the e-mail method was nevertheless seen as adequate and acceptable. This is because it contained sufficient reflective feedback of my analysis, in that it was still possible to gauge the tone of the written feedback.

The adoptees used the feedback sessions in various ways. Two adoptees (*William* and *Alison*) used them as an opportunity to rubber-stamp my analysis with their consent by agreeing to almost everything I had written.

Three adoptees (*Robert*, *Hee Yun* and *Natasha*) used it to clarify minor factual points and also to discuss (re-think) some of my interpretation. For example, when I asked *Robert* if there was anything that he felt I had misunderstood in the analysis of the interview narrative, he replied: "*just this little bit about me using stereotypes about white people, you know and me thinking that this is just what they think. I think it's more than just stereotyping, yeah, like them using the word 'tribe', I think that it's got a lot of strong connotations that do conjure up negative images in white people's minds. So yeah, and about that bit of 'never had any of them saying it directly to me', well um, yeah, but just look around at the television and stuff, and media images...that picture is there. I know that not all white people think like that, but a lot*

of white people do” (Robert). I had clearly underestimated Robert’s strong feelings about the racism he sees around him, and how this affected him.

One adoptee (*Julie*) used the feedback session to both clarify factual points and to ‘correct’ my analysis. However, this was done to such an extent and in quite an authoritative way, that I was led to wonder about the degree to which *Julie* was actually attempting to re-write parts of her narrative in order to present herself in a more favourable way (or what she may expect others to see as more favourable). For example, in the main interview sessions, *Julie* said: *“they (school children) made reference to my blackness as they made reference to somebody else’s freckles or fatness. You know, there are worse things than being called black if you are a child” (Julie).* In my analysis of this comment, I said: *“Julie had a few names, which at the time was not seen as racist abuse in the way it would today. But she thinks that the references made to her blackness were made in the way that another child may have had references made to their freckles or fatness, and so for her, there were worse things than being called black” (Interviewer).* To which *Julie* had requested that I change my wording of her sentence by adding a few words, so that it now read: *“she thinks that the references made to her blackness were made in the way that another child may have had references made to their freckles or fatness, and so in some ways for her, there were worse things than being called black” (Julie).* It had seemed here that *Julie* did not want to present herself as someone who had no sense of “blackness” at all. This was supported by a comment that she later made: *“I’m not particularly black at all you know my skin colour and my hair and that’s as far as about it goes and the more these things are thrown up, the more I feel like I kind of am, I don’t know, disloyal or something...I don’t have a black consciousness and also that you know, for most, you know the meaning of statement, I suspect that for some black people I am not black enough you know. I kind of sold out in some way or form” (Julie).* Indeed *Julie* herself recognised the possibility of her unconscious attempts to re-write, when she wrote in her reflective diary how it was: *“easy to criticise what I don’t like to see...have I gone beyond the ‘marking and defence mechanism’ stage of my reading? I’ve certainly been taken aback by some of the things I’ve said” (Julie).*

The differences in how much the feedback sessions were used as an opportunity to assess and correct my understanding, also meant that their lengths varied. One

discussion (*Julie*) was quite long, i.e. 2 hours, and others relatively short in comparison, i.e. between 30 and 45 minutes. However, one must consider how these differences may simply be due to how adoptees had actually felt about my analysis of their narratives. For example some may have felt that my analysis was generally correct and hence did not think there to be a need to have lengthy or detailed discussions.

Having completed the feedback sessions, I became aware of two points that I had not previously considered. Firstly, upon returning transcripts and a copy of my analysis notes to each of the adoptees, I had assumed that all would read over both the analysis notes and the transcript. However, after the feedback sessions I had realised that for various reasons, i.e. time-constraints, and differences in levels of interest, whilst all had read over the analysis notes (which were between 5 to 10 single-sided A4 pages), not all the adoptees had read over or consulted their transcripts (which in comparison was between 38 to 141 single-sided A4 pages). In reflection though, I think that it is maybe unfair to expect research participants to read whole transcripts of their narratives. Secondly, although I initially decided to record the ways in which certain text was spoken by the adoptee in a rather basic, yet what I thought to be an appropriate way, one adoptee (*Julie*) felt that this was inadequate: *"I am struck by the inadequacies of the textual analysis of transcription. Is there really no way of representing any nuance? I know that I speak a kind of shorthand at times, in "inverted commas"/quote, often my tone of voice will provide a different slant on...words. And none of this is represented, leading to some loss of meaning, and maybe to a few plain misunderstandings"* and *"it's the first time that I've seen, you know a cold hard transcript...is it standard practice or is it your particular preference to do a cold transcript, without any indication of what makes sense to what doesn't, because that's something that must have been apparent to you, you know that as you were doing it, that sentence doesn't make any sense"* (*Julie*). My response to this was to explain to *Julie* that it was difficult to 'represent nuances' with 100% accuracy, and hence that is why I decided to use feedback sessions to make these corrections and amendments. In reply to *Julie's* second question about the practice of capturing a narrative in its presented form, i.e. with all the meaningful hesitations and pauses, I explained to her that I thought it was important to capture how things were said, as well as what was said, because I wanted to record the data as

accurately as possible. Also, because I did not want to be seen as over-editing and therefore tampering with the data, and because in a study such as this, reading between the lines is an important part of the data analysis process.

Overall, the feedback sessions were very valuable to this research study. This is because they allowed the adoptees to 'comment on transcript accuracy' (Miller, 2000:84), but also to discuss my interpretation of their social experiences.

In the analysis of the data, I chose not to use a computer analysis program. Although computers do have advantages in the analysis process in terms of providing assistance to particular aspects of data storage management and analytical coding management, for a research study using the life (hi)story approach, the analytical process was seen to have benefited further from an approach which also reflected an immersion into the data, so to speak. The in-depth and 'closeness' that the 'manual' analysis method brought with it (Stroh, 2000:226) far outweighed the benefits that a computer-aided analysis package could bring. Similarly, a computer-aided analysis package would interpret and re-interpret the data more thoroughly and in doing so over-analyse the data, which is against the spirit of the life (hi)story approach.

(3.8) Summary

This Chapter has described the study's research process. In doing so it provides a critically reflective outline of the route followed in the study, including a discussion on the value of the pilot study, and in terms of the main study, issues around sampling and gaining access; the size of the final sample; the ethical issues of confidentiality and anonymity, informed consent and protection of participants; recording, analysing and transcribing the data. This Chapter has followed on from the previous Chapter, which critically examined the methodological issues involved in using the life (hi)story approach and in particular oral life (hi)story interviews. Having so far emphasised this researcher's advocacy role and the value of the adoptees speaking for themselves about their own lives, in particular about their relationship with the adoptive family and experiences of being 'trans-racially' adopted; their birth heritage; and their racial identity development, the next Chapter is the first of three empirical Chapters which examines these areas in detail.

Chapter 4

The 'trans-racial' adoption experience and the adoptive family

(4.1) Introduction

Literature looking at the experience of being 'trans-racially' adopted and growing up in a "white" adoptive family focuses on the supposed inadequacy of the "white" adoptive family to cater for the 'needs' of the "black" adoptee. Particular emphasis is given to the adoptees' development of a "black" racial identity, in other words, the ways in which a "black" child (and a "mixed race" child) is unable to develop a healthy sense of "blackness" when living in a "white" adoptive home. It is argued that this is because the "white" adoptive family "cannot provide black children with the skills and 'survival techniques' they need for coping with racist practices in society" (Tizard and Phoenix, 1989:428), which means that they will not be able to deal with the rejection that they will face from the "white" society, who will reject them because they see them as "black", and also by the "black" society with whom the 'trans-racial' adoptees will be unable to join because of their lack of understanding and appreciation of the "black" experience (Tizard and Phoenix, 1989:428). This type of argument is also used about those who are "mixed race" and raised by their "white" biological parent, usually in a "white" environment (Hayes, 1988).

The key aim of this study is to examine the racial identity development of 'trans-racial' adoptees. In doing so, this Chapter presents the adoptees' experiences of having been adopted into a family who were either of a totally or of a partially different racial background. The key research question guiding analysis is 'what impact did these experiences have on the adoptees' racial identity development?' In presenting answers, the claims made by the existing literature (such as those outlined above) are also assessed.

In looking at the impact that 'trans-racial' experiences had on the adoptees' racial identity development, a number of areas emerged as significant. These are, being 'trans-racially' adopted and feeling different; parental tactics for reducing difference; adoptees' tactics for dealing with perceptions of difference; the families' approach to

racial background; difficulties in the adoptees' lives; and adoptees' views about 'trans-racial' adoption. This Chapter discusses these areas. In doing so, the first of the study's key findings is highlighted. This is the way in which although adoptees were constantly aware of their racialised difference, not all perceptions of difference were negative. Also significant is how the adoptees' own ambivalent and ambiguous experiences of being 'trans-racially' adopted, i.e. on the one hand they felt constantly different and on the other they were grateful to their adoptive parents for having looked after them, was clearly reflected in their views about the practice of 'trans-racial' adoption. This is because the adoptees were not straightforwardly for or against the practice.

(4.2) Being 'trans-racially' adopted and feeling different

The adoptees referred to their circumstances in varied ways. Julie and Alison saw their own circumstances solely as an adoption, this being the "process by which the legal relationship between a child and his or her birth parents is severed and an analogous relationship between the child and the adoptive parents established" (Department of Health, 1990, paragraph 2). Robert specifically referred to it as a 'trans-racial' adoption, "the adoption of children by parents of a different racial origin to that of the child" (Gill and Jackson, 1983:1). Hee Yun and Natasha distinctively referred to it as an intercountry adoption as well as a 'trans-racial' one, that is the adoption of a child by parents in a different country, as well as a different racial origin, to that of the child. However, William was less specific, in that he seemed to be particularly prone to blurring between the description of adoption and 'trans-racial' adoption. For example, at times William talked about his experiences specifically as an adoptee, and then as a 'trans-racial' adoptee:

"because I was adopted and they weren't...black family, you know, it's a different situation...I should not be with them in the first place because I'm a different colour" (William)

When William was specifically probed further about this blurring, he said the negative experiences and feelings brought about by his awareness of the adoption, were exacerbated by the additional 'trans-racial' aspect of the adoption. For William, the racial differences made the adoption more obvious. This was also experienced by other adoptees. However, it had been a particular problem for William. For example,

William added to his last comment:

“it just makes me feel awkward...I think people look at me different...they probably just find it weird or strange that someone can be in that situation” (William)

The British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) argues that the types of feelings experienced by William are not unusual. This is because “any adopted child feels some confusion of identity...(but) being transracially adopted can compound this confusion” precisely because of the obviousness of the colour differences between the adoptee and the adoptive parents (BAAF, 1998:4).

BAAF also maintain that for intercountry adoptees the differences are further deepened because “not only are they potentially isolated within the family” but they are also “likely to be isolated within the country too” (BAAF in Ballis Lal, 1989:58).

This is supported by Hee Yun’s comment:

“I was too small for my age in German terms, and so I was kept back a year because the doctor decided, and I was too old for the class. So I was older than everyone else in this class...when I got older my most precious wish was to once stand in Korea in the crowd and not be recognised as different” (Hee Yun)

In describing their position in the adoptive family, the adoptees’ views were split between two rather clear-cut views. Both Robert and William viewed their adoptive family as a temporary institution where-by upon becoming an adult, they experienced (or in William’s case, were expecting to experience) a natural and lasting separation:

“I’d left home by then, so I didn’t really talk much to my family an awful lot” (Robert)

and,

“I’m due to leave home soon anyway. I don’t really see it as a problem, but I don’t know, I mean I think she retires at the end of the year, I think, and my brother is due to get married soon so I don’t think, um, well, he’s getting married next year, so therefore he’s going to be leaving...so I’d probably leave...so I think I’d leave about that time really” (William)

When I asked William if he would keep in contact with his adoptive family, he replied:

“I would yeah, but, um, I don’t know, I would say hello if I saw them out but I don’t think I’d go and see them or anything” (William)

These quotes seem to suggest that for the adoptees involved, the natural separation view is particular to them having been adopted, as opposed to something that was primarily tied to them having been 'trans-racially' adopted. For example, one would expect that 'same-race' adopted people are also just as likely to view the adoptive family as a temporary institution, although due to a lack of literature this can not be said for certain. It is therefore suggested that it is not something that is essentially tied to the presence of racialised differences. However, a comment later made by William suggested that the barriers that built up between him and his adoptive family were also a key feature of his view of them as a temporary institution. These are the very barriers that had been erected because of the racial differences between William and his adoptive family. Hence the racialised differences, resulting from the 'trans-racial' aspects of the adoption as well as the usual growing pains of becoming a young adult (the latter being something also felt by 'same-race' adoptees and non-adoptees), was significant in William's views of the adoptive family as a temporary institution:

"we're different aren't we. I'm not theirs and I should not be there, being a different colour and everything...and when she's (adoptive mother) retired she doesn't really want someone my age around her, to be honest, I would not want that...she's said it to me a few times...she's said it in fights, when we fight and at other times, when talking normally...I think I was quite close to all of them then, then you rebel, but as time goes on, you go your own way I think, you just grow up" (William)

However for Natasha, Julie, Hee Yun and Alison, there was a push for them having a permanent position in the adoptive family. This is something that was largely, if not wholly related to them having been adopted, as oppose to being 'trans-racially' adopted, i.e. feeling that they had already been abandoned by one set of parents. This is because 'same-race' adoptees are also likely to seek out such permanency. For example, Natasha's push for permanency was related to being adopted and having a particular fear of being abandoned (again) per se:

"my parents are actually moving to Greece soon to retire...it's gonna feel like I'm loosing them all over again, you know like for a second time. That's what it felt like at first you know, 'oh God it's happening all over again'...you know losing one set of parents originally...and then loosing them. But I'm a bit older now...but, I was a bit upset you know, crying and stuff, but now I've gotten use to the idea, because they are not leaving for good, they're only be like a phone call away...Yeah, that's it. So no, it's not like I'm loosing them, they are just going off to do what they want to do" (Natasha)

Following this, I asked each of the adoptees to reflect upon what being 'trans-racially'

adopted meant for them, in particular whether they felt as if the ‘trans-racial’ aspects of their adoption brought about any unique differences in their experiences within the adoptive family, that say ‘same-race’ adoptees would not have faced.

Hee Yun, William, Julie, Alison, Natasha and Robert felt they experienced no particular differences, in that they were treated as a biological child or a fully integrated member of the adoptive family. For example, as a child growing up in the late 1960’s and 1970’s, Robert recalled:

“we used to go off on holidays and things together...I was never excluded from the rest of the family in terms of that, you know when we’d go off together I certainly wasn’t treated any differently from the rest of the family or anything like that” (Robert)

Although Hee Yun suggested that being an intercountry adoptee, as well as a ‘trans-racial’ adoptee further deepened her feelings of difference from the adoptive family, Hee Yun did not feel as if her adoptive parents treated her any different to their biological child. For example, in specifically talking about her adoptive mother, Hee Yun said:

“(there was) no difference to how she treated me because I was adopted” (Hee Yun)

Hee Yun’s comment supports the findings of Simon and Alstein’s 20-year longitudinal study into ‘trans-racial’ adoption and intercountry adoption. The authors found that “on measures of family integration... there were no differences between the scores of adopted and biological children” (Simon and Alstein, 2000:24).

However, despite admitting not being treated differently by their adoptive families, the adoptees felt that the obvious racial differences and them being alone in their “non-whiteness” was significant in their experiences. This is even so for those who are “mixed race” by birth. This is therefore something distinctive to the experiences of ‘trans-racial’ adoptees, including those who are “mixed race”. For example, William and Hee Yun felt as if the ‘trans-racial’ status of the adoption brought about experiences that were rooted in the racialised differences and thus made them feel different:

“At Christmas as well, I felt different...because I’m the only one of this colour” (William)

Hee Yun similarly said:

“something about not being well in your own skin and um, trying to be someone else...it’s difficult to say, but you try to find your identity... ‘cos you lie about yourself. You have to find yourself and more than anything else you want to know where you belong and what makes you” (Hee Yun)

For Hee Yun and William, these feelings of difference penetrated outside of the adoptive home. In particular, school was a popular site where such feelings of difference emerged. For example, as a Korean-born child growing up in 1980’s Germany, Hee Yun said:

“I got much more, um, influenced at school when I realised I was an outsider...because I was different. I always felt as a child that I was not fitting in, and that I was not fitting anywhere” (Hee Yun)

Similarly, in late 1980’s England, William had been having identical experiences:

“it was you know, people saying things and then I would tell myself that I wasn’t the same...and every time it was parents evening...all the kids at school, no some of the kids at school, not bullied me, but every time they saw it, it, um, it made it difficult being adopted, um, how can I put it? I used to get not embarrassed but I could not really talk about it. I was feeling really sad about it and asking ‘why?’ I think yeah, it did make them take the mickey out of me, you know because I was different really” (William)

Clearly, Hee Yun and William’s experiences are rooted in them having been ‘trans-racial’ adoptees, and in addition for Hee Yun being an intercountry adoptee. For example, if a family of the same racial background adopted the adoptees, the differences would not be so obvious to others outside of the family unit. This would mean that the type of negative attention, such as that experienced by Hee Yun and William would be limited.

Also for William, it was primarily the physical racial differences brought about by the ‘trans-racial’ aspects of the adoption that led to barriers being formed between him and his adoptive family:

“I can’t talk to my mum...I don’t feel that they um, um, well I think that over the years it’s built up more and more and at the end of the day I think it’s just that...well it’s all about the adoption thin. I’m not theirs and we’re both different colours and you can tell ‘cos it’s obvious that I’m not really theirs” (William)

Although barriers between a ‘same-race’ placed adoptee and their adoptive family

may also emerge, William clearly emphasises that it was the racialised differences resulting from the 'trans-racial' aspects of the adoption, which led to barriers being built between his adoptive family and himself. However, William's previous discussion about the wrongness of adoption per se, i.e. the inappropriateness of being raised by a family other than your own biological family, leads one to argue that barriers of some sort may still have been erected even if a family of the same racial background had adopted William.

William's feelings of difference and the barriers that the difference erected, also extended into school:

"I didn't really like it, I mean, well, I just thought that at school everybody else was perfect, in a way, and that their life was better than mine because I was adopted and they weren't, therefore I was thinking that automatically, they were living a better life, I think that's what I thought. Other people, um, I would not say staring, but would ask me questions over and over again, like 'why are you adopted?' and 'why do you have white parents?'" (William)

This was also the case for Hee Yun, who despite not feeling different within the adoptive home, was troubled at school because of her Korean features and the adoption, by the "white" German children:

"I very quickly became an outsider at that school because I was so different and they asked me questions, I mean people, kids want to know questions yourself you cannot answer...They ask me 'why are your parents not look like this?' um, 'what is adopted?'...sometimes I would answer them as...but I got quite fed up because it was quite often...at least fifty to sixty kids want to know 'why you look like this?' and 'why is your eyes like this?' and 'why don't you have right, real parents?'...I found out that kids started talking about me behind my back, so like 'she's that way' and 'she's so stupid'...it was because of your eyes, because of you being small, because of you being stupid you know...and that's what they mean, you are stranger, different from me" (Hee Yun)

As a result of their differences being negatively perceived, Hee Yun and William felt a strong grievance at having been 'trans-racially' adopted. This grievance exhibited itself in the adoptees' feelings towards their birth parents and their country of birth. For example, William, felt angry at having been denied the opportunity to be raised by his birth family:

"I wasn't suppose to be there and I didn't choose to be there, in a white home instead of my real home" (William)

Hee Yun was particularly upset and angry at her lack of choice and the denial of an opportunity to be raised in her country of birth:

“they (the Korean government) just thought that ‘we have so many children’ and you know, ‘what are we doing with it’, they didn’t think about the child wanting to know about their history later when they had grown up...they had just thought you know ‘the best way for us’, the government and the people who made the decisions, is that ‘we adopt some out’...and that is the bitter taste in this...does it give it the right for a person to decide over other children’s lives, to give them the wrong history or none at all?...I think it’s a supply and demand thing...birth parents were encouraged not to keep their child, they were given some money to give it out for adoption, and I see that as a crime” (Hee Yun)

In their study of young people in care, Fisher, Marsh and Phillips also reported a sense of powerlessness being felt by the young people in terms of how decisions were being taken about them without their consultation. For example, the authors argued “the young person’s sense of being uninvolved in discussions was an important forerunner of a broader theme of powerlessness” (Fisher, Marsh and Phillips, 1986:69).

However, Hee Yun had contradictory feelings about her adoption. On the one hand she was angry, primarily towards the Korean government for the intercountry adoption programme, and at the adoption agency for treating her as a commodity, and also at her adoptive parents for taking part in the crime of her adoption. However, on the other hand, Hee Yun was reluctant to criminalize her adoptive parents and instead tried to rationalise, and almost excuse, their actions. For example, she had said about her adoptive mother:

“it is an emotional thing to accuse her of being involved. You cannot call her a criminal, but she was involved in this crime. Not that she knew it though. So in the end of the day I can not accuse her of the crime, because she did not know” (Hee Yun)

Similarly, William was also reluctant to criminalize his adoptive mother, in that he had some understanding, gratefulness and respect for her in choosing to adopt him and then to keep him when circumstances within the adoptive family had changed. For example when William’s adoptive parents split, William seemed to be grateful to his adoptive mother for her decision to keep him:

“she was kind of fair to be honest, I mean she could have said to my adopted dad ‘take him back’, because they both adopted me” (William)

These two last examples suggest that Hee Yun and William saw their own adoptions as “a form of deviance” (Bagley, Young and Scully, 1992:72). This is because they saw it as morally wrong. For William this moral wrong was related to the whole idea of adoption in itself, and then worsened by the ‘trans-racial’ aspect of the adoption. Where-as for Hee Yun, the moral wrong was tied to the ‘trans-racial’ and intercountry aspects of the adoption. However, despite their feelings, both adoptees also demonstrated gratitude and respect towards their adoptive families. Hee Yun and William’s views of their ‘trans-racial’ adoption as being in some ways ‘deviant’ is interesting in itself. This is because it has usually been others in society who had seen ‘trans-racial’ adoption as morally problematic. For example, by those who also view inter-racial relationships and “mixed race” children as threatening the existence of particular racial groups (Bagley, Young and Scully, 1992:72).

In reflecting upon what being ‘trans-racially’ adopted meant for each of the adoptees, it was also evident that opinions were not always negative. Some adoptees had seen their adoption as having provided them with a ‘second chance’. This was particularly so for Natasha, Alison, Julie and Hee Yun. For example, Natasha had said:

“I think I’ve sort of learnt that I’ve been given a second chance, um, and to me that’s really quite important because if I hadn’t been adopted I probably would have...you know, had a much, much harder type of life, you know, not had this good life or the good clothes or the good job”
(Natasha)

Clearly then, Natasha felt that her adoption, in particular the intercountry aspects of the adoption, not only gave her the ‘second chance’ of a permanent family, but also gave her the opportunity to be raised in a country where her economic chances and standard of living were greater than that of her (own expected) likely position in her birth country.

Despite having earlier spoken about her anger at the denial of choice in having been ‘trans-racially’ adopted out of Korea, Hee Yun also spoke about her adoption as “another chance”. For example, in talking about the day she had been brought into the adoptive home, Hee Yun said:

“I just walked through. I just remember I just thought at one stage ‘oh it’s nice here’, and I just lay down and slept...I always describe it as my birth really because that’s the first memory that I’ve got from my life, so that’s how I’ve been born really...that was my first experience and it was a very

warm and welcoming experience” (Hee Yun)

These adoptees’ views of their adoption as a ‘second chance’, adds weight to the arguments of many supporters of ‘trans-racial’ adoption. For example, in a follow-up study of adoptees, Tizard (1977) saw ‘trans-racial’ adoption, in particular the adoption of “mixed race” children by “white” parents, as having many advantages over temporary foster care or a placement in a care home, and thus strongly argued that ‘trans-racial’ adoption can be seen as, as the title of her book stated, ‘a second chance’. However, it must be noted that this ‘second chance’ is not something that is only tied to the experiences of ‘trans-racial’, or even intercountry adoptees. For example, ‘same-race’ adoptees are equally likely to view their adoption as a ‘second chance’ (Howe and Feast, 2000).

It was also evident that perceptions of racialised differences between the adoptee and their adoptive family were not always negative. This was particularly so if the differences were perceived by the adoptee as having its advantages. For example, Julie, Natasha and Alison felt as if they were ‘chosen’, and therefore had a special quality that led to them being wanted, as illustrated by one of Julie’s comments:

“my parents always used to say ‘we chose you’, and that makes you feel very special...I just felt like I mattered in the house” (Julie)

As a youngster growing up in the 1970’s and early 1980’s, Alison was a minority (in terms of racial background) in her social environment, as well as her adoptive family. However, Alison saw this as bringing a form of special attention with its own particular advantages and rewards, as her following comment illustrates:

“I always felt as if I was different, but...that turned me into a bit of a novelty, so I played on that...I just felt almost like the most important person...when I arrived they (social services) gave me an allowance, so I was walking around in all these new clothes and they (adoptive brothers) were walking in the hand-me-downs” (Alison)

Alison’s ‘novelty status’ in being the only “non-white” (Alison) person in a “white” environment, is something that is clearly rooted in the ‘trans-racial’ aspects of the adoption. This had profound effects on Alison’s behaviour and perception of self in relation to others. For example, as an adult Alison developed an attitude where-by she felt being around other “black” people would affect her ‘novelty status’:

“it could be competition you know, it could carry on from when I was

younger, you know, I'm still the novelty if I'm different to everybody else, so I'll be remembered" (Alison)

Even those adoptees harbouring negative perceptions of racialised differences, acknowledged that the differences also had its benefits. For example, William felt that being adopted had led to special treatment:

"To be honest the only person who got special treatment was myself really, yeah, out of the three of us, I think I got away with more...just because I was adopted really, I think, no other reason...I still get shouted at, don't get me wrong, you know but it was just stuff like if I'd come home late and I would not get a big shouted at, but she'd still shout" (William)

"Mixed race" adoptees

For those adoptees who are "mixed race" by birth, feelings of difference may be attributed to their partial "blackness" in a wholly "white" social world. However, the adoptees in this study primarily talked about how it was the 'trans-racial', aspects of the adoption that primarily led to feelings of difference. This is because they were clearly the only individual in the family who was partially "black". Hence, they felt different compared to the rest of the family. This difference highlighted their adoptive status. This is the case regardless if feelings were negative or positive.

Like 'trans-racial' adoptees' positive perceptions of difference, the majority of "mixed race" people who largely live in single-parent families headed by their "white" mothers (Banks, 1996; Barn, 1993), also report positive feelings of being special, in particular in terms of being seen as 'interesting, exotic and an asset' (Tizard and Phoenix, 2002:114). However, the majority of the "mixed race" 'trans-racial' adoptees in this study reported negative feelings of difference and attributed this to their knowledge that they were adopted.

Therefore "mixed race" 'trans-racial' adoptees are just as likely to have feelings of difference as those who are born to two African/African Caribbean parents and 'trans-racially' adopted.

The way in which adoptees were constantly aware of their racialised difference and how not all perceptions of difference were perceived negatively is an important finding.

(4.3) Parental tactics for reducing difference

In light of disclosing their awareness of racialised differences, and their positive and/or negative perceptions of these differences, the adoptees talked about the tactics used by their adoptive parents, to reduce negative perceptions of racialised difference.

All of the adoptees in this research study recalled that from a very early age, their adoptive parents were open about the adoption. Similar findings were reported by Howe and Feast (2000) who looked at the searching experiences of 159 adoptees, 30 of whom were 'trans-racial' adoptees. However, the adoptees in this study suggested that their parents were forced to be open about the adoption because of the obvious racial differences. For example, Alison said:

*“from the word go mum um, well I mean people said to me when did your parents tell you that you were adopted and I'd say well quite soon because it was apparent, you know, so they kind of did it from the word go”
(Alison)*

and,

*“I mean they always talked about it openly I think in their own way, of course with transracial adoption there's no option of pretending that a child's not adopted...so you have no option but to talk about it openly”
(Julie)*

The adoptive parents' openness was therefore largely something that was beyond their control. This is because, the 'trans-racial' aspect of the adoption and the racial composition of the adoptive family, i.e. that they were all “white”, meant that there was no way of pretending that the adoptees were anything other than of a “black” heritage, i.e. a different heritage. Similarly in Natasha's case, although some of her adoptive siblings are also “mixed race”, the fact that both her adoptive parents are “white” and that the siblings are of a different racial origin (i.e. in terms of continent) also led to the openness about her adoption. This degree of early openness then seems to be something that is unique to 'trans-racial' adoptees. However, in saying this Tizard (1977) found that such obvious racial differences do not always bring openness. In her study of “mixed race” 'trans-racial' adoptees, Tizard found that some adoptive parents of 'trans-racial' adoptees, were concealing the fact that their adoptive child was “mixed race”. For example:

“(one) child whom the parents were 'passing' as white was in

fact dark-skinned and obviously of Indian parentage... (another) child had not been told that his father was West Indian, although it had been pointed out to him that his skin was darker than that of his adoptive parents" (Tizard, 1977:181).

In this study, the adoptive parents' portrayal of birth families was largely positive. For example, Hee Yun said:

"my mum explained really that my birth mum had to give me up for adoption and she always tried to put a positive view on my birth mother, so she tried to explain to me that it's not her fault" (Hee Yun)

Due to a lack of empirical evidence on "black" adoptive parents portrayal of birth parents to the "black" adoptees, it cannot be said for certain whether such positive portrayal is something that is linked to being 'trans-racially' adopted.

Many of the parents were also open about the adoption and answered the adoptees' questions with little hesitation:

"I think they'd answered any questions I had. And I don't think I ever asked about the practicalities...you know, it was more from the point of view of the things that they told me" (Julie)

For Hee Yun, a book about a young boy's adoption was also used by her adoptive mother to explain the adoption:

"I had this book, it's a Swedish book, very hippy like, flowers and things, very cute... 'Booblan' was coming from a different country and um 'Booblan' was a child...from a poorer country uh, their parents for what ever reason...could not keep 'Booblan', it said they were upset they could not and...so 'Booblan' gets to be adopted to this parents because it's really basically the book saying, because one parent could not get, um could not keep, you know for that reason um had to give up 'Booblan' and they gave it to the other parent who could take the child and wanted a child. And then they just describe about the bit that they do with the planes, pictures with planes, it's flying over and 'hooray' and they have a massive party, and it stops there with 'Booblan' having his first birthday at um, have a birthday with his friends in that new area with new parents" (Hee Yun)

This particular story made Hee Yun feel wanted. It also reduced her feelings of difference because she was able to normalise the adoption experience, and the intercountry aspect of the adoption, i.e. others in the story were also adopted in this way.

However, this type of openness only existed during the adoptees' childhood years. This is primarily because the adoptee stopped asking questions, either because they were no longer interested or because they sensed that the questions were upsetting their adoptive parents:

"they always talked about it openly...I think they'd answered any questions I had. And I don't think I ever asked about the practicalities...you know, it was more from the point of view of the things that they told me, I remember things like we were so thrilled when you were finally ours...you know, and other stuff about feeling loved and wanted" (Julie)

and,

"they haven't talked much about it. I've not really asked them questions. Mainly because I don't really want to hurt them...I think my (adoptive) mum would be 'ooh she's getting to that stage now where she wants to find out' and she may be a bit worried that I'd run off and find her (birth mother)" (Natasha)

After having initially volunteered information and answered questions about the adoption, the adoptive parents used a number of tactics aimed at reducing the adoptees' sense of difference. A common tactic was to make the adoptee feel 'special', loved and wanted. This was the case for Hee Yun, Alison, Natasha and Julie. For example, Natasha said:

"it made me feel really quite special, and my mum used to say you know you're special...I think it's the words you know, 'oh wow I'm adopted'" (Natasha)

Additionally for Julie, the adoption had even been romanticised:

"they met me at a christening and my dad danced with me all day because he thought I was so wonderful. There's this kind of image you know...in falling for this little two-year-old and wanting to dance with me" (Julie)

However, some adoptive parents felt that 'ignoring' or 'underplaying' racialised differences, would limit the adoptees' negative perceptions of these differences, and in effect make them feel like a wholly integrated (i.e. a 'real') member of the family. Hence a second parental tactic was to withhold, limit or edit information about birth parents. For example, Natasha talked about discovering information when she carried out a secret search of her adoptive parents' possessions:

"I mean I have found out a few things. I mean there are a couple of things that I found out through, uh, dare I say being really nosey, because I mean

my mum's got a study upstairs in her house and I was just looking around one day and I found this letter that my, um, real mum had written to my mum now" (Natasha)

A third parental tactic is one that is unique to the experiences of 'trans-racial' adoptees. This was to not push the adoptee into experiencing the culture of their birth parents. For example, Hee Yun's adoptive parents had not encouraged her to learn about the Korean culture or the Korean language:

"She (adoptive mother) did not make me Korean...she waited for me. It was me who had to go and say 'can I learn?'" (Hee Yun)

Interestingly, none of the "mixed race" adoptees reported their adoptive parents attempting to reduce feelings of difference by emphasising the partial racial commonality shared between them, i.e. the fact that these adoptees were born to one "white" parent.

Having discussed the tactics used by adoptive parents to reduce the adoptees' negative perceptions of racialised differences, the adoptees then went on to talk about the success or failures of these tactics.

Although Hee Yun's adoptive parents' portrayal of her birth family had largely been positive, such a positive view was insufficient:

"However it was theoretical, you could maybe say 'ok, I understand that', but emotionally it took me a long time, I think up until about now, to work with the hate feelings. I was a person who was beaten up, because you know that although it's not a rejection, it feels like a rejection to you. And you always have to reason between your emotions and the facts. You have to negotiate between the emotions and the logical bit" (Hee Yun)

Robert also thought that the lack of information was insufficient. Even though Robert had admitted that he was not initially too concerned about the adoptive family not talking about the adoption, this later changed when he became aware of the "black" politics of 1980's Britain and wanted to learn more about his birth parents and "black" heritage:

"it wasn't a kind of an ongoing thing because...I think they sort of just thought that it's probably better...to just sort of get on with just treating me like the rest of their children, so you know there are some benefits in that and some problems in that attitude...I think gradually over the years I think I would have maybe liked to known a little bit more about my parents, but it wasn't sort of like a deep yearning need. It was kind of

more later on, probably after when I was about eighteen that I got as if I felt that I needed to know a bit more, but of course by then I was old enough to make enquiries myself” (Robert)

Similarly, Natasha, William and Hee Yun grew eager to be told more about their adoption and birth family whilst growing up. Natasha explained why:

“it’s things that you pass on as well really isn’t it. To be honest, it’s something that’s gong to settle me as well though because to be honest, sometimes I wonder if I am actually settled in myself, and I don’t think I am, I think once I do know what happened, everything is going to go ooohh, and I am going to feel normal...I mean my life is normal, but sometimes I just feel really angry in myself...because there are various things that have happened in the past...but if I can find out answers to this I will be happy, a lot happier than I have been...it’s the not knowing that’s the problem...Inside, I just feel a little muddled. I do feel a little hurt sometimes...I think it’s just a problem in myself, within me...I think once I’ve found out I will be settled, a lot settled” (Natasha)

For Hee Yun, William and Natasha, not being able to talk more freely about their adoption or being unsatisfied with the adoptive parents’ approach, also led to feelings of isolation or guilt about seeking further information:

“it is very difficult for a child to cope with this and to um, cope with their emotions if they did not get encouragement from their parents” (Hee Yun)

and,

“I think that’s why there’s a barrier up between me and them...because they don’t know or understand” (William)

and,

“I started to suddenly think you know, I would not mind finding out a few things. But...I don’t want to hurt my parents by doing it...it’s just my mum. It’s the fact that I don’t want to hurt her, which makes me step back and re-think that ‘oh I’ll say nothing’ and re-consider if I want to ask her stuff, but like I said I will definitely one day ask her” (Natasha)

Indeed, Natasha was so afraid of upsetting her adoptive mother, that she resorted to secret searches:

“like I said, I know me asking might upset her (adoptive mother) so I don’t want to do that...I just, well sometimes I have a quick look around her study on my own, when she’s not about” (Natasha)

However, Natasha was not angry with her adoptive parents for not telling her more about her adoption:

“I don’t feel angry, no. I just feel that...it would have been quite nice to have a little bit more extra info...about my roots I suppose” (Natasha)

Hee Yun on the other hand had been particularly upset with her adoptive mother for not having made her learn Korean as a child:

“that is not respecting the culture. And I am saying if you have another child from another background try as much as possible to learn about it and get into it as much as possible. I am saying to actually learn it is another thing, but to even attempt and try to learn is also good, and she did not. She waited for me. It was me who had to go and say ‘can I learn?’ I was the only Korean person in a Germany family and it’s me that has to go and do this, it’s me that has to say ‘hello yeah I’m Korean, but I have other needs as well’. You know I said to my mum ‘why did you not go and learn Korean with me...together?’ And she says she asked me when I was a child and I say ‘no I do not want to learn Korean’. But I was a child, I did not know. Why did she not take me by the hand and say ‘come we go learn Korean, you are Korean and I support that’? It is no good just me learn Korean. I have no one to talk Korean to. But she waited for me to come with my hand up and say ‘I want to learn Korean’. Me, as a child who does not know anything” (Hee Yun)

(4.4) Adoptees’ tactics for dealing with perceptions of difference

The inadequacy of parental tactics had profound consequences on adoptees. In particular it deepened their already negative perceptions of difference. For example, Hee Yun and William both talked in some detail and depth about their experiences of constantly feeling different to their adopters, as highlighted by a comment made by William:

“I don’t feel as if I fit in because I’m the only one of this colour...(I was) paranoid, that everyone was different...and that I wasn’t the same” (William)

For William, who had talked quite negatively about having felt different within his family specifically on the grounds that he was of a different colour, this difference had meant barriers between him and his adoptive family having been erected:

“that’s why there’s that barrier up between me and them, you know it’s because they just can’t see what it’s like for me and how...I can’t be who I really am, not really...because I should not have been adopted or living like this in the first place, so, um, therefore it’s like living a lie, you know, I mean I’m not from them obviously so it’s like living with someone else’s parents. I should not have been there really with them” (William)

William’s barrier had been strengthened by his feelings of his adoptive family not being able to understand his feelings of difference and his pre-occupations with his

birth family:

“(my adoptive mother) always brings it up in an argument anyway, that I went to find my real mum and that she didn’t want me to, she said that she didn’t want me to find them, and then I told her that I was and just went on my own to do it. I think...it’s just something you have to do, even if you’ve had a good upbringing...surely though she should realise, and she should help me and want me to know. But obviously not...I think (my adoptive siblings) feel the same as her. She’s thinking that and so are they, but I don’t really know, I can’t talk to her about it really or them” (William)

As a result of the problems resulting from perceptions of difference (and adoptive parents’ inadequate tactics for reducing feelings of difference), the adoptees were forced to develop their own coping strategies.

Hee Yun and William dealt with the differences in various ways. As a child, William would cry and get upset:

“I would tell myself that I wasn’t the same, and on very special occasions, like on my birthdays and that, and at Christmas, I’d say to myself that I wanted my real parents there. Then...I would cry” (William)

Where-as a young Hee Yun would constantly ask her adoptive mother if she loved her:

“I mean I have an older brother, five years older, and he is the natural child...and it was a question of who do you love more?’ I say to my mother ‘do you love him more or me?’” (Hee Yun)

In contrast, Alison as a child, dealt with the differences by inventing dramatic stories and using humour:

“I remember the first parent’s evening and I thought ‘oh my God’...and so then I started making up these stories about what had happened to my real mum and dad, you know, how my real parents had been killed in a plane crash and stuff like that...there was an incident at school when we were asked to write down for a project...called ‘who am I?’ and we had to write down who we’d got our eyes from and our brown hair from...and I was sat there thinking ‘well I look nothing like my mum or dad’ so...wrote ‘I’ve got green hair and...four legs’” (Alison)

The differences in how Hee Yun, William and Alison had dealt with the differences however, was that Alison had strongly felt that her difference within the family had made her the focus of positive special attention (as mentioned earlier), as oppose to the negative attention that had been experienced by William and Hee Yun. Again, it is interesting that like the adoptive parents, none of the adoptees attempted to reduce feelings of difference by using the “white” parts of their biological parentage to base commonality upon.

Two important findings emerge from this analysis. Firstly, how adoptive parents used a number of tactics aimed at reducing the adoptees' negative feelings of racialised difference. Such tactics included making the adoptee feel special; underplaying the racialised differences by withholding information and not pushing the adoptees to learn about and experience their birth culture. Secondly, although some of the adoptees revealed that the adoptive parents' tactic of making them feel 'special' helped to reduce some negative feelings around racialised differences, most of the adoptees' were critical of parental tactics. Here, the adoptees' main criticism was how they actually did very little to reduce negative perceptions of difference, and how they instead deepened adoptees' feelings of difference, which the adoptees were left alone to deal with.

(4.5) The families' approach to racial background

The literature has found that although adoptees are told about their adoption from a young age by their adoptive parents, further information and actual experience of the adoptees' racial background has often been neglected. It has been suggested that such neglect has been due a variety of reasons, which swing from being unintentional or naïve, i.e. a lack of knowledge or a view that 'love is enough' (Hayes, 1988), to the more dangerous reasons, i.e. the adoptive parent's own racist attitudes or stereotypes about "black" people (Small, 1986; Tizard, 1977).

Each of the adoptees in this study had been asked to talk about their adoptive families' approach to their racial background, in terms of if and how their adoptive families had catered for the racial differences.

Alison, Julie, William, Robert and Hee Yun had all been raised in a "white" adoptive home. Natasha however had been raised in an adoptive home, in which there were some adoptive siblings who were also "mixed race". Despite this, Natasha's adoptive parents had not made any efforts to provide her with information or experience of her 'black African-Caribbean' birth identity whilst she was growing up. However, this had not seemed to have been a problem for Natasha, until that is, she began to experience bullying at school, where she was bullied about her 'trans-racial' adoption

and her “mixed race” status. Natasha had only spoken to her adoptive father about the bullying:

“my dad knew a little bit about it...there were times where I said ‘you know dad, so and so has said this today and it really has upset me’. He’s understood, and he’s said ‘well, I hate to say it, but people are going to be nasty and you just have to deal with it the best that you can’...all he basically said to me was ‘you know you’ve got to stand up for yourself and try and you know...words hurt, so be prepared because it’s gonna happen’, and I think he knew that...(my brothers and sisters) didn’t really know about the bullying because a lot of them weren’t around, you know they weren’t living in the house or they were at work when I got back from school...I suppose I didn’t really want to trouble them with it” (Natasha)

The fact that Natasha did not tell her adoptive siblings, especially those who were also “mixed race”, about the bullying, or talk to them about being “mixed race”, is interesting. This is because the arguments from those opposing ‘trans-racial’ adoption maintain that adoptees suffer because they do not have anyone like themselves in the adoptive family to talk to about difficulties emerging from the racialised differences. However, Natasha’s case seems to question this argument because she does have an adoptive sibling of the same racial background, yet chooses not to talk to her about the racial bullying. Instead Natasha finds comfort and resolution in talking to her “white” adoptive father.

With Natasha’s adoptive family not having talked to her about the racialised differences (and similarities) between them and her, Natasha alone began to make a number of attempts to learn more about some of the ‘black African-Caribbean’ communities in her city:

“I once went with somebody to a gospel night and to be honest it was like completely, you know, ‘wow’, over my head sort of thing, and I really just sat there and I laughed all the way through, I thought it was embarrassing, it was like you know ‘la, la, la’ and I thought ‘ok, well it’s not me’ you know it probably would not have been in my (birth) culture, if you like, and you know it was probably the Jamaican thing, but still it’s quite close to obviously what I might have been doing” (Natasha)

and,

“I came back in and I saw the banner on the other side and it said ‘welcome to the new life’ and I thought ‘oh my God’, it was a funeral and as I walked to the front, it was like a big hall, with little offices to each of the sides, I saw a coffin lying there, I’d walk near enough past it and not noticed it. So I just carried on, did what I had to do and got out of there” (Natasha)

Natasha's attempts to learn more about some of the 'black African-Caribbean' communities in her city and integrate herself into that community fail. This is because she feels so different to them and their practices. For example, she added to her last comment:

"It was really weird, because I wasn't used to that...it was really different" (Natasha)

For William, Robert, Alison, Julie and Hee Yun, who had all been raised in a "white" adoptive home, there had been no real information or experience provided by their adoptive parents about their birth racial identity. For example, when asked whether his adoptive family accommodated for his racial background, William replied:

"they didn't do anything like that no" (William)

In fact, the only time that any of the adoptees could recall their adoptive parents showing concern about their racial differences was when Alison recalled an incident with her adoptive father:

"when I went off to Australia, you know my dad was quite concerned that Australia is quite racist, I don't know why he comes out with these things but he does, and um, you know he spoke to a couple of girlfriends who were white and Australian, and said 'Alison's not going to face any racism is she?'" (Alison)

However, such demonstrated awareness was a rarity. As a consequence, all the adoptees were in one way or another, critical of their adoptive family's approach in providing information about birth parents and experience of birth culture. For example, Hee Yun, was quite angry and upset with her adoptive parents:

"I would say it's not accepted, you know it's not acknowledged, yes acknowledged that's the word, that I am Korean in that family. They knew I come from there but that is not acknowledging that I come from there" (Hee Yun)

William was also quite angry with his adoptive parents, but more-so because they had not understood his feelings of difference and supported him when he sought information about his birth background:

"I think they should have helped me" (William)

In particular, the adoptees highlighted the inadequacy of their adoptive parents' tactics in reducing their negative perceptions of racialised differences. There were a number of reasons given for the adoptive families' insufficient approach. The first

was that although not realising it themselves, the adoptive parents held negative views about black people. For example, William had said about his adoptive mother:

“me hanging around with the black kids at college and school and not doing what she said...she still thinks that I’m hanging round with bad people...I don’t understand why she does because she knows who they are and stuff but she still thinks that and sees me as bad” (William)

However, of greater concern was that adoptees picked up on these negative views. For example, when I later asked William about his upbringing he said:

“(I’ve had) a white upbringing. I mean I haven’t been brought up badly or anything...I was brought up with certain things like, always do the right thing and go to church and that, and to go to school, and to keep yourself out of trouble and that” (William)

Upon being asked whether William thought he would have been brought up differently and not taught those things if he had been brought up in a “black” home, he replied:

“yeah...I would not have cared as much...when I think about the situation they (black people) could maybe do the same as me” (William)

William clearly picked up some of his adoptive mother’s negative stereotypes about “black” people. Although William had “black” friends, as well as “white” friends, in a subtle way his comment supports Chimuzie’s claim that some “black” children reared in “white” families and communities ‘will develop anti-black psychological and social characteristics’ (Chimuzie in Simon and Alstein, 2000:41).

Similarly, Julie and Alison also harbored some rather negative views about “black” people, in particular ‘black African-Caribbean’ people. However, this could not directly be attributed to the negative attitudes of their adoptive parents. Rather it seemed that their negative views had emerged from their own encounters with other “black” people, as well as them having been used to being a racial ‘novelty’, i.e. a “black” minority in a predominantly “white” environment. For example, Julie said:

“I can only describe it as kind of engrossed in blackness with a capital B, you know and (she) became a Rasta and had locks and the works and some succession of black baby-fathers which I had not approved of at all and I used to say things like ‘why have you bought into to this particular bit’? You know the hair and stuff I can understand, but why the baby fathers, you know how does that make your life better...it was something you know I was kind of interested in because when I became aware of the phenomenon I think I learnt about it through the media you know, um, it’s

not something that's impacted on my life at all I was just very, very curious as to how we, as to what was in it for the women, you know having quite often quite a few children by a wide range of men some of whom didn't seem to be a lot of use and whose main role appeared to be to bounce in occasionally and you know, be daddy as opposed to being anything useful...I can understand why people might you know they have a choice of serial relationships but it does appear to be a particularly thin with this acceptance of the fact that men go round spreading their seed and women bring up the children...and what I also find bizarre is that um, is that she certainly wasn't prepared to talk to me about it" (Julie)

Similarly, Alison said:

"It was a mixed place, but it was mainly black as well, and you know, I could not cope with that either, well yeah, um, I felt oppressed by it, it was in your face. And black people tend to be quite loud and 'look at me, aren't I great' sort of thing, and I just thought 'oh my God' type of thing, you know...and they talk in a different way, you know they talk in that way...that funny talk that black people do" (Alison)

Another reason given by adoptees for the adoptive parents' inadequate approach was that adoptive parents de-valued the birth heritage, or in their naivety and ignorance did not consider it important. This could be either with respect to providing knowledge or experience of it to the adoptee, or making the effort to learn about it themselves so that they could pass that on to the adoptee. This view was also partially due to them having viewed their own "white" heritage as the 'norm'.

"They (adoptive parents) knew I come from there (Korea) but that is not acknowledging that I come from there. So, maybe it's the fact that they did not know better. I was the first child for them of this experience, so that's maybe it" (Hee Yun)

A third reason for the adoptive parents' inadequate approach was due to a lack of information and resources. That is either a lack of access to resources, or a lack of take-up of available resources. In particular, Julie, Alison and Natasha, felt their adoptive parents essentially disregarded, out of innocence and naivety, the racialised differences, not only in providing information about birth heritage, but also in terms of the day-to-day practicalities. For example, Julie and Alison said:

"I think that people didn't think about those kinds of things in those days...the hair thing I think my mum would have been intensely grateful if anything was explained to her with what to do with the hair...and I used to have this terribly dry skin and I'd always assumed that it was me...I was an adult before somebody said to me you do realise that very dry skin is not uncommon in black people" (Julie)

and,

“well they didn’t know anything to tell really” (Alison)

A fourth reason as to why adoptees viewed their adoptive parents’ approach as inadequate was also underlined by a rather naïve approach. This was that the adoptive parents had taken the view that ‘love is enough’ to raise the adoptee. For example, Robert, Hee Yun and William felt that their adoptive parents ignored the racial differences or the adoptees’ birth racial identity almost out of naivety and ignorance. This is because they seemed to assume that there was no problem or difficulties with the racial differences or the adoptees wanting to know about their birth racial identity. In other words, there had been a sort of ‘love is all you need’ or ‘love is enough’ view held by some of these adoptive parents. This is illustrated by the following comment that was made by Robert:

“it just wasn’t talked about very often at all, I think maybe, yeah, once or twice I remember my mum telling me what little she knew about my parents, and that was about it really, it wasn’t a kind of an ongoing thing because they felt, you know in their sort of naivety about the whole thing, I think they sort of just thought that it’s probably better not to keep on addressing those issues and just sort of get on with just treating me like the rest of their children” (Robert)

A fifth reason for adoptive parents’ inadequacy was due to their inability to understand the experiences and feelings of the adoptee, as a ‘trans-racial’ adoptee. In particular, an inability of the adoptive family to understand the adoptee’s feelings of difference and pre-occupations about their birth family had been experienced by William, Robert and Alison. For William, there had been difficulties in his adopting mother being able to understand his desires to search for his birth family, which then caused further tension and strengthened the ‘barrier’ that already existed between William and his adoptive family:

“She (adoptive mother) probably thinks I’m being funny or something, she just sees it as me causing trouble. We’re different. That’s what it’s about at the end of the day, It’s obvious I’m not from them people...it’s a lie and it’s just getting too much. I need to leave everyone” (William)

There had not been any intentional animosity or ‘hidden agendas’ with the adoptive parents’ approaches to the adoptees’ birth racial background, in terms of the lack of information and experience they provided to the adoptees. However, there does seem to be an echo of some of the arguments made by those opposers of ‘trans-racial’ adoption. These being that “black” children raised in “white” homes are with a few

exceptions, denied their “blackness” by “meaningful – but nevertheless ignorant – white substitute parents” who are unable and fail to provide “knowledge, understanding, sensitivity, intelligence and the ability to empathise and to recognise racism” (Hayes, 1988:14). In this sense then, the adoptees were denied recognition (either through lack of information or experience) of their birth racial identity. This is despite the fact that such denial was presented in subtle and less overt ways. For example, although none of the adoptees had experienced being directly told by their adoptive parents that “they can choose to be white if they wish” (Hayes, 1988:14) or that ‘colour in this society does not really matter’, it is argued that the lack of recognition given by adoptive parents could be interpreted as “the denial of the reality of the visibility of the black child in a white family” and how this creates “the pre-conditions for the phenomenon of identity confusion” (Small, 1986:82).

Although all the adoptees were in some way critical about their adoptive parents’ approach, the effects of inadequate approaches had varied. Some of the adoptees experienced particular problems, where-as others did not.

William’s lack of information and experience of his birth racial identity, had strengthened the barrier that existed between him and his adoptive family. This is because not providing any information or experience of his birth racial identity, had made William feel as if they were keeping him in his false life:

*“I think I should not have been adopted. It’s a lie...it’s been a lie from day one and that’s what it is...I think they should have helped me get out of it”
(William)*

Robert felt that his adoptive family were unable to understand his experiences of racism as a child and later his feelings as a young “black” adult, which then led to a boundary being formed between him and his adoptive family. It was only outside of the family home that Robert was able to learn more about his birth racial background and comfortably develop a ‘black African-Caribbean’ identity:

“I’m pretty sure that I didn’t talk to my family or parents or siblings about it, I suppose I didn’t really see it as a need to because...it would just be the odd little incidents now and then that just got dealt with at school, also a bit of me kind of felt that they would not understand...(because) the kind of issue of race of my father being Nigerian, it just wasn’t talked about very often at all...I think gradually over the years I think I would have maybe liked to know a little bit more about my parents, but it wasn’t sort of like a deep yearning need. It was kind of more later on, probably after

when I was about eighteen that I got as if I felt that I needed to know a bit more, but of course by then I was old enough to make enquiries myself” (Robert)

However, although having very little information about, and no experience of their racial background, Julie and Alison said that they had no problems or difficulties:

“I don’t have a sense of anything that’s particular of a black consciousness you know...it doesn’t have a huge importance to me...I suppose there’s a definite sense that as I say ‘yes I don’t have a black consciousness’ and also...I suspect that for some black people I am not black enough you know...I kind of sold out in some way or form...it doesn’t bother me” (Julie)

and,

“Amy (birth sister) thinks that they should have done more with the west-Indian side of me, you know, but they didn’t...it just hasn’t bothered me at all” (Alison)

I then asked Alison about her adoptive parents’ approach to her racial background and whether she felt as if she lost out from not knowing more about her racial background:

“No, no, I don’t think so. I just think that they gave me everything in the house and the chance to find out more, and they never stopped any of that, which they could have done, so I don’t think, no, but I mean then again I don’t know, if they did it, it could have been different, so I can’t say, I’ve only had the experiences that I have had” (Alison)

Another important finding then is that adoptive families provided very little, if any information and experience of the adoptees’ birth heritage, which was largely due to negative views that adoptive parents held about “black” people; not seeing the birth heritage as important; a lack of (access or take-up of) information and resources; the view that love is enough to raise the adoptee and the inability of adoptive parents to understand the experiences and feelings of the adoptee, as a ‘trans-racial’ adoptee.

(4.6) Difficulties in the adoptees’ lives

As a result of having been ‘trans-racially’ adopted, the adoptees faced a number of difficulties. One difficulty is the adoptees’ constant feeling of difference within the family and the inability of the adoptive family to fully understand this difference. This led to a second difficulty. This is the erection of barriers between the adoptee and the adoptive family, which acted as a constant marker of their difference and non-

biological tie. A third difficulty occurred in childhood and adolescence. This was being questioned, bullied, and picked on, by other youngsters about their racialised differences, the 'trans-racial' aspect of the adoption, and the adoption in itself (which was made evident by the obvious racial differences). Another difficulty experienced by the adoptees is that they were left to contend with not knowing about their birth parents, and for some about their birth culture. A fifth difficulty is the contradiction between the adoptees' "black" appearance, i.e. their skin colour, and their lived experience, i.e. as a "white" person.

These difficulties are clearly unique to the experiences of 'trans-racial' adoptees. This is because they are difficulties rooted in the 'trans-racial' adoptees' feelings of racialised difference, in particular the difference and isolation of not completely fitting in anywhere, i.e. with the "black" people of their birth community, or with the "white" people of their adoptive community.

Some of the adoptees felt as if they did not fit in with people of the same birth culture. This is because they were criticised by "black" others for having been 'trans-racially' adopted:

"the black people that I was hanging round with, they either didn't like white people or they didn't think I should have been adopted by white people...well I think that's what my (birth) parents thought too" (William)

Similarly, Julie felt that she did not fit in with people of the same birth culture because of her "white" upbringing and little contact with "black" people. For example, Julie described an incident that made her feel very uncomfortable because she was unable to deal with the racism and questions about her "blackness" from some members of "black" society:

"I got cornered by what I think must have been a truly eccentric woman in a bookshop when I was like fourteen...she had obviously decided that I was somebody that she could talk to and I felt like telling her to bog off, and she told me at great length all about the um, the problems with the word 'wog' and how insulting the word used to be and it used to be a traders compliment for a rich oriental gentlemen and why she gave me all this stuff I have no idea at all...and one of the staff came and rescued me in the end...I felt uncomfortable, I felt deeply uncomfortable because whilst, I suppose the closest thing you could say was that my upbringing was colour blind so, at the point where anybody else who I didn't feel safe with made reference to it, um, I felt really uncomfortable 'cos I didn't know what was, you know, all this going to be about" (Julie)

Adoptees also recalled being equally rejected by “white” people, because they were seen as largely being “black”. For example, Robert said:

“I don’t feel entirely accepted in society or a kind of attitude where, um, um, you know, where white people say that ‘I don’t like black people but you’re ok’, I mean I don’t want to be sucked into that sort of acceptance” (Robert)

Robert also talked about dealing with the racism that he experienced largely in 1980’s Britain. In talking about how he dealt with the racism, which he received (only) from “white” people at this time, Robert said:

“I think a lot of the racist stereotypes that used to make me a lot more angry, um, um, I think like I say maybe these days I’m not confronted with it in my face so much, um, and maybe so I don’t feel as angry as I kind of used to with a lot of the racism in society...so, you know nothing particularly towards me, but you hear people on the bus with stereotypes...well I don’t come across it as much as I used to, but yeah, at various times, yeah, I have kind of gotten into arguments with people and then feeling after a while kind of too burnt out really, I mean I’m burnt out enough through my job without having to sort of confront every racist comment that I come across” (Robert)

However, Robert later found in becoming more involved with the “black” community, and indeed by taking on a “black” identity, he was able to access acceptance and support from members of his birth community:

“I just feel more comfortable with black people...I feel that I have a certain amount of respect from white people who know me...but maybe kind of more so from the black community” (Robert)

However, the basis of adoptees’ feelings of not belonging derived from them not fitting in with either of their birth (“black”) or adoptive (“white”) communities. Such feelings of not belonging to either communities supports the arguments of opposers of ‘trans-racial’ adoption who maintain that not only will ‘trans-racial’ adoptees face racism from “white” members of society, but also by “black” members with whom they would be unable to relate to because they would be seen as “not black enough...in culture and attitude” (Small, 1986:93). For example, Natasha experienced criticism from both “white” society members and “black” society members:

“but it was white kids calling me names and black kids calling me names, because I wasn’t black and I wasn’t white, I was mixed, which made it even worse...um, for them obviously...a black girl...said ‘oh you should not have mixes in this world, you should not have half-castes’ and nasty

sort of things like that” (Natasha)

Similarly Robert said:

“I must have been about eleven or twelve or something, and um, I was out with some white friends, and this, um, well this black woman said something to me about, um, you know just completely out of the blue, that ‘you’re neither black or white’ sort of thing, um, so that kind of upset me more than the odd kind of racist remarks about being black” (Robert)

Therefore, it seems that some ‘trans-racial’ adoptees at times felt different and rejected because of their “mixed race” status. This is something that has been reported by the literature on the experiences of “mixed race” people raised by their biological parent(s). For example, although the “negative orientation” towards these people has shifted in the last century (Tizard and Phoenix, 2002:39), they continue to experience feelings of difference, which is often joined by a feeling of rejection from both the “Black” community and the “white” community (Small, 1981).

Another important finding therefore, is that adoptees’ had a feeling of isolation and not completely fitting in anywhere, i.e. with the “black” people of their birth community, or with the “white” people of their adoptive community.

(4.7) Adoptees’ views about ‘trans-racial’ adoption

Quite surprisingly, very few studies have asked ‘trans-racial’ adoptees about their views as to the practice of ‘trans-racial’ adoption. Of those that have, there has been a tendency to gather opinions either from personal anecdotes and group discussions, which consist of adoptees who have the same opinions about ‘trans-racial’ adoption. For example, illustrations of this can be found in the studies of Dagoo et al (1993) and Shekleton (1990) who had collected opinions about the practice of ‘trans-racial’ adoption from adoptees who had been gathered from a post-adoption support group, whose majority of members had negative experiences of adoption. Few studies therefore, unlike this one, have sought to obtain ‘trans-racial’ adoptees’ views about the practice of ‘trans-racial’ adoption, from a sample of randomly selected adoptees with different sets of experiences.

The adoptees in this study were asked to talk about their views on the practice of ‘trans-racial’ adoption. Not surprisingly, their views were largely shaped by their own

ambivalent experiences. The following comments from William highlight such ambivalence in views. Here, in having talked a great deal about the negative aspects of his life as a ‘trans-racial’ adoptee, William said about the practice of ‘trans-racial’ adoption:

“It’s a bad thing because if parents don’t help him find his real parents, then that kid’s going to go away and find them himself and end up hating the adopted parents as well...so I don’t think it should happen” (William)

When then asked whether this view would change if the adoptive parents would give their adoptive child support to find their real parents, William replied:

“it’s still not a good idea because by then the real parents might not want to know about the child” (William)

Although William appeared to be talking in third-party terms, his views were clearly shaped by his own ambiguous experiences, i.e. on the one hand he was angry at his adoptive family for not understanding and helping him resolve his feelings from the racialised difference, and yet on the other hand he was grateful for his adoptive parents having looked after him.

As a result of such ambivalence and ambiguity, adoptees’ views were evidently not straightforwardly for or against the practice of ‘trans-racial’ adoption. Rather the adoptees highlighted the value of ‘trans-racial’ adoption as a means for finding permanent homes for “black” children in care, sooner rather than later. For example, although having previously talked about her lack of “black” awareness and her susceptibility to be open to attack from “black” people, Julie argued that despite the difficulties brought about by the ‘trans-racial’ aspects of her adoption, she was nevertheless content with her developed racial self:

“I see myself as being sort of grounded and have a strong sense of self...I don’t think I’m the kind of person to go off and have, you know, an identity crisis you know, other than in the sense of who I am and a sense that I’m fairly successful in what I do and who I am and again, um, I mean I have a reasonably well-paid professional job that I like, a reasonable education, I have all this, pensions, investments all this and um, quite the opposite of living on the street and um, unless something goes wrong, I’ll continue to have all that stuff so there’s a sense that you know from the, from the worldview of having made it, I think I have...Damaged? Adoption might have set back my development in which case this is the failure version, which I can live with, you know” (Julie)

This consequently made Julie in favour of the practice of ‘trans-racial’ adoption:

“the most important thing is that the child would want to be loved...I mean that is definitely imperative in my own experience...it’s not as if you know race and colour are the only thing, I don’t see it being as important...a whole host of things other things that need to be taken into account which are far more important than what appears to be colour matching” (Julie)

Similarly, despite having experienced some difficulties, i.e. bullying, Natasha spoke positively about the practice of ‘trans-racial’ adoption, as a means for providing children with permanent homes. For example, in calling for a greater practice of ‘trans-racial’ adoption, Natasha said:

“I think it’s a good idea. I think it’s nice. I think it should be an easy thing for people to do, because I know that even now it’s hard to go through. I just feel there should be more of it, there should be more adoption full stop...If somebody wants a child, then I think they should have every right to have a child, regardless of what they look like or where they are from...I really think that, because there’s enough kids in this world without parents, you know. I mean sometimes I think ‘oh God people don’t need to make more kids, you know, come on, what about us lot’...I mean it’s worked for me” (Natasha)

However, other adoptees emphasised the necessity for the effects of racialised differences to be carefully considered when placing a “black” child for adoption. In doing so they argued that placing a child with an adoptive family of the same racial background would be a much preferable and beneficial option. For example, Robert said that although he had concerns about some of the arguments used by those opposing ‘trans-racial’ adoption, he became very aware of *“how badly black people are treated” (Robert)* especially after living through the race riots and “black” politics of 1980’s Britain. As such, he was *“90% anti (‘trans-racial’ adoption)” (Robert)*.

Similarly, although Alison recalled largely positive experiences as a ‘trans-racial’ adoptee, her views about the practice of ‘trans-racial’ adoption was a little more complex. For example, Alison used her own experiences, which were largely positive to argue that ‘trans-racial’ adoption and adoption in general should be practiced more often. However Alison stated that she was applying to *“long-term foster a child of dual heritage”* because there are *“more black and mixed-heritage children that aren’t being fostered” (Alison)*. Clearly, then Alison’s views were more complex than, but not contradictory to, a matter of making a decision on the basis of her own experiences. This is because her reasons for seeking to long-term foster a “black”

child was based on the fact that there are more children from these backgrounds spending longer periods of time in care; a fact supported by the findings of Children First in Adoption and Fostering (1990).

Adoptees highlighted that if racial matching was not possible, then must be aware of the need for them to provide continuous knowledge and experience of the birth heritage, in particular the birth culture to the adoptee. For example, Hee Yun's contradictory views about 'trans-racial' adoption clearly reflected her own experiences, in that although she felt she was given a 'second chance' and thought that 'trans-racial' adoption and intercountry adoption should currently continue to happen, she argued that it should be slowly reduced to only happen under certain conditions being met. For Hee Yun, such conditions were the adoptive parents needing to be involved in the "*other side*" of the adoptee through active and genuine efforts:

"if you take responsibility of getting the kid from somewhere else...a different culture, then you have to be prepared...to get into this yourself...learn the language, learn the culture" (Hee Yun)

Another important finding then is that the adoptees' own ambivalent and ambiguous experiences of being 'trans-racially' adopted shaped their own views about the practice of 'trans-racial' adoption. For example, adoptees were not straightforwardly for or against the practice.

(4.8) Summary

In examining the adoptees' experiences of having been adopted into a family who were either of a total or of a partially different racial background, this Chapter asked 'what impact did these experiences have on the adoptees' racial identity development?'

In doing so, the first of the study's five key findings emerged. This is that the adoptees were constantly aware of their racialised differences. Most of the adoptees' perceptions of these racialised differences were negative. This was because they felt alone in their difference and saw it as a constant reminder of them not being a 'real' member of that family. However, not all adoptees perceived these differences

negatively. This is because for them it was the focus of positive special attention. Indeed it made them a 'novelty' in their predominantly "white" social world. The adoptive parents used a number of tactics aimed at reducing the adoptees' negative feelings of racialised difference, i.e. making the adoptee feel special; underplaying the racialised differences by withholding information about birth parents; and not pushing adoptees to learn about and experience their birth culture. However, the adoptees were critical of these tactics. The main criticism levelled at the parental tactics was at their inadequacies in reducing adoptees' negative perceptions of difference, and instead how they deepened adoptees' feelings of difference, which adoptees were left alone to cope with. Similarly, it was discovered that adoptive families provided very little, if any, information and experience about the adoptees' birth heritage. This was due to the negative views that adoptive parents held about "black" people; the adoptive parents' devaluation of the adoptees' birth heritage or not seeing it as important; a lack of (access to or take-up of) information and resources; the view that 'love is enough' to raise the adoptee; and the inability of adoptive parents to understand the experiences and feelings of the adoptee, as a 'trans-racial' adoptee. As a result of this, the adoptees reported feelings of isolation and not completely fitting in anywhere, i.e. with the "black" people of their birth community, or with the "white" people of their adoptive community. The adoptees' own ambivalent and ambiguous experiences of being 'trans-racially' adopted, i.e. on the one hand they felt constantly different and on the other they were grateful to their adoptive parents for having looked after them, was clearly reflected in their views about the practice of 'trans-racial' adoption. This is because the adoptees were not straightforwardly for or against the practice. Taking these findings into consideration, it is argued that in light of the obvious racialised differences brought about by the 'trans-racial' aspects of the adoption, the adoptive family plays a crucial role in the degree to which these differences affect the adoptees' perception of self.

Having considered the adoptees' experiences of 'trans-racial' adoption and their relationships with their adoptive family, it is important to consider the ways in which their birth heritage shaped their experiences. This consideration is given in the next Chapter.

Chapter 5

The birth heritage

(5.1) Introduction

The literature on the significance of the birth family, culture and racial origin for the racial identity development of ‘trans-racial’ adoptees, is in short supply. Of what little empirical information exists, the birth heritage, in particular the birth family has been found to occupy “very different places in the childhood thoughts” of adoptees, which range from ‘apparent disinterest’ to ‘near obsession’, and from ‘strongly positive’ to ‘strongly negative’ (Kirton, Feast and Howe, 2000:11). Despite these differences, ‘trans-racial’ adoptees are viewed as being more vulnerable and susceptible to an identity crisis than those who are ‘in-racially’²⁷ placed (Sorosky, Baran and Pannor, 1978). This is because they are seen as growing-up with a sense of loss of identity. This derives from them being “black” in a “white” family, and their racialised differences being ignored and under-valued, (Toynbee, 1985). Consequently, there is a general consensus that in developing a healthy racial identity, the adoptees’ need to know about all aspects of their birth heritage is ‘legitimate’ and must be supported by all those involved in the adoption (Silverman, Campbell and Patti, 1991).

The key aim of this study is to examine the racial identity development of ‘trans-racial’ adoptees. As such, this Chapter presents the adoptees’ accounts of their birth heritage. The key research question guiding the analysis of these accounts is ‘what role does birth heritage play in the shaping of adoptees’ racial identity?’ In presenting answers, the claims made by the existing literature are also assessed.

In looking at the role played by the adoptees’ birth heritage, that is their birth family, culture and racial origin, a number of areas emerged as important. These are, the adoptees’ knowledge of their birth heritage; search for birth heritage; experiences of birth heritage; and views of their birth heritage. This Chapter will now discuss these areas in greater detail. In doing so, it develops the second of the study’s key findings.

²⁷ As outlined in the terminology section, ‘in-racial’ refers to those placed within their own racial group. The term is problematic, and therefore used in inverted commas.

This is that the racialised differences brought about by the ‘trans-racial’ aspects of the adoption, are significant factors in the adoptees’ searches for their birth heritage, in that adoptees search to resolve issues around identity and belonging. However, it is also recognised that not all adoptees search in order to resolve identity issues. Rather they do so to answer the racialised questions of others.

(5.2) Knowledge of birth heritage

The adoptees all had some knowledge about the circumstances surrounding their birth, information that was passed on to them by their adoptive parents. These circumstances varied. For some race had been significant. For example, racialised controversy surrounded Alison’s birth because one of the reasons behind Alison’s (“white”) birth mother abandoning her was due to her fear of her own family rejecting her partially “black” baby:

“He, the granddad was very racist, very racist, and so he was completely against her (birth mother) having all these black men, well not all these, these two relationships black men, you know because she had the one and then she had Lionel (birth father), and he (grandfather) never...they (grandparents) would never entertain him at all and what was worse than black was having these...well...half-caste children, as they called them then, you know these kids who were neither one or the other, you know he was ‘I don’t want these brought into my house’ and whatever... so my mother abandoned me and left me on the train...she got home and thought you know ‘oh God, what have I done? I want her back’. But in the sixties she was treated as criminal, you know, it was a criminal offence to abandon a baby, so she’d actually lost me from that point” (Alison)

However, for other adoptees race was not seen as a contributory factor in their birth parent’s decision to put them forward for adoption. For example, Natasha’s birth mother had not planned to have a baby, and upon finding herself pregnant, without a partner or supporting family, and financially unable to raise a child on her own, she had put her baby forward for adoption:

“I found this letter that my, um, real mum had written to my mum now, saying that basically these are the circumstances. My dad was apparently a seaman that travelled a lot of miles and all over the place, you know he just sailed, I think he was a transporter of some sort, and my mum was quite young and that I was basically a mistake and that I should not have happened, and that she’s ‘thankful’, in the letter she said, because at least it’s gone to a family that’s wanted to love and care for me really. She said she didn’t really want to let me go but she had no choice because she could not afford to keep me” (Natasha)

Similar circumstances occurred for William, whose birth mother had abandoned him in a hospital:

“she (birth mother) said that she gave me away because she could not keep me, that she was too young...so she had me, left me in hospital and I was took away” (William)

Evidence shows that regardless of their own racial heritage, birth parents, in particular birth mothers put their child into care and forward for adoption for these very reasons, i.e. stigma, inadequate financial income, and lack of support from the family and birth father (Holman, 1975; Maza, 1983; Mech, 1983; Schor, 1982; Shyne and Schroeder, 1978). However, it is also argued that because members of the “black” population “suffer disproportionately in terms of poor housing and unemployment”, have less access to statutory resources and preventative work, and are more susceptible to institutional racism (Barn, 2001:20), the cumulative result is a greater number of ‘black-African Caribbean’ and “mixed race” (‘black-African Caribbean’ and “white”) children are entering care (Barn, 1993; Barn, 2001; Bebbington and Miles, 1989).

In this study, the type and focus of the knowledge that all the ‘trans-racial’ adoptees had about their birth heritage related to factual points around the circumstances surrounding their birth. For example, where they were born, why they were adopted, if their birth mother loved them and reluctantly put them forward for adoption, their birth parents’ racial origin, what birth parents looked like, and so on. In other words, the knowledge base of ‘trans-racial’ adoptees was similar to the knowledge base of those who are “black” and ‘in-racially’ placed, and even those who are “white” and ‘in-racially’ placed (Howe and Feast, 2000).

However, some of the ‘trans-racial’ adoptees’ knowledge base was more detailed, which reflected the significance of the birth (racial and cultural) heritage in the adoptees’ sense of self and racial identity development. The knowledge was firstly about their birth culture, in particular the traditions, customary practices, celebratory holidays, key figures, and secondly about the community of those who were of the same birth racial origin, and the practices and homogeneity created within the boundaries of the “black” or “minority ethnic” community. For example:

“I got to meet other Korean adoptees...I got more information about the history and people...it helped me quite a lot in finding myself in

developing me myself” (Hee Yun)

and

“You know being aware of things going on internationally and in London about how black people, you know the black community were treated, you know, just being aware of being black...so it was just sort of a gradual process from my teens that I sort of gradually took more interest in sort of race issues and the apartheid and sort of mainly then meeting more black friends” (Robert)

This means that ‘trans-racial’ adoptees’ knowledge, like those who are ‘in-racially’ placed, is largely based on factual points, which are about the specific issues and circumstances surrounding their birth heritage, i.e. where they were born, the racial origin of their birth parents, and what their birth parents looked like. However, for some ‘trans-racial’ adoptees, their knowledge base seems to transcend these factual points by moving towards more in-depth detail of their birth heritage, i.e. information about their birth culture such as tradition, religion, customary practices, celebratory holidays, key figures, and information about others of the same birth racial origin.

The differences between ‘in-racial’ and ‘trans-racial’ adoptees is grounded in the racialised differences that exist in their adoption circumstances. However, the differences between ‘trans-racial’ adoptees that have a knowledge based on more factual points about their birth and birth heritage, with other ‘trans-racial’ adoptees that have a knowledge based on more in-depth information about birth heritage, is due to the ways in which the ‘trans-racial’ adoptees perceived their adoption and the racialised differences between them and their adoptive parents. For example, those who viewed their adoption experience in largely positive ways had a knowledge base that consisted of the more factual points about their birth heritage, where-as those who had largely negative and difficult experiences had a knowledge base that was made up of greater in-depth detail about their birth heritage.

It is here that an important point emerged. This is that most ‘trans-racial’ adoptees require more detailed information about their birth heritage, because they hold negative perceptions about their adoption and the racialised differences between them and their adoptive parents, and therefore (as the next section will show) search to resolve issues around identity and belonging.

(5.3) The adoptees' search for birth heritage

The literature on adoption and searching generally agrees that there is very little empirical information on *who* searches and *why*. Even less is known about those who are 'trans-racially' placed (Feast and Howe, 1997). From what little research that does exist, Lifton argued that "in the past it was believed that only the psychologically disturbed, or those who were unhappy in their adoptive families, had the need to search", but that these views no longer dominate (Lifton, 1988:73). However, this study has found that these views about the 'psychologically disturbed' needing to search continue to prevail. For example, two years after Lifton's work, Schechter and Bertocci argued that adoptees search as an "attempt to repair loss and disadvantage" and to "consolidate identity issues" (Schechter and Bertocci, 1990:89). Similarly, Feast and Howe also talk about searching being an attempt to 'complete one's identity' and 'reconstruct one's past' (Feast and Howe, 1990:8).

The literature on why adoptees search has also found that for all types of adoptees, the idea of biological family ties also seems to be important. For example, Shekleton found that her sample of 'trans-racial' adoptees had an "intense desire to find the family connections" (Shekleton, 1990:4). Similarly, the 'same-race' placed adoptees discussed in Toynbee's book also "reiterated the same thing...blood is important" (Toynbee, 1985:180). Toynbee's sample of adoptees also added that they had felt that they had "been denied a part of their natural birth-right", that of 'blood kinship' (Toynbee, 1985:180). This was something highlighted by the adoptees in this study. For example, William said:

"I can't be who I really am, not really...I mean that because I should not have been adopted or living like this in the first place, so, um, therefore it's like living a lie, you know...I should not have been there really, with them. I don't think I could ever really find the person that I should be, so I just have to carry on" (William)

From the little empirical data looking at adoptees who search, it is also possible to identify two broad categories. Feast and Howe (1997) identify these two categories as (i) 'information seekers' - those adoptees who seek information about their birth or background, and (ii) 'contact seekers' - those who seek contact with birth relatives, and for the 'trans-racial' adoptees, those who seek contact with others of the same birth racial origin or cultural background. In my own study, the adoptees' searches

fitted under both these categories. For example, William searched for members for his birth family. In doing so, he not only wanted information about them, but to also meet them and have a long-term relationship with them:

“I wanted to be with my real family...because I'm a different colour. I would prefer to be like that in a proper way, with my real family and that, to be honest” (William)

In seeking to fill the important gaps in the literature around ‘trans-racial’ adoptees’ experiences of searching, the adoptees were asked to talk about searching.

The desire to search

All but one of the adoptees interviewed in this study had searched. Julie had not made any attempts to search, nor did she have any plans to do so:

“I suppose largely because I’ve been very happy where I am...I guess if I’d been one of these people who felt that they’d been given away by their parents and their adoption was proof that they weren’t loved and possibly weren’t wanted in the first place, and all that other stuff, I guess it might have been more of an issue for me. But because as I say I was loved and happy...it’s not really been an issue for me at all. And I think because of the ease with which I could find out also. I’m looking through these letters, it’s amazing there are clues all over the place...It’s all just there all I have to do is pick up the phone and ring Preeya (birth mother’s friend who dealt with the adoption) and say, you know, ‘tell me about Beverley’ (birth mother) and it would all be there. So it’s almost the ease of which, the ease of it that has perhaps in some ways left me free not have to think about it. You know children, particularly if they are not happy with their adoption build all these fantasies around it, you know. I suspect I never had to for those two reasons” (Julie)

However, it seemed that Julie’s apparent lack of desire to search was largely due to a fear in what she may find. Therefore, she felt the need to protect herself by exercising control and power over her own life. For example, when I asked Julie whether she thought about her birth parents, she said:

“No...I think it’s more about wanting to know that if I do, do anything it will be on my own terms ‘cos...what if I don’t actually like these people, you know, what does it actually mean for a relationship, do I need yet another relationship with an elderly person...This way round is fine. I suppose the only thing that is a very real factor is should I decide I wanted to initiate something then I would discover that Beverley’s dead or what ever...you know I don’t know how I would feel about that then, you know if at the same time I made the decision, that the rug is then pulled out from under my feet...I can’t imagine that it would kind of rock anyone’s kind of

universe. It's not the usual stuff about secret love child coming out of the woodwork...I mean I had two reasons for being remarkably uncurious. One is fearful of what you will find and the other one is not having a sense of needing to know. I've always assumed for me it was the latter" (Julie)

When asked about searching for details about her birth culture, Julie gave a similar view:

"Well I don't really know about the racial mix either, and again it's been something I've been depressingly uncurious about...I've never had the curiosity to find out, I've always felt that you know you're so clearly a product of the people who bring you up, you know, I am so much like my (adoptive) mum" (Julie)

The idea that adoptees who choose not to search, are more likely to have had a positive experience in the adoptive home is a common argument. For example, Audrey Thompson (2000), in discussing Howe and Feast's (2000) report, *Adoption, Search and Reunion: The Long-Term Experiences of Adopted Adults*, which had studied 472 adoptees, 394 of which had searched for birth family members, highlighted how "adopted people who were active searchers were less likely to describe their adoption experience as very positive or positive (53 %) than those non-searchers (74 %)" (Thompson, 2000:29).

The original authors of the report, Feast and Howe (1997) and again as Howe and Feast in 2000 and later as Kirton, Feast and Howe (2000), argued that adoptees begin to search because of two distinct factors. These are (a) 'particular triggers' and (b) 'motives' (Kirton et al, 2000:8). Kirton et al later referred to the latter being 'concerns of longer standing' (Kirton et al, 2000:11). The 'particular triggers' were identified as key events which makes an adoptee want to search, such as the death of an adoptive parent which can make an adoptee seek a 'substitute' or 'somewhere to run'; a difficulty for the adoptee to hold a relationship or a problem with a current relationship; and the birth of their own child. Kirton et al (2000) later added the events of health problems and receiving support and encouragement from other adoptees to this list of triggers. The 'motives' and 'concerns of longer standing' were identified as thoughts and feelings that would have pre-occupied the adoptee throughout childhood, adolescence and into adulthood, although at different times, in different ways and with different levels of intensity. Such 'motives' or 'concerns of longer standing' included an adoptee's wish to contact a birth relative; a desire for background information; a curiosity about their origins; and some concerns around

personal identity.

Although the authors of the report found that ‘trans-racial’ adoptees were just as likely as the ‘in-racial’ adoptees to have “similar motives for searching”, they also observed significant differences. This was how “people who had been transracially placed were much more likely to have felt different to their adoptive families when growing up” and have more ‘intense’ issues around identity and belonging. As a result, the ‘trans-racial’ adoptees “began their search at a younger age” compared to ‘in-racially’ placed adoptees. For example, it was found that the mean age of ‘trans-racial’ adoptees who first started their search (i.e. contacted the Children’s Society), was 25.8 years compared to the mean age of those ‘in-racially’ placed, which was 31.2 years (Howe and Feast, 2000:150-154).

The idea of a ‘trans-racial’ adoptee having particular desires to search for their birth heritage, and to begin searching for it at a much younger age than those ‘in-racially’ placed, is something that was also found in this study. For example, when the adoptees were asked to talk about when and why they chose to search, all had done so after a long time of having been pre-occupied, or what Kirton et al (2000) would call as having ‘concerns of longer standing’, with thoughts about their birth family, culture and racial origin. For example, as Alison’s comment illustrates:

“I said (to my adoptive brothers) ‘can you imagine going through the whole of your life and people saying you where do you come from?’ and I never took that as being racist, I just took that as them being interested about where the colour had come from, I mean this is probably in my naivety through-out my whole life, and you know I’d say ‘I was adopted, and my dad was black and my mum was white’, and I said to them, my brothers, ‘everywhere I had gone that’s one of the first questions people ask within the first ten minutes...but I never minded’, but it always drew attention to the fact that I didn’t really know where I came from, you know my identity and who I looked like, and so every time that came up, those thoughts were in my head” (Alison)

Similarly, the adoptees in this study also began searching at a much younger age, usually upon turning eighteen²⁸, which was when they were legally permitted to do so. This was despite the differences in how much adoptees thought about their birth

²⁸ Section 26 of the Children Act 1975 (later part of the Adoption Act 1976, section 51) gave adoptees aged 18 years and above, the legal right to access information about their adoption.

heritage:

“It was kind of more later on, probably after when I was about eighteen that I got as if I felt that I needed to know a bit more, but of course by then I was old enough to make enquiries myself [So was that at eighteen that you contacted the agency that kept all the adoption records?] Yeah, round then” (Robert)

and,

“when I was eighteen I found my real brother...and then when I tried to find my real mum through social services they would not let me...social services were saying that there were no details for her, that she left none that she just left me in the hospital. But then there was one of her friends I knew, who happened to know another of mine, and she went back to her and said this about me” (William)

Hee Yun, whose legal documents about her birth or adoption had not been kept by any of the parties involved in her adoption, had however during her teens, began researching the history of Korean intercountry adoption and information about the Korean culture. At eighteen Hee Yun then made her first contact with other Korean people and embarked on her first visit to Korea, where she also visited the orphanage where she had spent the first few years of her life:

“When I was um, eighteen I started...In Germany I got to know a few Korean adoptees...then my grandfather died and left me money so...I went to Korea...I saw the orphanage, where I was, it was still there” (Hee Yun)

An important finding then is that ‘trans-racial’ adoptees search at a much younger age than those who are ‘in-racially’ placed.

The significance of race

The second key finding of this study is that the ‘trans-racial’ adoptees’ race is a significant factor in their searches. This is because despite whether they had positive or negative experiences, the adoptees racialised distinctions had led them to feel constantly different within their “white” adoptive home and predominantly “white” adoptive environments. This led to them having difficulties in developing themselves a racial identity that they were comfortable with. For example, Robert said:

“just that sort of feeling of not feeling as a whole integrated person...I suppose I was in a bit of a limbo. So though, um, I had a sense of crude sense of identity as just being black, there was kind of no substance or no, um, there was nothing to support that really in terms of family ties or relationships, or parents, or that whole sort of social fabric” (Robert)

In order to ease this difficulty, the adoptees sought details of various aspects of their birth heritage. These details were perceived by the adoptees as providing them with answers to their questions about their birth heritage, such as where they are from, what their racial origin is, and so on, which would then give them a sense of completeness. For example, Natasha said:

“I want to feel more settled in myself...to feel less angry and more happier...to feel complete...knowing would be a big patch to cover the big gap...to feel more normal” (Natasha)

Additionally though, some of the adoptees felt that searching for their birth heritage would also provide them with a sense of belonging. This is because they would be with others who were born the same, and hence who not only had a shared understanding of their “non-whiteness”, but who could provide the adoptee with access to their ‘real’ self. For example, searching for and making contact with members of the birth family, in particular the birth father who was ‘black African-Caribbean’, was viewed by Robert as bringing him closer to his racial identity:

“I met up with my dad and his family, so that gave me more of a sense of feeling more of a whole and a complete person...So though, um, I had a crude sense of identity as just being black, there was kind of no substance or no, um, there was nothing to support that really in terms of family ties or relationships, or parents, or that whole sort of social fabric” (Robert)

However, this study found there are no differences in searches between “mixed race” ‘trans-racial’ adoptees, and those born to two African/African Caribbean parents. This is supported by Howe and Feast (2000), whose sample of searching ‘trans-racial’ adoptees also consisted of those “mixed race” by birth.

Using the search to answer the racialised questions of others

The adoptees’ searches were also used as a means of answering the racialised questions of others. This is another important finding. For example, adoptees talked about being bullied, teased and questioned at school by the other children about their adoption, in particular about the ‘trans-racial’ aspects of their adoption. For example, if we remind ourselves of William’s earlier comment about feelings of difference at school:

“when I was getting older, um, the fact that I was, um, no it was you know, people saying things and then I would tell myself that I wasn’t the same...And, all the kids at school, no some of the kids at school, not

bullied me, but every time they saw it, it, um, it made it difficult being adopted, um, how can I put it? I used to get, not embarrassed but I could not really talk about it. I was feeling really sad about it and asking 'why?' I think yeah, it did make them take the mickey out of me, you know because I was different really" (William)

Similarly, Hee Yun said:

"when...strangers come up and ask him who is that and (my adoptive brother) says 'it's my sister' and they sometimes make a joke out of it 'cos they find it really funny because of people cannot grasp an idea of being adopted...if you get to hear it so many times it's like somebody is hammering it into you, 'you are not who you seem to be'...you feel a bit distant" (Hee Yun)

Adoptees also recalled that being raised in a predominantly, if not wholly, "white" environment had led to them being questioned about their "blackness":

"The other children at that school, they keep saying 'why you look strange?' and 'where is your (birth) parents?' and that is all they really see when they are children, that you are different to them" (Hee Yun)

Some adoptees were similarly questioned about their "mixed race" background, by both "black" and "white" others:

"it really used to upset me, name calling...but it was white kids calling me names and black kids calling me names, because I wasn't black and I wasn't white, I was mixed, which made it even worse, um, for them obviously...the adoption wasn't an issue until people made it an issue, like calling me names...I think it was mainly like I say the colour issue rather than the adoption issue...they'd see that they (adoptive parents) were white and they'd say 'ughhh your parents are white, that's really weird' and stuff, and then say nasty words and stuff...but what they saw is what they picked on, and at that stage it was the colour thing" (Natasha)

This meant that the answers sought by adoptees via searching, were not necessarily entirely related to identity development problems, but rather it was a reflection of them living in a racialised society where race has meaning in everyday social relationships. Hence, the questions about the adoptees' racialised differences, compared to the others in their adoptive environment, had led the adoptees to seek out commonality and acceptance with others of the same racial background. This commonality was primarily sought from members of the birth family:

"I want to know who I look like...I would just love to know and that's why I would just look at her if I did see her, you know to compare and say oh yes, I have her skin colour, or I have her hair, or nose...I suppose it's like oh there's a little bit of me there that's with her and vice-versa" (Natasha)

Similarly, Alison had searched for her birth siblings only, because they too were also of “mixed race” background, like Alison:

“that’s all I wanted, to find my sisters, not my birth parents...I kind of decided that I don’t look like my mum and I don’t look like my dad, because my mum’s white and he’s black, which is a silly thing to say but, one’s white and the other’s black and I’m not, so I won’t look like either of them, so I look like nobody. But then I did know that I had a sister. So that’s that really” (Alison)

The desire for an adoptee to seek out physical similarity had also been documented by Kirton et al. Here the authors had found that 5 of the 13 ‘trans-racial’ adoptees who had searched and experienced reunion with at least one member of their birth family, “had a significant interest, which tended to focus, though not exclusively, on looks and physical similarity” (Kirton et al, 2000:11). The adoptees’ desire for physical commonality with a birth parent was also found in studies carried out by Campbell, Silverman and Patti (1991), Hollingsworth (1998) and Kowal and Schilling (1985).

However, some adoptees additionally sought commonality from others of the same birth racial origin and birth cultural background, as oppose to solely from birth family members. This meant that their searches were not just about seeking physical commonality, but also about finding people who share similar experiences of being “black” in a racialised society. For example, Robert said:

“I see it as maybe more specifically applying to African-Caribbean people, um, and yeah, I sort of see it as important to me, but more because I do feel that there is a lot of racism in society...it’s sort of a cultural and social thing, you know...it’s kind of a feeling that as time goes on you feel as if you have more of a natural affinity with that people” (Robert)

Effects of the search on perception of self

The literature on the effects of searching has largely focused on adoptees who search for birth relatives only. Here experiences have varied. Kirton et al (2000) and Shekleton (1990) found that some of their ‘trans-racial’ adoptees felt as if they had ‘lost out’ on a life with either their birth family (Kirton et al, 2000:16) or with a “black” family (Shekleton, 1990:4), whilst other adoptees saw the contact as bringing the ‘bonus of a second family’ or delight in finding others who had similar physical features (Kirton et al, 2000:16).

In this study, the adoptees' experiences of searching for birth heritage had significant effects on the adoptees' perceptions of self. Like the adoptees in Kirton, Feast and Howe's (2000) sample, this study's adoptees also saw their search as bringing them a second family and similarities in physical features. For example, Alison said:

"I've got (birth) sisters and I've never had sisters and it's great, and not only have I got sisters but I've got sisters that look like me, you know and so, my (birth) sisters have become almost closer than my (adoptive) brothers" (Alison)

However, for some adoptees, the search did little to resolve their deep-rooted racialised feelings of difference. This was because contrary to hopes and expectations, the adoptees did not feel any bond or commonality with birth parents or others of the same birth racial origin or birth cultural background. Indeed, in talking about the experiences and identity development of 'trans-racial' adoptees, Shekleton found that the majority of 'trans-racial' adoptees in her study had a "vague generalised identification with other black people" which had been "insufficient to meet the intense need for defining 'self'" (Shekleton, 1990:4). This was so for adoptees in this study. In particular, William, was not only rejected (again) by his birth family, but was also criticised for having a "white" upbringing. For example, William said about his search for his birth parents:

"It was a waste of time to be honest...I think my (birth) parents thought I was too, you know, white...so it wasn't worth it, we're different...I've had a white upbringing" (William)

Like Kirton et al's (2000) sample, some of the adoptees in this study felt as if they had lost out on a life with their birth family or with others of the same birth racial origin and birth cultural background. This is another important finding. For example although grateful for having been adopted, Robert said:

"I've missed out on those sort of years where I was, I suppose I was in a bit of a limbo. So though, um, I had a sense of crude sense of identity as just being black, there was kind of no substance or no, um, there was nothing to support that really in terms of family ties or relationships, or parents, or that whole sort of social fabric" (Robert)

However, the current body of literature on "mixed race" people who are raised by their "white" biological parent, usually the mother and sometimes with a "white" step-parent, does not seem to support this idea of missing out on the "black" birth heritage. In this study however, Robert was keen to recompense this sense of loss and non-belonging by choosing to identify himself as having a "black" racial identity,

even though he was of “mixed race” background. According to Robert’s earlier comment, this was also because:

“I just feel more comfortable with black people on a whole” (Robert)

Similarly, Natasha too felt a sense of loss. For example, she said about the Seychelles, her country of birth:

“I feel like I’ve missed out, because all I have is three photographs, I mean I don’t even have them personally, my (adoptive) mum and dad have them, and that’s why I thought ‘oh that looks nice’, but that’s all I’ve got. It is a bit sad...I would like to know more about the place I was born in” (Natasha)

However, Natasha did not feel as if she missed out on a life with any aspects of her birth heritage. Indeed Natasha had even felt that she had been saved from what would have otherwise have been a more difficult upbringing:

“if I had not been adopted I probably would have been the cliché of working in somebody’s house over there, but it’s true. I probably would not have been working, I probably would have been on the street, probably picking coconuts for somebody or something and selling them at the side of the road...I’ve been given a very good chance compared to over there in the Seychelles because that’s how they make their living, that’s what they do” (Natasha)

Alison was also pleased that she had been adopted, but in meeting her birth sisters and hearing about their life, she was especially pleased that she did not grow up in her birth family, culture and with others of the same racial origin:

“from when I met my older sister I thought I’m glad, because knowing what she went through, you know because she had a hard time, so I was glad, but I never met him (birth father)...everything I’ve heard is not particularly very nice...I mean he used to beat the living daylights out of them if they um, um, well Amy said that there was an incident where it was really hot and sunny and they came back from school and saw all the other children in the streets in their bikinis playing with water and stuff, so they put their bikinis on, he got home and went ballistic, because as far as he was concerned they were running around half-naked, they were ten years old, so he took them inside and he hit them with a belt...because the relationship between the (birth) mum and the (birth) dad was so off and on, off and on, off and on, the children will tend to take sides...and some of the children would go with mum, with Maureen, that’s her name, and some would go with him, and um, sometimes they’d actually be together, you know, but she was in and out of refuges and stuff...but I just don’t think that it’s right to say that it’s in your culture because if you’re in a country where it is not right, and it’s wrong, you should not do it, regardless of your culture, you know and I always think that if you do come to a country you then have to abide by their rules, you know no

matter what religion or race you are, you can't bring your own in and say this is what I do in my country...I mean if it's alright for a west-Indian guy to beat his wife up in Barbados, then that's fine, but if you come over to England, it's not ok, just because it's ok in your culture does not mean that you can do it here" (Alison)

In hearing about this aspect of the birth family's problems, Alison forms a negative stereotype of "black" culture as a whole, i.e. the idea of west-Indian men 'disciplining' their wives through physical violence. This is interesting because it is actually a negative view borne out of a lack of experience and knowledge of west-Indian culture. One must also wonder whether Alison is justifying her own 'trans-racial' adoption to herself by rationalising it as having saved her from what she considers to be, a culture tolerating of 'violent disciplinarian west-Indian men'?

Returning to the effects of the search on the adoptees' perception of self, in other ways, the search was positive for adoptees in that it was beneficial and useful to their racial identity development. This was because the search provided them with a sense of completeness and belonging. For example, Robert especially enjoyed the way in which his contact with his birth family, in particular his birth father, helped to bring him closer to his racial identity:

"I met up with my dad and his family, so that gave me more of a sense of feeling more of a whole and a complete person [Do you think becoming closer to your birth father had brought you closer to your racial identity, or was it the other way round?] Definitely yeah. It was definitely about getting closer to my birth identity. Definitely more about that" (Robert)

Similarly, Hee Yun said about her search for contact with others of the same birth racial origin and of the same birth cultural background:

"I think it brought me quite a step forward...I went to Korea first for a few months then went travelling round the world for the rest of the year...I think it helped me quite a lot in developing and understanding myself better" (Hee Yun)

However, for other adoptees, the search presented feelings of racialised difference to that of the birth heritage. For example, Alison took the view that her birth father's "black" racial heritage and cultural background had no significance in her life:

"That culture is not mine. It's not the culture that I know, so it doesn't mean anything to me really" (Alison)

This was also the case for Natasha, who felt out of place in her attempts to learn more about the local 'black African-Caribbean' community. For example, as mentioned

earlier, Natasha's testimony to this was her experiences at a funeral and then at a church event:

"I just carried on, did what I had to do and got out of there. It was really weird, because I wasn't used to that. It was really different [Did you talk to your (African-Caribbean) boyfriend about it?] Not really no, because it was, well I suppose he'd thought it was something that I should already know, you know, I can't explain it" (Natasha)

and,

"He (ex-boyfriend) was half, mixed. But his mum was proper Jamaican, you know I could hardly understand what she was saying sometimes, it was like that you know. And yeah I think it was one afternoon when we all went out and it was around my birthday and he goes 'oh I'm going to take you out tonight' and we went to this church thing and it was fully Gospel, and I just sat there and thought 'oh this is interesting, it's different', but I gave it a go, and I tried to get into it but I could not, for me it was really embarrassing. But it was only embarrassing because I had never experienced it, that wasn't what was in my culture, that was in their culture, and I was trying to get into it and see it from their point of view what it was like and stuff. But it was a bit too deep for me and I could not really do it. [Did you feel out of place?] I did a little bit, yeah. I don't think they could tell, because I was making an effort, and you know I'd go and do the clapping, um, but then I started to giggle and I just put my head down, you know when they jumped up and cheered, because I thought I need to show a bit of respect, so I just put my head down, um, yeah. I know I felt out of place" (Natasha)

From these accounts, 'trans-racial' adoptees do search in an attempt to resolve identity issues. In some cases these identity issues are resolved. However, Lifton's comment that "it is not that simple" (1988:73) is also of significance. Here Lifton discusses the work of William Reynolds who found that "those who were happy in their adoptive homes might search because they felt confident in themselves, while those who were unhappy might be restrained from searching through any guilt" (Reynolds in Lifton, 1988:73). Therefore according to this, it is not necessarily only the adoptees who are 'psychologically disturbed'; less satisfied with their adoption; or those who have identity development issues who search, but also the psychologically healthy, the confident, and those who are happy in their adoptive homes. Indeed, some may just want to search because they are curious or because they want to let their birth parents know that they made a sound choice with the adoption. For example, although Robert searched to primarily resolve identity issues, he also commented on how he wanted to let his birth mother know that he was ok:

"my adoptive mum kind of said that my birth mother would have been thinking about me at times like my birthday and I just thought that I kind

of felt that I wanted to get in contact with her just to sort of let her know that I was ok. So getting in contact with my mum was more sort of felt for her benefit” (Robert)

Similarly, although Julie chose not to search because she partly feared what she may find, she was also adamant that she did not search largely because:

“I’ve been very happy where I am...I was loved and happy...it’s not really been an issue for me at all” (Julie)

(5.4) The adoptees’ experiences of birth heritage

In different ways and to different extents, all the adoptees had experiences with the birth family, others of the same birth racial origin and with the birth cultural background. Some of the experiences were positive and others were negative. Consequently, the relationships had different meanings and were of different importance for each of the adoptees’ racial identity development.

In talking about these experiences, Robert recalled having a number of experiences, which were largely positive, with his birth family and others of the same birth racial origin:

“he’s (birth father) got four daughters, you know he got married and had four daughters with his Nigerian wife, um, and I get on ok with them. Again, um, I’ve only been over to Nigeria about four times and I’m not in regular contact with them, but when I do see them I’m ok with them. I just, you know, I suppose I feel better and more comfortable with other black people” (Robert)

These experiences made Robert feel a positive sense of sameness and belonging, in particular with his birth father’s “black” Nigerian heritage. These positive feelings in turn gave Robert a deeper sense of his “black” self:

“It was definitely here about my birth identity. Definitely more about that. [So then did you think that becoming closer to your birth father especially, that that would bring you closer to your birth identity and experiences of being black?] Definitely, yeah” (Robert)

On the other hand, Julie had no contact with members of her birth family and birth cultural background, and little contact with others of the same birth racial origin. This made her feel like an outsider of the “black” community:

“I became aware of the fact that um, the existence of the NF, National Front, and that was all quite frightening. You know as I became kind of

older I became more aware of boot boys and skin heads...and that I found was all inhibiting I felt I didn't have skills to deal with that or understand it so I stayed well clear...I think that because of, I think there wasn't an awful lot that impacted on a teenager who was fairly sheltered and lived in a village...and of course, you know, as far, if there is such a thing, as far as your average black person goes I'm not particularly black at all you know my skin colour and my hair and that's as far as about it goes" (Julie)

However, despite this lack of contact with her birth heritage, and feeling like an outsider of the "black" community, Julie felt confident with her sense of self:

"I'm not a stereotypical black person, but it doesn't bother me personally...I have a lot of strengths. I'm grounded and have a strong sense of self and am successful in what I do" (Julie)

Being raised in a predominantly "white" environment and having failed in her attempts to negotiate herself a position within the "black" community and gain experience of the 'black African-Caribbean' culture, Natasha similarly talked about having felt like an outsider of the "black" community. However, like Julie, Natasha had insisted that this was not a concern for her, because she felt confident enough in her sense of self:

"I think I'm just me, an individual, the original me" (Natasha)

The majority of the adoptees though, recalled a complex set of experiences in that they had a more balanced set of both positive and negative encounters. For example, making contact with some aspects of Korean culture and others of the same birth racial origin, was important to Hee Yun and helped her to deal with some of the difficulties as a result of her adoption:

"I think it brought me quite a step forward...I think it helped me quite a lot in developing and understanding myself better. I think that that many of these hate feelings when I was an outsider has influenced my way of how to interact with people. I still sometimes feel like this, but I think I have learnt some ways of how to deal with this" (Hee Yun)

However, because Hee Yun was unable to access information about her birth, she also continually felt angry, rejected and powerless, which had problematic consequences on her identity development:

"I've tried to deal with it but I think there's something I still need to go on thinking about...it makes me feeling sometimes very bitter about it. Although it's a situation thing, it's very difficult to say because you know you can reason with it and you can say ok, Korea has been in a very

difficult situation, however does it give it the right for a person to decide over other children's lives, to give them the wrong history or none at all" (Hee Yun)

Alison also had a contradictory and difficult set of experiences. This is because although Alison felt that her experiences with some of her birth sisters helped her feel a sense of sameness and belonging, in particular by bringing her physical similarities, she also had some negative experiences with some of her other birth sisters:

"when they would come, they would make me feel that, um, um, they would draw attention to me, which I didn't want. If we would go out into town and there was three of us, and they may have brought a couple of mates down as well, they'd draw attention to the fact that, I mean looking back I suppose we were you know it (town of residence) is not very multi-cultural, and um, I don't know, they were drawing attention to me and I didn't want them to and I was happy enough on my own, but I didn't want all the negative attention that they were creating, you know by saying, um, well they've all gone through loads of racism, they've had loads of issues you know, they said that they'd be walking down the street and somebody would spit at them, you know and when I said that that has not happened to me, they can't believe it, and I might have said stuff like 'oh maybe you're looking for it'...I just think that they went looking for it, like I said going to the bar and saying 'we're not getting served because we're black', and I'm saying 'well ok maybe they are racist, but why can't you look at it the other way, that white person is not getting served either'...and I just said 'look at it from other angles', and they would not, you know, and yet they had white friends down with them. But they are very feisty, these two sisters of mine, and um, I mean sober they weren't too bad, but um, um, well I used to say that if I got that horrible when I was drinking, I would not drink anymore, and that's what I could not cope with...they called me stuff like 'coconut' and 'bounty bar', meaning black on the outside and white on the inside" (Alison)

Alison also recalled negative experiences with others from the same birth racial origin:

"I mean I've never had a black boyfriend or um, I've had rows with them...I had an argument with a black guy because I didn't want to dance with him, and he went you know 'oh do you only dance with white guys?' and I went 'oh my God!' you know" (Alison)

These negative experiences with members of the birth family and others of the same birth racial origin, illustrates Alison's sense of difference from the "black" part of her birth heritage. This sense of difference is due to the "mixed race" nature of Alison's birth heritage, as well as the 'trans-racial' aspect of her adoption and her having been raised in a "white" environment:

“I just can’t cope, you know I haven’t had any black friends or any mixed-race friends at all through-out the whole of my life and I just could not cope with these sisters of mine who were like taking over and portraying me in this way and putting me in their category...I didn’t see my self as being black, um, so that was part of it all as well. I mean they may have had a more multi-cultural upbringing, you know more black friends and more Asian friends, I mean and I haven’t” (Alison)

Indeed, in reporting on “mixed race” people and their experiences with “black” people, Tizard and Phoenix found slightly more than one-third of their sample “said they felt uncomfortable with black people than those who said they felt uncomfortable with white” (Tizard and Phoenix, 2002:116). This was partially due to the young people’s unfamiliarity with “black” people, and feeling more at ease with “white” people whom they saw primarily accepted them more as individuals. Similarly, when asked about their feelings of “black” people, 13% of the sample gave negative answers. However, Tizard and Phoenix also argue that only “a minority of our sample had met hostility, exclusion and verbal abuse from black children” (Tizard and Phoenix, 2002:225), and of the reports of negative encounters with “black” people, an equal number was reported for encounters with “white” people. Therefore, Tizard and Phoenix concluded that “mixed race” people are no more likely to have negative experiences with “black” people than with “white” people.

William also experienced these types of difficulties, i.e. the criticism and rejection of the adoptees’ “white” parts, in his encounters with his birth family. In attempting to negotiate a relationship and more specifically to become a full member of his birth family by *“hanging around with them more”*, William faced rejection and criticism from his birth family. For example, in talking about his birth mother and birth siblings, William said:

“[The last time we talked you said that you tried to be more like black people and your birth family by hanging around with them more. Can you tell me, when you were doing that did you change your behaviour or anything?] No, well, not really no. I just wanted to be like them, which is nothing really. [What did you think you had to change?] That was the thing, there was nothing that I could change to be honest because there was nothing that I could do to be like that. But thinking about it was a bit of a waste of time really, you know thinking that I could change or be like them really...It’s just that she (birth mother) didn’t try and find me and I think she should have, not me go searching for them. [Do you think they should have searched for you?] They told me that they didn’t want to. [How did that make you feel?] It’s horrible...but I see...my real brother and sister quite a lot, I saw him today actually. I speak to him, but not

really my sister I mean he doesn't phone me and I don't phone him, so it's just when I see him. And I saw her yesterday, my sister, and she never said anything, I'm sure she saw me though but she pretended that she didn't...I'm sure she saw me, but I don't really like her. She's a bit of a funny character...but I don't want to cause trouble because I don't like them, I don't like the way they go round with their friends thinking that they are better than me...I just can't be bothered with them and how they go around. They don't like me and that's ok because I don't like them and I'm not bothered" (William)

(5.5) The adoptees' views of their birth heritage

In talking about their views of their birth heritage, the 'trans-racial' adoptees in this study exhibited the same types of views as those who are 'in-racially' placed. For example, Schechter and Bertocci found that all types of adoptees report wanting information about their birth heritage, such as "likeness-to-self" and "a full and coherent birth story" (Schechter and Bertocci, 1990:64). The 'trans-racial' adoptees in this study, were angry towards the birth family in particular for having put them forward for adoption and a sense of loss at having missed-out on a life with their birth family. For William in particular this sense of anger and loss was very strong:

"I did feel that I wanted to be with my real family...at the end of the day I should not have been adopted by them people, cos we're a different colour ain't it...I do think I've had a white up-bringing...but then I just wanted to get back at her (birth mother) really...I want revenge...I just want her to, um, at the end of the day, I want her to be sorry for what she's done" (William)

These same feelings of anger and loss have also been reported by those who are 'in-racially' adopted (McMillan and Irving, 1994), but not by those who are "mixed race" by birth and raised by their "white" biological parent. However, William previously mentioned that his feelings of difference and the teasing he experienced at school, were a result of the obvious racial differences brought about by the adoption. This suggests that the severity of the negative feelings are worsened by the 'trans-racial' aspect of the adoption.

In particular, intercountry adoptees also report feeling angry at their country of birth. For example, in talking about her anger with her birth mother, Hee Yun also spoke of the equal anger that she had towards Korea:

"in former times of Korea, in the sixties and the seventies, where some records were kept and some were destroyed, um, some were wrongly kept

and extra stories were made up, and sometimes, um, because there was a pressure on mothers in that time, um, on single mothers...so it could be that I am an orphan or it could be that I'm just an orphan on letters...You have to negotiate between the emotions and the logical bit...I mean I remember saying to my mum 'I really hate her, why did she have to do this? Why do I have to be in this situation?' I got much more, um, influenced at school when I realised that I was an outsider...I think what happened in Korea with the adoption, was a kind of crime in the sense that everything was not properly dealt with, you know that is a crime. Birth parents were encouraged not to keep their child, they were given some money to give it out for adoption, and I see that as a crime" (Hee Yun)

This study's 'trans-racial' adoptees additionally reported feelings of anger and loss at having missed-out on a life with others of the same birth racial origin and birth cultural background. For example, in talking about his birth family and members of their local black community, William said:

"she (birth mother) had my brother, kept him for a bit and then put him into foster care, and then she had me, left me in hospital and I was took away. Yeah, and after that she then goes and has three kids...there's no sense in getting rid of two and keeping three...she just used to make me angry as well, upset and angry, because I used to think that it's not really fair that I'm in this situation, and I got angry about that as well...I should be with them people at the end of the day" (William)

These additional feelings are particular to 'trans-racial' adoptees, because they are feelings that are directly borne out of them having been 'trans-racially' adopted by "white" adoptive parents and raised in a predominantly "white" environment. For example, in providing an account of her feelings about her own 'trans-racial' and intercountry adoption, Sue Jardine, who had been born in Hong Kong and then adopted from China to England, discussed how she had felt a "loss of connection with Chinese people" (Jardine, 2000:488).

The literature on 'in-racial' adoptees' feelings about their birth heritage has also highlighted a sense of completeness and belonging. For example Howe and Feast (2000) found that of the 129 'in-racial' searchers in their study, the majority felt that they belonged to their birth family. However, for 'trans-racial' adoptees this sense of completeness and belonging brings with it a feeling of sameness that is tied to shared racial features and common racialised experiences:

"with black people, it's kind of a feeling that as time goes on you feel as if you have more of a natural affinity with (black) people, so, it's not like that were always talking about race or racism or political issues...I just

feel more comfortable with black people on a whole...I think that on a whole, people in the black community who know me” (Robert)

On the other hand though, some of the ‘trans-racial’ adoptees in this study also reported feeling different to their birth heritage, in particular to the birth family and others of the same birth racial origin. For example, the adoptees viewed their birth cultural background as one that they were not associated with:

“they (adoptive parents) never really said anything about the culture or anything...but some of my other sisters, they go over to Barbados, because they feel as if that’s they’re, um, that’s the culture that they need...Claire and Lucy definitely do take after their dad and that culture...” (Alison)

Having no association with their birth cultural background and having been raised in a “white” home, was also viewed as having no real culture. In other words, the adoptive “white” culture was viewed as being ‘cultureless’:

“I think she (birth sister) is trying to put some culture into my life by giving me salt-fish and stuff like that...I think she likes to hang on to that bit of culture, but I haven’t got any of it and I think that she thinks I’m a bit white like that” (Alison)

and,

“maybe because they were more cultured than I was...um, roots type of thing, because a lot of them were Jamaican or Afro-Caribbean that went in there, and then there was me” (Natasha)

Many ‘trans-racial’ adoptees, like ‘in-racial’ adoptees report contradictory feelings about all aspects of their birth heritage (Howe and Feast, 2000). For example, although feeling angry at her birth mother and the Korean society in general for putting her up for a ‘trans-racial’ and intercountry adoption, so much so that she criminalized their actions, Hee Yun also talked about longing to belong to Korean society:

“they just thought that we have so many children you know, and what are we doing with it, they didn’t think about the child wanting to know about their history later when they had grown up. They had just thought you know the best way for us, the government and the people who made the decisions is that we adopt some out...They just thought that we’d do that and maybe even get some money out of it. And that what is the bitter taste in this. It makes me feeling sometimes very bitter about it. Although it’s a situation thing. It’s very difficult to say because you know you can reason with it and you can say ok Korea has been in a very difficult situation, however does it give it the right for a person to decide over other children’s lives, to give them the wrong history or none at all...I think it’s a supply and demand thing you know, there’s demand and there’s

supply...but I want to go back there...I was born there...so it's also part of me" (Hee Yun)

However, for 'trans-racial' adoptees these contradictory views and feelings are deepened by the paradox between their physical racialised differences (especially, their "black" skin colour) and their "white" set of experiences. This meant that adoptees were often criticised for their "black" looks and "white" behaviour:

"in the end they (birth sisters) called me stuff like 'coconut' and 'bounty bar', meaning black on the outside and white on the inside, and you know I could not cope with it" (Alison)

The adoptees' contradictory set of experiences with their birth heritage due to the sense of belonging tied to physical features, and yet the sense of difference tied to experience and understanding, is another important finding. The essentialist arguments about racial identity development, in particular "black" racial identity development maintain that a "black" individual's 'reunion' with the "black" community is the only real means through which their true self can be drawn out and a positive and healthy racial identity developed. For example, in using the 'Nigrescence Model' to outline the development of a "Black" identity, Cross (1971) argued that sooner or later every "Black" individual has an actual experience of racism, that is so strong that it forces them to reinterpret their "White" world view. In rejecting their previous identification with the "White" culture, the individual instead seeks identification with "Black" culture. In this 'immersion-emersion', the "Black" individual completely attempts to identify with "Black" culture and debase "White" culture, meaning that they are able to successfully 'internalise' "Black" culture. In specifically talking about 'trans-racial' adoptees though, it has been argued that although such a 'reunion' brings the opportunity for a successful development of a healthy "black" identity, some 'trans-racial' adoptees are unable to deal with the racism that they will inevitably face from the "black" community who will reject them on the basis of their "whiteness", i.e. their "white" characteristics, which will make the adoptees feel as if they do not belong to "black" culture (Small, 1991). This is supported by the studies of Dago et al (1993) and Shekleton (1990), which found that the "black" 'trans-racial' adoptees felt as if they did not fully belong to the "black" culture. It is also supported by the findings of this study, where although the adoptees were able to have some degree of commonality and belonging with the "black" community because they shared similar physical features, the adoptees'

“white” social and cultural upbringing acted as a distinct marker of difference and obstacle to the extent to which they were able to be identified as belonging to “black” culture.

(5.6) Summary

In examining the role that birth heritage plays in the shaping of adoptees’ racial identity development, this Chapter highlights the second of the study’s five key findings. This is that race and the racialised differences brought about by the ‘trans-racial’ aspects of the adoption, are significant factors in ‘trans-racial’ adoptees’ searches for their birth heritage. It was found that the ‘trans-racial’ adoptees in this study required detailed information about their birth heritage. This is because they hold negative perceptions about their adoption and the racialised differences between them and their adoptive parents, and therefore search to resolve issues around identity and belonging. In addition, because of the obvious racialised differences between them and their adoptive family, the adoptees became aware of their adoptive status at a much younger age than those who are ‘in-racially’ placed. This means that whilst growing up, they were more pre-occupied with thoughts about their birth heritage and tended to start searching at a much younger age. It was also found that whilst adoptees reported being happy in their adoptive homes, they also felt angry and a sense of loss of having missed out on their birth heritage. However, it also emerged that not all the adoptees searched to resolved identity issues. Rather they did so to answer the racialised questions of others. The ‘trans-racial’ adoptees also discussed their contradictory set of experiences with their birth heritage. This is because although there was a feeling of belonging, which is tied to the shared physical features, there was also a sense of difference that is tied to experience and understanding. Taking these findings into consideration, it is argued that in different ways and to different degrees, the adoptees’ birth heritage plays a vital role in the adoptees’ development of a racial identity.

Having considered the significance of the adoptees’ birth heritage in this Chapter, and their experiences of ‘trans-racial’ adoption and their relationships with the adoptive family in Chapter 4, the next Chapter examines in detail the formation of a ‘trans-racial’ identity.

Chapter 6

'Trans-racial' Identity

(6.1) Introduction

The debates surrounding 'trans-racial' adoptees' identity development are dominated by the arguments of those opposing 'trans-racial' adoption, such as NABSW and ABSWAP. These groups argue against 'trans-racial' adoption by maintaining that it damages the racial identity of "black" and "minority ethnic" children (Tizard and Phoenix, 2002). This is because the adoptee will fail to develop a true sense of one's own "black" self when raised by the racially naïve "white" adoptive family. This means that the "black" 'trans-racial' adoptee will grow up not knowing who they are, face identity conflict and confusion, be unable to positively relate to their own racial background, and develop a low self-esteem or even a hatred for their own "black" self. Hence they will face serious difficulties both personally and socially (Small, 1986). These arguments are politically and ideologically biased, and have been supported with very little empirical evidence. Yet they have continued to dominate debates.

The key aim of this study is to examine the racial identity development of 'trans-racial' adoptees. In doing so, this Chapter presents the adoptees' understanding of their racialised identity and their negotiation of a 'trans-racial' identity. The key research question guiding analysis is 'what constitutes a 'trans-racial' identity?' In presenting answers, the claims made by the existing literature in particular about identity development difficulties, are also assessed.

In looking at adoptees' racialised identity and negotiation of a 'trans-racial' identity, a number of areas emerged as significant. These are, the adoptees' understanding of their racialised identity; the existence of a "black"- "white" continuum; adoptees' experiences of having a positive or problematic racialised identity; and the adoptees' national identities. This Chapter discusses these areas in greater detail. In doing so, the third of the study's five key findings is developed. This is that although some adoptees saw themselves as more "black" than "white" or vice versa, all of them

negotiated an identity that incorporated both their “black” and “white” parts, i.e. a “mixed” identity. This study therefore is consistent with the idea all racialised identities are not fixed, but open to interpretation and modification.

(6.2) Having a ‘trans-racial’ identity

All of the adoptees in this study themselves recognised the inevitability of them being racialised in certain ways. This was largely because they were “black” or of another “minority ethnic” group, and living in a predominantly “white” society. Hence, being racialised and developing a racial identity is an inevitable outcome of living in a society where race has meaning. However, the adoptees’ experiences of being racialised were largely influenced by their status as a ‘trans-racial’ adoptee. This meant that whether adoptees settled more towards having the racial identity of their birth parents’, or one more towards that of their adoptive parents’ racial identity, or on one that equally encompassed both parts, they all tackled very much the same issues in having developed that racial identity. These issues centred on being of “black”, “minority ethnic origin” or “mixed race” by birth, yet having been raised by a “white” family in a predominantly “white” social environment. And, because each of the adoptees could not fully ignore either the birth or adoptive parts of their heritage, they developed a ‘trans-racial’ identity which took into account their experiences of the degrees to which they were accepted by some groups and rejected by others. Such acceptance (sameness) and rejection (difference) is seen as “the dynamic principles” of identity (Jenkins, 1996:4), and important to how individuals negotiate their sense of self in society. This means that for the adoptees in this study, their ‘trans-racial’ identity largely represented where they felt they belonged in relation to these two parts. The ‘trans-racial’ identity then, is the racialised identity that an adoptee negotiates when they are adopted by a family who are of a different racial background.

In seeking to understand what constitutes a ‘trans-racial’ identity, a number of important features were identified. These are:

1. The nature of experiences in the adoptive home, i.e. if they were positive or negative.
2. Levels of acceptance into and commonality with the birth heritage, i.e. the

- family, culture, and others of same racial group.
3. Levels of acceptance into and commonality with the adopted heritage, i.e. the family, culture, and others of same racial group.
 4. How others classified their physical features and the adoptees' negotiation of these classifications. For example, whether they agreed or disagreed with them, found them beneficial or a limitation, and if they chose to challenge or conform to them.
 5. How others categorized them in social relations and the adoptees' negotiations of these categorizations. For example, if the adoptees agreed or disagreed with them, found them beneficial or a limitation, and if they chose to challenge or conform to them.

However, the significance of each of the adoptees' features varied in form and intensity. This meant that there were variances of the 'trans-racial' identity, for each of the adoptees, i.e. although all were "mixed" some identified more with the "white" side than the "black" side, or vice versa.

The literature on the racial identity development of 'trans-racial' adoptees is dominated by the arguments of groups opposing 'trans-racial' adoption. These groups argue "Black children in white homes are cut off from healthy development of themselves as black people" (Merritt in Simon and Alstein, 2000:38)²⁹. Similarly, Stonequist (1937) used the theory of 'the marginal man' to argue that people raised between two cultural groups face serious psychological difficulties, as a result of being rejected by the dominant "white" group and looked upon as different by the "black" group. Clearly, the basis of these arguments is that being born in the margins of two different and conflictual cultures, inevitably leads the 'trans-racial' adoptee to feel as if they belong to neither (as oppose to both) and to then develop racial identity development difficulties.

However, in this study, the adoptees' negotiation of a 'trans-racial' identity contradicted this belief. This is because the 'trans-racial' adoptees' identities clearly incorporated both parts of their "black" heritage and "white" heritage. Despite this though, all the adoptees talked about how they were constantly being forced to choose

²⁹ Merritt's use of a capital letter.

between their “white” side and their “black” side. This left the adoptees feeling as if they were being denied the right to identify themselves in the multiple, complex and diverse ways that they saw themselves in. This is something that was also identified by Tizard who argued that “most studies do not explore the extent to which the young people assign themselves a mixed cultural identity, but ask them to choose between their adopted and original identity” (Tizard, 1991:754). As a result, the adoptees in this study were regularly being mis-identified, and talked about their annoyance at constantly having to correct these inaccurate labels. This is another important finding. For example in talking about an adoption reunion programme set up by the Korean Government, Hee Yun said:

“now the Korean government or some provinces are feeling a bit guilty or something, so they started doing projects like come and get to know our culture and you get a really negative view of you because if you don’t speak Korean language or if you don’t want to speak Korean, you are looked down upon. That is much more worse if you don’t want to speak Korean. They don’t give you the option if you want to speak Korean. They say oh you are Korean, well I am German, I’m not Korean really anymore. They say you are Korean, you should know our culture, you should get to know and learn the language, and that is what is happening. It’s not the right way that they should react to this. They should give us the choice, they didn’t give us the choice before. So they should give us the choice now...they still seem to think that we are Korean and it’s really difficult to say that we are Korean and it’s really difficult to say that we are just Korean because we are not just Korean anymore. We are Germans who have maybe had a Korean background” (Hee Yun)

(6.3) The adoptees’ understanding of their racialised identity

In a society where race has significant meaning, it is inevitable that identities are racialised. All the adoptees talked about their experiences of being involved in social relations where-by their identity was defined and shaped on the basis of race, in particular their “blackness”. The adoptees discussed how they conceived their racialised identity, and in particular the extent to which they chose to embrace a positive “black” identity (as theorised by those opposing ‘trans-racial’ adoption). In doing so, it emerged that not all of the adoptees chose to conceive themselves as entirely “black”. Rather, each of the adoptees’ choice of racial identity varied according to space, time and context.

Only one of the adoptees conceived themselves to have a largely “black” racial identity,

which they saw as necessary for developing themselves a positive racial identity. Here, in having largely had negative experiences of having been ‘trans-racially’ adopted in particular, led to a firm and passionate understanding of being “black”, despite the fact that this adoptee was actually “mixed race”. For example, Robert who based his racial identity around physical, cultural, political and social meanings, said:

“I acknowledge I have a mixed cultural heritage, but I see myself as Black, black African, Black African – Igbo-Irish to be precise...I’m not very politically active now, but for a long time I was, so yeah, I would kind of take it (black) as a political term of you know, all people of colour or non-white people” (Robert)

In contrast though, another “mixed race” adoptee had talked about her ‘special status’ in her “white” social world and her negative experiences with some members of the “black” community. These experiences had left Alison with a desire to largely assert her “white” identity. However, due to the “mixed race” aspect of her birth Alison settled on choosing to describe herself as having a “mixed” racial identity, which tended to lean more towards the “white” parts of her biological and social heritage. For Alison, this equalled a positive racial identity:

“I didn’t see myself as being black...I mean they (birth sisters) have had a more multi-cultural upbringing, you know more black friends and more Asian friends, I mean and I haven’t...I think a lot of people see me as my sisters described me, as being black on the outside and white on the inside...but I suppose really I’m mixed, cos of my birth parents, although more white cos of my upbringing” (Alison)

Although another adoptee discussed her difficulties with both sides of her heritage, she also talked about her sense of attachment with both parts of her Korean birth heritage and her “white” adoptive heritage. Therefore, Hee Yun chose to conceive her sense of a positive racial identity as one that is “mixed”, and incorporated elements from both parts. For example, in speaking with a sense of firmness about the significance of this choice, Hee Yun said:

“I am a born Korean with German nationality...sometimes I am Korean, sometimes German...I cannot live as if I am just a German...I am also a Korean...I know that my identity is made up of loads of different parts of my life...but I could not choose because in every different situation you are a different person. I refuse to choose. You cannot choose, there is no option, because no person is mainly one person...you always change in every situation” (Hee Yun)

In having largely talked about their negative experiences with both “black”

individuals and “white” individuals, another adoptee who was born to two parents of “black” African Caribbean origin highlighted how their negative perceptions of difference led to a choice of not completely attaching oneself to a particular racial identity. This is because they currently did not equate doing so with having a positive racial identity. This is a direct damaging result of their negative experiences with both “black” individuals and “white” individuals. As a result, this adoptee was in the process of negotiating themselves a “mixed” positive racial identity that they felt comfortable with, and so at the time of interviewing they chose to assert identification with various racial groups, and in addition emphasised a belief in the notion of ‘common peoplehood’, i.e. the idea of belonging to the human race as oppose to a particular racial group. For example, William said:

“I would just describe myself as black because of the fact that my birth parents were black and nothing else. That’s just the way it is really...I’m black (but) I know I have white elements in me. I can’t explain it really, it’s just things in me. I suppose that makes me mixed, I don’t know...I never thought about having a racial identity though. I just never really thought about it. It means nothing to me...I’m just human at the end of the day...if I like people I hang out with them, I don’t say ‘oh he’s black, so I’ll have him as a friend’ or anything, it just depends if I like them” (William)

Similarly, Natasha claimed to have no racial identity, but an attachment to such ‘common peoplehood’ as discussed by William. This suggests that Natasha was also in the process of negotiating herself a “mixed” positive racial identity that she felt comfortable with. For example, Natasha said:

“I don’t have black or white skin, but brown (skin)...I have no racial identity, I’m not black and I don’t see myself as white either. But I think I’m just me, an individual, the original me...I’m human, yeah a human person at the end of the day” (Natasha)

Another adoptee also talked about her racial identity in a vague way and claimed that they had not really thought about the type of racial identity that they had. Julie’s absence of in-depth thought was due to her lack of curiosity and a belief in a ‘nurtured’ view of identity development. However, Julie emphasised that she was aware that she had some sort of racial identity. This suggested that was also in the process of negotiating herself a “mixed” positive racial identity that she felt comfortable with:

“I’ve never had the curiosity to find out, I’ve always felt that you know you’re so clearly a product of the people who bring you up...I tick ‘black

mixed'...on these forms...(but) I mean to all intent and purposes I suppose that I can't honestly say that I feel a great deal different from white people who have been born and brought up and have had my set of experiences. I don't have a sense of anything that's particular of a black consciousness you know...yes, I clearly have a cultural and racial identity, but it's not perhaps a stereotypical black one" (Julie)

(6.4) A “black”-“white” continuum

Each of the adoptees' identity development had been influenced by their race. This is because they had all been involved, although in different ways and to different degrees, in social relations where-by physical, cultural, social and political definitions and meanings about race had been attached to the social context. This was done through them having been placed on a “black”-“white” continuum (see figure 6.1). On this continuum, there are two polarised ends, the “black” identity and the “white” identity. The individual's positioning on the continuum is determined by the categorisations of others and the individual's negotiations of these categorisations. These then determine how the individual is placed at different locations upon the continuum, i.e. more towards the “black” end, the “white” end, or somewhere in between. The adoptees' negotiated choice of position, i.e. whether they saw themselves as more “black” than “white” or vice versa, meant that all of them negotiated a ‘trans-racial’ identity that incorporated both their “black” and “white” parts, i.e. a “mixed” identity. This study therefore is consistent with the idea all racialised identities are not fixed, but open to interpretation and modification.

Other people classified the adoptees in certain ways, often these categorisations were not of the adoptees' choosing. This meant that in developing their racialised identity, the adoptees challenged and negotiated the racialised labels of others in order to contemplate where and how they identified themselves. Four areas emerged as significant in how adoptees were classified and positioned on the “black”-“white” continuum. These are according to their physical features; according to existing socially and culturally constructed ideas about race; adoptees' experiences of their birth heritage; and, adoptees' experiences of racism.

Physical features

The adoptees' position on the "black"- "white" continuum was primarily influenced by their physical features, where adoptees were largely categorised as being more "black". Being identified on the basis of one's human body, i.e. biology, is argued by Jenkins (1996) as being significant to the development and negotiation of one's identity. This is because "the human body is simultaneously a referent of individual continuity, and index of collective similarity and differentiation, and a canvas upon which identification can play. Social identification in isolation from embodiment is unimaginable" (Jenkins, 1996:21). Hence the ways in which the adoptees in this study were racialised on the basis of their physical features, is understood as significant in their positioning in the continuum. The most common features for the adoptees in this research study had been those of skin colour, hair texture, facial profiles such as the eyes and nose, and body shape. Both "black" and "white" people identified the adoptees in these ways.

Most of the times, definitions were negative. For example, Hee Yun was often labelled as an outsider by "white" people on the basis of her being a different skin colour:

"We had quite a mixed class, but a majority of them were still white people...I very quickly became an outsider at that school because I was so different and they asked me questions...They keep asking me questions, 'how you look this colour'" (Hee Yun)

Hee Yun's facial profiles in particular the eyes and nose, were also not welcomed by others in her predominantly "white" social environment. This meant that her "very Korean looking face" (Hee Yun) additionally led to her being labelled as different:

"having such eyes, small nose...they say it's stupid" (Hee Yun)

As mentioned earlier, Hee Yun's east-Asian body shape had added to this 'difference':

"I was too small for my age in German terms, and so I was kept back a year because the doctor decided, and I was then too old for the class. So I was older than everyone else in this class" (Hee Yun)

Natasha was also labelled negatively on the basis of her skin colour. However, she was done so by both "white" others and "black" others:

“they (black children and white children) would both call me names because I wasn’t really one or the other but had a bit of both, which really made it worse in the sense of them teasing me...you know, though it was their problem really” (Natasha)

However, some adoptees felt that although they were labelled on their basis of their skin colour, such labels were not necessarily viewed as negative or as a problem. Despite this though, they still found themselves being placed on a continuum whereby they were being identified in certain ways. For example, during childhood where she was a minority in terms of race, Julie found herself being positioned by others towards the “black” end of the continuum:

“I mean in terms of kind of racism and stuff, you know perhaps I was particularly naive. I mean kids are not nice to each other anyway, kids are brutal, kids are honest, kids are incredibly rude so when it comes to any name-calling that goes on, the fact that the rude names that I was called are now, you know, you’d call racist abuse. I don’t, I mean some of it no doubt was, you know, but I think a lot of the rest of it was simply the same kind of name calling that goes on with children full stop. So, you know they made reference to my blackness as they made reference to somebody else’s freckles or fatness. You know, in some ways there are worse things than being called black if you are a child, you know...I don’t remember anything that I found particularly distressing or offensive” (Julie)

Similarly, Alison talked about being positioned by others according to her physical features. For example, Alison said:

“on one occasion I do remember, and Duncan would tell you, my youngest brother, he had a boy in his class who was very racist. I think they were fifteen at the time, fifteen years old, Alastair his name was, don't ask me how I remember, I just do, and I think his parents had the kind of attitude of you know ‘they should all go back to where they came from, back on the banana boat’ and all this rubbish, anyway this Alastair came round one night, and I didn’t know what it was all about, you know what was going on, and Duncan said to me ‘oh Alison answer the door’ and I answered the door, and I don’t even know his reaction and he said ‘Oh God have I got the wrong house?’ and I said ‘well who are you looking for?’ and he said ‘Duncan’ and I said ‘no, he’s my brother’, and his face just fell to the floor” (Alison)

However, it seems that as long as Alison is labelled as having a particular type of difference and a minority in this difference, she feels she is accepted amongst her “white” others. This is because, as long as Alison is seen as “more white than black” (Alison), she has no problem with her being labelled on the basis of her skin colour. For example, Alison added to her last comment:

“But even he had a sort of attitude that was like ‘well you’re different, you’re not like the others’, you know what I mean, which is a bit like how people have always been to me” (Alison)

This is illustrated in Alison’s comments about how she welcomed her facial profiles that were more ‘white European’ looking. This was because they had not only made her more accepted in her predominantly “white” social environment, but had given her just the right amount of ‘difference’ in order to make her a novelty in her “white” social environment:

“I mean they’ve (birth sisters) got a big mix of friends that are Asian, black, white, mixed-race, but that’s because of where they live, you know if I lived in London and didn’t have that mix then I would think that there was something wrong with me, but, you know, bearing in mind that I left - - when I was sixteen, I’ve never lived in a place like that again, so I mean I might say that maybe part of me is racist to a certain degree of not wanting people like that in my life, but, maybe there is a bit of that...I don’t know, it could be competition you know, it could carry on from when I was younger, you know, I’m still the novelty if I’m different to everybody else, so I’ll be remembered” (Alison)

However, when Alison is labelled as “black”, she becomes upset and annoyed at being racially tied to her physical features. In response to this, Alison negotiates her position on the continuum by rejecting and challenging these definitions, and moving towards the “white” end of the continuum. This means that she not only chooses to position herself towards the “white” end of the continuum, but also moves the definition of others’ so they now too acknowledge this position. This illustrates how racialised identities are open to interpretation and modification. For example, Alison said:

“I work for social services now and my colour has become a rip-roar issue, but you know unbelievably so, and to the point of being quite oppressive...it was never an issue, I mean I didn’t think I wasn’t black, I’ve never thought that I wasn’t a different colour, but my friends will say to me you know ‘oh I don’t look at you and see you as black, I see you as you’, or whatever...The issue at work that I’ve now got is that society tells me that I’m black and I don’t want that label” (Alison)

Some adoptees took more control in using their physical features to negotiate their position on the continuum. For example, Robert used his hairstyle as a strong assertion and representation of his “black” self:

“when I was becoming more aware of my identity, it (four-inch Afro hairstyle) was a sort of strong statement of who I thought I was” (Robert)

However, other adoptees were not able to be so much in control of this self-defining. Instead they found themselves being labelled by others when they wore hair in certain ways. For example, Julie wore her hair in what is usually perceived as a “black” style almost out of ignorance or naivety:

“after my hair got to certain length I stopped combing. I mean what I would find was when I tried to brush or comb my hair in the morning I would get these little knots and the harder they were to get out the more likely I was to leave one or two just ‘cos I could not and I’d think I’d sort that out later and eventually realised that actually this is something that is going to turn into a little dreadlock and they just kind of, I just didn’t do anything at all I just left it and once they’d formed they’d continued to grow in that way” (Julie)

In being so naïve, Julie found that she offended “black” people, in particular ‘black African-Caribbean’ men. This is because as a result of her naivety, they placed her towards the “white” end of the continuum. A position that Julie herself accepted. For example, Julie said:

“it was mostly not particularly polite comments you know, I think they were making a set of assumptions and I can also remember and heaven knows why this happened I was walking through the streets one night having been at a pub with some friends and this chap on a bicycle pulled them (dreadlocks) and then cycled off, and it was a black guy and he had locks to, so I ran after him shouting and went to pull his locks and of course you know touching people’s locks is not a particular courteous thing to do but I thought since he’d been particularly rude I would be rude to him but he went absolutely ape...but I was upset. I was pissed off I mean it’s no different from somebody cycling past and you know hitting you on the head or on the back, you know, it was just felt like some minor assault which required redress so I belted after him and tried to pull his hair” (Julie)

Similarly, Alison talked about her hair and the way in which it affected how others defined her and how she negotiated these categorisations by using it to self-define and locate herself towards the “white” end of the continuum. For example, in choosing to wear her hair in her “*natural style*”, Alison felt most accurately represented who she was, an offspring of a ‘black African-Caribbean’ father and ‘white European’ mother, who happened to have inherited more of her birth mother’s “white” racial features. For example, Alison said:

“(my birth sister) straightens her hair all the time and I think it makes her look more black, but I don’t go there...I’m the only one who’s got curly hair now because they (birth sisters) all straighten their hair, and I think it makes them look more black, than mixed-race...I mean if you line me up with my sisters, we all look like sisters, we’ve got different features, and I

mean some of my sisters look more black than white, our skin colours are all different, and I think some have picked up more features from their dad than their mum, where-as I think that Vanessa and me, have picked up more features from my mum, because...the features are more white than black” (Alison)

Alison was pleased to self-define in this way, and is annoyed when she is made to look otherwise. This is because Alison perceived this moved her towards the “black” end of the continuum. For example, this is illustrated when she talked about her birth sister’s attempts to straighten her hair and send her hair styling products designed for African Caribbean hair:

“I mean Amy got me loads of products for my hair and it went awful you know I said ‘oh Amy my hairs gone all greasy and it’s all oily and it’s horrible, so thank you very much but no’, and she took me in to this hairdressers in London, and they straightened my hair, they blow-dried it straight, and it took ages...and that was a bloody whole experience, they got these hot rods that they put onto your hair, you know and you’ve got all these big black mamas in there with their straightened hair, and oh God, we were I there for about four hours and they straightened my hair and I hated it, absolutely hated it, and I thought ‘oh God I’ve got to go out in this tonight’, you know because Amy wasn’t going to let me wash it and leave it to go curly like I normally do, and I had to go out and I felt really black, black, black that night, I didn’t like it at all” (Alison)

Socially and culturally constructed ideas about race

The adoptees’ position on the “black”-“white” continuum also depended on the socially and culturally constructed racialised ideas about race that others used to categorise them, when in different social contexts.

Some of the labels placed upon adoptees were done so by “white” people, who socially and culturally categorised the adoptees as “black” or of “minority ethnic origin”. The others had done this on the basis of their own constructed ideas about race, i.e. racialised stereotypes. For example, Alison talked about feeling as if she was on the receiving end of categorisations, which assumed that she was “black” and had certain needs. In particular Alison recalled being offered a “black” interviewer when at a job interview and then again a “black” tutor when at college. Alison’s response in both these instances was of shock and annoyance, that she had been categorised in this way:

“I mean when I went to college I was offered a black tutor...when I went

to the interview for the social work course, a letter came and it said 'would you like a black interviewer?' and I thought 'what?'...I mean I could not believe it and I said 'I could not care less who interviewed me as long as they are nice'" (Alison)

Julie also found that “white” others held expectations about her ‘black African-Caribbean’ personality. These too were clearly based on socially and culturally constructed ideas about race:

“Something I’ve learnt in adult life that people always have an expectation of mouthiness from black people. Either mouthiness or sort of an obedience depending on whether you’re African, Caribbean or Asian you know” (Julie)

However, Robert encountered racism and stereotyping by some “white” people in relation to his “mixed race” and ‘trans-racial’ adoption status, to which he was clearly annoyed. For example, Robert said:

“a kind of attitude where white people say that ‘I don’t like black people but you’re ok’, I mean I don’t want to be sucked into that sort of acceptance” (Robert)

Some of the assumptions and stereotypes placed upon the adoptees, were done so by “black” people, who also assumed the adoptee to be “black” or of “minority ethnic origin”. For example, Natasha experienced being labelled as “black” and having a particular ‘black African-Caribbean’ culture, by ‘black African-Caribbean’ people:

“you know it was like ‘yeah but she’s black’ and a lot of people were like ‘yeah boo-yak-a-shah’ to me (Natasha clicks her fingers together and swings her arm outwards), and I’d just say back ‘yeah, hi, my name’s Natasha, what’s yours?’ and they’d be expecting me to be called some sort of, I don’t know ‘Chanelle’ or something like that, and I’d say ‘my name is Natasha’. So I think they had a lot of pre-conceived ideas” (Natasha)

However, in others using social and cultural signifiers as a way to measure their categorisations of the adoptees’ racialised identity, some adoptees found that they were labelled as “white” or “non-black” or not “black” enough, by “black” people. For example, Julie talked about her experience of labels being placed upon her by a ‘black African-Caribbean’ man:

“one of the unsuccessful applicants took out a grievance on the basis of race because he felt that he’d been discriminated against, a Mauritian guy, and when I, I think not completely naïve, pointed out that actually the person who got the post was also not white, I got this tirade of stuff about being the wrong kind of black which is the first time I think I actually

came up against that...you know it had not occurred to me that this kind of hostility would be coming at me from a black person...that's what I pick up you know, it's an exclusion thing. But if you were to ask me, I suppose there's a definite sense that as I say yes I don't have a black consciousness and also that you know...I suspect that for some black people I am not black enough you know. I kind of sold out in some way or form" (Julie)

Similarly, Alison also felt that she had similar labels placed upon her by "black" people. These were based upon social and cultural signifiers of a racialised identity as oppose to physical ones. For example, Alison said:

"in the end they (birth sisters) called me stuff like 'coconut' and 'bounty bar', meaning black on the outside and white on the inside...I am well, black and white on the inside, but I'm black and white on the outside as well, but, I don't know, it's difficult...I know I'm more white I suppose, and that's what black people see too, that in my attitude and actions that I'm more white, but they think that because of it, I'm just white, but I'm both, although yes, more white...but not all white" (Alison)

This idea of 'trans-racial' adoptees not being seen as 'black enough' was discussed by Small in an account outlining the negative effects of 'trans-racial' adoption. In discussing the likely problems faced by "black" 'trans-racial' adoptees, Small argued that "the majority of these children have not been given the tools to function as a black person" which means that as well as being rejected by "white" society, "they are likely to be equally rejected by some "black" people who may say that they are not "black" enough, not in the colour sense of the term but in culture and attitude" (Small, 1986:93).

Experiences of birth heritage

Adoptees experiences with their birth heritage also influenced where they placed themselves on the continuum. Not all adoptees had contacted their birth family, however in different ways and to different degrees, all of them had each experienced part of their birth culture or social relations with others of the same birth racial group.

If the adoptees' had positive experiences with their birth heritage, they identified more closely with that identity, i.e. either more towards the "black" end of the continuum or more in between the two ends. For example, after her positive experiences with other Korean people and going to Korea to resolve identity issues, Hee Yun identified herself as "*part Korean and part German*" (Hee Yun).

Similarly, some adoptees had largely negative experiences with the adoptive “white” heritage, and very positive experiences with the birth heritage. As a result they significantly identified more with the birth heritage. This was so for Robert who decided to seek out experience of his birth heritage, after his largely negative experiences with the “white” others of his adopted heritage. In doing so Robert redefined the allocated label given to him by members of his “white” adoptive community, i.e. *‘you’re black, but you’re different to other blacks’*, and instead replaced it with one that moved him towards the “black” end of the continuum. This is because, as Robert said:

“On another level, I see it as maybe more specifically applying to African-Caribbean people. I sort of see it as important to me, but more because I do feel that there is a lot of racism in society, and so partly a feeling that I don’t feel entirely accepted in society or a kind of attitude where white people say that ‘I don’t like black people but you’re ok’...I don’t want that type of acceptance” (Robert)

If adoptees’ experiences with the birth heritage were largely negative, they tended to identify away from that identity, i.e. more towards the “white” end of the continuum, especially if experiences with the “white” adoptive heritage were positive. For example, when Alison contacted her birth sisters, she began to have her first real set of experiences of her birth heritage. In doing so, Alison found herself amongst “black” people, where her ‘special’ status (as a “black” minority) became threatened and made her feel distressed. This then influenced how she viewed and interacted with those “black” people. In addition to this though, it also led to Alison feeling concerned that she was being viewed as another “black” person:

“I’m still the novelty if I’m different to everybody else, so I’ll be remembered...(but) they’d (birth sisters) only talk to people who were black, you know the black bouncers outside the door, and they’d talk to them, and you know I just can’t cope, you know I haven’t had any black friends or any mixed-race friends at all through-out the whole of my life and I just could not cope with these sisters of mine who were like taking over and portraying me in this way and putting me in their category” (Alison)

Experiences of racism

The adoptees’ positioning on the continuum was also determined by their internalisation of their experiences of racism, in particular, the bullying that adoptees

faced as young people, which was targeted at their physical features, their social and cultural differences and the ‘trans-racial’ aspect of their adoption.

The empirical evidence on ‘trans-racial’ adoptees’ experiences of racism and racist bullying is thin. Of the very little that does exist, claims about why ‘trans-racial’ adoptees are bullied clearly argue that racial differences are a contributory factor. For example, in reporting the findings of a focus group containing 6 ‘trans-racial’ adoptees who all had negative experiences, Shekleton (1990) found that the physical and colour differences of the ‘trans-racial’ adoptees in comparison to the other adolescents, meant that they were the object of ‘bullying and ridicule’ by other children (Shekleton, 1990:2). In addition, in looking at the literature on the bullying of “black” children at the hands of “white” children, Valerie Besag found there to be a “quiet erosion of identity and self-esteem” of the “black” children (Besag, 1989:47). Similarly, in interviewing fifty-eight 15-16 year olds who were of “mixed-parentage”³⁰ (“white” and “Afro-Caribbean”³¹ or “African parentage”), Tizard and Phoenix found that “the great majority” of their sample of “mixed-parentage” children had experienced racism in the form of name-calling “which had been deeply wounding” (Tizard and Phoenix, 1994:20). Shekleton (1990) found that the adoptees had felt something was wrong with being different, which had been reinforced by name-calling and bullying at school, and which for some had then led to self-rejection.

The adoptees recalled numerous occasions where they were discriminated against on the basis of race. This had come from both “black” people and “white” people. For example, Robert experienced racism from some “white” people:

“it was a white working class area of South London, which at that time was a predominantly white area...I was a black kid growing up in a white family and area, and that’s just how it was really...I sort of got on with the kids I knew...occasionally they’d be racist taunts from other kids in the area...I’d be called you know ‘nigger’ and ‘black bastard’” (Robert)

However, Robert also recalled being labelled by one ‘black African-Caribbean’ person about his “mixed race” status:

“the first time it did really actually bother me was when I was...I don’t know I must have been about eleven or twelve or something and I was out

³⁰ & ³¹ Tizard and Phoenix’s term.

with some white friends, and this black woman said something to me about you know just completely out of the blue, that 'you're neither black or white' sort of thing. So that kind of upset me more than the odd kind of racist remarks about being black...I was taken aback by it because it was just out of the blue and I didn't know whether she just knew me or what" (Robert)

Similarly, Natasha recalled being bullied by both "black" and "white" people about her "mixed race" status:

"the bullying first started when I went to two boarding schools...it was just silly things, but then it really used to upset me, the name calling...it was white kids calling me names and black kids calling me names...I used to have some fights about it. It should not have been about it, but they were, and it was upsetting" (Natasha)

Other adoptees, who were also "mixed race" by birth, recalled being racially bullied because they were 'trans-racially' adopted. For example, William said:

"some of the kids at school, not bullied me, but every time they saw it, it made it difficult being adopted...and other ther people, um, I would not say staring, but would ask me questions over and over again, like 'why are you adopted?' and 'why do you have white parents?' and all that...I think yeah, it did make them take the mickey out of me, you know because I was different really...and every time me and my parents were together and we had to go to parent's evening or something, they (other children) just wanted to know why my parents were white" (William)

Being negatively labelled in these inaccurate and often offensive ways, made the adoptee feel different. Several responses to this feeling of difference were observed. Some adoptees responded by seeking to reduce the racism by identifying themselves more with their perpetrators' racialised identity. In doing so they therefore negotiated a new position on the continuum. For example, in response to being teased about her "black" features, Alison rejected and challenged the "black" categorisation, by underplaying the "black" parts of her heritage and instead choosing to locate her self more closer to the "white" end of the continuum:

"I would have been eight or nine, or ten, and this Chinese girl came to the school and immediately she was picked on and bullied and had a lot of racism. And the teacher came to me and said 'will you look after her?' And I'm like 'why, why should I?'...What happened is that as soon as I started looking after her they started picking on me as well and I thought 'oh no I don't want this' and then I to her face was nice, but behind her back was the same as everyone else, you know because I was being singled out and I didn't want to be single singled out...they'd say you know 'oh if you hang out with her you'll get like her', because they didn't see me as being anything different because they were so used to me I

suppose, you know having been there from the beginning, I don't know really" (Alison)

In doing so Alison felt that it accessed a certain amount of protection from racial discrimination:

"I think that when you've got lots of cultures together, that's when racism comes in, because like they say, there's hardly any racism in Scotland because there aren't many Asian or black or dual heritage people, and the ones that are there just get on with it and they are accepted, and that's the same as going to these little villages, you know as soon as you're in and they know you're fine that's it, and I think that's what it is. I mean if I was to go and live in Birmingham, I might face loads" (Alison)

Alison felt that being fortunate enough to have inherited more of her birth mother's "white" features helped her to do this with relative ease. This view was also held by Julie, who felt that she was more "cocooned" and protected from racial discrimination, because of physical features, which were more "white" than "black", and also because of social and cultural signifiers, i.e. her middle-class socio-economic background. For example, Julie said:

"I think black men have a really hard time, it is actually easier as female. Then all those other sort of hidden hierarchy sort of things like having light skin and being well spoken and educated. That tends to, I mean ok you still get the odd kind of lightish thing, but you know the more so cocooned you are by all these things, the more covert things become don't they? [And do you think you've been protected more by this?] I think I am probably protected, yeah" (Julie)

Other adoptees responded to the discrimination and bullying by choosing to identify more with the "black" part of their birth heritage. For example, Robert used the racist name-calling to positively assert his "black" identity, because he felt that this was something that was attacked the most and hence should be defended:

"I suppose the racist name-calling was one thing that gave me, well a sort of sense of identity about who I was really, so there wasn't really anything else that was asserting that I was black, so in a funny sort of way it was actually quite positive in a sense" (Robert)

Another response was to lay claim to having a unique "mixed" identity, which represented the adoptees' "mixed" birth heritage, but more-so the 'trans-racial' aspects of their adoption. For example, Natasha said:

"I'm not black and I don't see myself as white either. But I think I'm just me, an individual, the original me" (Natasha)

Similarly, other adoptees responded by underplaying the significance of race in their identity development. For example, William said:

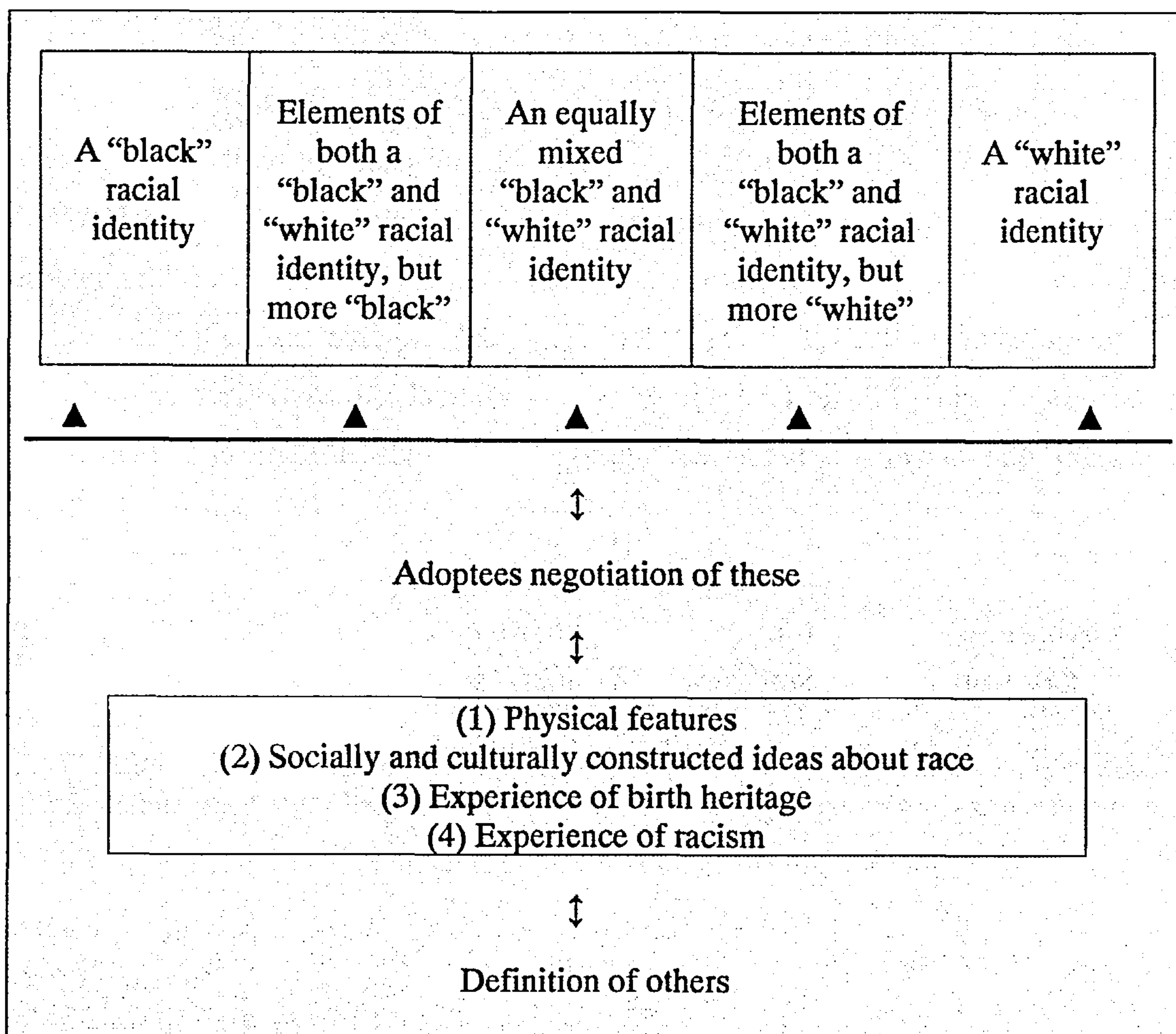
“I never thought about it, like I said, I would say I’m black but only cos my (birth) mum and dad are, nothing else really...I like being with mixed people now though, cos I got both parts I think, I don’t know” (William)

However, the adoptees responses demonstrated that they neither wholly identified with their “black” or “white” parts, but with certain elements from each. This made the adoptees want to locate themselves somewhere in the middle of the continuum. This was despite the fact that there was a social pressure to place themselves at either the “white” end or the “black” end of the continuum.

Clearly, the adoptees’ physical features, encounters with existing socially constructed ideas, experiences of their birth heritage, and experiences of racism, combined to play an important role in how adoptees were positioned on the “black”-“white” continuum. Similarly, adoptees used these to negotiate allocated labels and instead self-define identities that they perceived were more accurately fitting. In doing so they also negotiated their positioning on the continuum.

From the adoptees narratives, it is clear that although some adoptees saw themselves as more “black” than “white” and vice versa for others, all of the adoptees self-defined themselves as neither wholly “black” or “white”, but as having some elements from both parts. This means that they had a “mixed” racial identity. This is a key finding of the study. This is not only because many of them were “mixed race” by birth, but largely because of their experiences due to the ‘trans-racial’ aspects of the adoption. This showed that racialised identities are not fixed, but open to ongoing interpretation and modification. Similarly, there is no essential “blackness” or “whiteness”.

Figure 6.1 – A “black”-“white” continuum



(6.5) Having a positive or problematic racialised identity

One of the main arguments against the practice of ‘trans-racial’ adoption is that it leads to serious identity development problems for the adoptee. In particular, the adoptee will grow up facing identity conflict and confusion. And, because they will be unable to positively relate to their own racial background, they will develop a low self-esteem and even a hatred for one’s own “black” self (Small, 1986). In examining the racial identity development of ‘trans-racial’ adoptees, this study sought to test these arguments. It does so by contesting the literature that focuses on all ‘trans-racial’ adoptees having a negative racial identity, and instead argues that all the adoptees’ negotiated a ‘trans-racial’ identity that incorporated elements from both their “black” and “white” parts, i.e. a “mixed” identity. Developing a ‘trans-racial’ identity in this way meant that the adoptees were able to negotiate themselves a

positive racial identity that they felt comfortable with.

This study set out to give ‘trans-racial’ adoptees an opportunity to discuss their own experiences. An important part of this research design was to use oral life (hi)story interviews to allow adoptees to talk about their development of a racial identity. Although adoptees’ narratives were used to examine whether they had a positive or problematic racialised identity, no specific measurement tools or assessment criteria were used. Rather, the extent to which adoptees’ racialised identity development was perceived as positive or problematic, was primarily determined by the adoptees’ own assessment, and to a lesser degree by this researcher’s analysis into presented identities.

Although the adoptees talked about their difficulties in developing a positive racial identity that they felt comfortable with, they overwhelmingly talked about their settlement on a positive racial identity. In the process of developing this positive ‘trans-racial’ identity, three main components emerged as significant. These are feeling proud; self-esteem and confidence; and identity confusion.

Feeling proud

Some of the general literature on adoption has reported adoptees’ positive feelings of self. However, the literature on ‘trans-racial’ adoption has not done the same. The main reason for this is that debates have been dominated by arguments around the so-called negative perceptions of self that ‘trans-racial’ adoptees supposedly suffer from.

However, an overriding theme of adoptees’ accounts of their racialised identity development was how they felt proud of who they had become due to the ‘trans-racial’ nature of their circumstances, i.e. people who are neither wholly “black” or “white”:

“I have an idea of what it’s like on both sides, so I am both in that way, I like it...I am a born Korean with a German parentage, sometimes I am more German and sometimes more Korean, it depends...I am not just one...and that is me, it is what I am now” (Hee Yun)

Such feelings of pride were tied to the adoptees having survived the difficulties that they faced from both “black” and “white” people because of their racialised

differences. For example, William said:

“I do feel proud that I can carry-on and do stuff, not let things or those people get in the way” (William)

On a similar point, the adoptees also reported having a good awareness of oneself, and their racialised self. For example:

“I choose, I know that it is, that I am Korean and I am German, I am both, see? That is important to me...to be both, I can not just be German, cos I am also part Korean...I feel more comfortable in myself when I went to Korea and learnt about Korean things, so I was able to be more happier with my German part too...it just helped me become a rounded person” (Hee Yun)

This contradicts some of the arguments of opposers. Another contradictory finding was that none of the adoptees had a hatred for their black self, in the sense that Small (1986) and Maxime (1986) claim. For example, although it is true that one adoptee “underplayed” (Alison) her “black side” and was happy having inherited more of her birth mother’s ‘white European’ features, it does not mean that she had a supposed hatred for the “black” part of her heritage. Although it does suggest that Alison felt uncomfortable amongst “black” people and preferred to be amongst “white” people, as discussed earlier.

Self-esteem and confidence

Adoptees’ recalled times when their self-esteem and confidence was low. The main time that adoptees felt this way was when they were younger and thought about their ‘abandonment’ by the birth family. For example, for a short while Alison felt rejected as a child when her birth parents had in her view, given her up:

“I remember saying to my (adoptive) mum and dad ‘how can he (birth father) not like me, he doesn’t know me, I’m his baby, how can he not want me?’ (Alison)

However, although Alison felt this way, she did not allow it to seriously damage her levels of self-esteem and confidence. This is because of her positive experiences with her adoptive family who constantly emphasised her ‘special status’ and how she was ‘chosen’:

“we’d go to the supermarket and um, she’d pick the nicest thing and say that’s how we chose you and brought you home, sort of thing...I just felt special...I mean when I arrived, mum brought a kitten for me from the

RSPCA...mum said I'm going to get a new kitten and that's what I wanted, a kitten, and she got this little ginger cat from the RSPCA and she lived until she was eighteen and my other (adoptive) brothers had never had a pet...I think part of it is mum giving me this status because I was a girl...but part of it I think was probably due to the fact that I wasn't white and um she'd (adoptive mother) taken in everything that social services had said and she didn't want me to be left out, but I think it went a bit overboard...but it all made me feel special in that family" (Alison)

Similarly, Julie spoke about her self-esteem and confidence in positive ways, both as a child and as an adult. Although she described herself as being very *"bright, chatty and sociable"* (Julie) before her adoption, Julie was very clear that her adoptive parents nourished these characteristics and helped her develop into an adult who is *"grounded and has a complete strong sense of self"* (Julie). Although Julie herself recognised that she did not have a strong black consciousness, she also stated that this was only in the sense that her black consciousness was *"not a stereotypical one"* (Julie). This meant that she was able to develop a strong sense of self, as oppose to only a strong sense of racialised self.

However, to say that none of the adoptees' suffered seriously from low self-esteem and poor confidence would be misleading. This is because some of the 'trans-racial' adoptees in this study did experience the afore-named difficulties. However, they only did so as youngsters. One adoptee suffered from low self-esteem and poor confidence as a result of having been bullied about the 'trans-racial' aspects of his adoption. This led them to feel different, rejected and imperfect. For example, William said:

"I would tell myself that I wasn't the same...everybody else was perfect, in a way, and that their life was better than mine because I was adopted and they weren't, therefore I was thinking that automatically, they were living a better life, I think that's what I thought" (William)

In analysing the experiences of adoptees in her own study, Shekleton argued that feelings of 'not being good enough' and 'being different' also sometimes made socialising difficult for 'trans-racial' adoptees. This was because the adoptees feared that their "fragile black image" would be questioned or challenged either by "black" or "white" people (Shekleton, 1990:5). This was so for William, who spent much of his youth alone in an attempt to reduce the amount of questioning he received from others about his situation. For example, William added to his last comment:

“I just liked keeping myself to myself and being on my own” (William)

Another adoptee experienced low self-esteem also as a result of being a ‘trans-racial’ adoptee, but more so as a result of being seen as different to the “white” others in her social world. For example, Hee Yun said:

“you get to hear many times it’s like somebody is hammering it into you. You are not who you seem to be...‘you don’t look like his (adoptive brother) sister’, so you feel a strange, you feel a bit distant” (Hee Yun)

For both William and Hee Yun then, low self-esteem was a direct outcome of them being made to feel different and imperfect in comparison to others. Such feelings of difference were rooted in the racialised differences between them and others in their social environment.

However, despite having suffered from these difficulties in self-esteem and confidence, both William and Hee Yun stated that they felt they were able to think about themselves positively as adults. This is because of the other achievements they had made in life. For example, Hee Yun talked about her academic success and William about his music career:

“I study hard, and I come here to do that too...I concentrate on doing that, to make a good life for me, to have a good education...I am trying to get on a Masters course now as well” (Hee Yun)

and,

“I’ve been hooked on music ever since, ever since I was about fifteen, well, sixteen, seventeen. It’s the main thing at the moment, but I’m just in the studio at the moment, but it’s money [How much of your time does the DJ’ing take up?] In total probably about, well um, a lot longer than I think, probably, going to get and um, buy records, either once a week or I’d be on the phone to someone buying records or trying to find out the latest tunes that are about or whatever, really. So, it takes up a lot of my time really. [And do you do a lot of gigs and stuff?] Sometimes yeah...gigs, and sometimes on pirate radio stations...and I’d be travelling up to Birmingham or London or whatever to do like guest shows up there and stuff like you know and then I’d DJ up in clubs and that. [I’ve heard that you’re pretty good, can you do me a disc?] Yeah, ok. Um, I suppose I’m alright, yeah. I work hard at it I suppose. I’m doing a college course as well to learn about the studio side of it, you know the technical stuff as well” (William)

Identity confusion

As stated earlier, some of the adoptees did feel that they would not have had such difficult and painful experiences if they had been placed with an adoptive family of the same racial background. However, although expressing this view, none of the adoptees said that they wished to be another colour, i.e. the same colour as their “white” adoptive parents.

Similarly, although the adoptees talked about their racialised identities in different and sometimes vague ways, they were not perceived as being confused. That is not confused in the sense that Small believed when he stated that “transracial adoption encourages the phenomenon of racial-identity confusion...[which] often leads black children to deny the reality of their skin colour” (Small, 1986:83-84).

Rather the adoptees felt secure in defining themselves and their racialised identities in the given ways. Such security was tied to them acknowledging that they had a number of identities, and not just one essential identity. This security was also related to the adoptees’ acknowledgement that their racialised identity was something that was open to modification because it was flexible and ever changing. For example, Hee Yun said:

“I could not choose because in every different situation I am a different person. I refuse to choose. You cannot choose, there is no option, because no person is mainly one person, you know with that character. You always change in every situation...It is really something where I refuse to say that I am mainly that person. I think it’s unfair to say that and choose” (Hee Yun)

Clearly, adoptees at times suffered particular difficulties in their negotiation of a racialised identity. However, in different ways and to different extents, they all developed a positive racialised identity. This is because they firstly, overcame difficulties by using other achievements as measures of success, and secondly, asserted their own sense of pride as ‘trans-racial’ adoptees belonging to both “black” and “white” groups. This is another important finding.

(6.6) National identities

All but two of the adoptees were born and raised in England. Of the other two adoptees, one was born in the Seychelles and raised in England, and the other born in Korea and raised in Germany. The adoptees were asked to talk about their sense of a national identity.

As one would expect, all the adoptees had spent most of their lives in their adopted country. Most of the adoptees had not visited their birth parents'/birth grandparents' country of origin, nor did they have any desires to do so. The reason for this was that the adoptees felt that they had no ties with these countries. This is so for Alison, who in talking about Barbados, her birth father's country, demonstrated her disassociation from it, by referring to Barbados as "*his country*". For example, Alison said:

"I mean if it's alright for a west-Indian guy to beat his wife up in Barbados, then that's fine, but if you come over to England, it's not ok, just because it's ok in his country does not mean that you can do it here"
(Alison)

The lack of any ties with the birth parents'/birth grandparents' country of origin and the adoptees' disinterest to develop any links was largely due to them viewing their adoptive parents' country as their own. This was also particularly the case for adoptees who identified themselves as more "white" than "black". Hence these adoptees tended to identify themselves as having an English or British national identity³². For example,

"The English society...I mean it's where I'm from...um, I hate to say it, but probably a white society. Yeah, because you know mainly due to my (adoptive) mum and dad because they've been here and I've been brought up here...I've ended up here and that's how I've grown up to be really...I think it's very influential, mainly because it's how I live. I feel as if I've kind of slotted in here, you know like in this place I think I've fitted in quite well" (Natasha)

However, two of the adoptees had visited their birth parents'/birth grandparents' country of origin. They did so in an attempt to obtain information about their birth heritage in order to develop their sense of self, in particular their racialised sense of self. For example, Hee Yun and Robert both visited their birth parents'/birth

³² Contrary to recent research (CRE, 2002) the adoptees in this study spoke about the English identity and British identity in inter-changeable ways.

grandparents' country of origin in order to resolve identity issues and develop their birth racial identity:

"I've only been over to Nigeria about four times and I'm not in regular contact with them, but when I do see them I'm ok with them...getting in contact with that side was definitely more about developing my racial identity, yeah, definitely more about that" (Robert)

and,

"In my teens, when I got older my most precious wish was to once stand in Korea in the crowd and not to be recognised, that I am somebody else. When I was a teen it didn't look like my parents were rich enough to send me to do this in Korea, but then my (adoptive) grandfather died and left me money so I went...it was good, I think it brought me quite a step forward...I think it helped me quite a lot in developing and understanding myself better" (Hee Yun)

These two adoptees refused to identify their national identity solely in terms of their "white" adoptive side. Rather, Hee Yun chose to highlight her national allegiance to both Germany and Korea:

"I grew up in Germany and that's where I spent most time...but a thing is that I'm not just only German, I am Korean" (Hee Yun)

On the other hand though, Robert, who despite being "mixed race" identified himself primarily as "black", emphasised his African, in particular his Nigerian national identity. At the same time Robert also illustrated his lack of patriotism to the notion of being British:

"I feel more affinity to the Irish than the English, you know...I'm in contact with my own (birth) mum whose in Australia...and as I say I've been over to Ireland and got a strong affinity with the Irish, but in terms of actually how I perceive my sort of cultural identity, I would not sort of see myself as, um, I don't see myself as mixed really. I acknowledge that yes I have a sort of mixed cultural heritage, but in terms of how I would um, you know, which box I would tick, I would just see myself more as um, black or yeah, sort of black-African...so I see myself as Black, Black African, Black African – Igbo-Irish to be precise...I enjoy a lot of the English life, but I suppose through the years I feel I've become very focused on the sort of negative aspects of British culture, you know the sort of racism...I do think that white racism is a major factor which has made me see British society very negatively...I don't see myself as British. Administratively I happen to have a British passport, although I would value a Nigerian one much more" (Robert)

It is interesting that those adoptees who identified themselves as English or British also identified themselves as being more "white" than "black". Similarly, it is significant that Robert, who identified himself as "black" chose to primarily identify

with his birth father's Nigerian identity, and to a lesser extent with his birth mother's Irish heritage, as oppose to his adoptive family's English/British identity. This suggests that associations with national identity are also racialised. This is another important finding. Indeed the "black" and "mixed race" adoptees' perception of this is not surprising considering how such views are constantly being advocated and reinforced. For example, the following is part of a speech that was made in 1989, during calls to allow British passport holders from Hong Kong to settle in Britain. The Conservative MP John Townend gave the speech:

"The fact that the Hong Kong Chinese are very hardworking and hold British passports does not make them British. If millions of Chinese come to the UK, they would not integrate and become yellow Englishmen...this possibility should make us consider what has already happened to this green and pleasant land – first as a result of waves of coloured immigrants and then by the pernicious doctrine of multi-culturalism...the British people were never consulted as to whether they would change from being a homogeneous society to a multi-racial society. If they had been, I am sure that a resounding majority would have voted to keep Britain an English-speaking white country" (John Townend, quoted by Miles, 1990:148).

Clearly, according to the speech, dominant notions of *true* Britishness and Englishness are still based on racial terms. Hence, being English/British is still associated with a notion of "whiteness". This is argued by Alibhai-Brown who in calling for a more inclusive British identity, argued that "British society is still racially divided" (Alibhai-Brown, 1999:15) and to be British is still regarded by many as being "white". This is also reported by Modood, Beishon, and Virdee (1994). Although Modood et al found that many Caribbean youth take pride in their "Blackness"³³ and at the same time recognise that in a variety of ways they are also British, these young people also recognise that their colour is an 'obstacle to their being accepted as British' (Modood et al, 1994:108).

However the notion of Britishness being closely associated with "whiteness" is contradicted by others who argue that the British identity is today a more multi-racial

³³ Modood et al's use of a capital letter.

one and that many of the country's minority ethnic groups who were born and raised in this country to parents and grandparents who arrived in Britain from elsewhere, now consider themselves as having an English, or in particular a British identity. For example, in a recent survey of attitudes around the British identity³⁴, it was found that in terms of race and ethnicity "all groups feel comfortable using the label 'British'" (Commission for Racial Equality, 2002:8). The survey also found that "being British is not about being white: 86% of the British public disagree that to be truly British you have to be white. This is fairly consistent among all sections of the population" (Commission for Racial Equality, 2002:4).

However, for the 'trans-racial' adoptees in this study, national identities were still racialised, in that being English or British is closely tied to being "white". This meant that those adoptees that identified themselves as English or British also negotiated a position that was more towards the "white" side of the continuum.

(6.7) Summary

This Chapter examined the adoptees' racialised identity and negotiation of a 'trans-racial' identity. In doing so, the study's third key finding emerged. This is that all the adoptees' identities were racialised, but this happened in a variety of ways. This meant that there were different types of a 'trans-racial' identity, which consisted of having elements from both their "black" and "white" parts and developing a unique "mixed" identity. The adoptees' settlement on this 'trans-racial' identity represented their negotiation of a positive racial identity that they felt comfortable with. The adoptees' negotiation of a 'trans-racial' identity also demonstrates that racialised identities are not fixed, but rather they are open to an ongoing process of interpretation and modification. This also illustrates that there is no essential "blackness" or essential "whiteness". Just as there are different types of a "black" identity or a "white" identity. As such, the existence of a "black"- "white" continuum, in terms of how the adoptees developed and settled upon a racialised identity, was highlighted. On this continuum, 'trans-racial' adoptees challenge and negotiate their

³⁴ This survey was carried out by the MORI Social Research Institute for the Commission for Racial Equality in 2002. The sample consisted of (i) a nationally representative sample of 822 adults from around Britain, who were interviewed, and (ii) 610 ethnic minority individuals who were also interviewed.

position depending on the basis of their physical features; the socially and culturally constructed ideas of others; their experiences with their birth heritage; and, their experiences of racism. The adoptees' annoyance at being misidentified, and their reluctance and frustration in feeling as if they were being forced to define their racialised identity in a singular and exact way, was also highlighted. This is because 'trans-racial' identities, like any other racialised identity, are complex, flexible and diverse. Although types of racial identities varied, in different ways and to different extents, all the 'trans-racial' adoptees developed a positive racialised identity. This is because (i) they overcame the difficulties by using other achievements as measures of success, and (ii) asserted their own sense of pride as a 'trans-racial' adoptee belonging to both groups. It was also found that associations with a national identity are racialised. For example, a sense of Englishness/Britishness is closely tied to notions of "whiteness", so the adoptees who identified with the English/British nationality perceived themselves to be more "white" than "black". Taking these findings into consideration, it is argued that due to the 'trans-racial' aspects of their adoption, the adoptees had negotiated a "mixed" positive racial identity. This "mixed" identity illustrates the complex, flexible and diverse nature of racial identity.

Having spent this and the previous Chapters discussing the research study, in terms of the existing literature, this study's methodology and empirical findings, the next Chapter concludes the study by drawing together the significant aspects of the study and its contribution to the 'trans-racial' adoption debate.

Chapter 7

The implications of a 'trans-racial' identity for the 'trans-racial' adoption debate

(7.1) Introduction

This study has examined the racial identity development of 'trans-racial' adoptees living in Britain. In particular, the adoption of "black" children by "white" parents has been looked at. This is because it is the most common form of 'trans-racial' adoption, and one that has attracted the most controversy. This area of the adoption debate has been dominated by the views of those opposing 'trans-racial' adoption, whose arguments are based around politicised ideas of an essential "black" identity.

The problem with this sort of focus, i.e. levels of identification that emphasise an essential "black" identity, is that how and why these types of 'trans-racial' adoptees identify themselves in a certain way has not been studied. In this research study, I have attempted to resolve this by examining how an adoptee's 'trans-racial' identity is socially constructed. Therefore, unlike existing studies, this research has not assumed the "black" racial identity to be the natural and fixed racial identity and so attempted to measure its successful ownership by the 'trans-racial' adoptee. Rather it has examined the flexible status of identity development and in doing so it has looked at how the adoptees construct a 'trans-racial' identity. In particular, the social constructionist perspective has been used, which involved a construction of racial identity based on the identity theorisation and works of Symbolic Interactionist theorists Mead (1995), Blumer (1969) and Goffman (1982). This views race and "blackness" as labels that have been socially constructed by a process involving ongoing interaction between (i) the individual, (ii) the individual's social contact with other individuals, (iii) how the individual thinks others perceive him or her, and (iv) the individual's social environment. As a result, this study has contributed to the debate by deconstructing, evaluating and updating existing ideas about racial identity and in particular the notion of an essential "black" identity, as well as highlighting the value of allowing adoptees to speak for themselves about their experiences.

This study had three broad aims. The first was to examine the racial identity development of 'trans-racial' adoptees. The second aim was to consider the influence of research on adoption policy. The third aim was to assess the usefulness of the life (hi)story approach in investigating the lives of 'trans-racial' adoptees.

In light of these aims, the study had a number of objectives. In terms of the first aim, which was to examine the racial identity development of 'trans-racial' adoptees, there were three objectives. These were to look at the role of race in the adoptees' lives, the adoptees' social relations within society, and the social relationships adoptees negotiate with their adoptive family and their birth family. In terms of the second aim, which was to consider the influence of research on adoption policy, there were 4 objectives. These were to critically examine adoption policy and legislation, the levels of adherence to adoption policy and legislation by social work practitioners, the empirical evidence presented to support arguments for and against 'trans-racial' adoption, and the limitations of the empirical evidence. In terms of the third aim, which was to assess the usefulness of the life (hi)story approach in investigating the lives of 'trans-racial' adoptees, there were three objectives. These were to consider the research methods commonly used to study 'trans-racial' adoption and racial identity, the limitations of these research methods, and the appropriateness of the life (hi)story approach to studying the lives of 'trans-racial' adoptees

Although, the variety of experiences examined in this research study reflects in general the variety of 'trans-racial' adoption experiences, the presentation here of what are in effect 6 different experiences of 'trans-racial' adoption, has consequently meant that the study's ability to make solid generalisations is significantly reduced. Instead, the study has offered a firm sociological understanding of racial identity development and so offers a series of cautious comments and observations on the racial identity development and experiences of 'trans-racial' adoptees.

(7.2) The conceptualisation of a 'trans-racial' identity

From the study, a number of factors were identified by the adoptees and this researcher as being significant to the racial identity development and experiences of 'trans-racial' adoptees. These results formed three of the study's five key findings and

arguments.

The first key finding emerged in Chapter 4, which looked at the adoptees' experiences of having been adopted into a family who were either of a total or partially different racial background. This Chapter asked 'what impact did these experiences have on the adoptees' racial identity development?' In doing so, it was discovered that the adoptees were constantly aware of their racialised differences. These feelings of difference have been widely reported in the existing literature. However, it was discovered that although most of these perceptions of racialised differences were negative, in that the adoptees felt alone in their difference and saw it as a constant reminder of them not being a 'real' member of their adopted family, it was also found that not all of the adoptees perceived these differences negatively. This is because it gave them some form of positive special attention, i.e. they were a 'novelty' and received beneficial treatment. This is a significant finding. As is the way in which it meant that the adoptees had ambivalent feelings about the practice of 'trans-racial' adoption, i.e. they were not wholly for or against it. The Chapter therefore argued that the adoptive family plays a crucial role in the degree to which these differences affect the adoptees' perception of self.

Chapter 5 looked at the role that birth heritage plays in the shaping of adoptees' racial identity development. In doing so the second key finding emerged. This is that race and the racialised differences brought about by the 'trans-racial' aspects of the adoption, are significant factors in the 'trans-racial' adoptees' searches for their birth heritage. This is because the 'trans-racial' adoptees required more detailed information about their birth heritage, in order to resolve the negative perceptions that they held about their adoption and the racialised differences between them and their adoptive parents, and to then resolve issues around identity and belonging. However, it also emerged that not all adoptees searched in order to resolve identity issues. Rather they did so to answer the racialised questions of others. The key finding of this Chapter therefore argued that in different ways and to different degrees, the adoptees' birth heritage plays a vital role in the adoptees' development of a racial identity.

In asking what constitutes a 'trans-racial' identity, Chapter 6 examined the adoptees' racialised identity and negotiation of a 'trans-racial' identity. In doing so, the study's

third key finding emerged. This is the adoptees' possession of a 'trans-racial' identity, which is a racialised identity that consists of being "mixed". It was also found that there are different types of 'trans-racial' identities, because adoptees were racialised in different ways. The adoptees' settlement on a particular type of 'trans-racial' identity was determined by their negotiation (in terms of their acceptance, or their rejection and challenge) of their physical features; the socially and culturally constructed ideas of others; their experiences with their birth heritage; and, their experiences of racism. This meant that their choice of a 'trans-racial' identity represented their negotiation of a positive racial identity that they felt comfortable with. This also supports the idea that racialised identities are not fixed, but rather they are open to interpretation and modification, meaning that there is no essential "blackness" or essential "whiteness". To map the development of this 'trans-racial' identity, a "black"- "white" continuum was used to illustrate how the adoptees developed and settled upon a racialised identity. The Chapter argued that due to the 'trans-racial' aspects of their adoption, the adoptees had negotiated a "mixed" positive racial identity. This "mixed" identity illustrates the complex, flexible and diverse nature of racial identity.

It is clear that all the adoptees had a slightly different set of experiences, and therefore a slightly varied 'trans-racial' identity. However, all had gone through a process of having to negotiate racialised similarities and differences in order to settle on their 'trans-racial' identity. So whether they had a strong "black" identity or not, they had all tackled the same 'trans-racial' issues that are associated with having been born "black", Korean or "mixed race" and then adopted into a "white" home. Having a 'trans-racial' identity then, had been an outcome of the adoptees negotiating themselves a position on a "black"- "white" continuum. Their self-identification on this continuum had been based upon the ways in which their race had been socially categorised by those around them and the group inclusions and exclusions that were formed on the basis of this racial categorisation (Denney and Ely, 1987). The adoptees' 'trans-racial' identity had therefore been negotiated in ongoing social interaction where existing racially based definitions and assumptions had been accepted, or rejected and challenged, as to allow the adoptees to settle on a positive 'trans-racial' identity which catered for both parts of their "black" and "white" heritages, and one which they felt comfortable with.

The adoptees' adoption circumstances and life experiences were 'trans-racial'. This is because they had been born into one race and adopted by another race, i.e. they had been born of "black" (or of "minority ethnic") heritage, and adopted into a "white" heritage. In this sense the adoptees in this study were content with the use of the term 'trans-racial' to describe the nature of their adoption. However, because the adoptees had negotiated a "mixed" racial identity that incorporated both parts of their heritage, even if some identified themselves as more "black" or more "white", they were reluctant to use the term 'trans-racial' to define their racial identity. This is because it was felt that the term had an aura of negativity due to the term's suggestion of a permanent movement from one race to another. Rather, the adoptees emphasised their preference for a term that more accurately described the flexible, complex and diverse nature of their racial identity.

This study therefore questions the continuing use of the term 'trans-racial' to describe the racial identity of individuals involved in these types of adoptions, and instead suggests that an alternative term should be found. The new term would have to recognise the multiplicity of racial heritages. It is also important that the term identifies the reality of the growing presence of the people to whom it refers, and their acceptance as a distinct racial group in their own right. From a sociological and social work perspective, the replacement term needs to be one that does not further marginalize this population. It also needs to be a term that is accurate, and yet useable.

As a researcher that advocates the close consultation of the group it investigates, it is believed that in seeking a replacement term, the best source to consult is the current population of 'trans-racial' adoptees, i.e. the adoptees interviewed in this study. In having done this, it was suggested by the adoptees that the replacement term should incorporate the words "mixed" or "multiple", as to describe the diverse and numerous states of the adoptees' racial identities. The adoptees also demonstrated their agreement with this researcher's decision to use the term *heritage* throughout the study to describe the adoptees' family, culture and racial group. Taking this into account, the suggested and preferable alternative to describe the adoptees, their racial identity development and the nature of their adoption is that of '*mixed heritage*'; this

is the term used henceforth.

Such a replacement term emphasises the move away from restrictive essentialist ideas about race and “blackness”. As such there are several distinct advantages for the debate on ‘mixed heritage’ adoption and racial identity development. Firstly, it would allow a more accurate examination of the complexity of the race and identity issue. Secondly, it will mean an accurate description of the experiences for a labelled group of people, who are adopted in this way. Thirdly, the replacement term would enable policy makers and social workers to consider the role of wider social factors in child development, which will then allow them to make more accurately informed decisions when placing children for adoption.

(7.3) Re-examining the literature on ‘mixed heritage’ adoption and racial identity development

This study found that the racial identity development of ‘mixed heritage’ adoptees is far more complex than previous studies have stated.

The literature on ‘mixed heritage’ adoption and racial identity development is divided between two opposing camps. Although coming from opposite sides, both camps focus on the attainment of a healthy “black” identity, as oppose to a healthy racial identity per se. On the one side there are those who support ‘mixed heritage’ adoption, and maintain that “white” parents can teach “black” children about “black” issues and help them to develop a healthy “black” identity. In addition, supporters argue that because the most important thing is that children in care are provided with a secure and loving permanent home as soon as possible, ‘mixed heritage’ adoption should be allowed.

On the other side there are those who argue that ‘mixed heritage’ adoption of this type only occurs due to the decrease in available “white” babies for those “white” couples who are seeking to adopt (Gill and Jackson, 1983:2). In doing so it puts the needs and wants of the adopters before the needs of the child, and so is seen as another form of slavery, in that the “black” community are still seen as serving the “white” community (Abdullah, 1996:259). Opposers go on to argue that this is also a

problem because the needs of the “black” child to know about and experience their “black” birth heritage is being denied, which has serious consequences for their identity development, in terms of self-awareness and self-esteem. In this sense, it is argued by opposers that only “black” parents can teach “black” children about issues related to the development of a healthy and positive “black” identity. In these debates, opposers make no distinction between those adoptees born to two “black” parents, with those born to one “black” parent and one “white” parent. Rather, these “mixed race” children are referred to and treated as if they are born to two “black” parents. This is because opposers to ‘mixed heritage’ adoption argue that “mixed race” people are treated as “black” by the “white” majority and will therefore face the same discrimination. Therefore these “mixed race” adoptees will suffer from misidentification and serious identity difficulties if they do not wholly identify with the “black” part of their birth heritage (Small, 1986). The same arguments are also used in cases where the ‘mixed heritage’ adoption, is also an intercountry one. Indeed the consequences are even deemed to be worse, because the intercountry adoptee not only has to adjust to a new culture, but in addition they are more likely to face discrimination, marginalisation and identity conflict as a result of having to adjust to a new country (Bagley, Young and Scully, 1992). Despite the lack of empirical evidence provided to support these claims, it is the arguments of the opposers that have dominated adoption practice.

This study re-examined the arguments used in the ‘mixed heritage’ adoption debate from a social constructionist perspective, which involved a use of the Symbolic Interactionist theorisation of identity development. In doing so, it argued that racial identity is socially constructed and negotiated in a process involving ongoing interaction between (i) the individual; (ii) the individual’s social contact with other individuals; (iii) how the individual thinks others perceive him or her; and, (iv) the individual’s social environment (Blumer, 1969; Goffman, 1982; Harris and Sim, 2000; Mead, 1995). This found that the construction, meanings and usage of race concepts such as “black” and “white”, have been based on ideas that have been developed and maintained in social human interaction through dialectical and behavioural processes. Here “black” and “white” are held as distinct opposites, where you either belong to one or the other. Any others who fall in between or who belong to both, such as “mixed race” children or ‘mixed heritage’ adoptees are mislabelled,

marginalized and assumed to have identity problems. In light of this, the study contested the idea that race is a fixed and essential category, and therefore questioned many of the arguments used by opposers. Instead it looked at the social construction of racial identity by examining the various social processes by which a population group is categorised as a race, the effects of this assigned label, and the negotiation (in terms of the acceptance, or rejection and challenge) of this categorisation.

In addition to presenting the sample of 'mixed heritage' adoptees' development of a 'mixed heritage' identity, there was also the opportunity to test the arguments found in the literature.

Those opposing 'mixed heritage' adoption have tended to rely heavily on the idea of a fixed and essential "black" identity that must be lived in order to develop a healthy identity, i.e. have good levels of self-awareness and self-esteem. These opposers have also highlighted the importance of a lived "black" experience in order to feel a sense of belonging with the "black" community, and master survival in a racist society (Maxime, 1986; Merritt in Simon and Alstein, 2000; Small, 1991). This assumption of a total adherence to the "black" identity is also placed upon those who are "mixed race", i.e. those who have one "black" parent and one "white" parent (Small, 1986). However, the 'mixed heritage' adoptees in this study who were "mixed race" by birth, did not see themselves as just "black" in the sense that opposers argue. Rather they saw themselves as being of "mixed" biological origin, and "mixed" in terms of their socially constructed racial identity that at times was more "black" or more "white". Such a "mixed" identity was also viewed as positive. The same was also felt by the 'mixed heritage' adoptees born to two "black" parents, who said that in terms of their socially constructed racial identity, they had felt both "black" and "white" because of the 'mixed heritage' aspects of their adoption. This challenges the idea that such individuals need to develop a "black" identity in order to have a positive and healthy sense of self. It also disputes the idea of a fixed and essential "black" identity. This is because the adoptees' negotiation of a racial identity highlights that identities are open to interpretation and modification.

Saying this, the adoptees did report a constant feeling of difference and isolation in having been 'trans-racially' adopted. This led to them feeling as if they did not

wholly belong with the “black” people of their birth community, with whom they shared physical similarities but not social and cultural experiences, or with the “white” people of their adoptive community, with whom they shared social and cultural experiences, but not physical similarities. The adoptees’ felt that despite their adoptive parents’ efforts, overall the tactics for reducing the adoptees’ negative perceptions of difference was inadequate. However, not all perceptions of difference were negative. This is because it made adoptees the focus of special attention, which brought its own benefits. Neither did the perceived differences seriously damage the adoptees’ sense of belonging. This is because like the flexible nature of their racial identity, the adoptees felt that they were able to make active choices in settling on their sense of place, which they were able to change, modify and renegotiate as and when they wanted.

Opposers also argue that ‘mixed heritage’ adoptees suffer from low self-esteem and poor identity development. Indeed, some of the adoptees in this study reported having experienced some self-esteem difficulties, which were tied to them having felt different to others in their immediate “white” social world, being misidentified, or to them having to answer the racialised questions of others. However, most of the adoptees reported quite good self-esteem levels. Similarly, although some of these adoptees searched for their birth heritage in order to develop their sense of identity and deal with their negative perceptions about the adoption and the racialised differences between them and their adoptive parents, the adoptees did not view themselves as having suffered from poor identity development. Rather, the adoptees reported having a positive ‘mixed heritage’ racial identity, which was tied to them having other achievements of success and asserting their own sense of pride as a ‘mixed heritage’ adoptee. In addition, not all adoptees’ searched in order to resolve issues around identity and belonging. Rather they did so to answer the racialised questions of others.

Supporters of the practice of ‘mixed heritage’ adoption have argued that it is a viable option for children, as opposed to having to wait in care for long periods of time, because a loving, secure and stable home is the primary need of any child. These supporters, also argue that as well as meeting this need, racially sensitive “white” parents who have “black” friends or who live in a “black” or “mixed” neighbourhood,

can also teach the “black” child about their birth heritage, provide them with experience of their “black” culture and help them to cope with racism (Bagley and Young, 1979; Bagley, 1993). For example, Simon and Alstein (2000) argued that ‘mixed heritage’ adoptees have accurate racial self-definitions and no preference for “white” characteristics or negative reactions to “black” identity. However, this had not wholly been the case for some of the adoptees in this research study. This is because, although adoptees acknowledged their “mixed” identity, some did have a preference for “white” characteristics. Some adoptees even reported times when they had negative reactions towards a “black” identity, and even towards “black” people. Similarly, the adoptees highlighted how, although they were grateful to their adoptive parents for having raised and cared for them, they had nevertheless felt some degree of anger and loss at having missed-out on their “black” birth culture. This was largely due to a lack of information and experience of their birth heritage given to them by adoptive parents whilst growing up.

In consideration of the literature, this study’s research findings support the identity arguments that have been provided by those in favour of ‘mixed heritage’ adoption. This is that although some adoptees experience difficulties as a result of the ‘mixed heritage’ aspects of their adoption, and have a different racial identity development, no serious harm is caused to the ‘mixed heritage’ adoptees in terms of their self-perception and choice of racial identity (Feigelman and Silverman, 1984; Simon and Alstein, 2000).

(7.4) The future of adoption policy and practice

As discussed in Chapter 1, a tense relationship exists between adoption policy and practice. This is a problem because it means that a child’s time in temporary care is prolonged, and as outlined earlier, according to Marsh’s summary of the research on children looked after, this can result in a variety of problems for the child, i.e. feeling lonely, a lack of skills, and confusion about their past (Marsh, 1999:69). On the one hand adoption policy recommends that consideration needs to take account of all the child’s needs, and although knowledge of history, culture and language are significant factors to be considered when placing a child for adoption, they should not be regarded as the decisive ones. For example, this is outlined in the 1998 Local

Authority Circular 'Adoption: Achieving the Right Balance' (Department of Health, 1998), and more recently in the 2002 Adoption and Children Act. Despite this, adoption practice continues in seeking to place "black" and "mixed race" children with "black" families, which is a problem because for a variety of reasons, racial discrimination included, it is taking longer to do.

In examining the adoptees' narratives alongside the literature on adoption policy and placement practice, the fourth of the study's five key arguments emerged. This is the valuable insight that can be offered by the current population of 'mixed heritage' adoptees to policy debates, and hence the urgent need to consult them, for example by taking into account the findings of studies such as this.

The adoptees in this study said that they were grateful to their adoptive parents for having provided them with a secure and loving home sooner rather than later (or even not at all). To different degrees though, the adoptees also felt that there would have been particular benefits to having been raised in an adoptive home where the adoptive family had been of the same racial background. Such benefits included (a) a greater understanding of the racism experienced; (b) knowledge, contact and experience of the birth heritage; (c) a greater sense of sameness by being around people who looked like them; and (d) an avoidance of some (although not all) of the bullying that they had experienced. Similarly, some adoptees had sought a reunion with their birth heritage, largely as an attempt to feel more complete with their racial identity and sense of self. However, the over-riding theme was that although adoptees had experienced difficulties as a result of the 'mixed heritage' aspects of the adoption, most of the adoptees had not begrudged having been adopted in the way that they were or considered it to have seriously damaged their racial identity development, including their sense of self and their self-esteem. Overall, the overriding message that had come out of the narratives was that the adoptees had wanted to be recognised and accepted in their own right, as 'mixed heritage' adoptees who did not have a singular essential "black" identity or "white" identity, but a 'mixed heritage' one which incorporated both their birth and adoptive heritages.

In addition to this, recognition is also given to the way in which support for 'mixed heritage' adoption is used to mask the failure of the welfare system to respond to the

needs of Britain's "black" and "minority ethnic" population. This is because, as Frost and Stein suggest, "in a society that disadvantages black people" such a 'colour blind' and 'naïve liberal' approach can be seen as another form of racism (Frost and Stein, 1989:137), in that "black" and "minority ethnic" communities are still being let down by an inadequate welfare system. In this sense, this thesis recognises the value of the "black" and "minority ethnic" community as an important resource of social capital for "black" and "minority ethnic" people (Mirza and Reay, 2000; Wright, Standen, John, German and Patel, forthcoming). The thesis also supports the continued need to "recruit welfare workers in a proportion that reflects the ethnic make-up of the location in which they work" (Frost and Stein, 1989:137).

Taking this and the adoptees' insights, and the key findings and arguments of the study into account, it is possible to make a number of recommendations for adoption policy debates. These are as follows:

- (1) Exploring the value of the informal fostering methods which have for so long been successful in African communities, as a means of placing "black" children on a long-term basis with families of a similar background.
- (2) Further recruitment campaigns should be set up in order to recruit "black", "minority ethnic" and "mixed" adopters. However, it should also be recognised that the practice of 'mixed heritage' adoption is a viable option in its own right, and therefore be seriously considered as a means for providing children with immediate dedicated care, love, support, permanence and security.
- (3) A specifically tailored system of support needs to be established, which offers 'mixed heritage' adopters and adoptees help and advice in dealing with the types of difficulties experienced by the adoptees in this study.
- (4) It should be recognised that some adoptees require background or detailed information about their birth heritage. The support system developed to assist adoptees requiring further information should therefore be reviewed.
- (5) Acknowledging that although every child has the right to the knowledge and experience of their birth heritage, they also however, have the right to the knowledge and experience of the heritage in which they are raised. This is not only to help them appreciate and learn about the culture they came from, but to also help them to decide which cultural and racial identity they may want

to develop.

- (6) The need to recognise and accept that racial identity is complex, flexible and diverse, because it is largely based on an ongoing social process that is never completed.

It is recognised that some of these recommendations are in the current context difficult to consider, let alone implement. However, highlighting and calling for them to be considered is one small, yet significant step towards (i) providing 'mixed heritage' adoptive parents and adoptees' with the appropriate support in order to limit the number of difficulties faced; and, (ii) encouraging a more sophisticated level of thinking about racial identity development, which would help to empower the population of 'mixed heritage' adoptees by providing a means through which their own unique racial identity is recognised and accepted.

(7.5) Researching 'mixed heritage' adoption and racial identity development

As previously discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, the existing research which has been provided by both sides of the debate has tended to use methods such as longitudinal studies, survey methods, cross-sectional design surveys and focus groups. There have been a number of drawbacks with these research designs and methods. The longitudinal studies, as used by Bagley and Young (1979), Tizard (1977), Gill and Jackson (1983), Howe and Feast (2000), Feigelman and Silverman (1984), and Simon and Alstein (1996; 2000), are problematic due to the loss of contact between the researcher and some of the original sample. This means that a deeper understanding of the adoptees' lives and experiences are being lost. It may also lead to a bias in the results, particularly towards a more favourable outcome because it is possible that the families who dropped-out are precisely those families encountering difficulties and who did not want to be accused of inadequate parenting. The survey methods, as used by Silverman and Feigelman (1984) also have the problem of sample bias in terms of who responds to and completes the survey that has been sent-out. The cross-sectional design surveys, such as that used by Zastrow (1977) have the problem of only providing a 'snap-shot' of the 'mixed heritage' adoptee, the adoptive family or of the adoption, at one particular point in time. This means that they are limited in their ability to reveal information about how the observed individual has understood,

negotiated and adjusted themselves over time within their social environment. Instead cross-sectional design surveys can only speculate on possible outcomes. Also they tend to measure the 'mixed heritage' adoptees' 'adjustment' or 'maladjustment' according to parental responses. This is a problem because however well meaning they may be, the adoptive parents (like any parent) may not be fully aware of any difficulties or problems that the child may be facing. Similarly, they may lie about the presence of any problems or be reluctant to admit difficulties. Studies using focus groups, such as those undertaken by Dagoo et al (1993) and Shekleton (1990) also pose problems. This is the danger of the sample sharing the same views and experiences. For example as the studies of Dagoo et al (1993) and Shekleton (1990) both used a post-adoption support group used by adoptees experiencing difficulties and who had negative views about 'mixed heritage' adoption. This meant the consultation of a sample who shared strong views.

The problem with these types of research designs is that they have not sought strongly enough the voices of the adult 'mixed heritage' adoptee, directly from the adoptee him/herself. Instead they have treated the adoptees as observable passive social beings to be measured and spoken about. In this study however, there was an emphasis on the uniqueness and value of the life (hi)story approach to investigating the lives of those who experience 'mixed heritage' adoption. This led to the fifth of the study's key arguments. This is the value of the life (hi)story approach, in particular the oral life (hi)story interview as a method of data collection when studying the racial identity development of 'mixed heritage' adoptees. The benefits of the method are based around the way in which they gave the adoptees an opportunity to directly talk about their own views, experiences and feelings about having grown-up as a 'mixed heritage' adoptee. This also allowed the adoptees to speak for themselves about their social life experiences, and how they had understood and negotiated the labels and meanings that had been attached to them, and developed a specific racial identity as a result of having experienced a 'mixed heritage' adoption. This meant that this study found the use of the life (hi)story approach, and in particular the use of oral life (hi)story interviews valuable in mapping and tracing the way in which adoptees' negotiated a 'mixed heritage' identity. The approach and method is therefore advocated in similar research studies.

A reflection on the research design and methodology

Upon reflection, although the chosen method did produce an in-depth understanding of how this sample of 'mixed heritage' adoptees had negotiated a racial identity, it is possible to identify weaknesses and difficulties.

One difficulty is the way in which the use of the life (hi)story method brings with it an increased risk of participant identification, albeit a small one. Although adherence to ethical guidelines, such as that of the BSA (1998) helped to limit the risk of identification, the difficulty of completely anonymising all identifiable details is very difficult in studies using the life (hi)story approach.

Other difficulties are based on being restricted to studying the topic area at PhD level. Here each of the 6 adoptees had talked about their own lives with so much depth and detail, that I also felt restricted by the relatively small scale of a PhD project. This meant that I did not feel it was fully possible to explore more deeply the lives and experiences of each adoptee, nor to add extra adoptees to my sample.

Therefore, if I were to do this research study again, extend upon it or advise others in the field, I would make a number of changes.

The first change would be to consider in more depth the ethical issues of confidentiality and anonymity when using the life (hi)story method. In particular to explore the ways in which anonymity can best be guaranteed. This is a direct result of having been unaware prior to the data collection, of the increased risk of identification that comes with using the life (hi)story approach. Hence, if I would have been aware of this risk at the very start of the study, I may have been able to consider other ways in which anonymity and confidentiality could be guaranteed, or at least inform the participating adoptees at the very start of the study of the increased risk of identification, as opposed to doing so mid-way through the study.

Another change would be to consider the use of other research tools in addition to the reflective diary, to use alongside the interviews. For example, photographs, documents, letters and so on, may have been a useful way of locating experiences, as

well as evoking views and feelings about these experiences.

A third change would be to design the study with a view to it covering more depth and being carried out over a longer period of time, i.e. 1 year. This would allow the adoptees' lives and racial identity development to be examined on a regular and ongoing basis, and provide a deeper understanding of their meanings.

(7.6) Summary

This chapter has concluded the study by providing a conceptualisation of a 'mixed heritage' (formerly known as 'trans-racial') identity. It has also re-examined the literature in light of the adoptees' narratives sampled in this study. The chapter has used the research findings and experience to comment on the future of adoption policy and practice, where a number of recommendations are offered, and to also reflectively consider the usefulness of the life (hi)story approach to study this topic. Several observations are also offered here for future research. In doing all this, the five key findings and arguments of this study are presented. The first finding is that the adoptees were constantly aware of their racialised differences, and although most perceptions of difference were negative because the adoptees felt alone and saw it as a constant reminder of them not being a 'real' member of that family, some of the adoptees perceived these differences positively. This is significant because it tells us such differences are able to contribute to the adoptee considering themselves to be confident, have high self-esteem and a positive perception of self. The next finding is that race and the racialised differences brought about by the 'mixed heritage' aspects of the adoption, are significant factors in the adoptees' searches for their birth heritage. The third finding is that the adoptees' possession of a 'trans-racial' identity, and how this is a racialised identity that consists of being neither "black" or "white", but "mixed". A fourth argument is the valuable insight that the current population of 'mixed heritage' adoptees can offer policy debates, and hence the call for their consultation. The final argument is the value of the life (hi)story approach, in particular the oral life (hi)story interview as a method of data collection when studying the racial identity development of 'mixed heritage' adoptees.

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Appendices

Appendix-I

The interview schedule as used in the pilot study

- Leaving the foster home / care. Leaving friends. Leaving the area.
- Moving into a new home and into a new area.
- Starting primary school.
- Playing and making friends.
- Becoming part of the family.
- If you felt 'understood' by your adoptive family.
- Feelings towards birth parents.
- Formal and informal coping strategies to being adopted and building a new life.
- Starting secondary school and continuing into further education. Leaving the education system.
- Leaving home.
- Relationships with friends. If friends influence how you think about yourself.
- Relationships with partners. If your partner influences how you think about yourself.
- Relationships with significant others, for example, siblings, grandparents, other adoptees, and so on.
- Employment and career patterns. Relationships with co-workers and colleagues.
- Experiences of racism. When. How you dealt with them. How they affected your thinking & behaviour.
- Inclusion and exclusion.
- How would you identify yourself. What has led you to identify yourself in this way.
- The importance of religion, cultural heritage, gender / sexuality, politics, power / class / money, and age, on your identity. The role they play in your life.
- Do you feel 'understood' by your adopting family and by people around you.
- Do you now feel as if something is missing from your life. What. How.
- Do you now feel as if you have 'suffered any identity problems'. How. Why. Effects. Steps taken to resolve.
- Inclusion and exclusion.
- Challenges / struggles (as a 'black' person, as an adoptee, as an individual). The coping strategies taken to deal with these.
- What does 'black' mean to you. Is it important. How. Why.
- How influential do you feel the society in which you grew up in and now live in, is on how you identify yourself.
- What does 'being British' mean to you. Do you see yourself as 'British'. How. Why.

Apendix-II

In looking for a sample of adoptees to interview, the following was the advertisement placed in Adoption UK magazine

ADOPTION

A Study of Race, Identity and Policy

This study is to produce findings that could be considered in debates surrounding transracial adoption, with particular emphasis on the consideration of race in the placement of black children, and to understand the identity development of transracially adopted individuals.

This will be done through an analysis of their experiences, as told in oral narratives.

CAN YOU HELP?

I would like to talk to real people who have been transracially adopted, about their real experiences.

- Respondents should be aged at least 18 years, born and transracially adopted in the UK by white people who were not extended family members.
- I would like adoptees to talk at some length about their experiences, in interviews lasting about 20 hours in total.
- Any identifiable names and circumstances will be anonymised and confidentiality guaranteed.

If you can help, or would like more information, please e-mail
sop00tp@sheffield.ac.uk or send an s.a.e. to

Tina Patel, Postgraduate Research, Department of Sociological Studies,
University of Sheffield, Elmfield, Northumberland Road, Sheffield S10 2TU.

Appendix-III

This is a copy of the simple information sheet that was used in the main study to recruit interviewees

ADOPTION

A STUDY OF RACE, IDENTITY AND POLICY

The Purpose of My Study:

The purpose of this study is to produce findings, which could be considered in debates surrounding transracial adoption. There is a particular emphasis on the consideration of race in the placement of black children, and to understand the identity development of these transracially adopted individuals. This will be done through an analysis of their experiences, as re-counted in oral narratives.

The Research Design of My Study:

The life history approach will be used to gather data, because of its ability to provide in-depth and detailed information. These oral life history interviews will allow transracial adoptees to talk about their experiences of growing up in a transracial placement. The diaries and life documents, such as photographs and any letters, will also be used to illustrate their narrative. The data generated by all these will give the adoptee the opportunity to discuss how their experiences have informed upon their identity development.

Although there is no strict agenda of discussion, the interviews will broadly cover;

- Growing up in a transracial placement.
- Parenthood.
- Relationships with significant others in the family.
- Knowledge and experiences of birth identity.
- The importance of racial origin, religion and cultural heritage.
- The importance of age, gender / sexuality, power / class.
- Inclusion and exclusion.
- Self-identification.
- Stereotypes.
- Choices.
- Coping strategies to being adopted.
- Influential key stages of life that have informed upon the adoptee's identity.

Data Protection:

The identification of the adoptees participating in the study will be kept anonymous, and any information obtained will also be kept confidential and secure, as required by the *Data Protection Act (1998)* and *Copyright Design and Patent Act (1988)*. A Consent Form will be used to protect the rights of all the parties involved in the research. The British Sociological Association research guidelines will be consulted to ensure that these safeguards are maintained.

CAN YOU HELP? IF SO, PLEASE CONTACT:

**Tina Patel,
Postgraduate Research, Department of Sociological Studies,
University of Sheffield, Elmfield,
Northumberland Road, Sheffield. S10 2TU.
E-Mail: t.patel@sheffield.ac.uk**

Appendix-IV

This is a copy of the consent form that was used in the main study

Consent Form

Hello my name is Tina Patel. I am carrying out research at the University of Sheffield, into 'the identity development of transracial adoptees'.

Any information that you provide will only be seen by myself and my supervisors. Under no circumstances will your identity be revealed. By doing this, the research and its data collection process follows the law, this being the *Data Protection Act (1998)* and *Copyright and Design Patent Act (1988)*, as well as the University Guidelines, this being the *British Sociological Association's Guidelines on Ethical Practice (1998)*.

Full details of the research are discussed in the following pages. These are:

- (1) Research Details.
- (2) Ethical Issues.
- (3) Research Information.
- (4) Contact Details of Organisations.

Please read and answer below:

- I have read and understood the details about the research: **Yes/No**
- I agree to participate in this study: **Yes/No**

I would be grateful if you would sign this form

_____ (Signed)
_____ (Printed)
_____ (Dated)

I would be more than happy to send you a summary of the report. If you would like to receive a copy of this, please print your address:

Thank-you for agreeing to participate

Tina Patel

_____ (Signed)
_____ (Dated)

Research Details

The Researcher:

I am the principal and only investigator of this research project.

I may be contacted at:

Address: Department of Sociological Studies, University of Sheffield, Elmfield, Northumberland Road, Sheffield. S10 2TU.

E-Mail: t.patel@sheffield.ac.uk

Telephone: 0114 222 6470.

The Research Funding:

The research is being funded by a Departmental Studentship, which has been provided by the Department of Sociological Studies, at the University of Sheffield.

The Supervisors:

My supervisors can also be contacted should you have any questions or issues you would like to discuss with them:

▪ Prof. Peter Marsh.

Address: Department of Sociological Studies, University of Sheffield, Elmfield, Northumberland Road, Sheffield. S10 2TU. UK.

E-Mail: p.marsh@sheffield.ac.uk

Telephone: 0114 222 6445.

▪ Dr. Joanne Britton.

Address: Department of Sociological Studies, University of Sheffield, Elmfield, Northumberland Road, Sheffield. S10 2TU. UK.

E-Mail: n.j.britton@sheffield.ac.uk

Telephone: 0114 222 6431.

Ethical Issues

The purpose of the research is to understand the 'social identity development of transracial adoptees'. You have been asked to participate because you are a transracial adoptee, and I believe that you have a lot of quality information to offer about your experiences.

From this research, you can expect to be interviewed initially over a 4-day period, in about 8 sessions each lasting no more than 1 ½ hours. The interviews will be carried out on a one-to-one basis. They will also be tape-recorded and then transcribed. You will be asked to discuss your experiences of growing up as a transracial adoptee. You will also be asked to keep a diary to record your thoughts and feelings about issues discussed in interviews. The information obtained will be analysed, along with the results of 4 other interviews from transracial adoptees. You will be given a copy of the transcript and my analysis of the data collected. A meeting will then be arranged at a later date in order to collect your feedback on my analysis.

The data, this being all the details about you, the recordings of interview sessions and the transcribed copy of the recordings and the diary, will be stored and used in a manner that adheres to the *Data Protection Act (1998)*, and *Copyright Design and Patent Act (1988)*. This means that,

(A) Recordings and the transcribed copy of interview sessions will only be kept long enough for them to be studied.

(B) The diary will only be kept long enough for it to be studied.

(C) Confidentiality will be guaranteed via anonymising any identifiable names and circumstances.

(D) The raw data will only be seen by myself and my two supervisors.

(E) The raw data will be stored separately at a secure location that will only be accessible to myself.

(F) Upon completion of the research, excerpts of the interviews and findings will be discussed in my thesis, and are also likely to be used in any teaching that I may undertake. However, under no circumstances will your name or any identifying details be revealed.

(G) You will be asked to sign a Copyright Ownership Form after the interview sessions, as a formal acknowledgement of the transferring of copyright ownership.

You are free to withdraw from the interview at any time and for any reason.

You are also free to refuse to discuss any subject at any time and for any reason.

Research Information

ADOPTION

A STUDY OF RACE, IDENTITY AND POLICY

Tina Patel

Department of Sociological Studies, University of Sheffield

The Purpose of My Study:

The purpose of this study is to produce findings, which could be considered in debates surrounding transracial adoption. There is a particular emphasis on the consideration of race in the placement of black children, and to understand the identity development of these transracially adopted individuals. This will be done through an analysis of their experiences, as re-counted in oral narratives.

The Research Design of My Study:

The life history approach will be used to gather data, because of its ability to provide in-depth and detailed information. These oral life history interviews will allow transracial adoptees to talk about their experiences of growing up in a transracial placement. The diaries and life documents, such as photographs and any letters, will also be used to illustrate their narrative. The data generated by all these will give the adoptee the opportunity to discuss how their experiences have informed upon their identity development.

Although there is no strict agenda of discussion, the interviews will broadly cover;

- Growing up in a transracial placement.
- Parenthood.
- Relationships with significant others in the family.
- Knowledge and experiences of birth identity.
- The importance of racial origin, religion and cultural heritage.
- The importance of age, gender / sexuality, power / class.
- Inclusion and exclusion.
- Self-identification.
- Stereotypes.
- Choices.
- Coping strategies to being adopted.
- Influential key stages of life that have informed upon the adoptee's identity.

Data Protection:

The identification of the adoptees participating in the study will be kept anonymous, and any information obtained will also be kept confidential and secure, as required by the *Data Protection Act (1998)* and *Copyright Design and Patent Act (1988)*. A Consent Form will be used to protect the rights of all the parties involved in the research. The British Sociological Association research guidelines will be consulted to ensure that these safeguards are maintained.

Contact Details of Adoption Groups and Organisations

For general information about adoption:

ADOPTION INFORMATION LINE.

Telephone – 0113 388 5400.

For support and advice on adoption:

BRITISH AGENCIES FOR ADOPTION AND FOSTERING.

80 – 82 Cardigan Road, Headingley, Leeds. LS6 3BJ.

E-mail – leeds@baaf.org.uk

Internet – www.baaf.org.uk

Telephone – 0113 274 4797.

For issues specifically related to being transracially adopted:

**ASSOCIATION OF TRANSRACIALLY ADOPTED AND FOSTERED
PEOPLE.**

Unit 35, King's Exchange, Tileyard Road, London. N7 9AH.

Internet – www.atrap.org.uk

Telephone – 020 7619 6220.

For issues specifically related to being black and in care:

BLACK AND IN CARE.

300 Moss Lane East, Moss Side, Manchester. M14 4LZ.

Telephone – 0161 226 9122.

For support and advice on post-adoption issues:

POST ADOPTION CENTRE.

5 Torriano Mews, Torriano Avenue, London. NW5 2RZ.

Internet – www.postadoptioncentre.org.uk

E-mail – advice@postadoptioncentre.org.uk

Telephone – 020 7284 0555.

For support and advice on post-adoption issues:

**NATIONAL ORGANISATION FOR THE
COUNSELLING OF ADOPTEES AND THEIR PARENTS.**

112 Church Road, Wheatly, Oxfordshire. OX33 1LU.

Telephone – 01865 875000.

Appendix-V

The interview schedule as used in the main study

Your birth and pre-adoption childhood:

- Any experiences of birth identity before adoption.
- Leaving the foster home / care. Leaving friends. Leaving the area.

Being adopted and your post-adoption childhood:

- Moving into a new home and into a new area.
- Starting primary school.
- Playing and making friends.
- Experiences of racism. How you dealt with it. How it affected your thinking & behaviour.
- Becoming part of the family. Feelings of similarity and difference.
- If & how your adoptive family tried to accommodate for your birth background. How successful or appropriate this was.
- If you felt 'understood' by your adoptive family.
- Feelings towards birth parents.
- Formal and informal coping strategies to being adopted and building a new life.

Your teen years and mid-twenties / thirties / forties (if applicable):

- Starting secondary school and continuing into further education. Leaving the education system.
- Leaving home.
- Relationships with friends. Feelings of similarity and difference. If friends influence how you think about yourself.
- Relationships with partners. If your partner influences how you think about yourself.
- Relationships with significant others, for example, siblings, grandparents, other adoptees, and so on.
- Employment and career patterns. Relationships with co-workers and colleagues.
- Experiences of racism. When. How you dealt with them. How they affected your thinking & behaviour.
- Inclusion and exclusion. Feelings of belonging. Coping strategies. Choices.

Your life today:

- How would you identify yourself. What has led you to identify yourself in this way.
- The importance of religion, cultural heritage, gender / sexuality, politics, power / class / money, and age, on your identity. The role they play in your life.
- Do you feel 'understood' by your adopting family and by people around you.
- Do you now feel as if something is missing from your life. What. How. Steps taken to resolve.
- Feelings of loss of birth identity.
- Do you now feel as if you have 'suffered any identity problems'. How. Why. Effects. Steps taken to resolve.
- Inclusion and exclusion. Feelings of belonging.
- Challenges / struggles (as a 'black' person, as an adoptee, as an individual). The coping strategies taken to deal with these. The choices made.
- What does 'black' mean to you. Is it important. How. Why.
- What do you see as typical and commonly used 'black stereotypes' and 'white stereotypes'. Why. What stereotypes have other people placed upon you and how have you responded to these stereotypes.
- How influential do you feel the society in which you grew up in and now live in, is on how you identify yourself.
- What does 'being British' mean to you. Do you see yourself as 'British'. How. Why.