



Promoting and Protecting the Developing Self-identity of the Young, Transracially Adopted Child in South Africa

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Abstract

Purpose Transracial adoption (TRA), where parents from one race adopt a child from another race, usually occurs with Black children being adopted by White parents in South Africa.

Method Using multiple case studies (seven children) and a qualitative research design, the self-identity (personal and social) of six- to ten-year-old TRA children was explored. Data were collected from the adoptive parents and teachers by means of semi-structured interviews and the Child Behaviour Checklist. Additionally, parents completed a questionnaire and a Likert-style response scale. Participating children were assessed by an independent psychologist using three projective techniques. The data generated were thematically analysed.

Results There were six emergent themes, all conducive to healthy self-identity development by securing primary identity motivators of belonging and acceptance. The children exhibited advanced communicative skills and a novel approach to group membership, increasing their social accessibility and inclusion. A distinctive theme was a desire for a dedicated personal space and possessions symbolizing permanence in the family. The universal adoptive elements of loss and rejection was confirmed, possibly more prevalent due to an observable adoptive status and physical dissimilarity from the adoptive family. Intentional parenting promoting healthy self-identity was apparent. Lastly, the importance of placing the children in an accommodating and sensitive school environment was noted.

Discussion While not a comparative study, and with only seven children, it appears that these TRA children, with the acquisition of positive social skills and a sensitive and purposeful home and school environment, possessed the building blocks necessary to nurture a healthy self-identity.

Keywords Belonging · Family · School · South Africa · Transracial Adoption · Self-identity

South Africa faces a daunting social problem. With almost 5.2 million abandoned and orphaned children in need of care (Hall, 2018), private and government institutions have been compelled to employ less conventional strategies to address the problem of vulnerable children. Transracial adoption (TRA), where adoptive parents adopt a child from a different race to their own, both domestic and across international borders, as opposed to in-race adoption (Luyt & Schwartz, 2021; Goss, 2022), is one such socially

contentious intervention used to alleviate the burden of children in need. In South Africa, TRA mostly takes on the form of minority race White adoptive parent adopting majority race Black adoptive children.

Whilst most of the vulnerable infants and children in South Africa are Black (Hall, 2018; Luyt & Schwartz, 2021, 2023), there appears to be a scarcity of prospective Black adoptive parents. This may be due to a complex interplay of socio-economic, socio-cultural, historical and bureaucratic factors, as well as persisting ancestral beliefs (Gerrand & Nkomo, 2020; Gerrand, 2018; Rochat et al., 2016). The understanding of these factors is vital in addressing limited participation of South African Black parents to adopt but deeper research regarding these factors lies beyond the focus of this current work.

In contrast to the underrepresentation of prospective Black Adopters, according to the Register for Adoptable

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Children and Adoptive Parents (RACAP) (National Department of Social Development, n.d), the number of prospective White adoptive parents far exceeds the number of adoptable White children, making TRA of Black children by White parents a possible consideration (Luyt & Schwartz, 2021). TRA families in South Africa have become more publicly visible since TRA legislative approval in 1991 (Breshears, 2022).

However, with its long, emotive history of conflict, violence and enforced racial segregation, TRA remains a controversial practice and has yet to be uniformly welcomed by all South Africans (Tanga & Nyasa, 2017; Breshears, 2022). White South Africans appear to be more accepting of TRA as a manner to address the needs of a vulnerable and adoptable child, while more traditional and culturally attached Black South Africans have more reservations (Tanga & Nyasa, 2017). They consider it to be a practice resulting in cultural genocide and the loss of ancestral support, as ties with the forefathers are severed through adoption (Tanga & Nyasha, 2017; Mokomane & Rochat, 2012). The turbulent and well-documented history of racial segregation and tension in South Africa (Seedat, 2015; Modiri, 2011) has also left residual prejudices and unresolved racial issues, especially with the older population, further complicating the perceptions of South Africans of all races regarding TRA (Breshears, 2022).

It is within this complicated and racially divided milieu that the personal and social identity of the young school-going TRA Black child in South Africa must develop. Despite increasing in occurrence, there appears to be a dearth of literature regarding TRA in South Africa, mostly focussed on the relevant legal issues (Van Der Walt, 2014, 2018) and adoptive parental concerns and perceptions (Romanini, 2017; Jackson, 2018; Finlay, 2006). TRA is relatively new in SA due to the history of racial segregation but has been practised and well researched in developed countries (Luyt & Swartz, 2023). South African transracially adopted adolescents and adults have received some, albeit limited, and now somewhat dated, research attention (Thomson, 2005), but no literature could be found discussing the self-identity, social and personal, of the South African TRA child between six to ten-year-olds, an age group vital to autonomy, self-efficacy and positive self-identity (Voigt et al., 2018).

According to the Psychosocial identity development theory of Erikson (1950, 1968), latent childhood precedes adolescence, often considered to be the pivotal age for identity development. During the latent phase the child faces the challenge of industriousness versus inferiority, acquiring competence as a skill (Knight, 2017; Erikson, 1950, 1968). According to the hierarchical structure of the Psychosocial identity development theory, preceding and successfully

negotiated challenges have already provided a sense of optimism and hope, a healthy will and a sense of purpose (Erikson, 1950, 1968). South African author, Thomson (2005) and international authors Chang et al. (2017), Hrapczynski and Leslie (2019), Roorda and Chestang (2015), and Snyder (2017), amongst others, recognise identity issues and disrupted interpersonal relationships within TRA adolescents and young adults. Whilst Erikson describes the psychosocial development in latent childhood, Quintana and Maghoub (2016) classify racial awareness in six- to 10-year-olds as being a literal perspective of understanding race and ethnicity in non-observable terms such as food and language. There is also a limited conceptualisation of ancestry and heritage.

Did these identity challenges start in adolescence and young adulthood, or were there factors in the preceding phase that hindered healthy self-identity development? Secondly, could pre-adolescent, early school-going children possess characteristics and/or skills that could promote healthy development and limit identity conflict during adolescence, as suggested by Soares et al. (2017)? This begged explorative research on the presentation of the self-identity of the young school-going TRA Black child in the developmental phase preceding adolescence.

The current research regarding this topic was undertaken with the following four premises: Firstly, self-identity is deemed to be dynamic in nature and contains both personal and social components, shaped by identity motivators, contexts, experiences and social interactions with family, school, learners and teachers, the greater community and peer comparison. The self-identity influences choice, behaviour and action, and is reflected in the committed characteristics, coping strategies, interpersonal relationships and group membership that the child finds emotionally and socially satisfying. With developing awareness, evolving interpersonal relationships and membership to ingroups or favourable groups, the self-identity could be sustained, developed or transformed to achieve future success (Oyserman & Lewis, 2017; Brown, 2017; Corenblum, 2014; Erikson, 1950, 1968; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Breakwell, 1986; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2012).

Secondly, healthy self-identity development in childhood is viewed as a hierarchical process, so that the well-being of each new developmental phase is founded on the acquired skills of the preceding phase (Knight, 2017; Erikson, 1950, 1968). Thus, previously unachieved developmental tasks would adversely affect tasks of subsequent developmental phases.

Thirdly, all six- to ten-year-old children face new and greater personal and social identity challenges as they enter school and the larger community without parental control and supervision (Soares et al., 2017; Rosnati & Ferreira,

2014). They are reliant on their own self-identity, as manifested in their interpersonal skills, their ability to negotiate new social situations, make choices and modulate behaviour as young individuals.

The fourth assertion is that the public observability of being transracially adopted demands hitherto unchallenged interpersonal skills as the children are forced to explain their place and position in their visibly different family to others without parental intercession (Soares et al., 2017). Their burgeoning self-identity may come under attack in the presence of intentional and unintentional micro-aggressive questioning and comments with future social and emotional ramifications (Soares et al., 2019; Chang et al., 2017; Snyder, 2017). For example, a question frequently directed at the participating TRA families such as “Where is this child’s real mother” were invasive and hurtful, as well as debilitating to the child’s sense of belonging.

The focus of the research remained on the self-identity and the factors identified as contributing to healthy development, specific to the TRA child.

Method

Participants

The self-identities of seven young school-going transracially adopted Black children, three girls and four boys, were explored for recurring themes and commonalities using multiple case studies within a qualitative approach as dictated by the small amount of participants (Yin, 2014). All children had to have lived with their adopted family in their home for a period not less than five years in the absence of any biological family contact. The presence of White or Black siblings in the adopted family, adopted or biological, was not an exclusion criteria. In one family, a biological child was born to the TRA parents after they had adopted their Black daughter. Another family consisted of three adopted children, one White daughter and two Black sons. None of the adopted children were biological siblings. While it is acknowledged that South Africa has many alternative adoptive family configurations such as single parents, same sex parents and mixed-race parents, the families in these seven case studies were limited to White heterosexual parents living together as husband and wife to reduce possible variation.

Potential study participants were identified by three adoptive specialists who received a brief overview of the research protocol and ethical stipulations. He or she then approached possible families with an information leaflet regarding the study. The families were asked to make contact directly with the research team if they chose to participate.

There was no form of compensation and all the families that were approached, those that declined participation as well as those that agreed were unfamiliar to the research team.

Instruments and Procedures

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the parents and teachers of each child on separate occasions, the recordings of which were transcribed for thematic analysis. Twelve open ended questions, set to the parents, included a description of their family using their own words, their observations of their child(ren) in a social and school setting and possible intra- and interfamily bonding issues both past and present. The manner in which cultural, physical and racial differences are addressed within their family, the role of the significant others in the lives of their child(ren) and any choices, if any, they may have taken as a result of their status as a TRA family, such as school placement or residential area also formed part of the interview. The parents were also asked to, individually, complete a study specific biographical questionnaire for age and cultural background, a seven-point Likert-style response scale to 43 statements and to describe their adoption journey, starting with their decision to adopt up until study participation with their child(ren). The statements on the response scale included indications of their attached importance to extended family interactions, cultural exposure, language preference and community involvement to better understand the lived environment of the family. Responses to potentially emotive content such as the extent to which the parent and the children share personality traits, or how comfortable the parent is with the physical attributes and differences defined by race, such as hair texture were also requested.

The interviews with the teachers were guided by 11 open ended questions that asked for a description of the child within a school environment, the racial composition of the school and classroom, observations on the interactions of the child with his or her peers during school and play times and the manner in which possible racially contentious issues within school subjects, such as history and life orientation were addressed in the presence of the TRA child. The teachers were also asked how they managed awkward, if any, questions, such as how come the mom and child looked different on a family drawing, and how the TRA child responded to these questions.

Existing research relies heavily on the adult voices involved in TRA (Bershears, 2022). To provide a voice for the TRA children, an independent psychologist conducted a psychometric assessment of each child using well known and projective techniques (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2013), namely, the Draw-a-person test (DAP), the Kinetic family drawing (KFD) and a Scene building loosely based

on the Von Staabs Sceno Test. These projective techniques are widely used with multi racial South Africa children for their interpretative value and provide intuitive insight into the workings of the child's unconscious mind in the hands of skilled therapists (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2013). Clinicians in practice largely eschew the quantitative scoring sheets of these projective techniques, preferring a more qualitative interpretation. For this research, the projections were also only qualitatively analysed by the independent psychologist and provided rich and detailed descriptions of the child's perceptions and behaviours in a written clinical report. A Child Behaviour Checklist/ASEBA (Achenbach et al., 2008) was completed for each child, supplying more information in a Yes/No/Unsure format, such as an ability to express emotions verbally, or to take a leadership role in a group setting or the presence of anxiety in a social setting. Information gathered from the ASEBA was also not quantitatively scored but used to support or challenge the qualitative findings.

Ethical Considerations

In search of truth, scientist must consistently regard the rights of others (Mouton, 2017). The welfare of the young TRA child, parents and teachers remained a priority in this potentially emotively charged study. Strategies to ensure their welfare included voluntary, informed research participation, the right to withdraw at any time during the research period and our dedicated focus to maintain participant confidentiality. Since the children were very young and considered to be vulnerable, they had to confirm their own uncoerced and written assent in participating in the research and sharing their drawings and scene building. Their psychometric assessment was administered by a psychologist adept in working with children from all races to minimise any negative experience from testing. A referral system in the event of a significant clinical finding, such as abuse, was provided but proved unneeded.

General ethical considerations were upheld and ethical approval for the research was obtained from the University of Pretoria after careful scrutiny of the research protocol. Sensitive and careful planning, accurate, purposeful data collection and analysis and finally, unambiguous reporting, all subscribed to the stringent requirements of data verification and quality assurance. All recorded data was transcribed, and hard copies of the written documents form part of the stored data as prescribed by the University of Pretoria.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013) and Kiger and Varpio (2020) was used to identify

emergent, recurring themes in an attempt to describe the developing self-identity of the young TRA child, since this form of analysis possesses some theoretical flexibility and allows for a multitude of philosophical paradigms. The research of a uniquely human phenomenon was guided by a social constructivist and interpretive paradigm (Sefotho, 2018) as the self-identity of the young TRA child comes into play in the day-to-day interactions, perceptions, interpretations and understanding of and with family and community. The complete body of data, thus the written psychometric evaluations of the children, together with clinical observations of the psychologist, field notes made during the interviews, the transcribed interviews with all the involved adults and the independently completed questionnaires regarding each child was used in the thematic analysis. All these sources of data contributed to triangulation. Data immersion was followed by manual initial coding for each child and was done using six preliminary and loosely structured headings as indicated by the working definition of self-identity; the personal and social components of identity; aspects of group memberships; coping strategies; and significant findings with the family and the larger community. The findings and the significance for coding, together with the relevant sources, was tabulated and followed a rigorous validation process that included triangulation and stringent auditability. The presence of similar coding in all or most of the children allowed for the identification of emerging themes. These various subthemes were subsequently grouped together under superordinate themes.

Results and Discussion

Following the analysis of data, Table 1 outlines the six emergent themes, together with their subthemes which are then discussed below.

Identity motivators of continuity, belonging, purpose, self-efficacy, self-esteem and distinctiveness play a significant role in self-identity development and when not adequately addressed, challenge and threaten the self-identity (Breakwell, 1986; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2012). All children are at risk to attacks on their identity as they pursue psychosocial developmental challenges (Erikson, 1950, 1968; Knight, 2017) and expanding social exposure (Mols & Weber, 2013; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). However, these identity motivators, and subsequently, the self-identity of the TRA child, are particularly vulnerable in the presence of public scrutiny and opinion and the prevalent visible differences from his or her significant others (Soares et al., 2017, 2019; Grotevant et al., 2017).

To limit this negative impact, the seven participating TRA children have developed novel and innovative coping

Table 1 Themes and subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
Superior communication skills	Verbal prowess Language as a bridge or barrier to social interaction
Adapted approach to group membership	Flexible inclusion and exclusion criteria Group membership, homogeneity and a sense of belonging
Pursuing acceptance and an innate fear of rejection and loss	
Importance of place and possessions	Growing roots in my own place Feeling at home in my own space Cognitive approach to parenting
Intentional parenting	Parental ideology Heightened social and racial awareness
Tolerance and racial sensitivity within the teaching environment	

strategies to establish rapport, garner acceptance and ensure belonging, thereby promoting and protecting healthy self-development. Their parents also displayed distinctive and intentional parental approaches within the TRA context, such as racial identity discussions and significant cultural exposure, as advocated by Roorda & Chestang, (2015) and Rosnati and Ferrari (2014), while the seven interviewed teachers agreed on the importance of racial sensitivity and a demographically mixed school.

Superior Communicative Skills

All the participating TRA children, described as spontaneous, friendly and outgoing, exhibited verbal and expressive skills exceeding the expected age-related communication abilities. These superior skills were evidenced by above-average formal academic assessments, as well as reported by the participating adults, teachers and the independent psychologist, when compared to their same-aged peers. These skills may be attributable, firstly, to their forced disclosure of adoption status due to public visibility and their determined explanation of adoptive family ties in social settings (Soares et al., 2017, 2019). These topics demand an understanding of abstract concepts such as adoption, abandonment and loss, as well as nuanced emotional expression like ambivalence at being simultaneously happy and sad.

Secondly, these children engaged in regular collaborative conversations with adults and children alike, since they strive to garner acceptance from a wide circle of people within their community. According to Sun and colleagues (2021), children that enter into collaborative conversations with adults gain verbal skills that allow them to make focused inquiries, question specific aspects and enter into meaningful discussions. These advanced skills make for

more creative, reciprocal and intentional interaction (Sun et al., 2021) which, in the world of the TRA child, promotes good rapport and meaningful interpersonal relationships with a high premium on belonging and “fitting in”.

Finally, these TRA children were often part of frank family discussions concerning adoption, race, other related social and emotive matters and possible experienced TRA-related micro-aggressions. The parents of the participating children, without exception, eschewed the idea of colour-blindness (Bilodeau, 2015) and feel that open discussions with their children would enhance their understanding and provide them with the necessary social skills to address TRA-related issues as they arise, both personally and within the larger community (Morgan & Langrehr, 2019; Bilodeau, 2015).

The children spoke English and Afrikaans fluently and were in dual medium schools. Three of the seven children were also articulate in another European language. Sun et al. (2021) and Fox et al. (2019) found that a thorough grasp of a second and third language promotes social and behavioural skills and increases the connectedness with family and friends, since linguistic nuances are not lost in translation. They also observed a positive relationship with peers and increased group membership through a mutual language, all of which are positive identity motivators. The participating parents confirmed this finding, noting the affirming and encouraging social responses from White South Africans when the children spoke English and Afrikaans fluently. However, the converse was also evident. None of the participating children could speak a traditional African language, the parents citing various reasons for the omission, such as not knowing which language to acquire and fear of language confusion. This was despite their admission that they noticed the social barriers manifested when Black South Africans realised that the Black TRA children could not speak a traditional African language. The inability to speak a traditional African language may be a significant factor contributing to the traditional Black disenchantment of TRA, since language is a vital cultural and ethnic tool and object of pride, a finding confirmed by Breshears (2022).

An Adapted Approach to Group Membership

While personal and social identity theorists (Erikson, 1950, 1968; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Mangum & Block, 2018; Rutland et al., 2017) posit that group membership in the latent phase is largely determined by age, gender and race, the seven participating TRA children exhibited no characteristic group selections. They befriended different races and showed limited gender preference. Two participating nine-year-old girls were reported by their respective teachers to be more same gender discerning as they became body

conscious in prepuberty, but the other five children were equally comfortable with both genders. Their predilection for collaborative conversation also allowed for group inclusion of children of varied ages. The TRA children improved their own chances of positive group membership by being more accommodating of other children.

The absence of stringent group inclusion criteria may also be attributable to the TRA children's sustained familial, scholastic and social movement between differing races. Six of the children are actively involved in social outreaches with people from all socio-economic spheres of the community by lieu of their church programs, possibly making their affinity for all children more inclusive. Four of the children are also in demographically mixed schools while the other three are in a predominantly White school, since it is their church affiliated private school.

Rutland et al. (2017) describes homogeneity as the tendency to view members of an (out)group as being remarkably similar to each other and progressively more dissimilar to the (in)group members. The difference is considered to be the homogeneity gap. However, in the case of TRA children who may possess characteristics, such as race and language, that resonate and differ simultaneously within groups, homogeneity is challenged. The homogeneity gap is minimised, resulting in easier intergroup movement and increased group membership and social belonging, a primary identity motivator in TRA.

Pursuing Acceptance and an Innate Fear of Rejection and Loss

The active pursuit of acceptance and the omnipresent fear of rejection and experience of loss is not limited to TRA and is common to most children who have been adopted, whether through kinship adoption, same race adoption or TRA (Grotevant et al., 2017; Brodzinsky, 2011). However, it is highly probable that, due to the persistent visibility of being racially different to his or her family, the subsequent loss of adoptive privacy and the exposure to public scrutiny and opinion, these needs and fears are intensified and more complex in a TRA child, requiring appropriate management (Soares et al., 2017, 2019; Snyder, 2017; Roorda & Chestang, 2015). To allay the fear of not being good enough, the potential of repeated rejection, and to protect the wellbeing of the self-identity, the TRA child must secure acceptance and achieve belonging with his or her significant others, as well as within the larger community; notably by establishing positive and reciprocal interpersonal relationships and garnering extended group memberships. While showing above average academic and social abilities in language and other forms of communication, five of the seven children experienced difficulty with mathematics. All the teachers

made note of the children's emotional distress at not performing well enough academically in mathematics and the emphasis they placed on good results. While this may be related to Erikson's developmental challenge of competency as opposed to inferiority, it may also be linked to the fact that seven of the parents have extensive tertiary educational qualifications. These parents could therefore be serving as models that the TRA children desire to emulate. Another inference that can be drawn from this is how a supportive home environment, with interest in the child's education, can positively influence their school performance. This can in turn buy the child social currency and acceptance.

Importance of Place and Possession

The importance of occupying a dedicated living space and having prized possessions manifested as a persistent theme. All seven children projected their need for a private space that confirmed their place in the family and the family home and six of the children spent considerable effort in accumulating and protecting personal effects and mementos from their biological families. This theme, however, appears to be a theme associated with adoption per se, and not limited to TRA, since a designated family place and personal effects augment the adoptive narrative and adoptive identity and provide tangible evidence of belonging somewhere (Grotevant et al., 2017; Brodzinsky, 2011).

Intentional Parenting

Parents are mostly vigilant in the physical, emotional and social needs of their children. However, it would appear that the participating TRA parents anticipated emotional and social shortfalls that could adversely impact on the self-identity of their TRA children and were purposeful and persistent in addressing these anticipated deficits prior and immediate to their occurrence. They also aided and abetted their children in honing the novel social skills that the children exhibited to ensure a conducive milieu for healthy self-identity development. All eight parents prepared their extended families and cautioned them that any indications of intolerance or discrimination toward their adopted children would result in the severance of family ties. They approached the adoptive process cognitively and were diligent in gathering information regarding TRA, although they disparaged the scarcity of information specific to TRA in South Africa. They admitted to making social decisions with TRA in mind, such as choosing recreational locations, residential suburbs and schools that would be favourable to their visibly adopted child and avoiding locations that could evoke racism. They also uniformly disclosed that TRA has forced them to confront their own hitherto unknown racial

stereotyping and created a heightened awareness of the importance and omnipresence of race in South Africa. They were active in exposing their children to dynamic Black role models and engaged in collaborative and sometimes difficult conversations with their children regarding race and adoption in an attempt to prepare and protect their children against social confrontation and aggression. All these strategies appeared to support the children in their development of a healthy self-identity.

Tolerance and Racial Sensitivity within the Teaching Environment

South African teachers strive to be racially aware within the school environment. Potentially emotive subjects such as History and Life Orientation demand more sensitivity since an understanding and tolerance of the subject matter may be influenced by the scholar and teacher's race (Mayeza & Vincent, 2019; Morgan & Langrehr, 2019; Syed & McLean, 2018). In the world of a young TRA child, bridging these different perspectives may prove difficult and confusing and require focussed teaching interventions. A seemingly innocuous discussion of a family tree may also evoke feelings of separation, loss and anxiety. While the seven participating teachers were in agreement that for the most part, the seven participating children were typical pupils with well-developed emotional and social acuity, they admitted that there were scholastic incidents that could elicit unexpected emotional responses in the absence of mindful teaching. Cited examples included a reference to fellow scholars being interrogative regarding a family drawing in the First Grade, confusion at culture day, and a distressing event happening when the TRA child, being the only Black girl in the class, was unable to comply with the requisite "two ponytails" for a school concert. These incidents have served as learning opportunities for the teachers and their commitment to more sensitive teaching in class.

Limitations and Future Directions

The findings of this study may not be generalizable to the general population of South Africa owing partly to sample size. Secondly, though acknowledged, the many alternative adoptive family configurations such as single parents, same sex parents and mixed-race parents might have different TRA experiences and these were not explored. Thirdly, experiences of older pupils in high school who were TRA would have added value to the study by possibly sharing how they have learned to navigate their self-identities. Future studies should explore the alternative adoptive family configuration, and experiences of older TRAs. Further, researchers should include the experiences of younger adopted children

by having them as participants, so that they contribute to mitigation and intervention efforts aimed at them.

Conclusion

The universal trend of heightened sensitivity and racial awareness has been mostly favourable to South African TRA children and their families, and knowledge of this would serve prospective TRA parents well in their preparation to adopt. Less reserved interpersonal interaction, frequent and frank family and education-driven discussions have largely equipped all children with the ability to comprehend, accommodate and embrace personal and social differences with positive effects on the developing self-identity. Albeit that seven TRA children constitute a small study sample, the results have shown that this more personal and socially conducive environment has promoted the acquisition of focussed and effective coping skills to deal with the incremental TRA-related challenges. Together with intentional, consistent parenting, informed parental decision making and a sensitive, tolerant school environment, these TRA children have showed no untoward effect on their burgeoning self-identity.

A significant omission noted was the inability of the TRA children and their family to speak a traditional African language. Although all participating families indicated their understanding that this is an important and bridge-building social ability, as well as a major component of their child(ren)'s future ethnic pride, they have not made a concerted effort to learn a traditional African language. It would appear that the origin of their discomfort should be addressed and that the acquisition of a traditional African language should be an integral part of the TRA process.

Undeniably, same-race adoption is preferable and would eliminate compounding adoptive factors such as public scrutiny and opinion and loss of adoption privacy. However, the current context of a shortage of prospective Black adoptive parents, South African TRA, with mindful and contextual strategies and interventions, offers a workable solution for those adults seeking to adopt a child, and those children needing a caring adoptive family.

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Declarations

Ethical Approval All processes followed were in accordance with ethical guidelines approved by the University of Pretoria.

Consent to Participate Parental consent and child assent were obtained from all participants by voluntarily signing consent forms and assent forms.

Conflict of Interest The authors herein have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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