

Toward a Theory of Cultural Competence in Transcultural Parenting: The Role of Cultural Receptivity

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Abstract:

There is a dire need to place the disproportionate number of minority foster children with successful foster families. Because there are more minority foster children than minority foster parents, we suggest placing children with qualified families despite differences in racial, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds. We propose a conceptual model for transcultural parenting that accounts for cultural differences and emphasizes the importance of equipping foster parents with training to preserve children's birth heritages and help them thrive in dual worlds. We address how essential it is for agencies to assess foster parents' *cultural receptivity*, that is, their openness to participate in activities that stimulate children's cultural development. We suggest a theoretical framework that integrates cultural receptivity and culturally competent transcultural parenting.

Keywords: Assessment | cultural competence | foster care | foster parents | transcultural | transracial

Article:

Introduction

Three-fourths of the 520,000 children in foster care in the United States live with foster families (United States Department of Health and Human Services [US DHHS], 2006). Even though there has been a rise in the number of children placed with relatives, agencies place approximately one-half of children in non-kinship foster families (US DHHS, 2006). Moreover, a shortage of foster parents of diverse cultures, coupled with an overrepresentation of children of minority cultures in the child welfare system, has resulted in a dire need for transcultural placements—that is, placing children in families that do not share their cultures, meaning a

common history, tradition, values, and social organization (McPhatter, 1997). There are more Caucasian families than families of color available to foster children, but in practice child welfare workers who are misinformed about transracial placement policy or resistant towards placing children transracially do not always place children of color with available families irrespective of race (Bussiere & American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law, 1995; Carter-Black, 2002; Griffith & Bergeron, 2006; Hollingsworth, 1998).

Consequently, it has been difficult to find families for children of color. To this end, we suggest placing children in qualified families despite differences in cultural backgrounds. We propose a conceptual model that takes into account cultural differences and emphasizes the importance of giving parents the needed training to preserve children's birth heritages so that children can thrive in dual worlds. We call this model *Cultural Receptivity Process* (Figure 1).

Although it is unreasonable to expect prospective foster parents to be able to parent children from all different backgrounds, foster parents need to understand the role that culture plays in children's development (Buehler et al., 2006). For transcultural fostering to be successful, it is essential that caseworkers making placements assess foster parents' *cultural receptivity*, which we define as openness to participate in activities that stimulate children's cultural development. For this article, children's cultural development is defined as the process whereby children acquire knowledge rooted in their birth culture to form behaviors, social skills, and cognitions that help them thrive in their world (Super & Harkness, 1986).

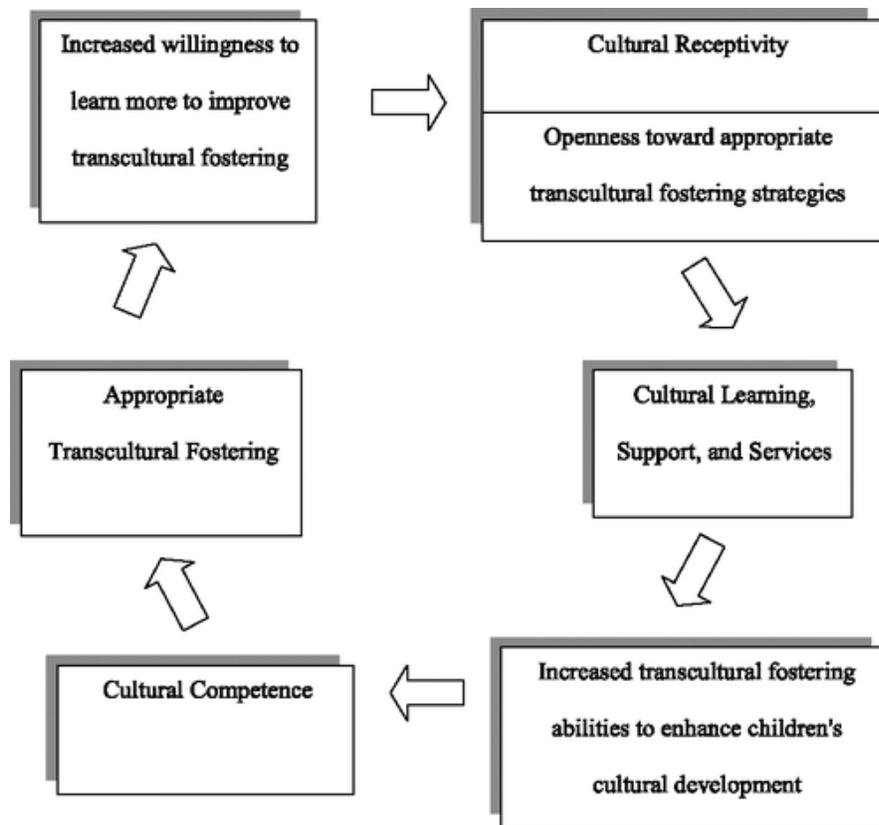


FIGURE 1. Cultural Receptivity Process

The concept of cultural receptivity focuses on prospective trans-cultural foster parents' willingness to build diverse support networks and broaden parenting capacity to include attitudes and strategies that enhance children's cultural development. It entails their willingness to support foster children's relationships with adults and children who share their cultures, find resources that help children understand and develop their cultural identity (e.g., same-culture adult role models), learn about parenting strategies that are typical of the children's culture of origin, and learn from others who have successfully parented children of different cultures. In this way children will be prepared to identify with people who look like them and become confident in their ability to succeed as persons of color. We hypothesize that assessing cultural receptivity leads to foster parents exploring their willingness to seek training, support, and services that will increase their transcultural parenting capacity before culturally different children are placed in their homes (Figure 1).

We explore the concept of cultural receptivity in order to consider carefully the role of culture in preparing foster parents for transcultural fostering. We highlight the importance of discovering early on how open-minded foster parents are toward taking part in a process of learning parenting strategies, and the extent to which they can and will participate in this important process. This is crucial because the adequacy of training for transcultural foster parents to raise successfully children from different cultural backgrounds depends on an honest introspection. We present a prerequisite to the cultural competence framework that can be used in child welfare practice and as a foundation for generating hypotheses in research on successful transcultural fostering.

OVERVIEW OF TRANSCULTURAL PLACEMENTS IN FOSTER CARE

Definition of Culture

When a child of color has to leave his or her birth family and move in with a Caucasian family, there will be cultural differences that both parties need help understanding, no matter how loving the foster family. *Culture* has been defined in many ways, sometimes interchangeably with *diversity* and *multiculturalism*. Generally, culture entails “those elements of a people's history, tradition, values, and social organization that become implicitly or explicitly meaningful to the participants ... in cross-cultural encounters” (McPhatter, 1997, p. 258). It encompasses “the customs, habits, skills, technology, arts, values, ideology, science, and religious and political behavior of a group of people” (Barker, 2003, p. 105).

We use *culture* here to capture the way of life for groups who share the same race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, spirituality, socioeconomic status, or other characteristics that influence perceptions, attitudes, and behavior (Lynch & Hanson, 1998; McPhatter, 1997; Mitchell, 1999; O'Hagan, 2001). However, we necessarily focus much of our discussion on race because

race has been the predominant factor in transcultural foster placements in the United States. Indeed, during the 1970s and 1980s, the scarcity of African American foster families and the disproportionate numbers of African American children in foster care (US DHHS, 2002) were the impetus behind new legislation regarding transracial foster and adoptive placements. We summarize three influential legislative acts that form the context for placement decisions and foster parents' assessment and training related to transcultural placements.

Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980

The purpose of the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 was to ensure that children in foster care were placed in homes as the result of a thoughtful planning process we now know as permanency planning. In part because of social workers' increasingly unmanageable caseloads, children had been remaining in the foster care system for long periods (Curtis, 1996), a predicament permanency planning was designed to redress. However, the number of children in care continued to increase throughout the 1980s (Dillon, 1994). Between 1982 and 1992, foster care placements increased by 69%, with numbers reaching a staggering 442,000 (Child Welfare League of America [CWLA], 1995). In 1993, an increase in child abuse and neglect reports led to a further increase in foster care placements (Curtis, Dale, & Kendal, 1999), swelling the numbers to 460,000 (CWLA, 1995).

Although the demand for foster care families was increasing, the supply of available foster families was decreasing (CWLA, 1995; Martin, 2000). The shortage of foster families of minority cultures was especially pronounced. At the same time, children of minority cultural backgrounds were disproportionately represented in the foster care system (CWLA, 1995). In 1998, of the 560,000 children in foster care, 34% were Caucasian, 44% were African American, 15% were Hispanic, 2% were Native American, 1% were Asian, and 4% was unknown (US DHHS, 2006).

Multiethnic Placement Act

During the 1990s, legislators began to believe that the solution to securing permanence for children of minority cultures was adoption; thus agencies pushed caseworkers to place children with pre-adoptive families while in foster care (Brooks et al., 1999). In 1994, Congress passed the Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) to address the shortage of minority foster and adoptive parents through a two-pronged approach: continuing diligent same-culture recruitment efforts while ensuring that potential foster or adoptive placements were not overlooked in cases where the culture of prospective parents did not match the children's.

The MEPA (1994) states that culture should not be considered in the screening or approval of foster or adoptive parents. For instance, it is unlawful for a public or private agency that receives federal funding to reject a Caucasian applicant's request to adopt an African American child solely on the basis of race (MEPA, 1994). The MEPA also states, however, that children are to be placed in same-culture families at the biological parents' request or when doing so is in children's best interests.

The conflicting statements of MEPA (1994) caused confusion among child welfare agencies regarding their priorities for placing minority children. Child welfare agencies that focused on same-culture recruitment efforts essentially ignored available placements with families from different cultures. Their inability to identify an adequate number of same-culture foster or adoptive parents ultimately led to prolonged stays in foster care for minority children (Hollingsworth, 1998).

Interethnic Adoption Provision

When MEPA failed to remedy the disproportionate numbers of African American children in long-term care, Congress passed the Interethnic Adoption Provision (IEAP) (1996), also known as the *Removal of Barriers to Interethnic Adoption Act* (Brooks et al., 1999). The IEAP states that a lack of same-culture adoptive families is not an acceptable reason to delay or deny a child's opportunity for permanence. This provision clarified that child placement decisions should not be based solely on culture and that discrimination will not be tolerated against applicants who do not share a child's culture. Thus, social workers no longer had to place locating potential same-culture foster or adoptive families for minority children above all other considerations. The new priority established by IEAP was placing children with approved foster or adoptive families, regardless of culture.

Attitudes Toward Transracial Adoptions and Fostering

Opinion is divided as to whether it is ever in children's best interests to be placed with families of different cultures. Organizations such as the National Association of Black Social Workers (Washington, DC) and the CWLA Child Welfare League of America (Arlington, VA) favor same-culture placements. Proponents of transcultural placements typically are those who have had experience parenting or want to parent children of a different race than their own (Curtis, 1996).

National Association of Black Social Workers

The NABSW opposes transracial adoptions except in those cases where they are used as a last resort (Curtis, 1996; Hollingsworth, 1999, 2000; NABSW, 1994; Simon & Alstein, 1996, 2002). The organization argues that African American children should be placed with African American families on the grounds that responsible parenting of African American children requires an awareness and appreciation of their race. Parents must be willing to instill pride in children about their heritage as well as educate them about how a historically racist society inevitably affects their lives. Rather than resorting to transracial adoption, NABSW asserts, agencies should increase their efforts to recruit African American families to adopt African American children (NABSW, 1994).

Originally, NABSW stated that transracial adoptions were essentially “cultural genocide” (Curtis, 1996, p. 157; NABSW, 1972) because African American children were being placed

with families who were unprepared and ill equipped to parent them effectively (Brooks et al., 1999; Curtis, 1996; CWLA, 1995; NABSW, 1972). Some child welfare experts believed this professional stance was a contributing factor in the growing numbers of African American children in the 1970s and early 1980s who remained in long-term foster care and were not adopted (Hollingsworth, 1998; Neal & Stumph, 1993).

Child Welfare League of America

Like the 1994 MEPA, the position of the CWLA on the adoption of minority children is ambiguous. In one regard, the CWLA holds that child welfare agencies should honor the biological parents' wishes to have their children placed with same-culture families (CWLA, 2000). In another regard, the CWLA also argues that no child's chance of permanent placement should be delayed or denied because of agencies' inability to select adoptive parents of the same culture (CWLA, 2000). In cases of transcultural placements, the CWLA adds that the adoptive families should respect the children's cultures and be knowledgeable about and sensitive to children's cultural needs (CWLA, 2000), a mandate easier issued than followed. Social workers who make fostering and adoption decisions face the challenge of both respecting the wishes of the birth parents and not obstructing permanence. The CWLA has not taken a policy stance regarding what to do when these two principles conflict.

Proponents of Transracial Adoptions

After a halt during the 1970s and early 1980s, transracial adoptions of African American children resumed in the mid-1980s. Numerous Caucasian applicants who had not been permitted to adopt transracially prevailed in lawsuits that alleged illegal discrimination (Hollingsworth, 1998; 1999; 2000; McRoy, Oglesby, & Grape, 1997). Many foster parents reported being initially told that transracial placements were needed because there were not enough same-culture foster families available (Hollingsworth, 1998). In particular, Caucasian applicants maintained that they sought to adopt transracially for altruistic or religious reasons (Hollingsworth, 1998).

More recently, there has been a steady increase in transracial placements over the past decade (US DHHS, 2006; Hansen & Pollack, 2007). In 1997 African American children accounted for 17% of transracial adoptions; the number rose steadily from 11% in 1999 to 20% in 2003 (US DHHS, 2006; Hansen & Pollack, 2007). This is important to note as 62% of public adoptions were by foster parents in 2003 (US DHHS, 2006). Further, because of continued problems with disproportionate representation of African American children in foster care and the disparity in their length of stay in foster care (Hill, 2006), it is clear that for the near future these children will continue to be placed transculturally. Therefore, we propose that it is essential to equip prospective foster parents with the proper training to meet the cultural needs of their transracially placed foster children and that the first step is to assess their level of cultural receptivity—that it is their openness to participate in activities that stimulate children's cultural development. From

there, parents can build on their willingness to engage in other cultures and in so doing help promote positive outcomes for children of minority cultures.

ASSESSING CULTURAL RECEPTIVITY

Assessing prospective foster parents' cultural receptivity is important for a number of reasons. The assessment process allows social workers to relay the central elements of transcultural parenting to those who might not otherwise have considered them. Prospective foster parents can then evaluate their ability to foster transculturally and come to an informed decision about whether to proceed (Cox, Orme, & Rhodes, 2002). Together, social workers and potential foster parents can ascertain whether applicants are willing to commit to learning about the culture of their prospective foster child and to participate in specific training to meet that child's cultural needs and promote the child's cultural development and identity. With this approach social workers will be better able to match prospective foster parents with foster children based on their willingness to parent effectively children of different cultural backgrounds.

Assessing applicants' cultural receptivity also allows social workers to establish a baseline from which to monitor the foster parents' progress after children are placed transculturally. Based on the degree of progress, social workers are then able to recommend needed cultural training, support, and services that are necessary to stimulate children's cultural development.

Our proposition that cultural receptivity is vital to successful trans-cultural placements assumes that cultural receptivity leads to cultural competence and appropriate transcultural fostering and that this competency can be measured (Figure 1). Future research needs to test this assumption. We should also note that assessment of cultural competence does not substitute for social workers' judgments about an applicant's other qualifications and should not be used alone to discourage or exclude applicants from becoming transcultural foster parents. Rather, assessment information from a validated assessment protocol, in conjunction with social workers' professional judgments, should serve as a basis for how agencies can best train and support foster parents.

ADEQUACY OF TRAINING FOR TRANSCULTURAL FOSTER PARENTS

Current Foster Parent Training

Purpose and Methods of Training

Currently, most state child welfare agencies use some form of pre-service training for foster parent applicants to prepare them for the challenges of fostering (Baum, Crase, & Crase, 2001; Rhodes, Coakley, & Orme, unpublished data, 2002). Although the type and length of training vary among agencies at state and local levels, typically training is conducted in nine weekly, 3-hour structured sessions in groups of approximately 25 applicants. In some states, kinship foster parent applicants also take part in training.

There are three established curricula guides commonly used by agencies to train foster parent applicants: Jackson and Wasserman's 1997 *Parents as Tender Healers [PATH]*; the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services' [IDCFS] 1993 *Parent Resources for Information, Development, and Education [PRIDE]*; and Pasztor's and the Child Welfare Institute & Center for Foster and Residential Care's [CWICFRC] 1990 *Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting [MAPP Program Guidebook]*. Agencies can elect to use any of the standard guides or they can develop their own training guides. Some agencies use a combination of established and agency-developed guides to conduct training (Rhodes, Coakley, & Orme, unpublished data, 2002).

Content of Training

Foster parent training usually includes information on foster children's typical backgrounds of abuse and/or neglect and how abuse and neglect influence their behavior and development. Foster parent applicants learn about attachment, separation, and loss. They are educated on the importance of preserving children's family identities and histories, which involves maintaining contacts between the children and their families and communities. Foster parents come away from this part of the training with an understanding of how they will contribute to children's self-identities.

Both the IDCFS (1993) and the Jackson and Wasserman (1997) curricula make some attempt to introduce foster parents to the special needs of children of different cultures. Jackson and Wasserman, for example, cover the dangers of diminishing the foster child's cultural identity; the risk of rejection from both the child's culture and the foster family's culture; and policies that govern transcultural placements (i.e., MEPA, 1994, and IEAP, 1996). Their guide asks applicants to evaluate their lives and communities before committing to transcultural fostering (Jackson & Wasserman, 1997). The curriculum by Pasztor and CWICFRC (1990) merely asks applicants about their preferences for fostering children of a specific race or gender.

There are several established areas in which foster parents are assessed during the training period in order to determine their fostering readiness. These include applicants' child welfare knowledge, effective fostering skills, and values (IDCFS, 1993; Jackson & Wasserman, 1997; Pasztor & CWICFRC, 1990). Assessing their readiness to raise children of different cultures, however, has not been part of the training process. Yet without that assessment, foster parents might not receive the training and support services they need to meet children's cultural developmental needs. This is a particularly grave omission given the fact that foster parents must possess a variety of competencies in order to raise children who already have led stressful lives and are at risk for developmental problems (Buehler et al., 2006).

PROMOTING CULTURAL RECEPTIVITY IN FOSTERING

The importance of cultural training and support is confirmed by findings that show that those foster parents who planned to continue fostering had received training in fostering a child of a

different race or culture, whereas those who had not received this training had already quit fostering or planned to quit soon (Rhodes, Orme, & Buehler, 2001). Additionally, foster parents who received information from their foster parent agency regarding children of a different race or culture were found to have greater willingness to foster such children (Coakley & Orme, 2006).

In their 2001 study of pre-adoptive transracial parents, Vonk and Angaran (2001) found that cultural competence training improved parents' perceptions of the importance of children's cultural development. Vonk and Angaran's training program included racial awareness, multicultural planning, and survival skills, as well as a video about the experiences of transracially adopted adolescents (p. 13).

Thus, research has documented the importance of cultural receptivity in fostering and has shown that cultural receptivity can be enhanced through training. Therefore, we propose that culturally receptive fostering can be promoted and incorporated into practice in several ways. First, cultural training and support efforts can be tailored to individual foster parents according to valuable information obtained through assessment. Foster parents whose scores on cultural receptivity assessments were above average would need minimal support, training, or services to promote foster children's cultural development, those with average scores would benefit from moderate assistance, whereas those with lower scores would require intensive provisions.

Foster parents in the latter category might have had little or no contact with people from other cultures and might not know the basics of interacting professionally or having personal relationships with people of other cultures. Foster parents with below-average scores would need to enhance their attitudes, skills, and knowledge about cultural diversity in order to provide successful transcultural foster care. Below-average scores also could reflect a prospective foster parent's reluctance to support different cultures or their unwillingness to have children of different cultural backgrounds placed with them. In such instances, further investigation by the social worker could ascertain the appropriateness of transcultural fostering for the applicants at that time.

APPROPRIATE PARENTING STRATEGIES FOR CHILDREN'S CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Super and Harkness (1986) provided one of the earliest studies on the relationship between childhood development and culture. They asserted that children's development is culturally constructed, and that it is based on their physical and social environments, their parents' psychological influence, and cultural customs of raising children, through which children learn the social, behavioral, and cognitive "rules of culture" (Super & Harkness, 1986, p. 545). The way such cultural intricacies as customs, values, beliefs, personal relationships, and physical surroundings interact determines how culture affects children's development. It is important therefore to develop appropriate parenting strategies.

Regardless of culture, successful parenting requires demonstrating warmth, acceptance, and sensitivity to children's basic needs, providing social direction, and having appropriate expectations for children according to their levels of development (Teti & Candelaria, 2002, p. 172). In addition to those parenting practices, there are unique child-rearing matters that are specific to various minority cultural groups. Cultural receptivity research aims to address how open foster parents are toward culturally based attitudes, beliefs, values, practices, and behavior, and how their openness enhances their ability to fostering transculturally.

Effects of Racism and Prejudice

Foster parents must be open to understanding the impact of societal prejudice and racism on children of different cultures. There is a long history of racial prejudice in the United States, and people of minority cultural backgrounds have experienced social injustices and economic inequalities in many ways (McPhatter, 1997; Sellers & Shelton, 2003; Sellers et al., 2006; Zinn, 1995). Being culturally different from the majority in a society causes one to *experience* that society differently from the majority (Zuniga, 1991). Therefore, foster parents must be prepared to teach children how to cope with instances of racism or discrimination that they will inevitably encounter (Vonk, 2001; Zuniga, 1991) and be willing to advocate for equal rights and opportunities for children in their care (Crumbley, 1999).

Children's Cultural Identity

Foster parents must be willing to acknowledge children's needs for their own cultural identities; they should not impose their own culture or ignore cultural differences (McRoy, 1994). Additionally, they should be willing to support and enhance children's cultural identities despite negative stereotypes about people in that culture (Crumbley, 1999).

African American children, in particular, are at risk for poor cultural identity development (Alstein & Simon, 1977; Erikson, 1968). According to Erikson, whose theory of ego identity development holds that identity development is critical during the adolescent stage, racial identity development is especially important for adolescents of minority cultures. Erikson is well known for his research on the eight psychosocial stages of development, during which individuals will encounter certain conflicts they must try to overcome. According to his theory, whether or not people are able to resolve these conflicts will determine how successful their psychosocial adjustment throughout their lives.

Erikson's (1968) theoretical foundation on racial identity development is important to consider in social work practice because the majority of African American adoptees who are transracially adopted have little contact with other African Americans and therefore have a harder time developing a racial identity (Crumbley, 1999; McRoy et al., 1984). Research suggests that when children are removed from their cultures or when their cultures are not acknowledged and appreciated, emotional trauma and behavior problems are exacerbated (Crumbley, 1999; McRoy et al., 1997). Interaction that comes from the extended family, school, church, or community

members is essential to social, interpersonal, and behavioral development. Therefore, it is necessary that cultural identity to be reinforced in transcultural homes.

Cultural identity, which includes racial and ethnic identification, pertains to the way in which people identify themselves with a particular cultural group. It involves the ability to distinguish between members and nonmembers of that group (McRoy, 1994; Zuniga, 1991). People develop a sense of belonging through the process of identifying with the group specific to their cultures (McRoy, 1994). Identifying with one's ethnic group promotes positive attitudes toward one's ethnicity (Phinney, 1989). This type of group identification is essential in helping people develop the needed behaviors to succeed in their cultures. Furthermore, understanding the uniqueness of one's culture enhances self-perception and the perception of one's cultural status (McRoy, 1994).

In a study of 91 Asian, African American, Hispanic, and Caucasian adolescents from integrated high schools, Phinney (1989) identified three stages of ethnic identity development for ethnic minority youth: 1) *Diffusion/Foreclosure*: Little or no exploration of their identity and may or may not have a clear understanding of what ethnic identity means; 2) *Moratorium*: Evidence of exploration, but some confusion about the meaning of their own ethnicity; and 3) *Achieved*: Evidence of exploration, with a clear, secure understanding and acceptance of their own ethnicity (p. 38). In Phinney's study, adolescents were asked 20 revised ego identity questions with a focus on ethnicity. Then they were administered four reliable standardized measures on child ego identity and psychological adjustment. The measures, which were part of the Bronstein-Cruz Child/Adolescent Self-Concept and Adjustment Scale, assessed adolescents' self-evaluation, social and peer relations, family relations, and sense of mastery (Phinney, 1989, p. 41). Phinney found that approximately 50% of the minority respondents had not explored their ethnic identity; nearly 25% of the respondents were in the process of exploration; and nearly 25% of the respondents had explored their ethnicity and were committed to their ethnic identity. Moreover, those who had achieved their ethnic identity had a stronger ego identity and better psychological adjustment.

The Phinney (1989) study is important because it provides empirical evidence that ethnic identity development affects adolescents' psychological well-being and influences their feelings about themselves and their particular ethnic group. Further, Phinney found that there were no differences across Asian, African American, and Hispanic adolescents in terms of the importance of ethnic identity development. Psychological adjustment was influenced by their development of ethnic identity and a sense of belonging to their ethnic group rather than by the particular ethnic group to which they belonged.

Although some researchers assert that empirical research on transracially adopted children fails to demonstrate that same-race placements are positively related to children's self-esteem or adjustment (Brooks et al., 1999; Simon & Alstein, 2002), there is some empirical research on culture in general that supports the hypothesis that children's self-esteem and pride are promoted when they are raised to maintain their own cultures as they are socialized into other cultures

(Super & Harkness, 1986; Szapocznik & Kurtines, 1993). As part of her study, Phinney (1989) examined the influence of ethnic identity development on adolescents' mental health and found that adolescents who had not developed their own racial identity and those who had assumed the majority culture were not well adjusted.

A lack of cultural identification leaves adopted minority children less able to handle inevitable instances of racism and prejudice than those who learn these needed behaviors early from their parents (Curtis, 1996). Children who assume others' cultures instead of their own become disillusioned once they realize that privileges of the majority culture are not extended to them as minorities and as a result they might experience anxiety or fear about their cultural status (Baldwin, 1984; Curtis, 1996; Semaj, 1981).

Because children's perceptions or view of self is directly related to cultural identity (Dillon, 1994; Zuniga, 1991), not identifying with one's own culture presents other psychological concerns as well (Baldwin, 1984; Curtis, 1996; Myers et al., 1991). Children might be influenced by others' attitudes (Dillon, 1994) and are in danger of internalizing racist values and adopting others' beliefs (Sellers et al., 2006; Zuniga, 1991). Therefore, it is important to address issues of positive self-concept versus identity confusion when working with African American children (Dillon, 1994). If adoptive parents do not acknowledge children's cultures or they take a color-blind approach to parenting children of different racial backgrounds, then transracial placements most likely will not succeed (McRoy et al., 1984; Schatz & Horejsi, 1996). Instead they will hinder children's racial identity development and will contribute to continued racism (Folaron & Hess, 1993).

Researchers have reached a plethora of favorable conclusions about the racial identity development of transracial adoptees. Unfortunately, the methodology of some of those studies is problematic. Moreover, the validity of certain measures is questionable because some researchers have used respondents' correct identification of their race as the primary indicator of healthy racial identities. For example, Alstein and Simon (1977) conducted one of the earliest studies on foster children's racial identities. Their research was based on the widely known Clark and Clark (1958) Doll Test in which African American and Caucasian baby dolls were used as instruments to measure children's racial identities and preferences. In the original study, Clark and Clark used a sample of young African American children from the general population who attended segregated preschools or public schools. They found that African American children were able to identify their race correctly by selecting the doll that looked like them. Their findings also indicated that African American children demonstrated a preference for the Caucasian doll while exhibiting pejorative feelings towards the African American doll. Clark and Clark concluded that African American children viewed themselves negatively and had inferior feelings about their racial status. This assessment method poses serious methodological problems. The researchers did not report the reliability for this type of assessment with dolls, nor did they provide sufficient evidence that doll preference is a valid measure of racial identity.

Similarly, Alstein and Simon (1977) found that African American children who live in transracial placements were not ambivalent about their racial identities, although they did not specify their methods of gathering data. However, unlike Clark and Clark (1958), they found that African American children had positive racial perceptions and did not show a preference for the Caucasian doll in the study. At the time this study was completed, these findings made important contributions to a research area that had not yet been charted.

Twenty years later, Vroegh's (1997) findings from a 20-year longitudinal study also indicated that transracially adopted African American children had formed positive racial identities. But her conclusions are questionable because children merely had to state their race correctly for a positive racial identity to be assumed. Moreover, the majority of transracially adopted children did not have relationships with other African American peers or adults nor had they interacted within African American communities, which put them at risk of cultural isolation. In addition, Vroegh did not address whether these adoptees expressed cultural pride or possessed the necessary skills to deal with potential acts of racism.

In the fifth stage of her 20-year longitudinal study, Vroegh (1997) examined 34 African American adolescent adoptees from transracial families and 18 African American adolescent adoptees from same-race families. She found that 33% of the transracial adoptees stated their race as African American, 55% as mixed, and 12% as undecided. By contrast, 83% of same-race adoptees regarded themselves as African American and 17% as mixed or undecided. The results clearly indicated that children in same-race adoptive families correctly identified their race more often than did transracial adoptees. However, it was unclear from these results the percentage of adoptees that reported an *undecided* race, the best indicator within this study of difficulties in terms of racial identity. Given this study's small sample size, caution should be used when interpreting these results.

Simon and Alstein (1996; 2002) reported that children adopted transracially were well adjusted and had positive racial identities. Their earlier studies, however, painted a different picture. In their 1972 study they found that whereas 79% of adoptive parents of Caucasian children said their children considered themselves Caucasians, only 38% of parents who adopted African American children reported that their children identified themselves as African Americans (see Simon & Alstein, 2002, for the most recent summary of that study). In their 1979 follow-up study, Simon and Alstein found that 45% of parents believed that their adopted children correctly identified themselves as African Americans (Simon & Alstein, 2002). Because the researchers did not provide sufficient evidence that parents can accurately report on children's self-perceptions, however, we cannot know whether the children indeed identified racially as reported. Their findings across time also suggest that more recent groups of transracial adoptees have fewer difficulties with racial identity than did children adopted during the 1960s and 1970s.

Addressing the issue of the accuracy of parents' reports regarding adopted children's racial identification, McRoy and colleagues (1984) found that adopted children's racial self-perceptions

matched their adoptive parents' perception of the children's attitude about their racial backgrounds. The McRoy findings are important because it is one of the first of few empirical studies that used comparison groups to study important aspects of transcultural parenting. The outcomes of three groups of Caucasian adoptive parents who adopted African American children were compared based on the parents' perceptions of racial identity. The findings indicated that 60% of the parents did not acknowledge the children's cultures or they used a "color-blind" approach (McRoy et al., 1984, p. 38). In these families, the issue of race was not discussed and the children did not identify with people of their own cultures. In the McRoy et al. (1984) study, parents who promoted racial identity did so in part by providing children with African American role models, integrated neighborhoods, and integrated schools. These parents had relationships with African Americans and discussed racial issues with the children. McRoy et al. found that the children of these families identified socially with African American peers.

In a third group of families, McRoy et al. (1984) also found that adoptive families with an interracial style of living positively affect children's cultural identities. Transracially adopted children who were raised to "emphasize their black heritage" (p. 38) identified with both African American and Caucasian friends. These children attended integrated schools and regularly discussed race with their adoptive parents. Other researchers' empirical findings concurred that children who were raised in families that maintain and promote cultural identities better identify with their community and cultures (Deberry, Scarr, & Weinberg, 1996).

Cultural Resources

In addition to preparing their children to cope with racism and actively helping them to develop strong cultural identities, foster parents can seek out resources that support their children's cultural development. Such resources include people who have successfully parented children of different cultures; same-culture adult role models; same-culture peer relationships; cultural community programs; cultural stores; books; and toys that represent the children's cultures. By tapping into these and other resources, foster parents can find out about caring for children's skin, hair, and overall health. They can also appreciate and share more fully in other aspects of children's cultures, such as holidays, special events, foods, clothing, and verbal expressions (Crumbley, 1999).

The fact that children of minority cultures are overwhelmingly represented in the foster care system warrants the assessment of prospective foster parents' cultural receptivity before children are placed in their homes. Additionally, child welfare agencies should consider augmenting foster parent training with essential strategies for successful transcultural fostering that can be monitored.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR CULTURAL RECEPTIVITY IN RELATION TO CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Despite the fact that cultural receptivity is vital for successful trans-cultural foster care, child welfare literature includes no conceptual or empirical references to the subject, but rather works around it, as we have demonstrated. We clearly need a theoretical framework for cultural receptivity to underpin transcultural-fostering research. Because that framework needs to address the kinds of changes people need to make in their behavior in order to work effectively, interact, or have personal relationships with others of different cultures, we have selected cultural competence theory to consider for cultural receptivity research and practice. Cultural competence concerns “congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that have come together in a system, agency, or among families and enables those behaviors, attitudes, and policies to work effectively in cross-cultural situations” (Hernandez & Isaacs, 1998, p. 7).

Adopting the cultural competence perspective for cultural receptivity research has both advantages and disadvantages. This perspective is limited, for example, insofar as it has focused heavily on worker competencies in human services and corporate agencies (e.g., Chau, 1992; Mitchell, 1999; Weaver, 1998) and has not adequately addressed parenting children of different cultural backgrounds. However, what strengthens this perspective is the inclusion of relatively new, albeit scarce empirical research on cultural competence in transracial foster care and adoption. Vonk's (2001) research on this subject is especially important to the theoretical framework of cultural competence, because it provides the first definition of cultural competence in adopting racially different children. Vonk defines cultural competence as parents' abilities to “... transform a particular set of attitudes, knowledge, and skills into the ability to meet children's unique racial and cultural needs” (Vonk, 2001, p. 248). To our knowledge, Vonk and Angaran (2001) also present the first empirical evidence that suggests that a specific cultural competence-training module enhances transracial adoptive parents' cultural competence.

Vonk and Angaran (2001) studied the effects of a pilot cultural competence-training project on 22 transracial adoptive parents' cultural competence levels. The Adoption Questionnaire,¹ a 37-item measure, was used to assess parents' multicultural planning (subscale 1: ways for creating ways for children to learn about and participate in their culture), racial awareness (subscale 2), and survival skills (subscale 3). The subscales' alphas ranged from .87 to .89. Vonk and Angaran found that cultural competence training administered to pre-transracial adoptive parents positively influenced their perception of the importance for children's cultural development. This was evidenced by the statistically significant paired-sample t-test results for the pre-test to post-test multicultural planning subscale scores, $t(11) = 2.19, p = .03$.

The concept of cultural competence in transracial adoption is useful in guiding research on appropriate transcultural foster parenting. In the context of transcultural fostering, cultural competence can be conceptualized as valuing diverse cultures, changing one's views about diverse cultures, learning about different cultures, and understanding the social interactions between foster parents and children of different cultures. Thus, cultural competence appears to be the most relevant construct with which to associate cultural receptivity research in order to

examine foster parents' openness toward participating in culturally stimulating activities that are conducive to appropriate transcultural parenting.

In terms of distinctions, cultural competence, as it relates to trans-racial adoption, focuses on demonstrated abilities in transcultural parenting activities, whereas cultural receptivity focuses on foster parents' attitudes about undertaking those activities in the first place. As such, cultural receptivity is a construct developed to examine areas that need to be addressed with foster parents *before* placing culturally different children in their homes.

Because prospective foster parents do not go into the fostering process knowing exactly which children will be placed with them, they cannot be expected to know a great deal about every potential cultural background they may encounter. Therefore, knowledge and skill assessments used to measure cultural competence would not be appropriate to measure cultural receptivity. The Cultural Receptivity in Fostering Scale (Coakley & Orme, 2006) developed specifically to measure one's openness towards participating in activities that stimulate children's cultural development, is recommended instead.

Based on this review of the literature, we propose that cultural receptivity can be best situated logically as a precursor to cultural competence in transcultural parenting. Foster parents must first be receptive to parenting children of different cultures before they develop the necessary competencies, or behaviors and skills, to be effective parents over time.

SUMMARY

This article introduces the concept of cultural receptivity into the literature on fostering to address how one's openness toward participating in culturally stimulating activities leads to appropriate trans-cultural fostering. Cultural receptivity research has implications for social work practice, policy, and future research. We believe it is important to provide foster parents who might foster children of different cultures with training in transcultural fostering strategies. Indeed, we propose that the approval of those seeking to foster transculturally be contingent upon their completion of such training, as well as their willingness to commit to employing transcultural-fostering strategies. Finally, we suggest that future research on cultural receptivity include studies with standardized measures that assess the level of cultural receptivity and evaluate its connection to other fostering quality outcomes. Such measures would be useful in obtaining quantitative data and would add to the currently scarce empirical research on successful transcultural fostering.

Notes

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1. The Adoption Questionnaire was later validated as the Transracial Adoption Parenting Scale ($\alpha = 0.91$), a multidimensional 36-item Likert-type scale that measures cultural competence among transracial adoptive parents (Massatti, Vonk, & Gregoire, 2004).

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