White Parents who are Parenting Children of Color: Navigating Race and Identity

Dr. Margaret O'Donoghue, Ph.D., LCSW

TRIGGER WARNING

Tough subjects on race ahead

Why Focus on This Topic?

- US citizens who identify as multiracial increased by 127% over the past decade (US Census 2021 figures. Multiracial identity)

- The largest majority of adoptive parents are White. White parents must navigate their own racial identity, which often has previously been unexamined, while at the same time equipping their child/teen to integrate how they see themselves as a racial being.

- How do White parents gain competence in exploring & integrating difficult topics, including historical and current structural inequities, trauma, racism, White privilege, and discrimination?

- This is a focus on adoptive families but much of the research on bio-normative multiracial families is instructive to the topic.

ANSWERS

- Background of presenter
- Definitions
- Historical background on interracial relationships and
  Adoption of COC by White Families
- Adoption Stigma
- Anti-Asian Racism
- Identity Development
- Preparing a Child for Life as a POC
- Transgressing Black/Brown and White Communities
- Q & A

MY STORY

DEFINITIONS:

Race: Phenotypic differences that arise from genetic or biological dispositions, such as skin color and hair texture OR purely a social construct

Ethnicity: Perceived group membership based on nationality, ancestry, or both

Culture: A much broader construct including individual differences within families, their values, beliefs, and practices and family roles; communication patterns; affective styles; and values regarding personal control, individualism, collectivism, spirituality, and religiosity.

Racial, ethnic, and cultural socialization are means by which children of color learn about their race, ethnicity, and cultural heritage and about living with racial bias. Why not White children?

- **Microaggressions:** Microaggressions are typically defined as subtle snubs, slights, and insults directed toward minorities, as well as to women and other historically stigmatized groups, that implicitly communicate or at least engender hostility (Sue et al.,2007)
- **Colorism:** African American and Latino respondents with the lightest skin are several times more likely to be seen by whites as intelligent compared with those with the darkest skin. (Hannon,L. 2015)
- **Whiteness Studies:** The construction of Whiteness as a relational category - defined by its distinction from racial and ethnic Others- makes racial boundaries an essential component of White Identity
- **White Privilege:** Strict racial boundaries preserve the exclusivity that defines Whiteness - privileges of space, access, and status are only privileges if they are not afforded to everyone.

What About Racism?

Racism is a *system* that encompasses economic, political, social, and cultural structures, actions, and beliefs that *institutionalize* and *perpetuate* an unequal distribution of privileges, resources and power between White people and people of Color.

This system is historic, normalized, taken for granted, deeply embedded, and works to the benefit of Whites and to the disadvantage of People of Color (Hilliard, 1992).

White Privilege

"I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Councilor or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action"; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a "more convenient season."

WE WANT WHITE TENANTS IN OUR WHITE COMUNITY

White Fragility: What is it and do I have it?

"I believe that white progressives cause the most daily damage to people of color. I define a white progressive as any white person who thinks he or she is not racist, or is less racist, or in the "choir," or already "gets it." White progressives can be the most difficult for people of color because, to the degree that we think we have arrived, we will put our energy into making sure that others see us as having arrived. None of our energy will go into what we need to be doing for the rest of our lives: engaging in ongoing self-awareness, continuing education, relationship building, and actual anti racist practice. White progressives do indeed uphold and perpetrate racism, but our defensiveness and certitude make it virtually impossible to explain to us how we do so." — *DiAngelo, R., (2018).White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*
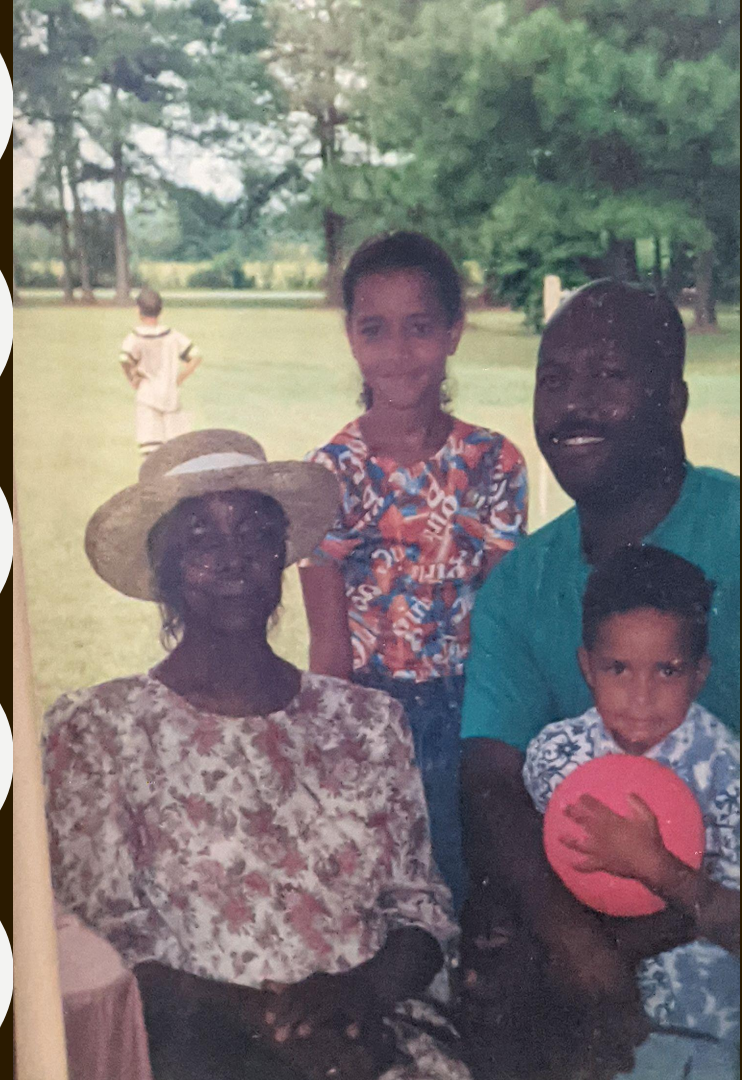
INTERRACIAL RELATIONSHIPS HISTORICALLY

In 1662 Virginia proclaimed that all children born in this country derived their status from the condition of the mother. Biracial children of enslaved Black women could not be free.

By the end of the 1600's, Maryland and Virginia legislators had enacted severe penalties for White women in relationships with non-White men.

In 1700's 44 year old Thomas Jefferson pursued 14 year old Sally Hemings and fathered children with her. Jefferson also had lobbied, unsuccessfully, for Virginia's White women to be banished instead of merely fined for bearing the child of a black or biracial man. "Amalgamation with the other color, produces degradation to which no lover of his country, no lover of excellence, in the human character, can innocently consent".

Kendi, I (2012). Stamped from the Beginning.

- The American Journal of Medical Science in 1843 published "The Mulatto- a Hybrid", the distinguished surgeon who wrote it, contended that Biracial woman were "bad breeders" because they were the product of two distinct species, that same way the mule was from the horse and the ass.
- In late 1800's, Ida B. Wells wrote that southern White men were shielding themselves behind the screen of defending the honor of their women through lynching in order to palliate their record of hate and violence. White men were lying about Black-on-White rape and hiding their own assaults of Black women.
- In 1918 Edward Bryon Reuter finished The Mulatto in the United States. Reuter argued that anything Black people achieved was in fact the achievement of Biracial people. He situated Biracial people as a sort of racial middle class, below superior Whites but above inferior "full Blacks". Reuter stamped biracial people as a peculiar people despite their success. He reinforced the fundamentally racist idea that biracial people were abnormal.
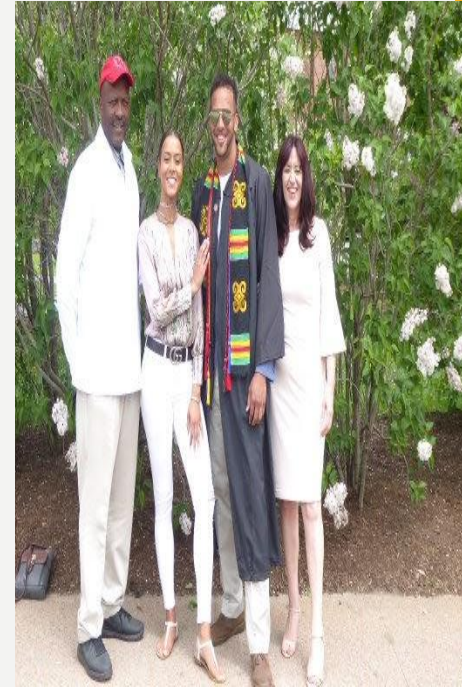
Anti-Miscegenation Laws

1967 - Loving vs. Virginia, the landmark Supreme Court case that declared anti-miscegenation laws unconstitutional in the United States. Before that intermarriage illegal in 14 states.

During the five decades following this decision, the share of newlyweds in interracial unions in the United States increased fivefold, from 3% in 1967 to 17% in 2013 (Parker et al. 2015).

The share of children of mixed racial and ethnic heritage in the United States also increased tenfold, from less than 1% in 1970 to 10% in 2013 (Parker et al. 2015).

Census Data

- In 2015, 17% of newly married couples (11 million) reported having a spouse of a different race or ethnicity, this represents a fivefold increase in mixed-race marriages since 1967 (Livingston & Brown, 2017).

- Interracial marriages are more common among younger, college-educated, and metropolitan populations.

- Black men are twice as likely to marry across race than Black women. In 2016, more than a third of Asian women (36%) reported a spouse of a different race/ethnicity compared with Asian men (21%).

- The opposition to a relative marrying a Black person was measured at 63% among non-Blacks in 1990, this number was measured at 14% in 2016 (Livingston & Brown, 2017)

Adoption of COC by White Families

History of Transracial Adoption

- The adoption of South Korean children by White US families began in the mid 50's after the Korean war.
- The number of transracial adoptions began to grow substantially during the late 1960s.
- An increase in the number of children entering the foster care system coincided with an increased recognition of the deficiencies of that system.
- The social consciousness movements of the 1960s made some Whites more open to the possibility of racial integration.
- Shortage of White adoptive infants for adoption due to contraception, abortion and/or single mothers keeping their babies.
- Increase in adoptions from foreign countries and African-American babies.

HISTORY

- 1972, The National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) argues that Black children belong physically and psychologically in the Black community.

- The US Supreme Court has never directly addressed the question of whether it is constitutional to use race as a factor in adoption. 1984, *Palmore v Sidoti*
  The effects of racial prejudice, however real, cannot justify a racial classification removing an infant child from the custody of its natural mother. The Constitution cannot control such prejudice, but neither can it tolerate it. Private biases may be outside the reach of the law, but the law cannot, directly or indirectly, give them effect.
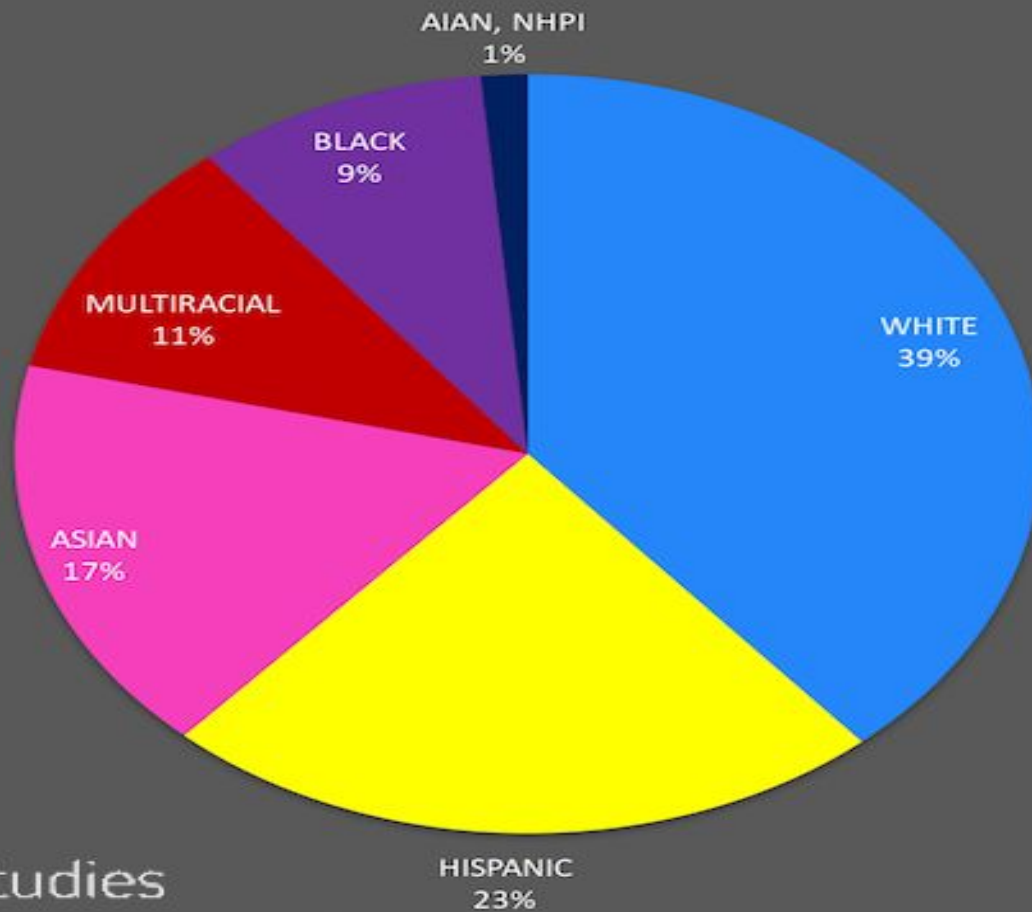
Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA), 1994 & 1996

Framed as:

- An effort to address the increasing number of children in foster care
- To prohibit the delay or denial of a child's foster or adoptive placement solely on the basis of race, color, or national origin
- To prohibit discrimination in approving individuals as foster and adoptive parents on the basis of race, color, or national origin
- To require that state agencies make diligent efforts to recruit foster and adoptive parents who represent the racial and ethnic backgrounds of children in foster care in the particular state.
- Only applies to government agencies or agencies that contract with the government, does not apply to private agencies that don't receive federal funding.

Figure 1: Racial and Ethnic Distribution of Adopted Kindergartners: U.S., 2011

AIAN, NHPI 1%
BLACK 9%
MULTIRACIAL 11%
WHITE 39%
ASIAN 17%
HISPANIC 23%

Institute for **Family** Studies

The Race & Ethnic Distribution of Adopted Children & Their Adoptive Parents

The proportion of adopted kindergartners being raised by a mother of a different race or ethnic group rose by 50% between 1999 and 2011. The proportion of adoptees with Asian backgrounds nearly tripled over the same time period. Paradoxically, the fraction of adopted students who are African-American seems to have fallen. What has not changed is that a large majority of adoptive parents are white, older, well-educated, and relatively affluent.

The Changing Face of Adoption in the US, IFS study

The Race & Ethnic Distribution of Adopted Children & Their Adoptive Parents

- 73% of adoptive parents are non-Hispanic White.
- 40% of [adopted children are of a different race,](#) culture, or ethnicity than both of their adoptive parents (or their sole parent if there is only one parent in the household).
- 3% of foster children and 4% of adoptees nationally(14,000) have gay or lesbian parents
- Same-sex couples are more likely than hetrosexuals to be interracial, and interracial couples are more likely to adopt multiracial or nowwhite children (Romesburg, D. 2014).

- 63% percent of children adopted from foster care have White parents, as do 71 % of children adopted within the United States, and 92% of children adopted internationally.

(US Dept of Health and Human Services, [Adoption USA](#))

Adoption Stigma

- Shame and Stigma surrounding adoption's link to illegitimacy and infertility
- Adoption viewed as 'second-best' alternative to creating families.
- Cultural standards of bionormativity -exclusively regarding biologically connected family as legitimate
- Face a variety of explicit and implicit messages that challenge the legitimacy of their parental identity.

Anti-Asian Racism

Nationwide, racist and anti-immigration hate crimes targeting Asian American grew by 30% between 2015 and 2018, more than the increase in such crimes directed against any other major racial and ethnic group in the US (Park et. al, 2021).

Asian American youth report the highest rate of peer harassment, perpetrated by both White racial and other racial minority youth.

Asian American students, in one study, had the highest rates of suicidal ideantion and suicide attempts among all the major racial groups in the US.

May be an underestimation since Asian Americans report the lowest rates of mental health service utilization.

Model minority stress

Transracially Adoptive Parents' Colorblindness and Discrimination Recognition: Adoption Stigma as Moderator

Transgressing Black/Brown and White Communities

Reaction of the White Community

- Discomfort and hostility
- Over-compensatory behavior
- Patronizing
- Intrusive questioning

Reaction of the Black Community

- African-American families found to be generally more accepting of Interracial relationships - seeing the White partner as a person rather than a category, inclusion of wider circle than blood kin, primacy of the mother role.
- Reaction of Black women to Black men partnering with White women - understanding the source of this resentment
- Affinity with Black mothers- understand what it is to raise children in a racialized charged society.
- Use Black women as a source of information, support, role models and as a sounding board.

Identity Development

- Identity development is the process or set of developmental stages through which one integrates their past, present, and future into an integrated and unified sense of self (Tatum 1997).
- Erikson's (1968) developmental model of identity formation throughout the lifecycle described life as largely a quest for identity
- When developing identity, racial-ethnic minorities must form a personal identity and a racial-ethnic identity in order to form a complete self-identity (Phinney and Chavira 1995).
- White Racial Identity Stages

Developmental Stages of Racial Identity Development

[Understanding Racial Developmental Stages](#)

[Stages of Children's Racial Identity Development](#)

Variables in Biracial Identity Development

- Biracial and multiracial people who live in white-dominated communities are more likely to adopt their white parents' white identity or a multiracial identity, while people who live in diverse communities are more likely to adopt their non-white parents' identities (Herman, 2004).
- The occurrence of biracial and multiracial individuals "passing" for white (and minimizing their non-white racial heritage) appears to happen more often in white dominated environments (Phinney & Alipuria; Twine, 1997).
- Biracial individuals risk being rejected or excluded by monoracial nonwhite peers if they integrate with the white community and do not culturally identify as a member of their non-white cultural group heritage.
- Additionally, biracial individuals who do not adopt a monoracial identity may feel excluded by members of both of their racial backgrounds (Collins, 2000).
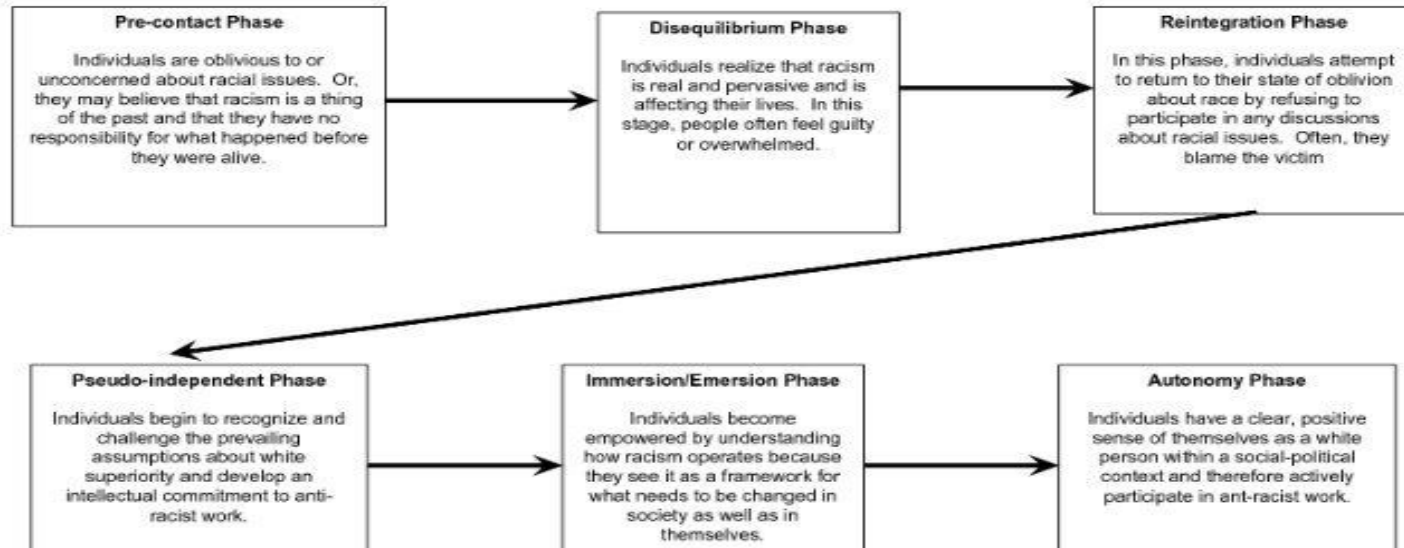
Identity Formation for Adoption POC

- Transracial adoption children are able to gain a healthy racial & cultural affiliation but they may take more time to do so than same race families. Reclaiming one's birth culture at some point after childhood, re-culturation, may also be an integral part of forming a healthy cultural identity.

Ethnic Identity Versus Preparing for Discrimination

- Importance of adoptive parents talking openly about race with their transracially adopted children.

- Ethnic socialization is clearly beneficial for the development of stronger ethnic identity and sense of ethnic pride (Hughes et al., 2009), it may not be sufficient to promote mental health resiliency in the face of discrimination.

- Parents may need to use more direct approaches that explicitly teach children how to respond to racial discrimination (i.e., preparation for bias)

White Racial Identity

Stages of White Racial Identity Development

Pre-contact Phase

Individuals are oblivious to or unconcerned about racial issues. Or, they may believe that racism is a thing of the past and that they have no responsibility for what happened before they were alive.

Disequilibrium Phase

Individuals realize that racism is real and pervasive and is affecting their lives. In this stage, people often feel guilty or overwhelmed.

Reintegration Phase

In this phase, individuals attempt to return to their state of oblivion about race by refusing to participate in any discussions about racial issues. Often, they blame the victim

Pseudo-independent Phase

Individuals begin to recognize and challenge the prevailing assumptions about white superiority and develop an intellectual commitment to anti-racist work.

Immersion/Emersion Phase

Individuals become empowered by understanding how racism operates because they see it as a framework for what needs to be changed in society as well as in themselves.

Autonomy Phase

Individuals have a clear, positive sense of themselves as a white person within a social-political context and therefore actively participate in ant-racist work.

What About the Racial Socialization of the Parent?

- Raising Children of Color requires intentionality

- Examining their own self-esteem and self-concept issues, identifying their own personal racism, the racism of others, institutional racism per se, and understanding how it impacts their lives become mandatory activities for parents of COC (Pinderhughes, 2021).

- Racial socialization is complicated because monoracial parents cannot rely on a shared racialized identity and social status with their children nor their family's intergenerational experiences of growing up a POC for insight to promote healthy child development. Despite the need for racial socialization, research on these practices and the influences of such practices on racial identity development in interracial families is limited

Models of WRI

- Helms(1990), Cross (1978), Phinney (1996), Carter (1998) - see racial identity development as a series of stages through which individuals pass as their attitudes toward their own racial group and the White population develop.

- Racism Scale - another useful tool.

  Where do you fall on the racism scale?
  www.racismscale.weebly.com

Ethnic identity of the White Parent
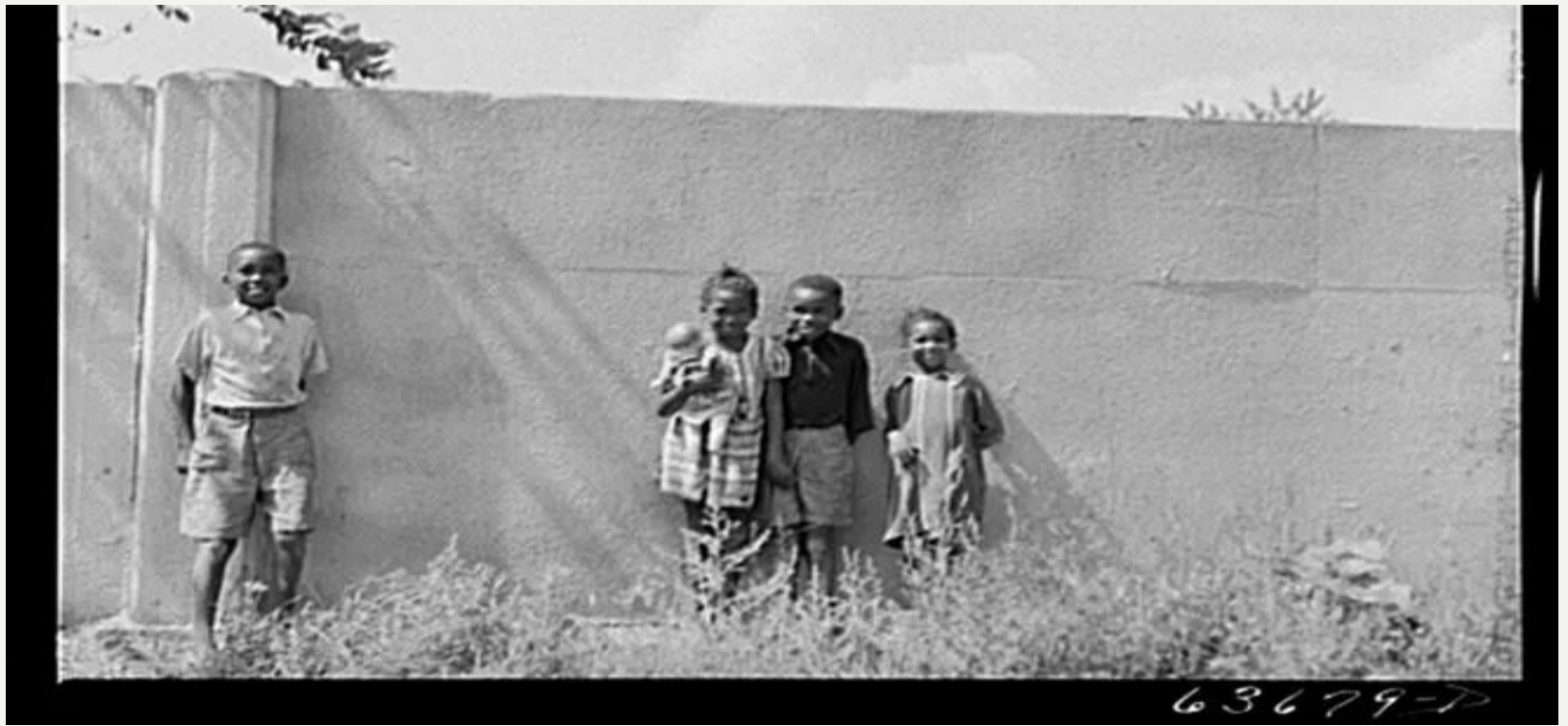
[Black, Brown and Green Voices](#)

[Trading Taps](#)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WMD_f02gelM

Preparing a Child for Life as a Person of Color

- Choose Carefully where you Live
- Have discussions around race
- Ecological Competence (African-American socialization facilitates a unique, multifaceted form of competence: Ecological Competence. It includes awareness, understanding, and implementation of strategies critical to African-Americans' resilience against oppression. DeBerry et.al.1996).
- Prepare COC for hostile possibilities in a racist world
- Get support

Detroit 1941. The Federal Housing Administration Required a Developer to Build a Wall Separating his Whites-only Project from nearby African American residences. (source, Rothstein, R. (2017) *The Color of Law)*

Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives

Levittown, Pennsylvania, 1957. A crowd mobilizes before proceeding to harass the first African American family to move into the all-White development.
(source, Rothstein, R. (2017) *The Color of Law)*

After Miami-Dade mayor Chuck Hall sent the first wrecking ball to destroy an African American neighborhood, buildings were demolished to make way for I-95, as children look on.

Segregation Continues to Be NJ's State of the State

Discussions around Race

- Racial socialization is part of parenting, interactional process of parents' race-related communications with their children regarding values and perspectives about race and ethnicity
- Implicit and explicit messages about interpersonal and group identity, interracial relationships, and social position related to race (Williams and Smalls-Glover 2014). Racial socialization also involves parents imparting information about coping with and navigating racial discrimination
- Minority socialization, preparation for bias is most commonly reported in studies with Black families and involves parents teaching their children to anticipate bias, as well as how to cope with such experiences, and ways to fight against it (Hughes et al. 2009; Rollins and Hunter 2013).

Advice?

- If you love to bowl, instead of bowling in an all-white league, go find a multiracial league to bowl in. It's not like you have to stop bowling. Black people bowl. Black people go fishing. Black people knit. Black people do all the same things white people do.
- How many black salons are in this country of black women doing black hair?! The group that gets the most attention is these white moms who are able to do black hair.
- Be interested in adults that look like your child,
- Put a name on racism and give your child the words to talk about racism,
- Understand the nuances of racism. Not only does racism exist, but you can break it down into the subtle and the overt types of racism.
- How do you teach your black child how to navigate the black community if you don't know anything about it? Eventually, unless your child is going to stay in an all-white farming community in the middle of nowhere (which some kids do), they are going to move into somewhere where they will run into other black people, whether it is in junior high or college or when they move into the city, whatever. All of a sudden they are going to be interacting with black people who will look at their black face and assume that they know certain black cultural nuances.

Raising Girls

Black Daughters

- Speaking up and resisting racism often stigmatizes

    Black girls as those loud Black girls. They are seen as aggressive, intimidating, scary, and ugly. Many Black girls learn to be silent in order to distance themselves from the stigma.

- Learn to replace or repress her anger with feelings that are deemed to be more acceptable, less confrontational, more productive.

- When White mothers ignore or deflect anger, their Black daughters are prevented from feeling things as they are, from being able to articulate the truth about their experiences of racism and from being able to use their anger to name, analyze and respond to the racism they encounter.

Ellis, J. (2015)

Salient Issues

- Research on transracial adoption has concluded that Black children who are adopted by White families can grow up to be emotionally healthy , happy and productive citizens.
- Marginalization of White adoptive mothers.
- Hair holds immense symbolic importance for kinship because it's care is highly visible, unlike other racialized parts of the body.
- Hair serves as a metaphor and method for "weaving" a black child into a white family
- When in public, White parents with COC are often the target of surveillance.

Social Workers/Therapists

In a continually racialized society, it is important for therapists to recognize, that biracial people do not represent a post-racial society, and that their racial identity and experiences as a racial being and as a part of an interracial family are unique. Family therapists must use their skills as multiculturally aware and sensitive therapists to invite multiracial clients and families to share their values and beliefs about race, their racial identity, and their interracial family

Stone & Dolbin-MacNab (2017).

Anti-racism handout: Robin D'Angelo

White fragility and feedback

Embracerace.org

Eddie Moore's 21 day challenge

Resources and Readings

Teach your children about racism & protest: NY Times 6/7/2020

Resources and Reading list

Reference List for White Mothers Presentation

Thank You!
Feel free to contact me.
mo558@ssw.rutgers.edu