

Elementary School Counselors' Perceptions of and Practice with Students Adopted Transracially

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ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COUNSELORS' PERCEPTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of elementary school counselors working with students adopted transracially (SATr) and their families. Previously, the voices of elementary school counselors have been omitted from the limited scope of professional literature available related to school counseling practice with SATr.

Using a phenomenological method, research questions were developed to capture the perceptions, needs, and practices of elementary school counselors working with SATr and their families. The purposeful sample of 11 participants represented elementary school counselors from Northern and Southern Virginia and West Virginia. The participants had professional school counseling experience ranging from one to 27 years where they worked with a range of one to over 200 SATr and their families. A structured analysis process was used that included coding (i.e., open, axial, selective), writing textural and structural descriptions that were verified by participants, and developing composite summaries. This structured process uncovered the categories, sub-categories, and themes leading to a core category. Bracketing was used to maintain the trustworthiness of the research study.

The findings included eight themes as continuums reflecting the various perceptions, needs, and practices of the participants in working with SATr and their families. The shared lived experiences can best be described as a **“CONTINUUM OF COMFORT AND CONFIDENCE”** whereby elementary school counselors relied on using foundational counseling skills, understanding human development, applying multicultural competency, and being sensitive to adoption related practices. Additionally, they continually refined their practice strategies in being responsive to the needs of SATr and their families.

Although the findings of this study cannot be generalized, the narratives of these elementary school counselors offer important insight and generate recommendations for practice. Salient recommendations include frequent collaboration among school and mental health counselors, the need for elementary school counselor advocacy to promote acceptance and inclusion of SATr and their families, and the necessity for counselor educators to include coursework on transracial adoption. Future research with middle and high school counselors,

SATr and their families who have used school counseling services, and professional development training will deepen our understanding for inclusive comprehensive, developmentally appropriate school counseling programs.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The 2010 United States (US) Census estimated there are more than two million adopted children, representing 2.3% of all children living within US households (Krieder & Lofquist, 2014). Of this group, a national survey of adoptive parents estimated that 40% of adoptive families are transracial (Vandivere, Malm, & Radcliff, 2009) and are comprised of White adoptive parents with children who are of a different racial, ethnic, or cultural background. Transracial adoptees, although representing a small percentage of children overall in the United States, are overrepresented in school special education (Raleigh & Kao, 2013) and in receiving mental health services (e.g., Brodzinsky, 2013; Miller, et al., 2000). Students adopted transracially have unique needs related to adoption related stigma, racial identity development, lasting effects from pre-adoption histories, and racism (Bradley & Hawkins-Leon, 2002; Evan B. Donaldson Institute (EBDI) & Center for Adoption Support & Education (CASE), 2009; Fishman & Harrington, 2007; Meese, 2012; Purvis, 2007). Elementary school counselors are often the first mental health providers these students will encounter (De Mato & Curcio, 2004). Yet little is known about the current services that elementary school counselors provide to meet the needs of students adopted transracially.

After decades of research, it is generally accepted within the professional mental health community that adopted persons and families have both normative and unique developmental challenges that include adoption related tasks, such as understanding the meaning of adoption, coping with adoption stigma, and coping with adoption-related loss (e.g., Brodzinsky, 2013; Brodzinsky, Schecter, & Henig, 1992; O'Brien & Zamostny, 2003). Transracial adoptive placements include additional complexities, such as racial/ethnic identity development challenges (Brodzinsky, 2013). Although researchers have established that transracial adoptees and their families experience unique developmental challenges that encompass both adoption related and multicultural components, the development of counselor competencies that address adoption issues is only in the beginning stages (Atkinson, Gonet, Freundlich, & Riley, 2013; Baden & O'Wiley, 2007). Further, a number of studies highlight how mental health providers are ill prepared to address adoption related issues (Sass & Henderson, 2000; Weir, Fife, Whiting, & Blazewick, 2008).

Adoption sensitive counseling approaches and techniques for adopted children and their families offers multiple strategies for mental health providers, including school counselors, to utilize; however, most are practice-based recommendations and few have empirical evidence of their effectiveness. While adoption sensitive counseling pertains to transracially adopted children and families, specific interventions for this population include addressing issues of race and privilege for transracial adoptive families (Baden et al., 2013). Similarly, there are various recommended school counseling strategies for multiple heritage youth (Harris & Durodye, 2006; Harris, 2013, Maxwell & Henriksen, 2012) and their families but none with empirical evidence for this population.

While an increasing number of studies exists that demonstrate the unique needs of persons adopted transracially (Brodzinaky, 2013; McGinnis, Smith, Ryan, Howard, 2009; Samuels, 2009), the research related to specific school needs for this population is mainly focused on teacher interventions (Evan B. Donaldson Institute (EBDI) & Center for Adoption Support & Education (CASE), 2009; Fishman & Harrington, 2007; Meese, 2012) with just one study found to include school counselors (Taymans et al. 2008). School counselors are poised to assist children adopted transracially through the delivery system of a comprehensive, developmentally appropriate school counseling program. Further, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) ethical code mandates that school counselors should possess multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills, which includes the unique needs of students who are adopted transracially (ASCA, 2009; Janus, 1997; Malott & Schmidt, 2013). However, there is limited research that examines what school counselors are doing and how they are faring in meeting the needs of students who are adopted transracially. School counselors, students adopted transracially and their families, and other adoption service providers will benefit from a greater understanding of what is being done and how well it meets the needs of students adopted transracially and their families.

A comprehensive, developmentally appropriate school counseling program (ASCA, 2012a) is organized and provided by elementary school counselors who hold a minimum of a master's degree in counseling (ASCA, 2011). These counselors provide services through a delivery system of core curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services, and indirect student services (ASCA, 2012b). Through responsive services, school counselors address an array of student socio-emotional and academic needs via individual and group counseling

(Auger, 2005; Malott, Paone, Humphries, & Martinez, 2010; Richardson & Rosen, 1999); while offering indirect services, such as consultation and collaboration, to advocate for students (Bauman, 2008; Geltner & Leibforth, 2008; & Lindwall & Coleman, 2008). Elementary school counselor consultation also includes collaborations with parents and guardians in family-school partnerships (Amatea, Daniels, Bringman, & Vandiver, 2004; Bryan & Henry, 2012; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010; Li & Vanzquez-Nutall, 2009). As part of an organized school counseling program, elementary school counselors can provide direct services (i.e., individual counseling, group counseling, classroom guidance), consultation, community engagement, and advocacy to meet the developmental and multicultural needs of students adopted transracially and their families.

Research indicates that students adopted transracially are at increased risk for academic delays that may need special education services (Brodzinsky, 2013; Meese, 2005; Howard, Smith, & Ryan, 2004; Raleigh & Kao, 2013; Ringeisen et al., 2009). The social emotional and mental health risks that these students may encounter include bullying (Ford, Scott, Moore, & Amos, 2013; Raaska, et al., 2012; Westhues & Cohen, 1998), racial and ethnic microaggressions (Bradley & Hawkins-Leon, 2002; Jacobson, Nielson, & Hardeman, 2012; Samuels, 2009), and marginalization based on adoption stigma ((Evan B. Donaldson Institute (EBDI) & Center for Adoption Support & Education (CASE), 2009; Fishman & Harrington, 2007; Meese, 2012). Literature on school counselor practices to meet the academic, social emotional, and mental health needs of students adopted transracially include individual and group counseling (Kizner & Kizner, 1999; Myer & James, 1989; Myer, James, & Street, 1987; Purvis, 2007; Zirkle, Peterson, & Collins-Marotte, 2001), classroom guidance (EBDI, 2007; Myers, James & Street, 1987), parent consultation and collaboration (Ramos, 1990; Zirkle, Peterson, & Collins-Marotte, 2001), and consultation with and referral to community resources (Ramos, 1990).

Purpose of the Study

This study explored the perceptions and school counseling practices of elementary school counselors who work with students adopted transracially. This exploration employed a phenomenological approach that aimed to better understand the common experiences of school counselors who work with students adopted transracially so as to “develop a deeper understanding about the features of the phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p.81). Comprehensive school counseling programs offer a range of developmentally appropriate and multiculturally

sensitive services to promote student achievement (ASCA, 2012a; ASCA, 2009). Research supports the effectiveness of school counseling programs by examining both individual (e.g., individual and group counseling, classroom guidance, consultation) and overall components (e.g., delivery system) of ASCA Model programs (Whiston & Quimby, 2009). The current research study built upon what is known about the effectiveness of elementary school counseling programs through the delivery of counseling and consultation services with specific application to students adopted transracially and their families.

There is limited information about how school counselors work with students who are adopted (Myers & James, 1987; Myers, James, & Streets, 1987; Ramos, 1990; Zirkle, Peterson, & Collins-Marotte, 2001), and some information does exist on how school counselors approach working with students from multiple heritage backgrounds (Harris, 2012; Harris & Durodoye; 2006; Maxwell & Henrikson, 2012). Multiple heritage youth and transracially adopted youth share some commonalities; specifically, both have opportunities to integrate more than one cultural/racial background into their identity schemas and both may experience discrimination, racism, and microaggressions (Harris, 2009; Sue et al., 2007). Therefore, the current qualitative study examining the perceptions and practices of elementary school counselors working with students adopted transracially and their families provides contemporary evidence of current perceptions and practices, upon which recommendations are made for comprehensive and developmentally appropriate delivery system services as part of a school counseling program.

Research Questions

This research offered professional elementary school counselors a safe and welcoming environment in which they had the opportunity to share their experiences in working with students adopted transracially. The research protocol employed an open ended interview for data collection as well as a demographic questionnaire to gather information to describe the participants. The specific research questions that served as a guide to the study were as follows:

What are elementary school counselors' perceptions of students adopted transracially?

What are common needs and concerns presented to school counselors by students adopted transracially and their families?

What counseling approaches and techniques have worked well with this population?

Definition of Terms

There are specific terms that are referenced throughout the research related to the scope of this study. These terms are defined as follows:

Adoption is the legal process by which children who are not able to be parented and raised by their birth or first families become legal members of another family (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.; Freundlich, M., 2007).

Adoption Kinship Network (AKN) describes those persons connected to the adopted person, including adoptee, adoptive parents, birth/first families, and kinship extended family members (Grotevant, 2000).

Asian depicts any child of east or Southeast Asian descent, including children from India (US Census, 2010).

Birth or first families refers to the biologically and genetically connected parents of the adopted person (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.).

Black/African American is the term used to describe children from African descent (US Census, 2010).

Children of color represent all children of non-White racial and ethnic backgrounds that includes children of multiple heritage descent (Ratts & Pedersen, 2014).

Domestic adoption refers to adoption of a child in the same country where the child was born, either through the child welfare system or via private agency, whereas *international adoption* refers to adoption from another nation (Vandivere, Malm, & Radel, 2009).

Elementary school counselor is a certified educator with a master's degree in school counseling who acts as an integral part of an elementary school community (ASCA, 2011).

Kinship adoption occurs when extended and biologically related family members of the first/birth parent(s) legally adopt the first/birth parent child(ren) (Merrit & Festinger, 2013).

Latin@ is an ethnic group that includes children of Central or South American or Mexican descent who can be of any combination of racial category and be of either gender (Ratts & Pedersen, 2014).

Multiple heritage youth are children and adolescents with backgrounds reflecting diverse racial, cultural, religious, and ethnicity (Henriksen & Paladino, 2009).

Native American/American Indian describes children who are registered members of US recognized Native American tribes (US Census, 2010).

School counseling program is a comprehensive, multiculturally sensitive, and developmentally appropriate program, led by a professional school counselor, that offers a range of service delivery components to promote the academic and socio emotional success of all students (ASCA, 2009, 2012a)

Students adopted transracially are collectively referred to by the acronym SATr.

Transracial adoption refers to an adoption type, domestic or international, in which the child and parent(s) are of different racial and ethnic backgrounds (Baden, 2007).

Delimitations of the Study

The study aimed to explore the perceptions of and practices of elementary school counselors with students adopted transracially. Middle and high school counselors' perceptions and experiences with students adopted transracially were not explored for the purposes of this study. While the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Model of school counseling is described within the research study, elementary school counselor participants were not required to be members of ASCA or their state or district school counseling association. Multicultural sensitivity underscores all components of professional school counseling; however, the proposed study did not examine multicultural competency or perceptions of competency by elementary school counselors. Lastly, the elementary school counselors who participated in this study were recruited from Northern and Southern Virginia, and West Virginia; hence, the results of the research may not be generalized to other elementary school counselors in other regions.

Summary

There are unique circumstances encountered by transracially adopted students that include adoption related developmental tasks, racial and ethnic identity development, and specific needs within school settings. Many of these students will present behavioral, social and emotional, and mental health issues that may adversely affect their ability to succeed academically. Elementary school counselors who provide developmentally appropriate and multiculturally sensitive comprehensive school counseling programs are in a prime position to provide direct and indirect services to these students and their families as well as to coordinate school-community-family partnerships. The examination of the perceptions and practices of elementary school counselors who are providing services to students adopted transracially and their families deepens our understanding and guide us in effectively meeting their unique needs.

Chapter two provides a comprehensive review of the literature that is the context for the proposed research. This context includes the frameworks of multiculturalism and multicultural competency related to counseling, human development related to psychosocial and identity frameworks for middle childhood, adoption in the US and multiple heritage youth, and elementary school counseling programs and services. The review shares what is known about how school counselors work with multiple heritage students, a population with similarities to SATr. It concludes with what currently is known about elementary school counselor practice and strategies that are used to work with SATr, their families, and the school community.

Chapter three describes the qualitative research methods utilized for the current study. This includes a rationale for and description of a phenomenological study and the research questions that will guide the researcher. Descriptions for the role of the researcher, recruitment of participants, data collection procedures, and data analysis are included. Limitations to the methods are presented along with various trustworthiness procedures implemented within the study to reduce bias and increase rigor.

Chapter four provides an overview of the coding analysis methods used to determine saturation in this study. Demographic data is presented on the 11 elementary school counselors who participated in the study. The chapter presents the categories and sub-categories that emerged from the coding analysis. The participants' lived experiences are illustrated with verbatim quotes and examples to reflect the themes discovered in the research and the corresponding research question. The core category describing the central phenomenon shared by the 11 participants is also presented.

Chapter five provides a summary of the findings of the study. Implications and recommendations for clinical mental health counselors, school counselors, and counselor educators are discussed. Suggestions for future research are also described in chapter five.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Despite the growing body of literature on adoption related strategies for mental health professionals, insufficient information exists related to school counselors' perceptions of students adopted transracially (SATr) and responsive services to meet their needs. Slightly more information is known about how school counselors perceive and intervene when working with multiple heritage students. Drawing from the literature and research within the mental health field, adoption competent practice can be viewed through the complementary lenses of multiculturalism and human development, which are the cornerstones of school counseling.

Therefore, the purpose of the literature review will be to provide a context for the proposed research study to explore elementary school counselors' perceptions of and services for SATr and their families in the school setting. The context will include multiculturalism and multicultural competency related to counseling, human development related to psychosocial and identity frameworks for middle childhood, adoption in the US and multiple heritage youth, and elementary school counseling programs and services. The review will include what is known about how school counselors work with multiple heritage students, a population with similarities to SATr. The chapter will conclude with current elementary school counselor practice strategies used to work with SATr, their families, and the school community.

Multicultural and Developmental Considerations

Counselors are guided by their training in multicultural perspectives and developmental frameworks. A review of these considerations will set the stage for the conceptual framework of this study.

Multicultural Perspectives

We live in a dynamic society that is comprised of individuals and systems that demonstrate both consistency and diversity. As demographics change to reflect the increasing diversity of the United States, it is important to ensure that research and practice policies embrace a multicultural worldview. This worldview includes examining the impact of oppression, racism, and other social justice factors that impact communities of color (Ratts & Pedersen, 2014). For these reasons, a multicultural framework is needed to further explore population demographics, multiple heritage persons, transracial adoption, and multicultural counseling competencies.

The US Census first collected demographic data, via observation rather than self-report, in 1790 (US Census Bureau, n.d.). Currently, the data is collected per the requirements of the U.S. Office of Business and Management. The Census Bureau describes the racial categories to “reflect a social definition of race recognized in this country and not an attempt to define race biologically, anthropologically, or genetically” (US Census Bureau, second paragraph, n.d.). The Census first offered individuals the option to select more than one racial category in 2000 (Jones & Bullock, 2013). The Census also includes a Hispanic or Latino and not Hispanic or Latino ethnicity category to capture those individuals of any racial background with Central or South American, Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, or other Spanish cultural origins (Jones & Bullock, 2013). Table 2.1 lists the racial categories and their definitions used in the 2010 Census.

Table 2.1

2010 US Census Racial Categories

Racial Category*	Description of Category Origins	%
White	Europe, Middle East, North Africa	72.4
Black or African American	Africa	12.6
Some Other Race	Includes racial categories not otherwise listed	6.2
Asian	East Asia, Southeast Asia, Indian Subcontinent	4.8
Two or More Races	Combination of any racial category	2.9
American Indian or Alaska Native	North, Central, South America, Alaska	0.9
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, other Pacific Islands	0.2
Hispanic or Latino Origin (ethnicity)	Mexican; Mexican American; Chicano; Puerto Rican; Cuban; Another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	16.3

*The US Census defines racial categorization based on identifying with “original peoples” of designated racial group (Jones & Bullock, 2012, p. 2).

Multiple heritage persons. Henrikson and Paladino (2009) defined multiple heritage persons as those with backgrounds reflecting diverse racial, cultural, religious, and ethnicity. The terms biracial, mixed race, and multiracial also are used interchangeably to describe this population. Multiple heritage individuals in the US have grown in numbers as a result of many

social factors. These include anti-miscegenation laws, school desegregation, and the Civil Rights Movement (Harris & Durodoye, 2006). The 2010 US Census estimated that 2.9% or nine million people classify themselves as being of two or more races (Jones & Bullock, 2012).

Multicultural competency in counseling. Given the diversity of the US, professionals working in the helping fields, which include elementary school counselors, need to be sensitive to their own biases and practice to best meet the needs of our multicultural society. Multicultural competency in counseling is a pre-requisite skill for counselors when working with all clients and students (Ratts & Pedersen, 2014). Multicultural competency is assessed by evaluating awareness, knowledge, and skills related to multiculturalism. These domains are defined as follows (Ratts & Pedersen, 2014):

Awareness of one's own cultural and racial background; bias towards differing cultures, racial groups, and ethnicities; the ability to respect differences, and develop an understanding of how these factors influence the counseling process.

Knowledge of the factors and systemic influences, such as racism, discrimination, and oppression, that impact how normalcy is viewed and perceived and how counselor personal bias, experiences, and values influence the therapeutic process.

Skills related to counseling effectiveness to work with diverse groups and the counselors' willingness to access ongoing education, supervision, consultation, and training to prepare for counseling persons from diverse populations.

Ratts and Pedersen (2014) stated,

We are all cultural beings who are exposed to a complex web of cultural influence that shape our worldview, behaviors, and lived experiences. How we see and experience the world is a result of cultural conditioning that begins at birth and continues throughout the lifespan. For this very reason helping professionals need to be committed to understanding the relevance of culture throughout the therapeutic process. (p. 10)

Since this research is specifically focusing on elementary school counselor practice and strategies with students of color who are adopted by White adoptive parents, multicultural competency is a useful and necessary perspective for the current study.

Developmental Frameworks

Developmental frameworks provide a theoretical basis to better understand how the individual experiences the process of maintaining "flexible identities" while integrating "multiple facets of self" (Mistry & Wu, 2010, p.5). The frameworks selected for this study include psychosocial, identity development, and racial identity. These particular aspects of human development were selected because multiple heritage and transracially adopted persons face unique challenges related to psychosocial relatedness to others and to varying degrees of

identity development, both as an individual and as a member of a multiple heritage background. Multiple heritage and transracially adopted persons experience multiple worldviews that are dependent on many factors and offer them opportunities to develop multiple racial and ethnic identities. A review of the tasks involved in psychosocial, identity, and racial identity development allow for foundational knowledge that aids in better understanding the additional tasks encountered by multiple heritage and adopted persons during these developmental stages.

Psychosocial development. Erik Erikson's (1997) stage model of psychosocial human development described tasks or "crises" that need resolution during various periods of the life cycle. Of the eight identified stages, the elementary school psychosocial stage is associated with industry versus inferiority (i.e., competency), "the first being a basic sense of competent activity adapted both to the laws of the tool world and to the rules of cooperation in planned and scheduled procedures" (Erikson, 1997, p. 75). Successful resolution of this stage includes the integration of a sense of competence as an individual and within a group, such as a classroom of peers who share similar goals. Erikson described unsuccessful mastery during the school age period as resulting in feelings of inferiority. A sense of inferiority can lead to overly competitive impulses or regressive behaviors (Erikson, 1997). Erikson's psychosocial model did not examine how the stages may differ, if at all, for persons not affiliated with the dominant group, such as persons of color. For this reason, other contextual frameworks regarding identity development are reviewed to supplement the psychosocial model.

Identity development. Identity development is the process by which both individuals and society determine an identity from a myriad of factors (Ratts & Pedersen, 2014). It is a fluid process and the result of multiple contexts impacting an individual. These contexts include racial, ethnic, religious, gender, and sexual orientation. For the purposes of this research, identity development is mainly contained to address racial, ethnic, and adoptive status. Jackson and Hardiman (1997) developed the five-stage Social Identity Development Model (SIDM) to describe the influence of oppressive factors on both dominant and target groups. The SIDM takes into account many factors that contribute to oppression including racism, sexism, classism, and ageism among others. The five stages include the following:

Stage 1. *Naïve or No Social Consciousness* takes place from birth to early childhood (and is the only stage with a chronological time frame offered) when both dominant and target groups are unaware and accepting of the societal value and privileges placed on their respective groups.

Stage 2. *Acceptance* is when both groups internalize the dominant group ideology. Dominant group members have internalized their privilege while target group members have internalized their oppression.

Stage 3. *Resistance* is when members of both groups have an increased awareness of privilege and oppression and begin to question the status quo.

Stage 4. *Redefinition* is characterized by both group members seeking an identity that is apart from dominant group norms to develop a sense of pride in their heritage.

Stage 5. *Internalization* is when members of both groups can integrate their identities into other parts of their lives, including activism and collaborative work to end oppressive factors in society.

The generalizability of this model is appropriate as a foundational framework for this research as the stages of racial and adoptive identity development share commonalities depicted by the various models in this chapter. School counselors need to have a basic understanding of how the identity development process is both similar yet highly unique for SATr.

Racial and ethnic identity. An understanding of mono racial and ethnic identity development models is important when considering identity development for multiple heritage individuals. Three highly recognized racial/ethnic identity models include Cross (1978), Phinney (1996), and Henriksen and Paladino (2009).

Cross (1978) described Black racial identity using a five stage task model whereby the individual undergoes a process of unconsciousness to internalization of Black racial identity. Cross's (1978) stages are as follows: (1) pre –encounter, (2) encounter, (3) immersion, (4) internalization, and (5) internalization-commitment. Cross' model considered the sociopolitical context for Black persons and incorporated this within his model depicting racial consciousness. Phinney (1996) examined the concepts of minority ethnic identity development within a framework exploring an individual's commitment to and recognition of his/her ethnic group. Phinney's three stage model of minority group ethnic identity focuses on "1) unexamined ethnic identity, 2) exploration, and 3) achieved ethnic identity" (Phinney, 1996, p.147). Both models describe racial and ethnic identity development as a process of unawareness to awareness with resultant internalized identity states. This process includes examining origins, relationship to others in the racial/ethnic group, awareness of racism and oppression, and a commitment to connecting and identifying with one's racial/ethnic group.

Henriksen and Paladino (2009) developed the Multiple Heritage Identity Development Model (MHID). This model describes six, non-linear periods exploring an individual's

movement towards racial identity development. The MHID is a fluid process where individuals may revisit periods as needed throughout the course of the lifespan. This model delineates the following periods: (a) neutrality; (b) acceptance; (c) awareness; (d) experimentation; (e) transition; and (f) recognition. Neutrality is prior to an individual's awareness of racial/ethnic differences and/or the impact of these differences. Acceptance is when individuals can identify themselves with the racial/ethnic background ascribed to them by family and friends. Awareness is the period when the individual develops an understanding of the complexities of a multiple heritage background. The experimentation period is when an individual attempts to connect and identify with only one aspect of his/her heritage. Transition marks the period when an individual begins to acknowledge that selecting only one heritage is not feasible or may not be fully accepted by family, friends, or community. Recognition is when an individual is able to acknowledge and accept multiple aspects of identity, including race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, gender, language, indigenous heritage, and sexual identity.

Table 2.2 provides a summary of the four identity models as a framework for the current study focusing on students adopted transracially. An understanding of models of identity development is needed in order to appreciate the differences in various aspects of identity development experienced by transracially adopted persons and students. In regard to identity for transracially adopted persons, McGinniss, Ryan, and Howard stated (2009), "Those adopted across race and culture also face the reality of integrating racial/ethnic identity without input from a family with this lived experience" (p. 11).

Table 2.2

Summary of Identity Models

Model					
Stages/Periods					
<hr/>					
<u>Social Identity Development Model (SIDM; Jackson & Hardiman, 1997)</u>					
naïve or no social consciousness	acceptance	resistance	redefinition	Internalization	
<u>Black Racial Identity (Cross, 1978)</u>					
pre –encounter	encounter	immersion	internalization	internalization-commitment	
<u>Minority Group Ethnic Identity (Phinney, 1996)</u>					
unexamined ethnic identity	exploration		achieved ethnic identity		
<u>Multiple Heritage Identity Development Model (MHID; Henriksen & Paladino, 2009)</u>					
neutrality	acceptance	awareness	experimentation	transition	Recognition

Adoption in the US

Adoption in the US grew from informal arrangements to care for children in need during colonial times to its current modern, formalized, and socially sanctioned construct as a way to create a family (Esposito & Biafora, 2007). During its development, adoption practices underwent enormous changes including reasons behind child relinquishment for adoption, the types of families seeking to adopt, same race to transracial adoption, and multiple legislative efforts that altered adoption policies (Esposito & Biafora, 2007). The following sections will review the relevant history of adoption in the US, adoption related developmental tasks and adjustment, and adoptive person identity. The section will conclude with attention to transracial adoption developmental tasks and describing the complexities that surround racial identity development.

History of Adoption and Transracial Adoption in the US

The 2010 United States (US) Census estimated there were over two million adopted children, representing 2.3% of all children living within US households (Krieder & Lofquist, 2014). The US Department of Health and Human Services defines adoption as “the social, emotional, and legal process in which children who will not be raised by their birth parents

become full and permanent legal members of another family while maintaining genetic and psychological connections to their birth family” (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.). Informal and formal adoption practices in the US date back to the 1700s with state and federal laws defining adoption practices developing in the 1930s to present day (Freundlich, 2007).

Although accounts of adoption in the US can be traced to the mid 1700s, adoption laws and legal processes did not become standardized until the 1930s and 1940s with the majority being same race adoptive placements (Freundlich, 2007). Unique circumstances ushered in the era of transracial adoption, including the aftermath of World War II and the Korean War and the increased accessibility of contraception in the US.

Transracial adoption refers to an adoption type, domestic or international, in which the child and parent(s) are of different racial and/or ethnic backgrounds from the adoptee (Baden, 2007). Those persons adopted transracially are referred to as transracial adoptees, transracially adopted persons, and persons adopted transracially (Baden, 2007). There are no current estimates of the total number of transracial adoptees in the US; however, a national survey of adoptive parents estimated that 40% of adoptive families are transracial and are comprised of adoptive parents who are White with children who are a different racial, ethnic, or cultural background from their adoptive parents (Vandivere, Malm, & Radcliff, 2009).

After World War II and the Korean War, the US experienced the first significant immigration of international adoptees from Japan, Korea, and Vietnam (Biafora, 2007; Brumble & Kampfe, 2011). A combination of factors left these children without permanent caregivers, including loss via death from war or displacement of first families, stigmatizing social conditions that led to abandonment, and impoverished conditions (Brumble & Kampfe, 2011). These placements were considered transracial as well because, mostly, children were adopted into White families. Since then, international adoption steadily increased and reached its peak in 2004 with 22,991 adoptions compared to 15,719 in 1999 and 7,092 in 2013 (US Department of State, n.d). Children have immigrated to the US via international adoption from countries throughout the world with the most prevalent being from Asia, Eastern Europe, Central America, and, more recently, East African nations (US Department of State, n.d.). International adoptions have steadily declined because of various factors including accreditation standards and stricter regulations in response to corruptive practices (Kreider & Lofquist, 2014). Current estimates suggest that 80% of international adoptions are transracial (Kreider & Lofquist, 2014).

One of the first accounts of domestic transracial adoptions was the Indian Adoption Project, a joint partnership between the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Child Welfare League of America (US Department of the Interior, 1966). This project sponsored the forced removal of Native American children to White adoptive parents during the 1950s and 1960s (US Department of the Interior, 1966). The Indian Adoption Project aside, domestically, most available children were White and entered into same-race families until the 1970s. During this time several factors altered same-race adoptive placements. These factors included access to contraception, increased acceptance of single motherhood, the Civil Rights Movement, and abortion legalization (Biafora, 2007). As a result of the decreased availability of White, healthy infants, adoption agencies and social welfare workers began to implement transracial placements of Black and Biracial children (i.e., racially Black and White or a combination of other races) with White families (Roorda, 2007). This practice was not met without controversy; in 1972, the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) issued a definitive stance against placement of Black and Biracial children with White adoptive families, fearing cultural genocide as a result of White parents' inability to teach Black children about their racial and cultural heritage (National Association of Black Social Workers, 1972).

The opposition to the transracial adoptive placements of Native American and Black children by social workers and other civil rights groups resulted in federal legislation to eliminate domestic, but not international, transracial placements. The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) passed in 1978 was an effort to preserve the cultural heritage of Native American children by enforcing placement (if removal from the home was necessary) with Native American families with similar cultural backgrounds (Baker, 1995). The Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) of 1994 sanctioned adoptive placements based on racial matching (Banks, 2009). However, in 1996, the Interethnic Placement Act (IEPA) made it illegal to consider race and ethnicity in adoptive placement decisions (Freundlich, 2007). IEPA remains the current legal standard for domestic foster care and adoptive placements. One intention of MEPA and IEPA was to reduce the disproportionate number of children of color in the child welfare system. Despite these federal laws, children of color remain in the child welfare system at higher rates as a result of multiple systemic barriers, including insufficient numbers of available foster families of any color for placements (McRoy & Griffin, 2012).

Adoption-Related Tasks and Adjustment

After decades of research, it is generally accepted within the professional mental health community that adopted persons and families have both normative and unique developmental challenges that include adoption related tasks for the individual (Brodzinsky, 2013; Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Henig, 1992; O'Brien & Zamostny, 2003) and adoptive family tasks (Brodzinsky, 1987). Brodzinsky's (1987) Psychosocial Model of Adoption Adjustment, using Erikson's life cycle model as a template, describes seven developmental stages that incorporate adoption related tasks needing resolution by the individual adoptee. Although Erikson (1997) suggested that human development requires individuals to successfully achieve mastery of related tasks, Brodzinsky's research demonstrated that adopted persons and their families have additional adoption related tasks. These adoption related tasks include telling the child's adoption story, managing racial/ethnic physical differences, addressing grief and loss issues, and coping with the stigma of adoption (see Table 2.3). As the focus of this research is on elementary aged children, the developmental tasks of that age period will be examined.

Brodzinsky's (1987) adoption adjustment model accounts for school-aged adopted persons who may express a wide range of feelings related to their adoptive status. He noted examples that include grief, anger, sadness, curiosity, and other emotional states. Developmental progress in middle childhood allows for rapid cognitive growth and learning and is reflected in an adopted person's increased ability to understand the complexities of adoption that includes relinquishment and integrating into a new family. Considering the needs of an adopted school-aged child, his research utilized a systems approach to address the adoptive family and the unique tasks they face (see Table 2.3).

Table 2.3

Individual and Family Adoption Tasks Related to Middle Childhood (Industry vs. Inferiority)

Adoption-Related Developmental Tasks (Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Henig, 1992)	Adoption Adjustment Family Tasks (Brodzinsky, 1987)
Understanding the meaning and implications of being adopted	Helping the child master the meaning of adoption
Searching for answers regarding one's origin and the reason for relinquishment	Helping the child in the initial stages of adaptive grieving
Coping with adoption-related loss	Maintaining an atmosphere in which questions about adoption can be freely explored in light of the complications brought about by the grief process
Coping with physical differences from family members	
Coping with peer reactions to adoption	

Adoptive Person Identity

Similar to Erikson, Brodzinsky's (1987) adoption adjustment model does not directly address identity development tasks until the adolescent years. However, both are stage models that ascribe to the belief that individual development is based on acquisition and mastery of skills learned and achieved starting from infancy. Therefore, those adopted individuals and families who acknowledge and address the additional adoption related tasks would be prepared to address the identity development tasks of adolescence into young adulthood. Adoption related identity development tasks take into account that an adopted person may or may not know or have information about his/her birth parents, racial/ethnic heritage, and circumstances surrounding the reasons for relinquishment. Sants (1964) referred to this lack of knowing and subsequent confusion as "genealogical bewilderment" (p.133). Key tasks include "connecting adoption to one's sense of identity, coping with adoption-related loss, especially as it relates to the sense of self" (Brodzinsky et al., 1992, p. 16) and "considering the possibility of searching for biological family" (Brodzinsky et al., 1992, p.16).

Grotevant (1997) examined how adopted persons integrate their adoptive status into their personal identity. He described how traditional stage theories do not adequately capture the various layers and complexities of adoption identity integration. Relevant issues related to adoptive identity development include open or closed adoption status (i.e., frequency and type of contact with first parents), age at time of adoption, racial/ethnic differences from adoptive

family, and relinquishment information. The preliminary schema for identity integration centers around the following processes: lack of awareness about adoptive status or relevance to one's identity, unexpected experience or crisis that compels an adopted person to reconsider or question his/her sense of identity, and, eventually, self exploration to re-establish identity coherence. All of these factors and how an adopted individual addresses them contribute to a process of adoptive identity development where "the fuller content of one's adoptive situation can be woven into the broader emerging life narrative" (Grotevant, 1997, p. 18). The contextual factors Grotevant delineated parallel the adoption related developmental tasks described by Brodzinsky et al. (1992, 1987) and reinforce the notion that successful management of those tasks will be helpful for later development, including one's identity.

Transracial adoptive developmental tasks. Transracial adoptive placements include additional complexities, such as racial/ethnic identity development challenges (Brodzinsky, 2013). One of the few studies of identity development and adjustment among adopted Latinos in the United States exemplified the racial and ethnic identity challenges experienced by persons adopted transracially. Andujo (1988) examined the self-esteem and identity development among Mexican American adopted adolescents. She compared one group of 30 adoptees with Mexican American adoptive parents and one group of 30 adoptees with White adoptive parents in an attempt to discern differences in development. She found that the adoptees with White adoptive parents presented with differences in identity and physical self-concept and were less likely to identify themselves as Mexican Americans. Andujo's study supported her hypothesis that adoptees with Mexican American parents would be better prepared to manage and cope with ethnic and racial discrimination based on learning "survival techniques" from their adoptive parents' experiences to manage racism and bias (Andujo, 1988, p. 533); this was not the case with the White adoptive parents.

The results in Andujo's study are echoed in later research including Samuel's (2009) phenomenological study examining the experiences of African American persons adopted into White families and a larger quantitative study of persons adopted transracially (McGinnis, Smith, Ryan, & Howard, 2009). These studies highlight the difficulties experienced by persons adopted transracially during childhood, adolescence, and adulthood related to racial and ethnic identity development. Specifically, McGinnis et al. (2009) found that 79% of the transracial Korean adoptee participants ($n = 179$) experienced some form of racial discrimination during childhood.

Additionally, when compared to White adoptees, the Korean adoptees spent statistically significant more time thinking about racial identity and finding more information about their identity. Despite the increased amount of time considering racial identity, when compared to White adoptees, the Korean adoptees reported feeling less likely to have a strong sense of belonging to their Korean heritage.

Transracial adoptee racial and ethnic identity developmental challenges are unique. Therefore, some researchers have created reculturation identity development models that take into account the experiences of transracial adoptees in an effort to normalize and validate their racial and adoptive developmental tasks.

Acculturation and reculturation. Park-Taylor, Walsh, and Ventura (2007) described how acculturation impacts immigrant youth in school. The acculturation process is the unique set of developmental tasks that youth who have immigrated with their families undertake, both individually and as a family. This includes learning a new language, negotiating new cultural and social norms, and adjusting to a life away from their original countries of origin. Although persons adopted transracially do go through a process of adapting and adjusting to their new families, it is dissimilar from the acculturation process because it is undergone solely by the child as s/he enters into the adoptive family's culture.

Baden, Treweeke, and Alhuwalia (2012) developed a model of ethnic, racial, and adoptive identity after noting descriptions of immigrant acculturation or enculturation do not suitably capture the process by which transracially adopted persons attempt to reconcile the dissonance between their adoptive family culture and lost cultural practices. The researchers explained how upon adoption many transracially adopted persons (either adopted domestically or internationally) lose a connection to their original culture and racial/ethnic group. This is especially the case when adopted by White parents. Hence, the term describing the unique process some transracially-adopted persons engage in to reclaim their lost original culture and racial and ethnic identity is referred to as Reculturation (Baden, Treweeke, & Alhuwalia, 2012).

The Reculturation process (Baden, Treweeke, & Alhuwalia, 2012) includes phases, modes, and themes (see Figure 1). The six linear phases include the following: (1) Enculturation Begins – in utero and post birth exposure to sounds, smells, language of birth family and culture; (2) Relinquishment and Temporary Care – residence in orphanage care and/or foster care frequently provided by members of the birth culture; (3) Adoption – Enculturation stops and

assimilation begins through language acquisition, among other ways, to majority White culture of adoptive parents; (4) Immigration – a process that is different from “typical” immigrants in regard to visa and citizenship acquisition as internationally adopted children are granted automatic citizenship based on their adoptive family’s citizenship status; (5) Assimilation continues – adapting, adjusting, and fitting in with the dominant culture; and (6) Reculturation – describes the late adolescence, young adult, and adult periods process by which transracial adoptees seek information about their birth culture. The Reculturation process includes three modes of education, experience, and immersion. For example, education processes include knowledge acquisition on birth culture heritage, such as learning the history, language, and values attributed to the birth country. After adoptees learn about their birth heritage in the education stage, some desire to act upon their knowledge by seeking out experiential activities, such as interacting with members of their birth culture, visiting their birth country, or attending social events with representatives of their birth heritage. After the education and experience stages some elect to further immerse themselves in their original birth cultures. Examples of immersion experiences include living in birth countries, electing to reside in neighborhoods predominantly represented by members of their heritage, and changing their names to original birth heritage names. Possible outcomes of the Reculturation process are described using five thematic categories that include the following: (a) adoptee culture, (b) reclaimed culture, (c) bicultural, (d) assimilated culture (explored), and (e) combined culture. The Reculturation process offers a theoretical framework and language to describe a process for mental health counselors, school counselors, and educators to competently work with and address the needs of this population. Specifically, the Reculturation model (see Figure 1) allows counselors to offer validation and normalization of a SATr’s identity development process. Such an understanding can assist a SATr to identify where s/he is in the exploration stage of reculturation and can aid to describe the phenomenon to transracial adoptive family members (Alvarado, 2014).

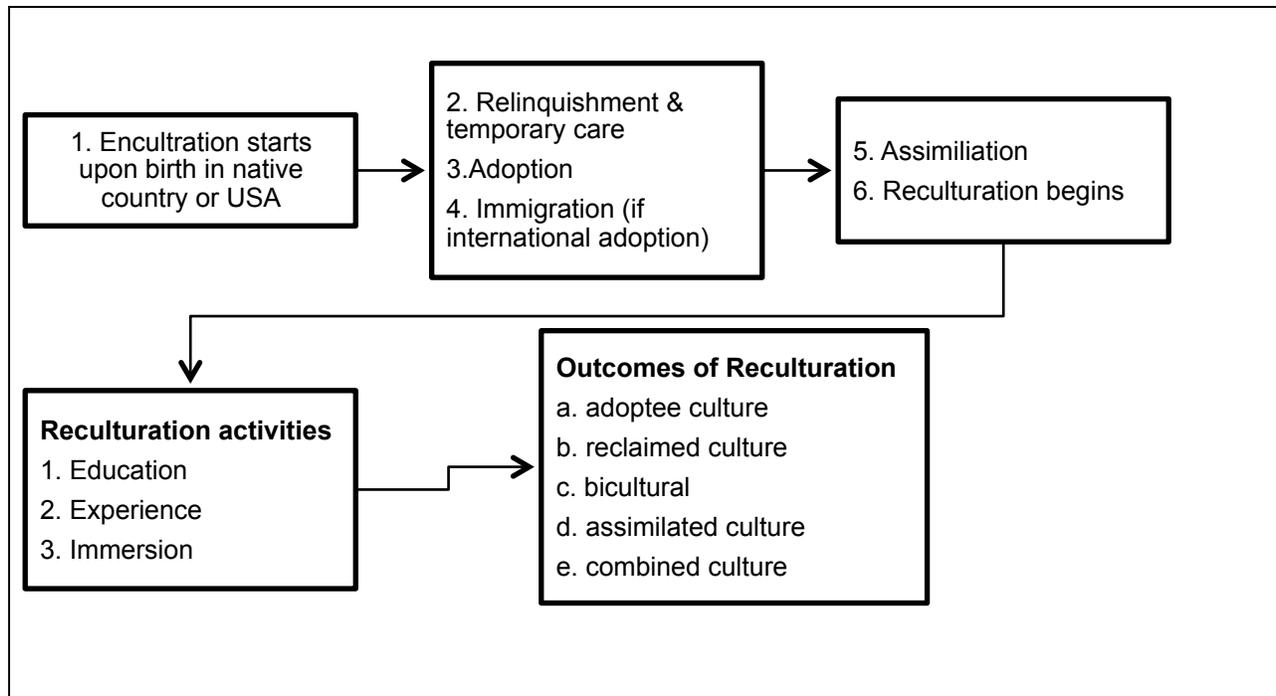


Figure 2.1. Phases, modes, and thematic categories of the Reculturation process (Baden, Treweeke, & Alhuwalia, 2012)

Adoption Counseling

Despite the research undertaken on adopted person and family adjustment (e.g., Brodzinsky, Schecter, & Henig, 1992; Howard, Smith, & Ryan, 2004; Lee, 2003), there are no universally accepted standards of adoption competency that outlines a set of skills and knowledge necessary for mental health professionals to effectively work with adopted persons and families (Brodzinsky, 2013; Porch, 2007). The following section will provide information on attempts by various mental health fields, including school counseling, to determine the extent professionals are prepared to work with adoptive populations.

Adoption Competency Standards

Recent efforts have been undertaken to define and delineate competency standards of practice (Atkinson, Gonet, Freundlich, & Riley, 2013). The proposed foundational domains for adoption competent providers include the following: (a) separation and loss; (b) developmental challenges; (c) development of multiple service systems; (d) family formation and differences; (e) abuse, neglect, and trauma; (f) experience with adoptive families and adopted persons; (g) cultural competence; (h) success in supporting strengths; (i) range of therapies for healing; (j) evidence based approaches; (k) advocacy; (l) therapies to strengthen parenting; (m) therapies for

parent entitlement; and (n) professional education and licensure (Atkinson et al., 2013). Atkinson et al. (2013) surveyed members ($N=485$) of the adoption kinship network (i.e., adopted person, birth/first family, adoptive parents, extended family members) and found positive agreement ranging from 90.9% to 97.5% for the 14 competency domains. Further, members of the kinship network who had sought services from a mental health provider, 24.87% found their providers adoption competent, 26.18% found their providers not competent, and 48.95% found their providers a combination of both. When they examined the experience of adopted person respondents, only 13.95% indicated their providers were adoption competent, 55.82% indicated they were not competent, and 30.23% indicated that providers were a combination of the two.

These 14 competency domains were used to develop a manualized, 13-session adoption competency training for mental health service providers. Results from an evaluative study to determine effectiveness of the competency training indicated significant change in clinical practice related to intake information, assessment, and counseling services (see Table 2.4).

Table 2.4

Training Participants Reported Change in Clinical Practice (Atkinson et al., 2013)

Domain	% Reporting Change
Intake information	94%
Assessment methods	86%
Clinical approaches	85%
Clinical techniques	82%
Organizational changes	58%
Referral to other therapies	55%

Overall, this research endeavor was supportive of the need for clinician competency measures when working with persons associated with adoption. However, a number of limitations to the study were evident. These included a lack of information on what criteria defined the experts developing the competencies, little or no detailed information on the content of the training, and an overrepresentation of adoptive parent respondents (87%) to the survey.

Helping Professionals' Preparedness in Working with Adopted Persons

Research from various mental health disciplines demonstrated an overall lack of preparedness for those helping professionals working with members of the adoption kinship

network. The field of psychology offered one of the first studies to report on psychologists' perceptions of their levels of preparedness (Sass & Henderson, 2000). In another study, researchers (Weir, Fife, Whiting, & Blazewicks, 2008) explored the types of training related to adoption and foster care that was offered by accredited MFT, social work, and counseling graduate programs (see Table 2.5). The field of social work found that few training programs required adoption and foster care specific coursework (Seigal, 2013).

Table 2.5

Summary of Results for CACREP, COAMFTE, and CSWE Respondents (Weir, Fife, Whiting, & Blazewick, 2008)

	<i>n</i>	Clinical Training & Employment Related to Adoption & Foster Care		
		Employment	Coursework	Fieldwork
COAMFTE	42	19.8%	9.6%	5.2%
CACREP	78	13.4%	7.8%	23.8%
CSWE	104	25.7%	38.4%	21.6%

In an exhaustive review of the literature, only one experimental design study (Taymans et al., 2008) was identified where researchers examined the effect of instruction on adoption sensitive practice for pre-service education professionals including school counseling students. The intervention group ($n=65$) included 15 school counseling master's students; the comparison group ($n= 81$) included 19 school counseling students. The intervention group was assigned to read a workbook related to how adoption is represented in school followed by a 75-minute manualized interactive presentation of the same theme. The comparison group did not receive any pre-service training related to adoption information in the school. Because there is a lack of available validated instruments for the specialized topic that can measure perceptions related to adoption, the researchers developed the Perceptions About Adoption Scale (PAS), which was a 15-item Likert scale measurement (alphas ranging from .60 to .75). In addition, four evaluative questions were offered to the intervention group to elicit their responses to the intervention along with 12 additional open response questions related to the training content. The experimental and comparison groups were given the PAS at the end of the fall semester and prior to the experimental group intervention. The PAS was then re-administered post intervention at the end of the spring semester. The results revealed a significant increase in perceptions about and

knowledge of adoption within the intervention group at post-test and follow up. The questions regarding evaluation of the intervention yielded results supporting the participants' strong agreement of its effectiveness as evidenced by responses ranging from 4.17 to 4.65 on a 5-point scale.

This study, one of the first to specifically consider school counselor preparation for adoption sensitive practices, is important given the limited body of research available. The researchers addressed the lack of education and training for educators and school counselors on adoption related issues, developed a brief educational presentation, and discovered that it increased awareness and perception among the participants. Its limitations included using a non-validated instrument (PAS) that could be impacted by social desirability, insufficient ability to monitor completion of pre-intervention reading assignments, voluntary nature of the study, and results for each subgroup of participants (e.g., school counseling master's students) were not reported. Despite these limitations, the researchers encouraged teacher and school counselor education programs to consider including adoption related instruction under the umbrella of multicultural instruction.

Transracial Counseling

Although adoption competency standards among mental health providers are gaining attention (Atkinson, et al., 2013) and research findings (Brodzinsky, 2013; Sass & Henderson, 2000, Post, 2002; Weir, Fife, Whiting, & Blazewick, 2008) suggest that, by and large, mental health practitioners are not adequately prepared to work with this population, transracial adoption literature is significantly more limited. A 2003 *Counseling Psychologist* journal edition devoted exclusively to examining adoption related practice included Lee's (2003) literature review of transracial adoption studies. His review provided practice implications for counseling psychologists that included identifying personally held bias about transracial adoption and offering psycho-education, support, and mediation on cultural socialization practices for transracial adoptive families.

When specifically examining transracial adoption within the counseling field, two practice articles were found that addressed implications for counselors. Malott and Schmidt (2012) and Bradley and Hawkins-Leon (2002) both emphasized the need for counselors, including school counselors, to have an awareness of the history of transracial adoption in the United States, knowledge and skills of adoption related developmental tasks, and ongoing

refinement of multicultural competencies, including examining their own racial/cultural backgrounds and its impact when working with clients/students. Bradley and Hawkins-Leon (2002) included a recommendation that counselors should explore the impact of white privilege and racism as part of a counselor's responsibility when working with students adopted transracially.

Adoption Sensitive Counseling Strategies

Despite research demonstrating a lack of overall mental health professional preparedness to work with adoptive populations, recognized practice assessments, strategies, and interventions that have been developed by practitioners who work with adoptive families are available and emphasize an ecological or systemic approach.

Brodzinsky (2013) supports an ecological approach to assessment of adoptive children and families. This approach takes into consideration the complex systems that influence an adopted person and his/her family. He states,

Even more so than the general population, the lives of adopted children and their parents, as well as birth/first parents, are influenced by a host of interacting contextual factors, including but not limited to: multiple family and extended family systems, the legal system, the child welfare system, the mental health system, and the special education and the medical system. (p. 26)

Pavao (2007) also endorses an ecological and systemic approach when assessing individual adoptees and their families. She highlights how a systemic approach for an adoptive family during the assessment process can determine current crises while also offering psycho-education to address normative adoptive individual and family tasks. Alvarado, Rho, and Lambert (2014) suggest using the Adoptive Family Life Cycle, developed by Brodzinsky, Smith, and Brodzinsky (1998) to both normalize adopted related family tasks as well as assist the family in identifying where they fall within the cycle.

The Child Welfare Information Gateway of the US Children's Bureau (2013) outlined various approaches for adoption sensitive treatments. These include the following:

Play Therapy uses play to encourage the child to communicate feelings and emotions related to adoption.

Individual Therapy encourages the child to identify adoption related challenges for developing goals to address stated challenges.

Group Therapy facilitates the expression of typical adoption related issues in groups of adopted children, adoptive parents, and birth parents to develop a supportive and therapeutic environment.

Family Therapy addresses adoption issues as they relate to the entire family system. This includes developing strategies to address adoptive family life cycle tasks, communication regarding adoption themes, and assists in negotiating various other systemic entities, including incorporating birth/first families, within the adoptive family.

Trauma Informed Therapy provides support to manage the effects of trauma through abuse and neglect that impact some adopted children.

Behavior Modification identifies behaviors, such as impulsive or acting out behaviors, and develops rewards systems for positive behaviors with both the child and adoptive parents.

Cognitive Therapy assists the adopted child and family to reframe cognitions that lead to poor self concept and subsequent negative behaviors.

Attachment Focused Therapy addresses the impact of care giver disruptions for an adopted child and fosters increased attachment security within adoptive families.

It is important to acknowledge that Attachment Focused Therapy should not be confused with harmful and coercive practices also referred to as attachment therapy. Practices, such as holding therapy, rebirthing, rage reduction, or regression, have been found to be ineffective and potentially harmful as a treatment practice and are not endorsed by major mental health associations (Chaffin et al., 2006).

Janus (1997) described how professional counselors could assist adopted children and families. Recommendations included maintaining a safe and non-judgmental counseling atmosphere for those adopted children who express curiosity and interest in knowing more information about their first/birth families; helping facilitate an understanding of this curiosity within family counseling; and offering counseling support groups for adopted children to address and normalize issues related to grief, loss, adoption stigmatization, and birth/first family search interest (Janus, 1997; Porch, 2007). A variety of commonly used adoption practices, albeit not empirically studied, are presented here.

Rituals to honor birth/first families on birthdays and other important celebrations can also address grief and loss issues (Brodzinsky, 2013; Smit, 2002). Some examples of rituals include lighting candles, planting trees/flowers, or engaging in other ceremonial acts.

Lifebooks offer visual representation of an adopted child's journey from birth to permanent family. This is usually in the form of a loose leaf binder with photos of current and past family members (foster, birth/first, and adoptive), memories, places of residence, schools, and friends to validate an adopted child's journey (Brodzinsky, Smith, & Brodzinsky, 1998).

Pictorial Time Lines offer adoptees and their families a strategy to organize significant events, such as birth, multiple moves, different foster families, and permanent homes, to

aid the child in developing a coherent life narrative (Brodzinsky, Smith, & Brodzinsky, 1998).

Letter writing allows the adopted child to express questions related to the adoption story to birth/first families as a way to encourage typical curiosity and exploration even if the birth/first parents are unavailable to respond. Sometimes adoptive families can collectively write letters (Fineran, 2012).

Loss boxes are often shoe boxes used to store tangible mementos, photos, or other memories related to birth/first families, birth countries, or former foster families. The child develops items for the box in a counseling setting so that s/he may process emotional feelings related to the losses experienced (Fineran, 2012).

Genograms help adopted children and families depict the entire adoptive family kinship network and can encourage discussion about birth/first families, even if little information is known (Becker, Carson, Seto, & Barker, 2002).

Adoption sensitive techniques and interventions are important elements of providing helpful clinical counseling for adopted children and their families; however, the techniques presented, while commonly used amongst adoption specialty providers, have not been empirically validated. Two recent adoptive family therapy interventions have demonstrated efficacy in treating adoption issues related to family communication, behavioral concerns, and overall adoption adjustment. These interventions include Child Parent Relationship Therapy (CPRT; Landreth & Bratton, 2006, as cited in Carnes-Holt & Bratton, 2014) and Whole Family Theraplay (WFT; Weir et al., 2013)

Child Parent Relationship Therapy (CPRT). Child Parent Relationship Therapy (CPRT) is a 10-session, manual-based, family counseling intervention that uses parent- and child-centered play therapy. Groups of six to eight parents meet for two-hour weekly groups for 10 weeks. During this time, the parents also meet with their adopted children for weekly, one hour, supervised play therapy sessions. Both the parent groups and play therapy sessions are aimed to increase secure child parent attachment by promoting parental empathy and attunement (Landreth & Bratton, 2006 as cited in Carnes-Holt & Bratton, 2014).

Carnes-Holt and Bratton (2014) researched the efficacy of Child Parent Relationship Therapy (CPRT) in reducing externalized, or acting out, behaviors in adopted children and in increasing adoptive parental empathy. The researchers utilized two instruments, Child Behavioral Checklist (CBCL) and Measurement of Empathy in Adult – Child Interaction (MEACI), for pre- and post-test measurement of parental reports for child externalizing behaviors and independent evaluator observation of parental empathy. The experimental group

participants completed the 10-week CPRT manual-based intervention that included weekly parent groups where they learned about supportive and attachment enhancing parenting practices, as well as weekly one-hour video recorded family play therapy sessions with parents and children to further develop attachment relationships via practicing at home between sessions. The results of the study revealed that parents in the experimental group reported a statistically significant decrease in child externalizing behaviors. Further, there was statistically significant increase in overall parental empathy.

Limitations to the Carnes-Holt and Bratton (2014) study included the small and regionalized sample size, limited measurements utilized, and inability to account for unique adoption variances within individual families. However, this is a promising first step in validating the effectiveness of CPRT with adoptive families towards and assisting practitioners and adoption and child welfare agencies in determining appropriate treatment strategies within post-adoption services.

Whole Family Theraplay (WFT). Whole Family Theraplay (WFT; Theraplay) is an attachment focused, directive play therapy approach that was developed for preschool Headstart programs in the 1960s (Booth & Jernberg, 2010). Theraplay has been cited as a promising intervention for use with adoptive families (Booth & Jernberg, 2010; Brodzinsky, 2013).

Weir et al. (2013) completed a study combining Theraplay with the clinical interventions of family systems therapy to determine if the joint strategies would be effective in treating adoptive family systems that included adopted and biological sibling sets. The study included 12 families in total ($N=53$) with 23 parents (i.e., cohabitating hetero, married hetero, lesbian) and 30 children of which 25 were adoptees (14 female, 11 male). The ethnic and racial demographics of the parents were three Latino, one biracial Latino and White, 15 White, three African American, and one person of Southeast Asian descent. The children included seven Latino, eight biracial Latino and White, nine White, and six African American. In regard to adoption type, 23 children were adopted from the public child welfare system, and the remaining two were adopted privately.

The researchers used the McMaster Family Assessment Device (FAD) to measure family functioning, Outcome Questionnaire-45 (OQ) to assess symptom outcomes related to relational functioning for the parents, Youth Outcome Questionnaire (Y-OQ) to assess outcome measures related to behavior for children, and Child Behavioral Checklist (CBCL) to measure parental

reports of child internal and external behaviors. The families participated in 12 to 15 Theraplay sessions conducted by master's level MFT student therapists in training who had received the standard, three-day Theraplay training by certified Theraplay trainers. In addition to the weekly sessions, the families also checked in with the therapists by phone mid-week for status reports.

The results of the family Theraplay sessions revealed statistically significant differences in increased family communication, increased interpersonal relations, and children's overall behavioral adjustment. The researchers acknowledged the study's limitations, which included being a small sample size, no control group, and not obtaining the length of time the adopted children had been in foster care placements. However, this research shows promise in using WFT with adoptive families. Specifically, the results demonstrated potential clinical effectiveness in three areas for "improving family communication within adoptive family systems, enhancing adult parents' interpersonal relational skills, and assisting children in adoptive families to have better overall clinical outcomes" (Weir et al., 2013, p. 192).

Transracial Adoption Specific Interventions.

The above references to assessment strategies, techniques, and empirically validated interventions can be utilized with same race and transracial adoptive families. Specific counseling techniques for transracial adopted persons and families focus on how mental health professionals can assist families to address issues related to race, ethnicity, and White privilege but are neither technique specific nor empirically validated.

Utilization of post-adoption services. Researchers (Adkinson-Bradley, DeBose, Terpstra, & Bilgic, 2012) have explored the extent by which various adoptive families have accessed post-adoption services (i.e., support groups and/or individual and family counseling) using data from the National Survey of Adoptive Parents (Vandivere, Malm, & Radcl, 2009). They sought to determine if post-adoption service utilization was influenced by racial/ethnic demographics of the adoptive families. The data were extracted from three groups of adoptive families ($N=1386$), namely African American parents with African American adopted children (BB; $n=219$), White parents with White adopted children (WW; $n=799$), and transracial adoptive parents with adopted children of a different race/ethnicity (TRA; $n=368$). The researchers examined the frequency rates by which the adoptive family structures reported accessing post-adoption services. They found that, when compared to BB and WW families, TRA families were approximately two times more likely to seek initial consultation for post-adoption services and

participate in support group counseling. These findings are relevant as it speaks to the need for more research of transracial adoptive parent group counseling (Adkinson-Bradley, DeBose, Terpstra, & Bilgic, 2012). Post-adoption parental group counseling could be an avenue for teaching the skills and strategies to address racial socialization issues that Baden et al. (2013) referenced.

Transracial adoptive parent cultural competence. Vonk (2001) attempted to operationalize constructs related to skills needed for transracial adoptive parent cultural competence. She categorized cultural competence based on three domains, namely racial awareness, survival skills, and multicultural family planning.

Racial awareness for adoptive parents describes the extent to which they are aware of how race, ethnicity, and privilege impact their and others' experiences.

Survival skills refers to the "recognition of the need and the ability of parents to prepare their children of color to cope successfully with racism" (p. 251).

Multicultural family planning is the process by which families cultivate meaningful and persistent connections with the adopted child's birth/first heritage.

Each domain lists 12 to 14 recommendations in the form of questions (see Appendix A) for transracial adoptive parents to consider when raising their transracially adopted children. Vonk (2002) recommended that these questions be utilized in pre- and post-adoption parental training, post-adoption support groups, and group counseling.

Family counseling. Friedlander (1999), in her practice article, offered multiple strategies for family therapists working with international, transracial adoptive families. She recommended conjoint and individual sessions to evaluate the degree of openness in regard to adoption related themes. She indicated separate sessions were specifically helpful to offer the transracially adopted child a safe environment to disclose racial discrimination or microaggressions without worry or concern for hurting adoptive parents' feelings. She also recommended psychoeducation for the family on transracially adopted person racial/ethnic identity development and encouragement of the family to consider the entire system as "in cultural transition" (Friedlander, 1999, p. 576) would increase cohesiveness and emphasize the importance of cultural and racial identity. Baden, Gibbons, Wilson, and McGinniss (2013) described how clinicians should aim to encourage families to acknowledge racial differences rather than use a colorblind attitude but also assist adoptive parents to access cultural opportunities for the entire family system to identify with their child's heritage in order to promote family cohesion. They stated, "In

addition, adoptive parents and adopted adolescents need specific skills and strategies in order to prepare for race-based bias and experiences of discrimination, teasing, or bullying” (Baden et al., p. 231).

Group counseling. Support groups for adoptive parents and adopted adolescents, such as the one described by Watson, Stern, and Foster (2012), can offer structured group counseling sessions in an effort to promote adoptive parent navigation of the adoption experience and positive adoption identity among adopted youth. The researchers (Watson, Stern, & Foster, 2012) presented separate group counseling models to address the needs of adoptive parents and of adopted adolescents. Both groups met for 12-weeks and used a semi-structured format for session delivery. The adoptive parent groups’ goals included the following: (a) foster and enhance a healthy relationship with the adopted child, (b) explore and understand their family of origin culture and that of their child, (c) identify family resources and strengths, and (d) determine how to maintain a healthy marriage post-adoption. Topics covered in the parenting group sessions included the following: “(a) Being New Parents, (b) Support Systems, (c) Adoption Stigma, (d) Parenting Skill Sets, (e) Family of Origin, (f) Family Culture, (g) Stresses of the Adoption Process, (h) Communication skills, (i) Family Roles, and (j) Relationships” (Watson, Stern, & Foster, 2012, p. 437).

The adolescent counseling groups’ goals were to (a) identify meaning in adolescence, (b) develop freedom to make choices and accept responsibility for these choices, and (c) recognize and value the need for relationships throughout life. Topics reviewed during the adolescent section included (a) Freedom and Responsibility, (b) Feelings, (c) Communication, (d) Relationships with Parents, (e) Friendship, (f) Family of Origin, (g) Family Culture, (h) Risky Behaviors, (i) Family Roles, and (j) The Future (Watson, Stern, & Foster, 2012). The Family Culture session focused on how the adolescents assess similarities and differences within birth and adoptive families, how they feel they fit or are accepted into their adoptive family culture, and how they may integrate their culture with their adoptive family (Watson, Stern, & Foster, 2012). The group counseling models for adoptive parents and adopted adolescents show promise for future validation research as it covers common adoption related themes and developmental tasks while offered within a supportive and cohesive group counseling milieu (Watson, Stern, & Foster, 2012).

Summary of Adoption Sensitive Counseling

Adoption sensitive counseling can be offered within various frameworks that include individual, family, and group counseling. While not yet empirically validated as effective practice, a variety of techniques are frequently used by adoption sensitive mental health providers that include rituals, lifebooks, pictorial timelines, letter writing, loss boxes, and genograms. These techniques allow for exploration and processing of adoption related developmental tasks, such as telling the adoption story, managing grief and loss issues, understanding the meaning of adoption, and questions about birth/first families (Brodzinsky, Smith, & Brodzinsky, 1998). Two promising adoptive family counseling interventions that have undergone empirical validation include CPRT (Carnes-Holt & Bratton, 2014) and WFT (Weir et al., 2013). Both interventions have demonstrated effectiveness in addressing the family system of adoption by encouraging improved parent and child interactions through the use of play and through parent consultation.

The frameworks, techniques, and validated interventions could also be applicable for transracial adoptive families. Specific recommendations for this group include clinicians attending to discussions surrounding race, ethnicity, and privilege (Baden et al., 2013), using individual and family sessions to assess openness in adoption communication, using psychoeducation on transracial adoptee identity development, and encouraging the family to consider the entire system as a multicultural unit (Friedlander, 1999). Group counseling to address racial, ethnic, and cultural implications in transracial adoptive families could prove beneficial since transracial adoptive families have been shown to be more likely than other adoptive family structures to access group counseling services (Adkinson-Bradley, DeBose, Terpstra, & Bilgic, 2012). The group counseling model suggested by Watson, Stern, and Foster (2012) with separate groups for adoptive parents and adopted adolescents, shows promise in covering a range of adoption related development topics, including racial and cultural identity development. However, research on transracial adoptive parenting cultural competence is needed to fully determine best practice provisions (Vonk, 2002).

Elementary School Counseling

This research aims to examine how elementary school counselors perceive and work with students adopted transracially (SATr). In order to fully understand this topic, it is necessary to provide a context for school counseling programs and the role of the elementary school

counselor. This context is shaped by district and building leadership, national and state standards that include ethical codes and multicultural practice, and demonstrated effectiveness of counseling services in a school setting. What is known about adoption sensitive practice for helping professionals bears relevance to how school counselors provide responsive services to SATr within the school setting. The review of the literature is related to comprehensive and multiculturally sensitive school counseling programs with a specific focus on elementary school counselor roles within these programs. Demonstrated program effectiveness and effective elementary school counseling service delivery supports the need for accountability, which is essential in understanding the context of elementary school counseling. Attention is brought to school counselor multicultural competency with information on perceptions of and practice strategies with multiple heritage youth. The chapter will conclude with a specific focus on what is known about school counselor practices with SATr and a synthesis of the literature review.

School Counseling Program

Professional school counselors are collaborative members of a school community that provide a myriad of student services through a comprehensive developmentally appropriate school counseling program.

Professional school counselors are certified/licensed educators with a minimum of a master's degree in school counseling, making them uniquely qualified to address all students' academic, career and personal/social development needs by designing, implementing, evaluating and enhancing a comprehensive school counseling program that promotes and enhances student success. (ASCA, 2011, para.1)

Professional school counselors are responsible to design and implement a comprehensive school counseling program that promotes student achievement (ASCA, 2012b). Specifically, the ASCA Executive Summary (2012b, p.1) outlines the components of a comprehensive school counseling program through the ASCA National Model (2012a) to

- ensure equitable access to a rigorous education for all students
- identify the knowledge and skills all students will acquire as a result of the K-12 comprehensive school counseling program
- be delivered to all students in a systematic fashion
- be based on data-driven decision making
- be provided by a state-credentialed school counselor

Comprehensive school counseling programs must provide for multicultural sensitivity across all components of the ASCA Model. ASCA's 2009 position statement on professional school counselors and cultural diversity states, "Professional school counselors collaborate with stakeholders to create a school and community climate that embraces cultural diversity and helps to remove barriers that impede student success" (p. 17). The statement highlights professional school counselors' roles as advocates to promote a "school climate where cultural diversity is celebrated; curriculum, textbooks, pedagogy, and classroom management methods are inclusive; and cultural relations within the school are encouraged and embraced" (ASCA, 2009, p. 17).

The components of the school counseling program establish a multiculturally sensitive framework that clarifies the services provided and the role of the school counselor. These components include *foundation*, *management*, *delivery*, and *accountability*. The school counselor incorporates four themes of *leadership*, *advocacy*, *collaboration*, and *systemic change* as part of this framework (ASCA, 2012a). Trolley (2011) highlighted the professional school counselor role that includes leadership, advocacy, and mental health capacities to best meet and address student needs. Professional school counselors are often students' first relationship with a mental health professional (De Mato & Curcio, 2004).

The *foundation* of a comprehensive program involves the program focus (i.e., beliefs, vision and mission statements, goals), student competencies (i.e., academic, career, social/emotional development), and professional competencies (i.e., knowledge, attitudes, skills; ethical standards). *Management* is accomplished by using assessments and tools that will aid in program assessment and use of time, data, and plans. *Delivery* of school counseling services is offered to students, families, school staff, and community through indirect (i.e., referrals, consultation, collaboration) and direct services (i.e., curriculum, student plans, responsive services). *Accountability* for school counseling programs is maintained by school counselors through the use of data collection and analysis of the results and impact of school counseling interventions and the evaluation and improvement of services. The four themes ensure that school counselors are providing *leadership*, *advocacy*, *collaboration*, and *systemic change* so that every student has access to a rigorous education and opportunities to achieve success in school (ASCA, 2012a).

It is recommended that school counselors spend 80% of their time in service delivery with the remaining time in program management and support services (ASCA, 2012a). ASCA (2012b) defined service delivery activities to include the following:

School counseling core curriculum – structured series of appropriate competencies delivered by the school counselor in collaboration with teachers and other school staff to “provide all students with knowledge, attitude, and skills appropriate for their developmental level” (p. 3)

Individual student planning – school counselor led coordination of services and activities that will aid in a student’s personal and academic development.

Responsive services – activities that meet a student’s immediate needs. These include individual, group, and crisis counseling.

Indirect student services – “provided on behalf of students as a result of the school counselors’ interactions with others including referrals for additional assistance, consultation and collaboration with parents, teachers, other educators and community organizations.” (p. 4)

Research supports the efficacy of school counseling programs (Whiston et al., 2011). Studies have demonstrated program effectiveness by examining individual components of the ASCA Model service delivery (e.g., Whiston & Quimby, 2009) and the overall effectiveness of the entire ASCA Model program (e.g., Wilkerson, Perusse, & Hughes, 2013). For instance, Wilkerson, Perusse, and Hughes (2013) found that elementary schools ($N=24$) with Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP) designation had significantly higher Language Arts and Math proficiency scores in Indiana schools’ Annual Yearly Progress than non-RAMP schools. Whiston, Tai, Raharjda, and Eders’ (2011) meta-analysis of outcome studies ($N=117$) based on elementary school guidance curriculum and responsive service delivery suggested that school counseling interventions yielded moderately significant effect sizes in elementary, middle, and high schools.

With regards to elementary school counselors, it is recommended that 30% to 40% of their time be in providing responsive services that include individual and group counseling and indirect student services that include consultation and collaboration (ASCA, 2012a). Elementary school counselors are actively engaged in consultation and collaboration to support teachers and administrators in creating caring school communities (CSC; Lindwall & Coleman, 2008), advocating for students with disabilities during the individual educational planning process (Geltner & Leibforth, 2008), and implementing programmatic interventions to reduce bullying within the schools (Bauman, 2008). Further, consultation is offered to parents and guardians as

part of family-school partnerships (Amatea, Daniels, Bringman, & Vandiver, 2004; Bryan & Henry, 2012; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010; Li & Vanzquez-Nutall, 2009). Elementary school counselors are capable of providing individual and group counseling to students experiencing an array of socio-emotional issues including family divorce (Richardson & Rosen, 1999), depressive symptoms (Auger, 2005), and ethnic identity development (Malott, Paone, Humphries, & Martinez, 2010).

Whiston and Quinby's (2009) study of elementary school counseling revealed the effectiveness of group counseling approaches to address social skills training, family adjustment issues, and discipline problems for elementary school students. The overall academic achievement scores of elementary school students attending a school with a comprehensive school counseling program were significantly higher than students who did not attend a school with a school counseling program (Whiston & Quinby, 2009). Overall, the researchers indicated that responsive services were most effective at the elementary school level compared to middle and high schools and small group work was the most effective delivery method of core guidance curriculum and responsive services (Whiston & Quinby, 2009).

School Counselor Multicultural Competency

School counselors are in optimal positions to act as leaders and advocates for students and communities, including diverse communities of color within the school setting, which necessitates multicultural competency. The Ethical Standards for School Counselors (ASCA, 2010) includes a specific section (Multicultural and Social Justice Advocacy and Leadership) related to multicultural competencies (MCC). Specifically, professional school counselors are to "Develop competencies in how prejudice, power and various forms of oppression, such as ableism, ageism, classism, familyism, genderism, heterosexism, immigrationism, linguicism, racism, religionism and sexism, affect self, students and all stakeholders" (ASCA, 2010, E.2.b,p.5). Familyism, racism, and immigrationism are among the oppressive forces that impact transracial adoptees. School counselors are tasked with providing culturally competent direct and indirect services to diverse student populations that include counseling, assessment, and consultation. Therefore, attention to MCC for professional school counselors is foundational in their capabilities to effectively work with SATr.

School counselors' multicultural competency came to the forefront with Holcomb-McCoy's (2001a, 2001b) exploration of self-perceived school counselor MCC. She revised the

61-item Multicultural Counseling Competence and Training Survey (MCCTS; Holcomb-McCoy & Myers, 1999) to develop the MCCTS-R that specifically examined school counselor MCC. The MCCTS-R is a 32-question, self-report instrument that has been utilized in multiple studies to examine school counselor MCC perceptions (Guzmán, Calfa, Van Horn Kerne, & McCarthy, 2013; Holcomb-McCoy & Day-Vines, 2007; Owens, Bodenhorn, & Bryant, 2010). In addition to the MCCTS-R, Holcomb-McCoy (2004) developed a MCC theme analysis of multicultural school counseling practice, which is a 51-item school counselor multicultural competency checklist. These assessment tools are based on self-report of multicultural competency perceptions.

Research on school counselors' perceived levels of MCC span the past 14 years (see Table 2.6). The findings from these studies offer no consensus on significant predictors of school counselor perceived MCC. Years of school counselor experience predicted perceived MCC in one study (Owens, Bodenhorn, & Bryant, 2010), yet bore little impact in another (Holcomb-McCoy, 2001). MCC training also had mixed results as one study found that it had no significance towards perceived MCC (Holcomb-McCoy, 2001), and another found that minimal training contributed to lower levels of perceived MCC (Chao, 2013). Another study found that race significantly predicted perceived MCC (Dodson, 2012), while no other study found this to be the case. Overall, while school counselor perceptions of MCC have been studied, it remains to be determined what variables are consistent predictors of these perceptions.

Table 2.6

School Counselors' Multicultural Counseling Competencies (MCC)

Author/s (Year)	N	Findings
Holcomb-McCoy (2001)	76	Overall school counselors perceived themselves as MCC competent with no significant difference based on years of experience or MCC coursework
Owens, Bodenhorn, & Bryant (2010)	157	School counselor years of experience predictor of MCC
Dodson (2012)	41	White school counselors had higher levels of perceived MCC than school counselors of color
Chao (2013)	259	Minimal MCC training and colorblind attitudes predict low levels of school counselor MCC
Guzmán, Calfa, Van Horn Kerne, & McCarthy (2013)	227	Perceived school counselor MCC do not predict skill level

Elementary School Counselors

Elementary school counselors are integral and collaborative members amongst a team of teachers, administrators, and parents to ensure student academic success. Specifically, elementary school counselors provide “education, prevention, and early identification and intervention” (ASCA, n.d.) so all children can achieve academic success. Barna and Brott’s (2011) study found that elementary school counselors endorsed both Academic and Personal/Social standards as methods to support favorable student outcomes and academic development. By providing a comprehensive developmental school counseling program that embraces multicultural sensitivity, elementary school counselors are in optimal positions to act as leaders and advocates for students and communities in support of student academic success, including diverse communities of color within the school setting such as SATr.

A study comparing elementary school counselors’ roles to middle and secondary school counselors found that elementary school counselors reported they spent more time in coordination and consultation; performed less administration related activities; and worked in a more systemic fashion in collaboration with teachers, family, and community agencies (Hardesty & Dillard, 1994). Another study found that elementary school counselors reported their services to be mainly individual student planning and responsive services, addressing many

developmentally appropriate themes, such as peer relationships, family issues, and character building (Trolley, 2011).

The following examples highlight the types of elementary school counselor delivery system services for a variety of student concerns.

Divorce. Richardson and Rosen's (1999) review of school based interventions for elementary aged children experiencing a family divorce found that counselor strategies including supportive group counseling, psychoeducation, skills building, and fostering parent and child communication aided in student adjustment to and coping with their parent's divorce.

Depression. Auger (2005) presented a set of guidelines that include collaboration with parents and teachers, and offering individual and group counseling to address the depression symptoms while offering consultation to remediate the impact on academic functioning and performance.

Bullying. Bauman (2008) suggested the school counselor utilize their expertise in advocacy to promote systemic interventions to prevent and address bullying, act as consultant to teachers and parents, train staff, students, and parents, offer guidance curriculum, and provide individual and group counseling.

Disabilities. Geltener and Leibforth (2008) recommended that school counselors take on an advocacy role to assist students with individual educational planning (IEP). Advocacy is utilized to promote a student's strengths, to integrate identified strengths into the IEP, and to promote school wide strengths to support the student.

Caring school community. Lindwall and Coleman (2008) describe a caring school community (CSC) as an effective way to increase student feeling of belonging. This is achieved using multiple strengths based counselor strategies: connectedness, empowerment, safety, collaboration, consistency, shared ownership, and fun.

Grief/Loss. Eppler, Olson, and Hidano (2009) described individual /group counseling using biblionarrative techniques where students use both verbal and written methods to describe a scenario, displaced communication where students talk through emotional concerns via the use of characters of a story. These techniques could be effective ways to address a manner of emotional themes including grief and loss issues.

Social skills. Bostik and Anderson (2009) found that the Social Skills Group Intervention resulted in statistically significant reductions in loneliness and social anxiety in third graders.

Ethnic identity development. Malott, Paone, Humphries, and Martinez (2013) reported on the impact of group counseling for ethnic identity development of Mexican American students. The results of this group indicated that group members reported growth in their

knowledge of their culture, ethnic pride, and cultural history while also improving relational skills.

Anxiety. Thompson, Robertson, Curtis and Frick (2013) described easy to use instruments for school counselor use to identify anxiety symptoms while offering strategies such as individual and group cognitive behavioral therapy, group play therapy, and computerized cognitive behavioral therapy for symptom reduction. They also highlight the school counselor collaborative efforts with families and teachers and taking an advocacy stance for school wide screening and prevention efforts.

Elementary school counselors offer service delivery activities that include classroom guidance, individual student planning, responsive services, and indirect services within a comprehensive school counseling program. Examples of service delivery include a myriad of individual and group counseling, classroom guidance, consultation and collaboration, and advocacy activities to address a range of socio-emotional needs. This service delivery system is embedded within a comprehensive and developmentally appropriate school counseling program. Multicultural sensitivity is integral across all components of a school counseling program and programmatic service delivery to meet the needs of all students. Table 2.7 delineates the multiple ways services are offered within the continuum of elementary school counselor practices.

Table 2.7
Elementary School Counselor Service Delivery Practices

Socio-Emotional Concerns	Delivery System*			
	IC	GC	CG	C&C
Divorce		X		X
Depression	X	X		X
Bullying	X	X	X	X
Disabilities				X
Caring School Community				X
Grief/Loss	X	X		
Social Skills		X		
Ethnic Identity Development		X		
Anxiety	X	X		X

*Note: IC= Individual Counseling; GC=Group Counseling; CG = Classroom Guidance; C & C=Consultation and Collaboration

School Counselors' Perceptions of and Counseling Strategies with Multiple Heritage Students

Multiple heritage youth (MHY) are students with backgrounds reflecting diverse racial, cultural, religious, and ethnicity (Henrikson & Paladino, 2009). The National Center for Education Statistic (NCES) began collecting information on students endorsing two or more racial categories in 2000. Since this time the number of MHY has remained relatively stable with incremental increases. The 2010 percentage distribution reported 1.5% MHY with predictions of an increase to 2.0% by 2025. Examining counseling practices with multiple heritage students has received relatively little attention until the past decade; however, during this time, several studies have explored how school counselors perceive and work with multiple heritage students (Harris, 2012; Harris & Durodoye; 2006; Maxwell & Henrikson, 2012). Table 2.8 is a summary of these studies.

Table 2.8

School Counselors' Perceptions of Multiple Heritage Students

Author/s (Year)	N	Findings
Harris & Durodye (2006)	323	WSC* perceived MHY** to experience more adjustment/behavioral issues than AASC***; AASC perceived multiracial neighborhoods for MHY to be more important than WSC
Harris (2013)	1627	School counselor years of experience, racial identity, gender, school setting, and diversity of school setting impacts perceptions of MHY
Maxwell & Henriksen (2012)	10	Provided information on identifying MHY, perceptions of interracial relationships, needs of MHY, and counseling interventions for MHY

*White school counselors

**Multiple heritage youth

***African American school counselors

Studies have shown that school counselors' perceptions of multiple heritage students are impacted by the school counselor's racial identity, age, years of school counselor experience, and gender (Harris, 2013; Harris & Durodoye, 2006; Maxwell & Henriksen, 2012). These studies identified multiple counseling interventions and strategies to work with this population (Harris & Durodoye, 2006; Harris, 2013, Maxwell & Henriksen, 2012). Among these include suggestions

for school counselors to engage in self analysis to assess for bias towards multiple heritage youth (Harris, 2002) and to provide creative therapies (e.g., play, music, art), bibliotherapy, and family counseling (Harris, 2009). Future research aimed at empirically validating the efficacy of some of the recommended approaches would be helpful to determine appropriate best practice strategies for multiple heritage youth.

There are numerous counseling strategies that can assist MHY and their families; however, none were found that had empirical validation when working with this specific population. Despite this limitation, a variety of techniques and interventions can be gleaned from the literature. The research reviewed all suggested that school counselors assess their personal feelings and bias towards interracial relationships and multiple heritage persons as a beginning place when working with this population (Harris & Durodye, 2006; Harris, 2013, Maxwell & Henriksen, 2012). In order to do so, school counselors are recommended to ask themselves reflective questions (Harris, 2002). Examples of some of these questions include the following:

“How do I honestly feel about interracial marriages and partnerships? Do I judge them differently when compared to non-interracial marriages and partnerships? What preconceived notions do I have regarding biracial individuals? What type of experiences have I had with biracial individuals? What type of experiences have I had with parents of biracial children? How do those experiences impact my perceptions?” (p. 127)

Harris (2009) suggested a number of counseling approaches when working with multiple heritage youth. *Play therapy* is a developmentally appropriate approach for children to explore their feelings and experiences using play with toys, dolls, art, games, and other play materials. Selected play materials should represent diverse populations and backgrounds. *Music and art therapy* are creative approaches to help children identify feelings and emotions. *Bibliotherapy* with age appropriate books that reflect multiple heritage persons and families can be helpful counseling tools. *Family counseling* assists the family to support a child's exploration of multiple heritage background to eliminate the burden of the child needing to choose one heritage over the other.

In a review of the school counseling literature, a variety of techniques and strategies have been utilized by school counselors to work with multiple heritage students. These approaches are offered within the delivery system of the school counseling program to include both direct and indirect services. Table 2.9 reflects how the approaches fit within the school counselor delivery system.

Genograms offer the counselor an opportunity to visually represent a student's family history and include varying racial and ethnic backgrounds (Maxwell & Henriksen, 2012).

Journaling can be a helpful exercise where the student can describe developmental interactions on a daily basis to process and explore feelings (Maxwell & Henriksen, 2012).

Connecting with ancestors can be a helpful way to encourage a student to learn about positive aspects of relatives from both heritages (Maxwell & Henriksen, 2012).

Validation refers to confirming the experiences of the student (Maxwell & Henriksen, 2012, p. 23).

Building self esteem to enhance a student with a multiple heritage background overall sense of self can be a helpful tool (Maxwell & Henriksen, 2012).

Coping strategies through the use of strategic role plays depicting common scenarios (ie. introduction of a friend to your parents) that can be challenging for multiple heritage youth (Maxwell & Henriksen, 2012).

Listen in an active and engaged manner to emphasize that what the student is sharing is important (Maxwell & Henriksen, 2012).

Group work with other multiple heritage youth to facilitate cultural exploration within a supportive group to normalize and validate feelings related to multiple heritage backgrounds (Maxwell & Henriksen, 2012).

Parenting workshops that provide psychodeucation on multiple heritage identity development and promote increased parent and child communication can be facilitated by the school counselor (Moss & Davis, 2008).

Classroom guidance that promote diverse families, similarities, and differences among all persons (Moss & Davis, 2008)

Collaboration with art and music teachers to promote art projects and musicals that reflect diversity (Moss & Davis, 2008).

Table 2.9

School Counselor Service Delivery Practices with Multiple Heritage Youth

Techniques with Multiple Heritage Youth	Delivery System*			
	IC	GC	CG	C&C
Using genograms	X	X	X	
Journaling	X	X		
Connecting with ancestors	X	X	X	
Validating	X	X	X	
Building self esteem	X	X	X	
Coping strategies	X	X	X	
Listening	X	X	X	
Facilitating group work		X		
Parenting workshops				X
Providing classroom guidance			X	
Collaborating				X

*Note: IC= Individual Counseling; GC=Group Counseling; CG=Classroom Guidance; C & C=Consultation and Collaboration

Multiple heritage students share some similar experiences to students adopted transracially, which includes stereotyping, racism, and possible discrimination. This is related, in part, to contextual and historical factors related to race relations in the US, racial identity development, and increased scrutiny based on physical features (Harris, 2009). As was reviewed in the preceding sections, transracially adopted children experience similar instances of racial stereotyping (Bradley & Hawkins – Leon, 2002; Snyder, 2011), potential racial identity developmental challenges (Baden & Javier, 2010), and increased scrutiny as a result of racial differences and physical dissimilarities from adoptive parents (Samuels, 2009). Research has reviewed how society's perceptions of multiracial children impact perceptions of school counselors (Harris, 2013; Harris & Durodoye, 2006) that can either be supportive of or contribute to marginalization of multiracial students.

SATr Needs in Schools and School Counselor SATr Sensitive Practices

Researchers have suggested that adopted children are at a higher risk for academic challenges that include needing special education services (Brodzinsky, 2013; Meese, 2005; Howard, Smith, & Ryan, 2004; Raleigh & Kao, 2013; Ringeisen et al., 2009). Howard, Smith,

and Ryan's (2004) research examined academic and social adjustment of adopted children from varying adoptive backgrounds, including child welfare, international, and infant domestic adoptions. They found that adopted children, compared to non-adopted children, had higher rates of special academic needs and emotional and behavioral concerns. Ringeisen, Casanueva, Cross, and Urato's (2009) research found that adopted children who had experienced maltreatment as infants were more likely than non-adopted children to need both educational and mental health interventions upon elementary school entrance. A meta-analytic review of adoption research examining IQs of adopted and non-adopted children found that IQs were similar in both groups; however, adopted children demonstrated delayed school performance (van IJzendoorn, Juffer, & Poelhuis, 2005).

In addition to academic challenges, adopted children also experience increased instances of bullying that are often related to their adoptive or racial/ethnic backgrounds (Ford, Scott, Moore, & Amos, 2013; Raaska, et al., 2012; Westhues & Cohen, 1998). For SATr, micro-aggressions, which are defined as commonplace and often unintentional insults pertaining to race or ethnicity (Sue et al., 2007), are exacerbated by being raised within White, culturally homogeneous environments where cultural preparations and protective measures against racism may not be the norm (Bradley & Hawkins-Leon, 2002; Jacobson, Nielson, & Hardeman, 2012; Samuels, 2009). Finally, academic assignments, such as family trees, autobiographies, genetics projects, Mother's Day/Father's Day, timelines of lives, birth data and medical history, sex education, family heritage, literature with stigmatizing adoption themes, and baby picture homework, further marginalize adopted students (Evan B. Donaldson Institute (EBDI) & Center for Adoption Support & Education (CASE), 2009; Fishman & Harrington, 2007; Meese, 2012).

School counselors are in a unique position to offer preventative measures for academic and social concerns within the school setting and to identify and refer to outside mental health services as needed (Myer & James, 1989; Purvis, 2007). The literature on school counselor practices with adopted and transracially adopted students is limited and focuses on practice-based articles with no quantitative or qualitative research studies reported. Despite these significant limitations, the practice-based literature does provide recommendations for school counselor SATr sensitive practices (see Table 2.10).

Table 2.10

School Counselor Practice Recommendations for SATr

Author/s (Year)	Recommendations
Myer, James, & Street (1987)	Eight session classroom guidance lessons with group activities to address and prevent racial discrimination and negative stereotyping towards SATr
Myer & James (1989)	Individual counseling, parent consultation, and staff consultation
Ramos (1990)	Adoptive parent collaboration, adoption consultation with specialists, and community resource referral
Kizner & Kizner (1999)	Adoptive parent collaboration and group school counseling
Zirkle, Peterson, & Collins-Marotte (2001)	Teacher and parent consultation, individual and group school counseling, and coordinate school resources and programs
Evan B. Donaldson Institute (2006)	Attention to adoption related acceptance, accuracy, and assignments
Purvis (2007)	Awareness of post institutionalization affects and seven school counselor interventions
Taymans et al. (2008)	Awareness of adoption sensitive practices to reduce stigma
Baden & Javier (2010)	Address issues related to racial/cultural identity; reconsider testing and evaluation
Harwood, Feng, & Yu (2013)	Awareness of the impact of pre-adoption adversities; neglect, abuse, sensory deprivation, and post institutionalized behaviors

Myer, James, and Street's (1987) practice article on school counselor guidance activities to integrate an internationally, and presumably transracially, adopted student suggests building an eight meeting classroom guidance program. Their assumption was that a SATr will experience negative stereotyping and discrimination based on racial differences. To address this possibility, he developed a classroom guidance group that aimed to address and prevent discrimination and negative labeling. Each lesson was centered on group activities that encouraged students to explore the impact of discrimination and stereotyping and to develop self-awareness about the importance of cultural and racial identity. The final group in the series utilized a "strength bombardment" (p. 93) exercise whereby each student received multiple positive messages validating how other students perceived him/her. They asserted that this final

activity demonstrated that the SATr is fully accepted into the classroom; however, the authors offer no concrete rationale on how and why this is the case. While this effort is a start, particularly when so little can be found in the literature, it is replete with flaws. One significant concern is no mention was made about how the group, meant to be a learning experience for the entire classroom, would avoid further stigmatizing the SATr, particularly if there is a lack of diversity in the classroom make up. Secondly, some of the guidance lessons, such as using a kiwi “because it will be strange to most students and perceived as ugly” (p. 91), implied that a SATr may be perceived different from other students in the group. Another activity divided the children into hypothetical racial/ethnic groups, among other categories including “orphans” (p. 91), where the students determined similarities between groups, which may result in the students not being able to find commonalities. This would then open a discussion on how differences can lead to negative stereotyping. This exercise is problematic as it could expose children of color, including SATr, to racial microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007). Finally, the suggestion of reading adoption themed books, such as “Oliver Twist” (p. 93), an 18th Century story about a parentless child in an institution, can easily lead to stereotypes about adopted students and can contribute to a SATr feeling stigmatized. While the information presented is outdated and could be perceived as insensitive today, it does offer the suggestion of using classroom guidance as part of the school counseling program delivery system as a way to address issues related to diversity that could easily include transracial adoption.

Myers and James' (1989) practice article for school counselors when working with internationally adopted students centers on three domains: individual student counseling, parental consultation, and staff consultation. Individual student counseling was suggested as an effective intervention in addressing issues related to school acculturation, assessing for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms, and dealing with relational issues, such as fear of being returned to their birth country. Parent consultation was suggested as a parent training support group to provide psycho-education on common adoption related issues within families. The authors also emphasized remaining in close contact with parents of SATr to update them on their child's social, emotional, and academic progress. The final domain, teacher consultation, involved training for teachers and other staff on adoption and cultural related issues.

Ramos (1990) offered a critique and practice-based article in response to the Meyer and James' (1989) article. In essence, Ramos pointed out that Meyer and James used inaccurate

statistics to describe the population, lacked practice-based evidence in their suggestions, and made multiple inferences about the characteristics of students adopted internationally (e.g., non-English speaking), which invalidated most of the recommendations suggested. Ramos, a self-described social worker and adoptive parent to an internationally adopted student, suggested that school counselors would be better served by collaborating with adoptive parents to learn about the unique circumstances of their families, consult with specialist providers to gain accurate information on school counseling practices with SATr, and look to community resources for support for adoptive families.

Kizner and Kizner (1999) described a 12-session adoption group for elementary aged students. They highlighted the importance of collaboration with parents during the recruitment stage of the group to develop and approve the content. The group covered adoption related themes pertaining to grief and loss, questions about adoption story, and birth/first family questions. They utilized multiple group counseling strategies that included psycho-education, feelings exploration, autobiographical timelines, symbolic items of each student's adoption, lifebooks, and play therapy.

Zirkle, Peterson, and Collins-Marotte (2001) recommended that school counselors working with late aged adopted students (although not specifically SATr) provide consultation to teachers and school staff, offer individual and group counseling, and coordinate school resources and programs. They recommended that all three areas (i.e., consultation, counseling, coordination) utilized common clinical themes found in adopted populations that relate to loss, grief, and relationship concerns that can serve as frameworks for service provision. For example, they recommended that school counselors offer in-service training and ongoing consultation with teachers to assist them to respond in an adoption sensitive manner when working with adopted students. They suggested that group counseling with other adopted students could offer a place to normalize and validate adoption related concerns and feelings and can provide psycho-education on normative adoption related developmental tasks for the student groups. Individual counseling could focus on relationship building with the school counselor to establish safety and consistency. School counselors can engage in program coordination of various services potentially needed for the adopted student, while maintaining close communication with adoptive parents to ensure a collaborative service delivery network.

The Evan B. Donaldson policy report on adoption and school personnel (2006) including teachers, school psychologists, and school counselors recommended the following practice interventions to allow for a more equitable school environment for adopted children, including SATr:

Acceptance of adoptive families can be modeled by teachers and school counselors to validate and normalize adoptive families

Accuracy addresses the teacher or school counselor supporting adopted children to dispel adoption related myths that can often be stigmatizing. Accuracy can be promoted by including adoption related material when cover subjects such as families, immigration, genetics, and stories that may cover adoption related themes.

Assignments that address issues related to infancy, genetics, families, heritage, or timelines can be challenging for adopted children to complete. Teachers and school counselors can offer assignments that every student can complete.

Purvis (2007) described practice interventions to work with students who are internationally adopted and post-institutionalized. She highlighted the numerous ways that institutionalization can impact growth and development, such as language deprivation, increased sensory regulation concerns, and social/emotional delays. She offered seven distinct interventions that school counselors can implement to best serve the needs of adopted students who experienced post-institutionalization that include the following:

Assessment that includes collecting detailed medical and pre adoption histories so that appropriate referrals, if necessary, can be made.

Behavioral journals to track events that lead up to a behavioral episode or fear response with eventual goal to prevent such episodes if the trigger becomes known.

Relationship building activities using attachment focused individual and group counseling (i.e., Theraplay), social skills training, and puppet role plays.

Identify and recognize signs and symptoms of issues that may need referrals for sensory deprivation, occupational therapy, and speech therapy evaluations.

Behavior modification using a reward based system and to determine if PTSD symptoms are triggering a fear response.

Mirror and model positive affect and behaviors.

Provide a safe environment that promotes trust in the relationship.

Other general practice strategies include Baden and Javier's (2010) recommendation that school psychologists and counselors address issues related to racial and ethnic identity development and reconsider testing and evaluations used with SATr. Harwood, Feng, and Yu (2013), like Purvis (2007), recommended school counselors be aware of the impact of pre-adoption adversities, such as neglect, abuse, sensory deprivation, and post institutionalized behaviors that influence school and social performance in order to cultivate specific resources for SATr to address specialized needs. Finally, adoption advocates have suggested that teacher and school counselor awareness in adoption sensitive practices can be powerful antidotes for adoption related stigma and marginalization within academic settings (Taymans et al., 2008).

Adoption Sensitive Practices in the School Counseling Program

While only one empirical study (Taymans et al., 2008) was found that examined pre-service school counselor training and competency in working with students who are adopted, indicators point to school counselor capability via current practice strategies, multicultural competency, and skills to effectively work with SATr. Based on the proposed adoption competencies (Atkinson et al., 2013), the intersect of the school counseling program delivery system (i.e., individual counseling, group counseling, classroom guidance, consultation and collaboration) to multiple heritage youth, adopted students, students adopted transracially, and elementary students in general can be suggested (see Table 2.11). Please see Appendix B for a more detailed crosswalk of the proposed competencies with current school counselor interventions.

Table 2.11

Adoption Sensitive Elementary School Counselor Practices

SATr Domain	Delivery System*			
	IC	GC	CG	C&C
<u>Academic</u>				
Program coordination addressing all needs and collaboration with adoptive parents (Zirkle, Peterson, & Collins-Marotte, 2001)				X
Accuracy about adoption information and adoption sensitive assignments (EBDI, 2006)			X	X
Assessment of pre adoption history and identification of signs of academic barriers for appropriate referrals (Purvis, 2007)	X			X
<u>Personal/Social</u>				
Classroom guidance to address stereotypes, racism, and adoption related stigma (Myers, James & Streets, 1987)		X		
Acculturation, PTSD screening, relational issues (Myers and James, 1987)	X			X
Parent collaboration & specialist constellation to address familiar circumstances (Ramos, 1990)				X
In –service training for teachers, staff, psycho-education on adoption related developmental issues, validation of feelings/experiences related to adoption (Zirkle, Peterson, & Collins-Marotte, 2001)	X			X
School staff promote and model acceptance of adoptive family situations (EBDI, 2007)			X	X
Attachment building relationship activities, model positive affect/behaviors, and provide safe environment (Purvis, 2007)	X	X	X	
<u>Behavioral</u>				
Behavioral journals to identify fear triggers and behavior modification plans (Purvis, 2007)	X			X

*Note: IC= Individual Counseling; GC=Group Counseling; CG = Classroom Guidance; C & C=Consultation and Collaboration

Summary

Students adopted transracially are at higher risk than non-adopted populations for experiencing social and academic difficulties (Bradley & Hawkins-Leon, 2002; Brodzinsky, 2013; Howard, Smith, & Ryan, 2004; Jacobson, Nielson, & Hardeman, 2012; Meese, 2005;

Raleigh & Kao, 2013; Ringeisen et al., 2009; Samuels, 2009). Research has suggested that persons adopted transracially experience unique developmental paths that encompass both adoptive and racial and ethnic identity tasks. Additional studies suggest that persons adopted transracially may encounter difficulties and struggles related to successfully navigating their developmental tasks as a result of being raised in families, mainly White, who do not share the same ethnic/racial heritage. Although adoption competencies for helping professionals are in the early stages of development to better collaborate with and treat this population, little is known about how school counselors perceive and work with students adopted transracially (SATr).

Comprehensive school counseling programs provide a developmentally appropriate and multiculturally sensitive service delivery system to promote and support student academic and social achievement. Research supports the overall efficacy of school counseling programs (Whiston et al., 2009). School counselor service delivery activity includes core curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services, and indirect services. Elementary school counselors provide responsive services, such as individual and group counseling, while also actively engaging in advocacy work via consultation and collaboration for the students they serve. Research also supports the effectiveness of elementary school counselor responsive services to promote student emotional and academic achievement (Whiston & Quimby, 2009). Elementary school counselor services address a broad range of socio emotional and academic issues to meet the needs of a diverse student body. Research has sought to learn more about school counselors' perceived multicultural competence, while some information exists about how school counselors perceive and work with students with multiple heritage backgrounds. Maxwell and Henriksens' (2012) research on school counselor perceptions of multiple heritage students offers concepts that can be utilized in assessing how school counselors work with SATrs. This includes examining school counselors' perceptions of transracial adoption and its impact on SATrs.

It is necessary to use a contextual framework that includes multicultural perspectives, developmental considerations, and intentional services through a comprehensive developmentally appropriate elementary school counseling program in order to examine how elementary school counselors perceive and work with SATr. This framework is grounded in the literature that examines the multiple racial/ethnic and adoptive identity developmental and psychosocial tasks while accounting for elementary school counselor roles within a

multiculturally sensitive comprehensive school counseling program. This framework supports a qualitative study that examines school counselors' perceptions of and specific practice strategies and interventions with students adopted transracially.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

A comprehensive review of the literature has provided a better understanding of students adopted transracially (SATr) and elementary school counseling programs and services. The increasing diversity in the United States that is reflected in our schools, the ethical standards that articulate school counselor multicultural competency, and the developmental needs of children underscore the unique adoption related developmental tasks and adoptive identity frameworks for multiple heritage youth and elementary aged students adopted transracially. However, there are gaps in our current research regarding the actual practices of elementary school counselors who are serving the needs of SATr and their families. Therefore, there is a need to uncover what are the current developmental and multicultural appropriate practices used by elementary school counselors to understand and meet the needs of these students and their families in the school setting.

I invited professional elementary school counselors to share their experiences when working in their school communities with SATr and their families. The research questions concentrated on how elementary school counselors perceive and practice with students adopted transracially and their families within their school settings. The following research questions offered a guiding framework for the study:

What are elementary school counselors' perceptions of students adopted transracially (SATr)?

What are common needs and concerns presented to school counselors by SATr and their families?

What counseling approaches and techniques have worked well with this population?

This chapter is a description of the methods followed by the researcher for the study. First, the stage is set by providing a rationale for choosing a qualitative approach, description of the conceptual frameworks that provide the context for the study, and an overview of phenomenological research. Next, the procedures for identifying participants based on selection criteria are articulated. Procedures outlining the Institutional Review Board requirements, ethics, and data collection methods are detailed and include specific information related to the interview design and protocol, field notes, reflexive journals, data storage plans, and the interview process. The section following is specific to the role of the researcher, detailed data analysis procedures,

and information on qualitative analysis software. The chapter concludes with strategies to address trustworthiness for this study.

Research Design

A qualitative design is a best-suited approach to explore how elementary school counselors work with students adopted transracially and their families. A qualitative study supports obtaining a detailed understanding of a complex issue, allows for direct communication with those who have experienced the issue, and empowers individuals to share and describe their experiences (Creswell, 2013). This understanding is needed to “identify variables that cannot be easily measured, or hear silenced voices” (Creswell, 2013, p. 48). Based on a review of the literature, there is a dearth of information concerning what is known about elementary school counselors’ perceptions of and practices with SATr and their families. Maxwell and Henriksen’s (2012) phenomenological study examining how middle school counselors perceive and practice with multiple heritage students has been proven useful in describing an experience that had previously been unknown. The researchers offered ample descriptions of how middle school counselors work with multiple heritage students. It was my aim to offer a similar type of study with elementary school counselors and SATr and their families.

I used a phenomenological approach to further explore how elementary school counselors work with SATr and their families (Creswell, 2013). Specifically, phenomenology aims to capture “how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others” (Patton, 2002, p. 104). Elementary school counselors are uniquely qualified through their education, training, and ethical guidelines to provide a multitude of services to SATr and their families (ASCA, 2012). However, the voice and experiences of these professionals have not been reviewed or examined in scholarly literature. A phenomenological approach that employs semi-structured interviews allowed for rich and detailed perceptions, descriptions, and feelings to emerge from those elementary school counselor participants who have experience working with SATr and their families. The framework and research questions aim to “describe the common meaning” (Creswell, 2013, p. 76) of school counselors’ lived experiences when working with SATr and their families. The interview aided in determining the process by which school counselors are identifying students adopted transracially, assessing the school counselor’s perceptions of transracial adoption, facilitating an exploration of what common needs or concerns are most often presented by SATr and their families, and describing

what counseling techniques or interventions have been found to be most helpful. Further, a demographic questionnaire was used to collect information on the number of years of school counselor practice, participant self-identified race/ethnicity, number of SATr and their families with whom they have worked, and previous training/education in working with SATr and the helpfulness of this type of training.

Conceptual Frameworks

Four frameworks provide for the context of the study, namely (a) multiculturalism and multicultural competency related to counseling, (b) human development related to psychosocial and identity frameworks for middle childhood, (c) adoption in the US and multiple heritage youth, and (d) elementary school counseling programs and services. They provided for a thorough understanding of the unique roles of an elementary school counselor and how these roles are utilized to work with SATr. The contextual frameworks offered a foundation for the study. A qualitative, specifically, phenomenological approach, utilized the contextual foundation to offer enhanced, rich, and detailed information on the shared experiences of elementary school counselors when working with students adopted transracially.

Phenomenology

A phenomenological approach is the most appropriate manner in which to understand how individuals experience similar scenarios. Specifically, Moustakas (1994) states,

The aim is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it. From the individual descriptions general or universal meanings are derived, in other words the essences of structures of the experience. (p. 17)

In phenomenological research, data is collected from persons who have experienced the topic at hand using in-depth interviews (Creswell, 2013). A phenomenological approach allowed for data collection from elementary school counselors to share their experiences of working with SATr and their families.

I followed Creswell's (2013) simplified version of Moustakas' (1994) Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction approach. The role of the researcher in this approach requires that preconceived beliefs and understanding about the topic of study be carefully set aside in order to view the subject with a fresh vantage point. Specifically, Moustakas (1994) defines this approach as follows,

The researcher following a transcendental phenomenological approach engages in disciplined and systematic efforts to set aside prejudgments regarding the phenomenon being investigated (known as the Epoche process) in order to launch the study as far as possible free of preconceptions, beliefs, and knowledge of the phenomenon from prior experience and professional studies-to be completely open, receptive, and naïve in listening to and hearing research participants describe their experience of the phenomenon being investigated. (p.27)

The phenomenological approach lends itself to efficient analytic procedures that begin with bracketing or setting aside preconceived or everyday understandings or ways of knowing to approach the subject with newness and objectivity as much as possible (Moustakas, 1994). Analysis proceeds with Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction whereby each interview response is reviewed and analyzed to ultimately develop textural and structural descriptions to determine the essence or composite summary of the experience for the participants (Moustakas, 1994).

Participants

The participants of this study were professional elementary school counselors working in Virginia and West Virginia. To identify participants, I relied on publically accessible elementary school counselor email addresses and phone numbers for recruitment purposes. I utilized a Participant Recruitment Letter (Appendix C) via email to identify myself including my background and credentials and provided an overview of the proposed study to potential professional school counselor participants. Responses to interested participants followed the format offered via email (Appendix D). Once interviews began, I relied on a snowball sampling procedure where interviewed participants are asked about other potential interviewees (Patton, 2002). Phenomenological inquiry does not specify a prescribed number of participants; however, Creswell (2013) suggests participant numbers ranging from three to 10 as sufficient for this type of qualitative research. This research study had eleven total participants.

For the purposes of this research study, a professional school counselor was defined as a person who had graduated from a school counseling master's level program, is certified as a school counselor, and has had at least one year of professional experience as an elementary school counselor. To identify those elementary school counselors with direct experience working with SATr and their families, a clear explanation of a student adopted transracially was offered. The explanation was as follows: A student adopted transracially is a person of color (i.e., racial category other than White) and adopted either domestically (e.g., private or from foster care) or

internationally by White adoptive parent(s). I ensured potential participants meet the required criteria via confirmation emails. This follow up email was also used to schedule a mutually agreed upon interview time and setting. Additionally, I utilized a Participant Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix E) to ensure that potential participants meet the criteria outlined.

Procedures

The procedures followed in this study included Institutional Review Board policies and requirements, ethical standards, and data collection methods. Data collection methods provided detailed information for the interview process, field notes, and reflexive journaling employed during the study. The section concludes with a description of the interview and pilot interview process.

Institutional Review Board

I followed all Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech) policies in conducting this study. I obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from the university before undertaking the research. The informed consent form for adult elementary school counselor participants (Appendix F) explained the purpose of the study and provided information regarding their participation. The consent forms were distributed to potential participants and returned prior to the interviews. The consent form affirmed that participants acknowledged and agreed to the following terms identified by the Virginia Tech IRB:

- Purpose of study
- Length of interview
- Interview will be audio recorded
- Risks and benefits of participation
- Compensation
- Confidentiality and anonymity procedures
- Release of confidentiality to committee chair and members
- Right to refuse to answer any questions
- Right to end interview at any time
- Transcript of the interview
- Ability to review and revise transcript for edits, clarifications, or additions
- Data will be maintained in a confidential manner
- Data will be destroyed post research completion

- Audio will be destroyed post transcription
- Right to withdraw at any time

ACA Ethics

The American Counseling Association Code of Ethics (2014) for Research and Publication (Section G) was followed. Compensation of Amazon gift cards worth \$25 was offered to each participant. Patton (2002) discusses the ethical dilemmas inherent in offering compensation to interview participants. Based upon my experience as a school counselor intern and informal interviews with professional school counselors, I ascertained that frequently they are compelled to purchase supplemental materials for their school counseling programs using personal funds. Hence, compensation for participation via gift cards was appropriate for this study. The National Board of Certified Counselors' Minority Fellowship Program (MFP) provided funding for the gift cards. I was awarded this fellowship to use towards tuition, educational resources, and dissertation funding for the 2014 to 2015 academic year.

Data Collection Methods

The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions, experiences, and practices of professional elementary school counselors when working with students adopted transracially and their families. Because of the limited information available on school counselors and SATr, I chose to employ a qualitative methodology. This choice allowed me to determine the essence of their experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The following section reviews the data collection methods employed in the study including interviews, field notes, and reflexive journaling.

Interviews. The interview location was determined by a mutually agreed upon setting or telephone call whereby the participant and I engaged in a private interview. I followed the interview protocol (Appendix G) outlined in the approved IRB, and it included consent for permission to record. Recordings included both an audio electronic recorder and phone-based recorder for back up purposes. All interviews were then transcribed verbatim for use in data analysis. The research relied on open-ended interviews for data collection using probes to draw out rich, detailed descriptions of the participants' experiences.

I developed an interview protocol (Appendix G) using the format suggested by Creswell (2013). This protocol offered structure to the interview process and was a working guide throughout the research. Although phenomenological inquiry traditionally follows a multiple interview process (Seidman, 1998), this research study used a one time, in depth interview to

capture school counselor perceptions and experiences of working with SATr. While a one-time interview might have been a limitation, I addressed this by utilizing member checking to allow the participants the opportunity to review transcriptions of their interview to ensure it accurately captured their experience. Other limitations, such as interview rigidity and standardization inhibiting the flow of natural responses (Patton, 2002), were addressed by including the final question, "Is there anything else you would like to add about working with SATr and their families?" to encourage participants' responses that may not have been elicited prior in the interview. The interview questions were as follows:

What, if any, personal connections do you have to adoption? (If there is a connection) How do you see your connection or lack thereof impact your perceptions of SATr and their families?

In your role as a school counselor, how do you most commonly identify students who are adopted transracially?

How do you, if at all, as a school counselor, connect with SATr and their families?

How do you, if at all, determine the school counseling needs of students adopted transracially and their families?

What do you think are some of the most helpful counseling approaches/ strategies when working with SATr and their families? Why do you think these approaches/ strategies are most helpful?

What are the biggest challenges for you, as a school counselor, when working with SATr and their families?

Think about a significant moment in working with SATr and describe the experience to me. Why do you think this moment stands out?

How have your experiences with SATr and their families impacted your views on transracial adoption?

What advice would you have for school counselors who might want to learn more about how to help transracially adopted student and their families?

Is there anything else you would like to add about working with SATr?

Field notes. Field notes were completed during the interview. These notes were based on my observations during the interview and included "detailed, nonjudgmental (as much as possible), concrete descriptions of what has been observed" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 139). The notes included observations based on visual, auditory, and tactile senses. The field notes served to record the initial experience during the interview in a non-judgmental and objective manner.

Reflexive journal. A reflexive journal was used as one tool to bracket subjective thoughts and opinions from the interviews (see Appendix H). The journal serves the purpose to reflect on “one’s identity and one’s sense of voice and perspectives, assumptions, and sensitivities” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p.96). The reflexive journal protocol I employed uses the following categories: (a) initial thoughts, (b) thick, rich descriptions, (c) notable quotes, (d) self reflexivity, (e) reflexivity about participants, and (f) reflexivity about the audience. The journal was completed immediately after conducting each interview to capture observations, thoughts, feelings, ideas, hypotheses, and bias, which will assist in the maintenance of the research study and data analysis (Krefting, 1991; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Such efforts minimized and prevented the researcher from sharing personal experiences with the participants that may influence data analysis (Creswell, 2013).

Data Storage

I followed careful and meticulous data storage procedures throughout the course of the research study. Several protocols were in place to maintain confidentiality and protect the collected data. I attended to the Institutional Review Board guidelines specific to Virginia Tech that include the following (Creswell, 2013, & Patton, 2002):

- Maintained backup copies of all electronic files on a password protected and encrypted cloud-based storage accessible only to the primary researcher
- Utilized high quality audio recording instruments
- Used password protected phone audio recording backup system
- Protected the anonymity of the participants by using coding system in lieu of names
- Compiled all data on a password protected computer owned and accessible only to the primary researcher
- Safeguarded non-electronic files in a locked box accessible only to the primary researcher in her home office

Interview Process

Phenomenological research involves the use of in-depth interviews. In the instance of the current study, I employed an open-ended interview process. Interview skills included rapport building, probing, and clarifying with the interviewee (Silverman, 2011). I selected this type of interview in an effort to fully capture the lived experiences offered by elementary school counselors is working with SATr and their families. I strived to develop an interview climate that

encouraged the research participants to feel comfortable and safe in sharing their experiences in a setting conducive to a private interview (Moustakas, 1994). This format is similar to Maxwell and Henriksen's (2012) phenomenological study of middle school counselors' experiences with multiple heritage youth where interviews took place in a school setting; I followed a similar interview protocol. When in-person interviews were not possible due to scheduling, distance, or weather related concerns, I offered telephone interviews as an option.

I interviewed participants who met the stated criteria until data analysis confirmed that saturation was achieved, and information became redundant (Patton, 2002). I built sufficient time between interviews to adequately attend to field notes, debriefing sessions, and data analysis. Data analysis was undertaken after rounds of every two interviews. In this way, I was apprised of analytic content to help determine when saturation was achieved. A series of letters and numbers were used to mask the identification of the study participants. I sampled a variety of elementary school counselors from the Northern Virginia area; hence, scheduling naturally occurred in intervals. After my ninth interview, I sought an amendment to the IRB to allow for a broader recruitment area with the hopes of identifying more elementary school counselors of color as potential participants. This broader area yielded two new participants, from southern Virginia and West Virginia.

Pilot Interview

Maxwell and Henriksen's (2012) study completed a pilot study of initial interviews with three middle school counselors to refine their questions and revise their interview protocol as needed prior to conducting their research. I completed a pilot study of two interviews with professional elementary school counselors in an effort to strengthen my interview questions and procedures. This process included the interview protocol, field notes, reflexive journaling, and data analysis. This round of interviews were used in the research study.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher was embedded in multiple ways within the research study. Throughout my years of practice, I have worked with many SATr referred for counseling by their school counselors. Many have expressed school setting concerns that range from academic struggles, mostly resultant of early life neglectful conditions impacting cognitive functioning; feeling marginalized by certain class assignments or projects; working to develop an understanding of what it means to be adopted; and, for those children adopted transracially,

managing micro-aggressive situations while attempting to understand what it means to be a child of color living in a White family. As noted in the literature review, these expressed concerns reflect what little research is available on the experiences of SATr in the schools. My clients' accounts and the significant lack of school counselor voice in the transracial adoption research compelled my interest in undertaking this study.

I was a doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education and Supervision program at Virginia Tech. Although I was not a practicing school counselor, I have completed a doctoral level internship in a school counseling setting, and I was and still am a current practicing licensed professional counselor. These similarities to the intended participants were carefully examined to avoid judgment, inferences, and assumptions. Secondly, I have worked closely with students adopted transracially for the past decade in the capacity of a licensed professional counselor serving adopted individuals, adoptive families, and birth/first parents. While this lends to the knowledge base of the proposed study, it conceivably increased the risk for judgment, critical views, and an all knowing stance. Finally, my status as a person adopted transracially was a challenge to fully bracket out of the study. Moustakas stated that "some entities are simply not 'bracketable'" (1994, p. 4) and, indeed, this personal status may fall under this category. All of these contribute to potential researcher bias that could have impacted both the participant interviewees and data analysis (Onweugbuzie & Leech, 2007). However, while phenomenological inquiry necessitates management of researcher bias, the researcher is also called to own one's perspective and voice to maintain authenticity and integrity of the research study (Patton, 2002). I am uniquely qualified to have conducted the research study. My lived experiences as a transracially adopted person and my clinical experiences learning, striving to understand, and counseling other transracially adopted persons and their families are strengths that provided for insight into the topic of study.

The SATr population and their academic, social, and emotional needs in a school setting have not been appropriately acknowledged and explored within the adoption and multicultural counseling literature. Because of my connections to the SATr population via my experience as a licensed professional counselor and consultant, collaborating with and advocating for this population, and because of my status as a person adopted transracially, I used several strategies to address my biases and engage in the bracketing process. These strategies included using the aforementioned reflexivity journals containing my responses to the interview protocol questions;

incorporating peer reviewers, including other doctoral level students who have expertise in the area of counseling; transcribing the interview as soon as possible after its completion; and allowing participants an opportunity to review their transcript and my narrative composite summaries. The following sections describe the data analysis process and provide more detail on how limitations will be addressed.

Phenomenological Data Analysis

Phenomenological data analysis requires preparation and organization in order to develop themes derived from coding procedures. Strategies for data analysis include managing, reading and memoing, describing, classifying, interpreting, and representing the data (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) provides a data analysis approach that is a simplified version of Moustakas' (1994) Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction method. It is a six-step process that includes the following:

1. Bracketing
2. Identifying significant statements
3. Clustering into meaning units/ themes
4. Writing a textural description
5. Writing a structural description
6. Developing a composite summary description

In the sections that follow, I define and describe each of these six steps. In an effort to further clarify the data analysis process, I include the strategies that I used to address how the data was organized. The final section details how I implemented the coding process with the qualitative analysis software Dedoose.

Step 1: Bracketing

Moustakas (1994) described Epoche as occurring when researchers are able to “set aside our prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about things” (p. 4). He described the dedication and practice needed for one to truly achieve Epoche in research and suggested that it is “rarely perfectly achieved” (1994, p.4). Creswell (2013) suggested an alternative to pure Epoche through researcher bracketing; a conscientious attempt to suspend one's preconceived ideas and experiences related to the research study while actively collecting and analyzing data. Professional counselors are trained in interviewing techniques and skills that require a non-

judgmental stance while maintaining engagement with the client. These skills aided in bracketing before, during, and post-interview and in data analysis processes.

Creswell suggests that this step includes descriptions of “personal experiences under study” (2013, p. 191). I bracketed my role as the researcher and set aside, as much as possible, the current knowledge I held about participants’ lives, experiences, jobs, and work settings. My field notes and reflexive journal supported me in this bracketing process. Additional bracketing methods included debriefing interview experiences with both my dissertation chair and a fellow doctoral level candidate, either via face-to-face meetings or email correspondence.

Step 2: Identifying Significant Statements

Developing a list of significant statements required repeated reviews of the interviewee’s transcription. Initially, all transcribed statements were considered with equal value (Moustakas, 1994). These statements were then further refined by selecting those that were “significant” to describing the experience of the research under study (Creswell, 2013, p. 82). This phase of the proposed study used verbatim transcription, whereby I completed a sentence-by-sentence analysis, out of which I identified significant words, phrases, and statements. I manually coded the round one interviews identifying significant statements. I also utilized an independent analyzer for significant statement identification in round one to determine that statements identified by both were closely matched. Next, I used a process of open coding to examine the significant words, phrases, and statements to identify categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I met with my dissertation chair to hand code round one interviews using an open coding method. After my preliminary analysis in round one with manual open coding, I used Dedoose qualitative analysis software for coding and categorizing significant statements and participant responses for subsequent rounds of interviews. For a dependability measure, I analyzed round one interviews using Dedoose to confirm the original hand coding results. Creswell (2013) outlines several advantages to utilizing qualitative analysis software in addition to the researcher’s analysis. These include efficient and organized filing systems, ease of locating relevant material, line-by-line analysis, visual data representation, and quick information retrieval.

Step 3: Clustering into Meaning Units/Themes

After identifying significant statements from the transcriptions of all of the interviews, I grouped them into meaning units for emergent themes by collecting all of the open codes for round one. This included cutting the paper open codes and manually grouping open codes to

develop categories. Creswell (2013) refers to this part of the analysis process as developing “clusters of meaning” (p. 82) derived from the significant statements identified in step two. This process may sometimes be referred to as axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) where connections are made between categories and groups of shared meanings are organized. The axial coding process also involved developing dimensions or properties and attributes of the category along a continuum (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I developed a round one codebook using the emergent themes from the axial coding process. I utilized Dedoose to assist in organizing participant significant statements into broader themes for all the rounds of interviews. These codes and themes were then continuously collapsed into one master codebook for the overall research study.

Step 4: Writing Textural Descriptions

Moustakas (1994) indicated that the textural description process requires an “interweaving of person, conscious experience, and phenomenon” (p. 15) in an effort to accurately describe the experience. Textural descriptions tell “what the participants in the study experienced with the phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p.193). I grouped the interview data for each participant per round to determine the responses that corresponded with textural data. I wrote textural descriptions, developed from the meaning units and themes identified in step three, of what each participant experienced with SATr and their families. The textual descriptions blend the participant’s “what” of the experience and include verbatim examples from the transcribed interview. Textural descriptions were completed after each round of interviews and include research question correspondence. Participants were offered textural descriptions for member checking. Each round of interviews was linked to the themes previously identified and to the emergent new themes. This process continued until saturation was achieved.

Step 5: Writing Structural Descriptions

While the textural descriptions examined “what” participants have experienced in the phenomenon, structural descriptions offered the “how” of the experience, which includes the setting and context of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). I grouped the interview data for each participant per round to determine the responses that corresponded with structural data. I wrote structural descriptions, developed from the meaning units and themes identified in step three, of how each participant experienced SATr and their families. The structural descriptions shared the “how” of the participant’s experience and used verbatim examples from the transcribed

interview. Structural descriptions were completed after each round of interviews. Participants were offered structural descriptions for member checking. Each round of interviews was linked to the themes previously identified and to the emergent new themes. This process continued until saturation was reached. The structural descriptions offer information on how elementary school counselors experience students adopted transracially. This step closely resembles the procedures for step four; however, here I was looking for descriptions of how, in regard to the setting and context, the elementary school counselor experienced the SATr and family.

Step 6: Developing a Composite Summary Description

The final stage of data analysis was to develop an “integration of the fundamental textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essence of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 19). The composite summary provided a clear description of the shared structure or essence of common experiences of the participants while also describing the “what” and “how” of the participants’ experiences (Creswell, 2013). For the purposes of this study, the textural and structural descriptions were collapsed to develop a written composite summary for each participant. This summary listed the eight final themes and included narrative summaries per theme. Composite summaries were developed for each round in the analytic process. Then, all of the composite summaries were grouped again to develop a composite summary theme of the phenomenon, or core category (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) across interviews.

Dedoose Coding Process

I selected the Dedoose qualitative software for data analysis because of its ease of use, security features, and its ability to graphically display codes, themes, and categories (Creswell, 2013). Dedoose was utilized for data analysis of the entire study, including the two pilot interviews. Creswell (2013) highlights the collaborative features between the researcher and qualitative software that aid in data analysis. One example of such collaboration includes my role to set up the initial themes derived from the round one. I then altered and adjusted the themes based on information gained from the subsequent rounds of interviews. Dedoose aided in identifying significant statements, categorizing themes, and organizing the data of all eleven participant interviews.

Trustworthiness

I utilized multiple strategies in an effort to maintain trustworthiness and deepen the rigor of this qualitative research study. These included strategies from Lincoln and Guba's (as cited in Krefting, 1991) constructs developed to address validity and reliability within qualitative research. Although there is no one standard method to ensure total trustworthiness of any qualitative study, the strategies utilized exceeded the suggested two strategies per research study recommendation offered by Creswell (2013). In the sections ahead, the approaches to trustworthiness will be described, namely credibility, transferability and confidentiality procedures, dependability in the coding procedures, and confirmability strategies.

Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research describes its validity. Krefting (1991) described various approaches to addressing credibility or validity concerns. These approaches include reflexive journaling where the thoughts, ideas hypotheses, and emotions of the researcher are processed with the intentions of increased self-awareness for bias; member checking where participants may read a part of or an entire transcript interview to confirm an accurate capture of their experiences; and peer debriefing where the researcher will review the research process, including debriefing with colleagues for feedback. As mentioned, I completed reflexive journals after each interview. I also offered participants an opportunity to review their textural and structural narrative summaries for member checking. I debriefed about interviews and the research process with my dissertation chair and fellow doctoral candidate peer.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the applicability of the findings to other groups. Creswell (2013) suggested that data with thick and rich descriptions allows readers ease with which to determine the applicability of the results to other populations or scenarios. These descriptions will often include "dense background information about the informants and the research context and setting to allow others to assess how transferable the findings are" (Krefting, 1991, p.220). I provided dense descriptions of participants' responses while maintaining their anonymity by using a coding system in lieu of names.

Dependability

Dependability describes the consistency or reliability of a research study. Creswell (2013) suggested utilizing transcriptions of audio recordings and maintaining intercoder agreement. This

refers to using more than one person for data coding procedures. In addition to using qualitative software, I utilized an independent analyzer for step two, identifying significant statements, for the pilot interview data analysis. Dedoose software was used to confirm the manually coded data analysis for the pilot interviews and for data analysis of subsequent rounds. In addition, I utilized an independent analyzer, a recent Counselor Education and Supervision Doctoral graduate, to obtain intercoder agreement for the tenth round of interviews.

Confirmability

Confirmability addresses the objectivity of a research study. Lincoln and Guba (as cited in Krefting, 1991) strongly recommended the specifics of the research study to be clearly written and defined to develop an audit trail. To create an auditable trail, I detailed the research protocols, maintained reflexive journals following the protocol (Appendix H), and kept demographic forms. As previously noted, all research material was preserved on a password protected computer and locked file box in my home office with access limited to myself only.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the phenomenon of elementary professional school counselors' perceptions of and experiences with students adopted transracially and their families. In this case, there is limited information on how elementary school counselors practice with SATr and their families. A phenomenological approach was selected to offer information on a subject where little is known. The phenomenological approach gave a voice to the lived experiences of elementary school counselors to describe the complex issue of working with SATr and their families.

Creswell's simplified method of Moustakas' (1994) Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction method was used to identify significant statements, cluster these statements into meaning units or themes, delineate the emergent themes into textural and structural descriptions of the participant's experience, and develop composite summaries of the "essence" of these experiences with SATr and their families (Moustakas, 1994). This method was demonstrated to be appropriate and trustworthy in an example of data analysis based on a prospectus required mock interview using coding procedures to identify significant statements, group into themes, write textural and structural descriptions, and develop a composite summary. In addition to the round one manual data analysis, the study employed Dedoose software for qualitative analysis. Results of the study were analyzed within the contextual frameworks of (a) multiculturalism and

competency related to counseling, (b) human development related to psychosocial and identity frameworks for elementary aged children, adoption in the US and multiple heritage youth, and (c) elementary school counseling programs and services.

It was critical to the study that the role of researcher was explored and strategies to limit researcher bias and increase the validity and reliability of this study were adequately addressed. Researcher bracketing strategies were used as a conscientious attempt to suspend any preconceived ideas and experiences related to the research study while actively collecting and analyzing data. In addition, issues of trustworthiness were thoroughly addressed through the lenses of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this research study was to explore the perceptions and practices of elementary school counselors working with students adopted transracially (SATr) and their families. The research questions were constructed to capture the lived experiences of elementary school counselors when practicing with this population. The questions that guided this research study were as follows:

What are elementary school counselors' perceptions of students adopted transracially (SATr)?

What are common needs and concerns presented to school counselors by SATr and their families?

What counseling approaches and techniques have worked well with this population?

This chapter presents the methods used and results found in completing the study. First in the chapter is a demographic overview of the 11 elementary school counselors who participated in this study. Next, a review of the procedures used for data collection and coding processes will be highlighted. The results of the study are presented by research question and followed by the core category that emerged from the analysis will conclude the chapter.

Participants

This phenomenological study represents the lived experiences of 11 elementary school counselors who have worked with SATr and their families (Table 4.1). These participants were recruited via open email, standard mail recruitment, and snowball sampling. Nine participants self identified as female and two as male. Eight participants self identified their racial category as White, one as American Indian, one as multiple heritage being White and Latino, and one did not identify with any racial category. The participants' ages ranged from 31 to 62 with an average age of 43. Participants reported practicing as a professional school counselor ranging from one to 27 years. The average number of professional school counselor practice was 11.5 years. Participants reported having worked with a range of one to 200 SATr and families. One participant reported learning about adoption or transracial adoption in graduate school, while three participants received post-graduate continuing education training related to adoption; 64% reported no training in adoption or transracial adoption.

Table 4.1

Participant Demographic Information

ID	Gender	Age	Race/ Ethnicity	State	Yrs. of School Counselor Experience	No. of SATr	Training
P001	F	57	White	VA	7	5	No
P002	F	41	<i>did not identify</i>	VA	10	5	No
P003	F	62	White	VA	27	150	Yes: Workshops
P004	F	39	White	VA	13	5	No
P005	M	46	White	VA	15	4	No
P006	F	32	White	VA	8	5 or 6	Yes: Grad School (Diversity)
P007	F	41	White	VA	13	5 or 6	Yes: Information Sessions
P008	F	39	White	VA	2	1	No
P009	F	47	White	VA	22	100 – 200	Yes: Workshops
P010	M	38	American Indian	VA	8	12	No
P011	F	31	White/Latino	WV	1	3	No

Coding and Analysis

I followed Creswell's (2013) version of Moustakas' (1994) Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction approach utilizing a six step coding process: (1) bracketing, (2) identifying significant statements, (3) clustering into meaning units/themes, (4) writing a textural description, (5) writing a structural description, and (6) developing a composite summary. The following will describe the coding and analysis of the participants' interviews that led to the eight emergent themes and the core category.

I employed multiple strategies to maintain the *trustworthiness* of the research study. To address *credibility*, I utilized bracketing strategies to offset, as much as possible, any researcher bias and increase self-awareness. These strategies included field notes, reflexive journal, and debriefings. I maintained handwritten field notes (e.g., significant words, behavioral observations, environmental descriptions) during each interview. These notes were separate from

the reflexive journal entries completed post-interview. The reflexive journals (Patton, 2002) offered a space to explore and process my initial reactions, feelings, and thoughts from the interview. After rounds of two interviews, I verbally debriefed my experience with my dissertation chair or a peer doctoral candidate. Those debriefings would then be noted in the reflexive journal pertaining to the relevant interview. Additional *credibility* measures involved member checking, whereby each participant had the opportunity to review the textural and structural narrative summaries and provide feedback. *Dependability* measures included enlisting analyzers for identifying significant statements during step two of the process; for round one, an independent reviewer was enlisted, and, for subsequent rounds, a qualitative software program, Dedoose, was used for coding and categorizing purposes. In addition, I met with my chair approximately every other week from March through May to review the coding and analysis process to ensure my procedures continued to reflect the purpose of the study.

I began the first round of two interviews for the research study in late February 2015 with the last interview completed in early June 2015. Each interview was completed either face-to-face or by phone; all interviews were recorded and professionally transcribed. A structured process using open coding and axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was followed subsequent to each interview in order to identify common themes in the participants' descriptions of their experiences; further, a process of folding codes into emerging themes after each round of two interviews was completed. After round four, no new themes were added to the codebook; therefore, a ninth interview was completed to confirm saturation. At this point, it was apparent that the nine participants represented a racially homogenous group. A targeted recruitment called for an amendment to the IRB (Appendix I) to expand the catchment area to all of Virginia and surrounding states. I specifically searched for and interviewed a male and female elementary school counselor of color who met the participant criteria. Although no new themes emerged from the coding process completed on these two interviews, these participants offered a different perspective on the lived experiences in working with SATr and their families.

Emerging categories informed the *what* and *how* of the lived experience; sub-categories were identified related to each of the main categories. Textural (i.e., *what*) and structural (i.e., *how*) descriptions were written as a narrative for each elementary school counselor's lived experience in working with SATr and their families. These descriptions were shared with the respective participant as a member checking review. Where needed, the description was edited

based on participant feedback. One participant asked for minor revisions to the summaries to protect anonymity. Another requested a more detailed revision of her summary to clarify an aspect of her response related to racial and ethnic identification. For each round, a composite summary was developed that conjoined the descriptions from the respective interviews. A total of six composite summaries were written.

I searched for how all of these categories, sub-categories, and composites connected. It was like pieces of the puzzle needing to be rearranged to create a coherent picture. As I shared my emerging themes from the research with other elementary school counselors who were interested in the research, it became clear to me that there was a coherent picture, which I began to talk about as a central category that binds these particular school counselors in their work with SATr and families. This central category was framed as the *core category* (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Open Coding

I manually open coded these interviews with the assistance of my dissertation chair. I completed repeated reviews of the transcribed interviews to identify significant statements. Creswell (2013) defines significant statements as “sentences, or quotes that provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon” (p. 82). Within the significant statements, words or short phrases were underlined (i.e., identified) as open codes. These open codes were entered into a master spreadsheet as a means of compiling and organizing the steps in the open coding process. After the first round of interviews to allow for a visual review of the open codes, I printed out the master spreadsheet, manually cut the individual open codes into individual slips of paper, and grouped the slips of paper into preliminary categories. Within each category, sub-categories emerged.

For *credibility* purposes, I crosschecked the hand-coding of the first two interviews by uploading the transcripts of these interviews into Dedoose and completed the open coding analysis using the software to compare the results. There were minimal differences between the two coding iterations in identifying the categories and sub-categories. See Table 4.2 for an example of the open coding process. Open codes are underlined, categories are in ***bold italic***, and sub-categories are in *italic*.

Table 4.2

Open Coding

Significant Statement (Open Code Underlined)	Category	Sub-category
P003: “They <u>stick out</u> from the get-go that they're adopted.”	<i>identification</i>	<i>Observed</i>
P006: “We do go in at the beginning of the year and try to meet all the kids, and a lot of <u>the younger ones</u> are very talkative and will <u>tell</u> you every detail, and so I know some other kids that are also adopted that are having no classroom issues.”	<i>identification</i>	<i>Teller</i>
P010: “The <u>parents</u> sometimes <u>will disclose</u> it before the child even enrolls as a kindergartner.”	<i>identification</i>	<i>teller</i>
P009: “It’s <u>not</u> always <u>easy</u> to <u>pinpoint</u> .”	<i>identification</i>	<i>hidden</i>
P007: “I felt like <u>she mentioned</u> it all the time and she <u>was worried</u> about it all the time and <u>was worried</u> that her <u>son and her daughter would not be accepted</u> .”	<i>SATr families</i>	<i>adoptive parenting differences</i>
P007: “Her parents had such <u>tremendous expectations</u> of her in all regards. Very often, <u>it was very high and too high</u> for her to meet and that was causing a problem within.”	<i>SATr families</i>	<i>challenges</i>

From round one, 102 open codes were recognized and related to the initial categories of *personal connection to adoption, identification, elementary school counselor characteristics and qualities, SATr descriptors, SATr parents and family, ways to connect, determining needs, and approaches & strategies*. Within each category sub-categories assisted me in finding the connections between open codes and a related category. Open codes that flourished in subsequent interviews led to refinements to the categories and sub-categories. An example of these refinements would be the initial category of *elementary school counselor characteristics and qualities* being refined after round two as *elementary school counselor role*. The open codes from round two that generated this refinement included counselor’s role is preventative, know what to do to support, know different things with parents, continue developing multicultural skills and competencies, and it’s tricky to talk to parents about that, because we’re talking about race. Round three found the emergent codes writing and charts, family tree, games, and journals related to specific school counseling techniques. Also in round three other open codes including, re-visit the issue about being adopted, normalizing it, reminders around Mother's Day and Father's Day, which led to the development of the *adoption sensitive* sub-

category. In round five, the sub-category *hidden* emerged under the category *identification*. The open codes in round five that generated the refinement of this category included don't always know, we wouldn't know, and it's hard to pinpoint.

In total, 1529 open codes within 518 significant statements were identified during the open coding process that encompassed all 11 interviews. These 1529 open codes related to eight refined categories: *personal connection*, *elementary school counselor role*, *identification*, *SATr experiences*, *ways to connect*, *determining needs*, *approaches and strategies*, and *SATr family*. Sub-categories were developed that further refined the related category. Table 4.3 is a summary of the categories (*bold italic*) and sub-categories (*italic*) that emerged from the open coding process.

Table 4.3

Categories and Sub-Categories

Category	Sub-Categories
<i>Personal connection</i>	<i>Influence on connections</i> <i>Awareness</i> <i>Types</i>
<i>Elementary school counselor role</i>	<i>Advice</i> <i>Multicultural counseling skills</i> <i>Challenges</i>
<i>Identification</i>	<i>Observed</i> <i>Hidden</i> <i>Tellers</i> <i>Strategies</i> <i>Socio emotional</i>
<i>SATr experiences</i>	<i>Types of adoption</i> <i>Adoption related developmental tasks</i> <i>Adapting/adjusting/survival</i> <i>Difficulties</i>
<i>Ways to connect</i>	<i>A variety of ways</i> <i>Meetings/screenings</i>
<i>Determining needs</i>	<i>Strategies</i> <i>Socio-emotional</i>
<i>Approaches & strategies</i>	<i>Consultation & collaboration</i> <i>Responsive services</i> <i>Adoption sensitive</i>

SATr families

Strengths
Adoptive parenting differences
Challenges

The open coding process continued by developing dimensions of properties and attributes of the sub-categories along a continuum (see examples in Table 4.4). Using the category of *identification* as an example, the sub-category of *observed* became a continuum of hidden to obvious because some participants indicated SATr status stood out immediately where others said SATr status was ambiguous and not always obvious (i.e., something you can “see”).

Table 4.4

Sub-Category Continuums for Identification

Sub-Category	Continuum	Continuum Represents
<i>Observed</i>	Hidden ← → Obvious	SATr blends; SATr looks different
<i>Tellers</i>	Telling narrative ← → Sharing concerns	parent, teacher, sibling, SATr tells counselor; someone asks for help
<i>Hidden</i>	Unaware ← → Uncertain	counselor doesn't know; counselor not sure

A continuum was developed for each sub-category by examining participant interviews where open codes reflected the respective sub-category (Appendix J & K). It was relatively straightforward to name the anchors for each continuum except for the sub-category of *strategies* from the category *determining needs*. In this sub-category, participants provided the greatest variance in responses; my a-ha moment was when I recognized that it was this variance that needed to be reflected in the continuum (i.e., one dimension; multidimensional).

Textural and Structural Descriptions

Using the categories and sub-categories, textural and structural descriptions were developed for each participant as a narrative summary. Textural descriptions are *what* the participant experienced with SATr and their families. Structural descriptions are the setting and context of *how* the participant experienced the SATr and their families. The narrative summary included both descriptions and was illustrated with verbatim examples from the transcribed interview. An example of a textural description follows with categories in ***bold italic*** and sub-categories in *italic*:

P003 reported that ***identification*** of SATr in her school community was relatively obvious as they stood out as the students of color in a mostly White school. She stated,

“This is a school that, without adopted kids and embassy kids, it's almost all white” and “They stick out from the get-go that they're adopted.” She indicated that because of the homogenous school, SATr have little choice but to reveal their *identification* as such given the questions that other students may ask them about their families. She reported, “They stand out. I mean, you just can't pretend you're not, you know, because the kids always ... you know, the friends will question ‘Why don't you look like your mom or dad?’” P003 described *tellers* ranging from SATr themselves in a friendship counseling group situation to parents reaching out to obtain extra support for their children.

An example of a structural narrative summary follows with categories in *bold italic* and sub-categories in *italic*:

P007 shared her experiences with *SATr families* that denoted *adoptive parenting differences* in relationship with racial and cultural aspects and *challenges* pertaining to academic expectations and unpreparedness. She described one family as being overly preoccupied with racial dynamics and its impact on their children, “I felt like she mentioned it all the time and she was worried about it all the time and was worried that her son and her daughter would not be accepted.” While another family was not prepared to address issues related to different hygiene and hair care needs, “And I feel like what happened is that hygiene and hair care and the family hasn't taken the time in advance to learn about some of those things that they were going to need to assist with later on.” P007 described a number of *challenges* related to discordant academic expectations between the SATr's capacity and family's desires. For example she reported, “Her parents had such tremendous expectations of her in all regards. Very often, it was very high and too high for her to meet and that was causing a problem within.” And “there were a lot of issues that came up in the family that she was expected to have come further along academically and with language acquisition then she had actually. I thought she was doing fine, but her family expected more of her.”

The respective textural and descriptive summaries were shared with the participant for member checking. Summaries were revised based on participant feedback. At least one and in most cases both participants per round responded to member checking. Two participants requested minor revisions to their summary narratives. The other participants offered feedback endorsing the summaries as accurate portrayals of their respective interviews.

Composite Summary

A composite summary to blend both textural and structural descriptions was developed for each round to capture the essence of the lived experience of the two elementary school counselors from the round. The composite summary was written after the respective participants from the round had read and provided feedback on the textural and structural descriptions.

Axial Coding

The axial coding process focused on putting data back together in new ways by making connections between categories and re-assembling into themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I examined the sub-category continuums within each category and searched for patterns that reflected a global continuum for the category. As an example, the three sub-categories of *observed*, *tellers*, and *hidden* represented a continuum of “you don’t always know” (i.e., SATr blends with student population, someone tells you, not aware SATr exists in the school) to “they stick out” (i.e., visually SATr looks different, someone asks for help, counselor is not sure). Therefore, the continuum for the category of ***identification*** emerged as “you don’t always know ← → they stick out” using a continuum symbol (← →) between the anchor phrases/words.

The master codebook that was developed during open coding was now used for the axial coding process. The codebook allowed for tracking the revision process of (a) folding and connecting open codes into respective sub-categories; (b) explicating anchors for each sub-category continuum; and (c) creating a continuum for each category that would capture the conditions, context, action, and interactions of these elementary school counselors’ lived experiences with SATr and their families. After multiple meetings with my dissertation chair and conversations with professionals attending a counseling conference, I realized that these continuums conveyed a rich representation of what and how these participants experienced working with SATr and their families. These continuums became the themes for this study. Table 4.5 is a summary of the axial coding process: categories are identified using ***bold italic***, sub-categories are identified using *italic*, and “**bold ← → quotes**” are the themes.

Table 4.5

Axial Coding: Themes

Category	Themes as Continuums
<i>Personal connection</i>	<p>“families are families ← → better qualified”</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/> <p><i>Influence on Connections</i> <i>Awareness</i> <i>Types</i></p>
<i>Elementary school counselor role</i>	<p>“strengths ← → limitations”</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/> <p><i>Advice</i> <i>Multicultural Counseling Skills</i> <i>Challenges</i></p>
<i>Identification</i>	<p>“you don’t always know ← → they stick out”</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/> <p><i>Observed</i> <i>Hidden</i> <i>Tellers</i></p>
<i>SATr experiences</i>	<p>“a totally different animal ← → the looking glass self”</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/> <p><i>Types of Adoption</i> <i>Adoption Related Developmental Tasks</i> <i>Adapting/Adjusting/Survival</i> <i>Difficulties</i></p>
<i>Ways to connect</i>	<p>“a variety of ways ← → it’s no different”</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/> <p><i>A Variety of Ways</i> <i>Meetings/Screenings</i></p>
<i>Determining needs</i>	<p>“figure it out as I go ← → it varies”</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/> <p><i>Strategies</i> <i>Socio Emotional</i></p>
<i>Approaches & strategies</i>	<p>“group ← → nuts”</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/> <p><i>Consultation & Collaboration</i> <i>Responsive Services</i> <i>Adoption Sensitive</i></p>
<i>SATr families</i>	<p>“a-ha moments ← → erasing the past”</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/> <p><i>Strengths</i> <i>Adoptive Parenting Differences</i> <i>Challenges</i></p>

Selective Coding

I found the core category via a process of selective coding. Using the composite summaries, I identified the story or “general descriptive overview” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.

119) of the phenomenon in the study. I determined this story to be how elementary school counselors use knowledge, skills, and application of school counseling service delivery methods as a foundation to inform their approaches to utilizing human development, multicultural competencies, and adoption related practices when working with SATr and their families. Next, I conceptualized this story to develop a storyline, which required naming the central phenomenon. Two important moments occurred that were essential to the discovery of the core category. First, after repeated reviews of the categories, sub-categories, and themes within the study, I was aware of how continuums informed the process. Second, I took advantage of a serendipitous moment at a professional counseling conference where I was sharing preliminary results from this study. Counselors attending my session asked me, "How does all this connect?" I responded, "I see elementary school counselors using a continuum of comfort and confidence." These counselors were enthusiastic in affirming that "**CONTINUUM OF COMFORT AND CONFIDENCE**" captured the essence of their own lived experiences in working with SATr and their families.

Then I related the categories to the core category to determine how these categories are connected to the central phenomenon. To do this, I first validated the lived experiences among the 11 participants against my storyline statement, "elementary school counselors use knowledge, skills, and application of school counseling service delivery methods as a foundation to inform their approaches to utilizing human development, multicultural competencies, and adoption related practices when working with SATr and their families." This ensured that my statement pertained to each participant in the study. Next, like the axial coding process, I analyzed the conditions, context, strategies, and interactions of each theme represented by continuums to ensure they fit within the continuum of the core category, "**CONTINUUM OF COMFORT AND CONFIDENCE.**" The representation of the core category as a broad continuum made the process of checking for a fit for each theme relatively straightforward. For example, the theme "**you don't always know ← → they stick out**" fit within the continuum of the core category as this theme describes how elementary school counselors rely on basic school counseling service delivery skills that they are relatively confident utilizing to address the sometimes obvious and conversely ambiguous (and not as comfortable for elementary school counselors) scenarios of SATr identification within their school communities. I followed the same process of checking for theme fit within the core category for all eight themes.

Themes from the Elementary School Counselors' Experiences

Phenomenological research aims to deconstruct participants' narratives to allow for the emergence of themes that tell the story of their lived experiences. Eleven elementary school counselors were interviewed, and, from the purposeful analysis of these interviews, the three research questions were answered through the themes that tell the story of a continuum of comfort and confidence (see Table 4.6). The following sections will detail the narrative summaries per theme as they correspond to the research questions that guided the study. Participant quotes are woven into the presentation to offer a richness and depth to the member responses. The chapter concludes with an elaboration of the core category.

Table 4.6

Themes by Research Question

Q1: Perceptions	
<p>Personal Connection <i>Types</i> <i>Awareness</i> <i>Influence on connections</i></p>	<p>“families are families ← → better qualified” Elementary school counselors relied on their personal connections and experiences with transracially adopted persons to inform their level of awareness to potential SATr experiences and obstacles. The types of personal connections ranged from being an adopted person or adoptive parent to knowing friends who have adopted transracially. Many elementary school counselors indicated that their connections to transracial adoption enhanced their relationships with SATr and their families, while others felt that their connections had no significant bearing on the quality of their relationships with SATr and their families.</p>
<p>SATr Experiences <i>Types of adoption</i> <i>Adoption related developmental tasks</i> <i>Adapting/Adjusting/Survival</i> <i>Difficulties</i></p>	<p>“a totally different animal ← → the looking glass self” Elementary school counselors described working with SATr from various types of adoptive backgrounds. These include foster care adoption, international adoption, kinship adoption, and both open and closed adoption. Several described SATr experiences within the context of typical adoption related developmental tasks. These include questions about pre adoption history, reactions to birthday/ adoption day/holidays, and experiencing feelings of loss. Many elementary school counselors related their experiences observing SATr adjusting to new foster and adoptive families, new schools, acculturation, and adapting to these contexts. Some specifically recalled noting SATr progress in many of those areas. While others witnessed SATr struggle in this area. All indicated that SATr experience difficulties and challenges in multiple facets of their lives. These include physical limitations, behavioral issues, including ADHD, that interfere with school performance, racial identity integration, struggles with peer relationships, and socio emotional obstacles that ranged from grief, loss, and trauma to severe symptoms of suicidal ideation.</p>
<p>SATr Families <i>Strengths</i> <i>Adoptive parenting differences</i> <i>Challenges</i></p>	<p>“a-ha moments ← → erasing the past” Elementary school counselors described SATr family strengths that focused on families' demonstrating emerging insight to being highly attuned. Examples fell within the contexts of good collaboration with the school, accessing resources, being seamless in the transition period to adoption, and managing the different needs of SATr well. They noted parenting differences in the following contexts: open versus closed in regard to acknowledging adoption within the family, differences in addressing racial/ethnic/ and cultural needs, and the influence of socio economic differences among SATr families. Challenges experienced with SATr families ranging from unrealistic academic expectations, not acknowledging or addressing the SATr pre adoption history, being unprepared for adoption related tasks.</p>

Q2: Needs & Concerns

Identification

Observed
Tellers
Hidden

“you don’t always know ← → they stick out”

Elementary school counselors mostly relied on visual observation for SATr identification. Parents, SATr, teachers, or siblings also provided identification information within the act of “telling” the school counselor. Sometimes, neither observation nor telling, informs elementary school counselors about SATr status and they may remain hidden within the school communities.

Determining Needs

Strategies
Socio emotional

“figure it out as I go ← → it varies”

Elementary school counselors utilized multiple strategies to determine the school counseling needs of SATr and their families. These strategies were represented by one dimensional and multidimensional interventions from talking to the students, building rapport, collaborating with teachers, asking teachers for recommendations for small groups, becoming familiar with the social histories of SATr, noticing what may be needed, and balancing the SATr’s needs. Some elementary school counselors considered the severity of the social emotional impact on the SATr and how it is impacting school performance to determine school counseling needs.

Q3: Practice

Ways to Connect

A variety of ways
Meetings/Screenings

“a variety of ways ← → it’s no different”

Elementary school counselors described various ways, from passive to more active interventions, to connect with SATr and their families. These included building a natural connection, having a lot of contact with SATr, collaborating with school staff members to make a plan to connect, ensuring SATr and families know they are available to them, and responding to families who are seeking out services. Some school counselors met SATr through running groups for other topics, such as friendship and kindergarten groups. Some reported that connections are often made with SATr and their families at various meetings for the SATr including Individual Educational Plan meetings and child study screenings.

Approaches and Strategies

Consultation & Collaboration
Responsive services
Adoption sensitive

“group ← → nuts”

Elementary school counselors engaged in consultation and collaboration with families, teachers, multicultural helpers, mentors, and outside resources, including outside therapists and post adoption services. They provided a variety of responsive services to SATr including classroom guidance, individual, and group counseling. Specific counseling techniques employed by some elementary school counselors included friendship, lunch, or adoption groups, journaling, family tree drawing, charts, playing games, and bibliotherapy. They practiced adoption sensitive services such as developing an awareness of typical adoption related tasks and normalizing and validating adoption related experiences and attending to milestones and holidays that could trigger loss feelings in SATr.

Elementary School Counselor Role

Advice
Multicultural counseling skills
Challenges

“strengths ← → limitations”

Elementary school counselors offered a broad range of active and passive suggestions and advice to other school counselors working with SATr and their families. They recommended multicultural competencies when working with SATr and their families. These included the need to continue to develop multicultural counseling skills to broach with families, manage the “tricky” situations regarding race/ ethnicity, be self reflective and aware, consider the implications of their own racial/ethnic background, be knowledgeable to identify and address racial micro-aggressions or discriminatory incidents. Challenges related to limitations of their roles as school counselors that included the struggle to be perceived as competent to provide mental health aid, time and budget constraints and large caseloads. Some indicated that the lack of training in adoption and transracial adoption was a limitation to working with SATr and families. While others described their biggest challenges to center around managing teacher and staff adoption subtle and direct bias and / or stigma towards adoption.

Q1: What are elementary school counselors' perceptions of SATr?

The themes reflect dimensions that arose from axial coding and represent the two anchors for each continuum. For example, the theme representing *personal connections* illustrates the axial coding dimensions of “families are families” to “better qualified” that becomes a continuum identified as “**families are families** ← → **better qualified.**” The following sections will present these themes highlighting participant examples in quotes to provide for rich, detailed information to deepen the reader’s understanding of participants’ experiences that shape their perceptions of SATr.

Families are families ← → **better qualified.** A majority reported *types* of *personal connection* to adoption (e.g., being an adopted person, knowing families who have adopted). Most said that this *personal connection* influenced their level of *awareness* towards circumstances encountered by SATr and their families. In regard to the *personal connection* to adoption and its *influence* on elementary school counselors’ relationships with SATr and their families, there were varying degrees of *influence*.

Types. The *personal connections* varied in types of relationships among the elementary school counselors. These relationship types covered a range of statuses that include being a transracially adopted person, being an adoptive parent, having transracially adopted extended family members, and having friends and colleagues with children adopted transracially. As will be discussed in the subsequent sections, participants’ *personal connections*, irregardless of *type*, had some degree of influence on their perceptions of SATr and their families.

Awareness. Elementary school counselors’ *awareness* of transracial adoption came from their own *personal connection* as their lived experiences as a transracially adopted person, through family members or friends and colleagues, or through the historical impact adoption has had on their culture of origin. Examples to illustrate *awareness* include the following:

P006: She indicated that her connections to adoption via her maternal grandmother and friendships with transracial adoptees growing up enhanced her *awareness* and shaped her perspective, “I guess it just makes me really aware of all the different things, and it can be very normal and functional, but it's not always a typical upbringing, and there's a lot of other factors.”

P010: This participant reported a *personal connection* to adoption via his cousins, “Two of my cousins are adopted, and I’m an only child. I was extraordinarily close to my

cousins.” He reported that this connection impacted his *awareness* surrounding SATr related issues, “I would like to think it makes me more mindful and empathic.” In addition to this connection, P10 described a historical connection to adoption via American-Indian ancestry that has influenced his perceptions and *awareness*. He stated, “That’s gone on now for centuries. My grandmother was removed and sent to a residential school when she was a young woman. So was my grandfather actually. He died when I was so young, I don’t think of it. In my living memory, not my memory, you know. I think we need to be aware of there are subtle injustices that I think the castle of white privilege makes it invisible to the people inside the castle.”

P011: An adopted person and the only professional staff person of color in her school system reflected on her transracial adoptive status, “In my *awareness*, just the importance of being able to embrace that part of yourself. Otherwise, you feel disconnected, or there's a part of you you're just not connected with.” She recognized the importance of managing the *awareness* her status contributes while respectfully working with SATr and their families. “I would say that even though I acknowledge that because of my background there are some things I do give a little more leeway with, because I'm emic to the population. I still try to remain sensitive, and even though I see these things and there are things that I value and also see as important psychological implications for these children, I know I can't just come out and impose them on these families out of the blue.”

Influence on connections. Elementary school counselors described how their ***personal connection*** to adoption influenced their relationships with SATr and their families. Some described how their ***personal connections*** greatly benefited their relationships. Examples to highlight how elementary school counselors perceived their ***personal connection*** to adoption as positive *influences on connections* include the following:

P003: An adoptive parent to a transracially adopted young adult stated, “I think it's for the parents it's, you know, a bonding thing and they feel more confident sharing things with me than they would if they didn't feel I was familiar with adoption issues.”

P008: She reported no ***personal connection*** to adoption but found a connection between SATr and multiple heritage persons. This similarity offered a starting point for a

conversation with SATr family, "I was talking with her about my concern for race in general because I am in a multiracial family, and that's how the conversation started."

P011: Her transracial adoptee status has increased her *awareness* and enhanced her relationships with SATr and their families. She stated, "I'm the only minority employee in the school system. I try to encourage that with my students and take it seriously, but also lighten it up, make it easy to talk about. We're brown, and we're black, and we embrace that. We try to all support each other" and "Just by looking at me, you can see my Latino background. I'm definitely more of a brown Latino. It's complicated. Even though I put white racially because I don't go into details, from looking at me, you can tell that there's definitely that native Indian blood from regions around Mexico. I didn't physically look like my adoptive family, at all, so I would say I definitely relate in that way, in the physical difference is obvious." She described her openness with her adoption status, "In either case, whether it's the children or the parents, I always disclose that I am adopted, myself, because I'm trying to de-stigmatize it, normalize it."

Conversely, participants P005 and P007 indicated that their connection to adoption had little to no *influence on their connections* with SATr and their families. P005 reported that although he has friends who have adopted transracially, he does not feel this connection influences his approach with SATr. He stated, "I think it's just families are families." P007 indicated, "I don't necessarily think that it has too much of an effect."

A totally different animal ← → through the looking glass self. Elementary school counselors described a broad range of *SATr experiences*. These experiences often start with an acknowledgement of the various *types of adoption*. These include foster care to adoption, international adoption, kinship adoption, and both open and closed adoption. Several elementary school counselors described *SATr experiences* within the context of *adoption related developmental tasks*. Some elementary school counselors described observing SATr *adapting/adjusting/surviving* to new families and environments. All of the participants indicated that SATr experience *difficulties* and challenges in multiple facets of their lives. These included physical limitations, behavioral issues, including ADHD, racial identity integration, struggles with peer relationships, and socio emotional obstacles that ranged from grief, loss, and trauma to severe symptoms of suicidal ideation.

Types of adoption. Elementary school counselors described SATr from various adoptive backgrounds. Several indicated working with children adopted from the foster care system, while many described experiences working with children adopted internationally from China, Ethiopia, Russia, South America and India. Additionally, participants indicated working with SATr who self identified as African American, Native American, and multiple heritage backgrounds. One participant reported working with SATr and her family in an open adoption where there was some limited contact with her birth family. Others mentioned working with kinship adoptions where the grandparents assume guardianship of their grandchildren who are from multiple heritage backgrounds. P011 indicated that kinship adoption is prevalent in her geographical area in West Virginia mainly resultant of birth parents losing their parental rights because of substance abuse or incarceration.

Adoption related developmental tasks. This sub-category refers to those developmental tasks that are typical to adopted persons. Tasks include SATr questions about pre adoption history, reactions to birthday/adoption day/ holidays, and experiencing feelings of loss. Examples that demonstrate how elementary school counselors perceived SATr within the context of *adoption related developmental tasks* include the following:

P003: She described SATr using this framework in multiple areas. For example, “Adoption is wonderful when you're a little kid but when you're in like second or third grade and you realize there's a loss factor, many kids get sad and, you know, will begin to speak much more openly about their birth family though they may have had no contact with those people”; “Like they don't know much about their biological family, or they know a story that's been told to them a lot of times that's very sanitized, obviously, at this age which is appropriate”, and “I mean, some of our little kids do their homecoming day, is celebrated like their birthday is, and stuff like that, with K[kindergarten] and one, in particular. Then, like I said, that pretty well goes away. Kids are not so positive about. It's connected with the feeling of loss by that time.”

P005: He also considered SATr perspective through typical *adoption related development*, “But the child just wondered do I fit in? Am I as important as my brothers? Etc”, and “But just personally, how do you handle that? You're dealing with who are, where are my birth parents? Why am I not with them? Why did they not want me (in the

child's view of want)? And then why did this new family want me? Why did they invite me to their family?"

P10: He detailed SATr experiences related to *adoption related developmental tasks* through an example of a SATr sharing an adoption story with peers, "We had an Asian child that was adopted, transracial. It was interesting, she was talking about, 'Well, I have a birthday, and I have a plane day. The day we came over, I came on a plane and met them'."

Adapting/Adjusting/Surviving. Elementary school counselors recognized ***SATr experiences*** within the context of their acclimation to new families, schools, environments, and in some cases language and country. P005 commented on the adjustments inherent in foster care to adoption. These include moving from multiple foster care placements into an adoptive family situation, "It's got to be a struggle when you join a group that may look different, talk different, act differently and you are then thrust into this environment, which could be extremely caring and supportive." P007 and P008 observed SATr to experience *adjusting* and subsequent *survival* in many areas including *adjusting* to the school, adjustment issues, observing progress, an uptick in academics, and a heightened sense of awareness emotionally. P008 noted, "I'm sure that many of the trans-racial adoptions are very well adjusted and necessarily counseling isn't something that they need at that point."

Difficulties. All of the elementary school counselors in this study depicted SATr struggles and challenges that ranged from moderate to severe concerns that interfered with academic or social emotional functioning to some degree. Many elementary school counselors shared experiences of SATr *difficulties* centered on challenges encountered at school based on behavioral, or in some instances specific diagnoses, such as ADHD. Pertinent examples that illustrate ***SATr experiences*** with behavioral *difficulties* include the following:

P006: She described a SATr's behavior interfering with her classroom behavior, "Her's was brought to my attention because she also has severe ADHD, and so that is presenting in the classroom. She's still very young, and as she's already developed these bad habits, and she has severe ADHD." She further indicated, "Poor thing, she had not control over what happened to her, but she's having to deal with all of the impact, and then I feel sad that she feels unsuccessful some days because of all the different factors that make it so hard for her to function in a normal classroom."

P009: She suggested that overall for SATr, “There's a higher incidence, for example, of ADHD, and just to be aware of that as well.”

A majority of elementary school counselors in this study discussed SATr *difficulties* with racial identity integration in a variety of contexts. Examples include the following:

P007: She shared her experiences with a SATr from Ethiopia, “One particular very early on, had a lot of things going on where he was noticing the difference between himself and his parents and noticing between himself and his peers. Our particular demographics at our school would be we overwhelmingly have a Caucasian population. Him coming from Ethiopia, he definitely, early on was seeing the difference between himself and other students.”

P010: He recounted, “The first girl started to cry, and then the second girl started to cry. They said, “You know, it finally hit me that I’m never going to be beautiful in this way.” She meant like many of the other girls that were at the country club swimming pool where this family lived. She was never going to be slender, and blond and blue-eyed. She said, “That’s never going to happen. I will never be one of them.” She just wept. The other one said, “It kills me that I’ll never be really one of them.” They both just wept, sobbed, and I cried. Here I am, a Caucasoid man in a little room with two 10-year-old African-American girls, crying about not ever being really a part of the dominant culture, even though they had been adopted by this wonderful man and woman. They had opportunities, and they were smart, and they were going to go places, and I think they have. It’s one of those things I tracked as best I could. That looking glass self, that was that awareness. Their awareness had hit them like a freight train. They wanted it for whatever reason. I don’t know if they shared that with anybody else. I was part of that.

P011: She described racism that exacerbated difficulties with racial identity integration for the SATr with whom she has worked, “For instance, you got kids who are darker, being called the N word, and they don't even know if they're Latino or black, or what, but other kids are calling them names. That's how the racial things are in the communities.”

Elementary school counselors noticed that some of the SATr with whom they have worked experienced *difficulties* with peer relationships that were related to their pre adoption history or overall self esteem in general. P005 and P006 described two SATr who had

experienced multiple foster placements before adoption finalization with their current families. P005 reported, "There was a student who was having social issues. It was a female and there was a lot of discord within her social group as well as her class." P006 described the SATr's misguided attempts at developing friendships, "She wants friends, but she doesn't go about it the right way. She'll be physically aggressive with them, but she loves attention." P007 indicated that one SATr she had observed, "was having a lot of getting along with friend issues."

Many elementary school counselors described socio emotional *difficulties* with SATr that ranged from general self-esteem to more severe symptomology. The following examples highlight *SATr experiences* with socio emotional *difficulties*:

P003: She noted that SATr, "Sometimes, I think, self-esteem issues bubble up that are really related to that [SATr status] and, you know."

P005: He described a SATr whose emotional concerns were related to her pre adoption "background and history." He indicated the severity of her *socio emotional difficulties* reaching a point of "self-mutilation, talk of suicide, and suicide attempts."

P007: She reflected on her work with a SATr, "There was a lot of insecurity and self esteem work that we had to do."

A-ha moments ← → erasing the past. Elementary school counselors shared a range of experiences that captured their perceptions of *SATr families*. They described *SATr family strengths*, noted *adoptive parenting differences*, and revealed the *challenges* experienced with *SATr families*. The following section will offer more detailed information on individual participant responses related to *SATr families*.

Strengths. Participants noted that families demonstrated emergent insight to highly insightful attunement to the needs of children adopted transracially. Many elementary school counselors observed *strengths* within the context of good collaboration with the school, accessing resources, being seamless in the transition period to adoption, and managing the different needs of SATr well. The following accounts offer elementary school counselor perspectives on *strengths*:

P001: She observed, "It's been very interesting that the transracial adoption seems to be more seamless, in my experience, because the parents have been aware of the different things that will come up." She noted readiness for parenting, "They don't assume, they

seem to have an understanding that it's going to be a little bit of a... I don't want to say tougher, but it'll be a more interesting life for the child and for them."

P003: She commented on *strengths* in advocating for their children, "Parents, for the most part, even when they're being difficult, they're advocating for their kid." She surmised that SATr families are in a good position to access resources because of their adoption experience, "I think, I would say the parents of adopted kids tend to seek help more because they're used to dealing with outside people."

P008: She described the strong collaboration she developed with one family, "I feel like it's been a great collaboration that I've had with the mother as a result of her actually being a mother of a trans-racially adopted child" and "The mother and I could really be allies with actually creating change within the school, as well."

P009: She also noted family efforts for their child, "Certainly adoptive parents, a lot of them tend to be very nervous about outcomes, but they don't know all the outcomes that are going to happen with their kids, and really go the extra mile and try to compensate, and just to be aware that that happens often as well." She recounted her experiences with SATr families and their ability to manage SATr needs, "All those different needs, getting everyone to come together as a family. I feel like they did a really good job, but it was a challenge to manage all the different needs."

Adoptive parenting differences. Several elementary school counselors noted *adoptive parenting differences* related to the level of openness adoptive parents demonstrated towards acknowledging adoptive status. P003 commented, "I have mixed success with the parents acknowledging that, you know, maybe a little bit more open approach is going to be better in the long run for the kids." She further described the influence of the parents' comfortableness in discussing adoption impacting the SATr, "Also, for some, it's their parent's lack of comfort with being open about adoption. We have a couple families here that insist that it never be brought up. That they want them to perceive themselves as just part of the family." Many participants described experiences with ***SATr families*** related to how they address (or not) SATr racial/cultural differences. Examples that showcase elementary school counselors' experiences with SATr *adoptive parenting differences* related to racial/cultural areas include the following:

P001: She stated, "Some adoptive parents of transracial children really attend to their child's culture, and then others don't" and "Seeing if the parent is culturally aware because some parents they adopt the child and they just assume they'll assimilate."

P003: She suggested that openness and even celebrating racial/cultural dissimilarities can benefit SATr's, "I think families who make an effort to really celebrate the, you know, ethnicity ... birth ethnicity, in the long run, I think the kids fair better."

P007: She explained one family's preoccupation with racial dynamics and its impact on their children, "I felt like she mentioned it all the time and she was worried about it all the time and was worried that her son and her daughter would not be accepted."

P009: She recalled the efforts of one family to address SATr racial differences, "I remember one mother talked about going down different neighbors and going with the neighbors to the African-American hair place. That's a different way to care for hair so she had to learn some of those things." She also observed families attending a school sponsored cultural event, "Sometimes even they'll come to like a Korean coffee if they've adopted a Korean child."

Elementary school counselors described a range of socio economic backgrounds of *SATr families*, from those having significant access to resources while others may struggle obtaining basic services. P003 commented on those within her school community as having more access to mental health care if needed, "I think they also have more resources so they take their kids to outside treatment if they feel like they need it." On the other end of the continuum, P011 described experiences with SATr and kinship adoption in regard to socio economic status limiting access to resources, "At times the parents who can take over, do not necessarily have a completed high school education, themselves, may not be fully literate, and even the ones who have Medicaid, there's no school social worker in the county where I work. Most people never have any access to case management at any point."

Challenges. All 11 elementary school counselors experienced *challenges*, of some kind, with *SATr families*. *Challenges* ranged from holding unrealistic academic expectations, not acknowledging the SATr pre adoption history by erasing the past, being unprepared for adoption related tasks, and being resistant to school counselor assistance. The following section will depict *challenges* elementary school counselors' encountered with *SATr families*.

Several elementary school counselors cited academic expectations among one of the difficult aspects of working with SATr and their families. P001 described how some families have high academic standards, “The expectation that all of that will be erased and they will magically be able to take care of academics in the way an American child is sometimes hard to help them understand.” P007 also described a number of challenges related to discordant academic expectations between the SATr’s capacity and family’s desires. For example when discussing her work with a recently arrived SATr from China she reported that, “Her parents had such tremendous expectations of her in all regards. Very often, it was very high and too high for her to meet and that was causing a problem within.” And “there were a lot of issues that came up in the family that she was expected to have come further along academically and with language acquisition than she had actually. I thought she was doing fine, but her family expected more of her.”

This area of difficulty describes how elementary school counselors found *SATr families* to not acknowledge, avoid, or dismiss SATr pre adoption history. P001 found this to be true for some families created via international adoption, “Some families are very accommodating, and then others are struggling because it’s like the child won’t eat, and yet they don’t remember that the child’s diet may have been very different from what an American diet looks like.” P002 described how one family dismissed her concerns about pre adoption trauma for the SATr. She stated, “So, parents are not ready to hear about why certain behaviors may be happening or for many reasons too.” P003 observed how this dismissal is evident when SATr families “insist that it never be brought up. That they want them to perceive themselves as just part of the family.”

Elementary school counselors’ described circumstances where they have found *SATr families* to be minimally or totally unprepared to address SATr common needs. P001 stated that overall, “I’ve been surprised at sometimes how little educated the parent is. Whether that’s because of the adoption agency or lack of commitment on the parents’ part to continue looking into it, to the fear that the child won’t like them, P009 described the *challenges* she has encountered with families related to not being prepared to manage some of the obstacles present in transracial adoption, “Especially the kids with more major issues than - the parents could be overwhelmed, how do I take this one”? P011 also described overall unpreparedness to manage adoption related concerns and racial identity issues, “Most of the time with parents, it’s just a lack of awareness, themselves. I don’t believe they’ve been educated at all in talking with their

children about being adopted, or about having a different kind of racial or ethnic identity from themselves.”

Many elementary school counselor reported that *SATr families* had a range of reactions to school counselor interventions. For example, P001, “Sometimes the parents get defensive about it, but sometime it’s an a-ha moment.” P005 noted SATr family resistance evident by their apprehension to engage in school counselor services, “I think that it can be a difficulty in building the trust with the parents. Sometimes in some situations they may be a little guarded about the situation.” And P009 noted that sometimes she experiences “working with parents who have a hard time accepting that their child has issues.”

Q2: What are common needs and concerns presented to school counselors by students adopted transracially and their families?

Elementary school counselors described the ways in which they initially identify SATr. The theme *identification* is represented by “**you don’t always know ← → they stick out.**” Elementary school counselors revealed how they begin the process of identifying SATr school counseling needs. The theme *determining needs* is represented by “**figure it out as I go ← → it varies.**”

You don’t always know ← → they stick out. Elementary school counselors reported identifying SATr via combinations of *observation*, through *tellers*, or persons or information that directly inform them of SATr status. Some elementary school counselors indicated often times SATr identification is not known or *hidden*.

Observed. Many elementary school counselors described relying on visual observation to identify SATr within their schools. Often this is most noticeable when SATr are seen together with their parents. Examples that highlight the elementary school counselors’ experiences of SATr *identification* include the following:

P001: She indicated that sometimes SATr *identification* is not obvious and only determined through direct observation of a child with their parent, “It’s not necessarily something that I would know about unless I see parents with children.”

P003: She stated that identifying SATr in her school community was relatively obvious as they stood out as the students of color in a mostly White school, “They stick out from the get-go that they're adopted.” She indicated that because of the homogenous school, SATr have little choice but to identify as such given the questions that other students may

ask them about their families. “They stand out. I mean, you just can't pretend you're not, you know, because the kids always ... you know, the friends will question ‘Why don't you look like your mom or dad?’”

P008: She reported that she most commonly learns about SATr status via *observation*, “It's more just a noticeable *observation* that the parents are white and the child's black, or vice versa.” She also indicated that while she is certain there may be more SATr in the school community, there is a need to “finding out that information” while being “considerate of the parents.”

Tellers. Elementary school counselors identify SATr through multiple sources or *tellers*. Tellers include adoptive parents, teachers, siblings, or SATr themselves. Sometimes the context of “telling” relates to concerns parents have about the SATr, teachers relaying information about SATr, or parents or teachers sharing background information on the SATr adoption story. Elementary school counselors’ experiences with *tellers* include the following examples:

P001: She described one parent identifying her children as SATr, “Mom shared the background story of these young children, and that’s the first thing she seemed to share with everyone, that they were on the street and the other daughter took care of her brother, and she adopted them at an older age.” She also noted that sometimes a *teller* is a sibling of a SATr who may be sharing information because of excitement of a new SATr sibling or because of concerns about the SATr sibling, “Once that little boy got here then he started talking about all the difficulties that the brother is having getting used to a new language and a new surrounding.”

P010: He described SATr *identification* through Child Protective Services, “Occasionally, protective services will say you’re going to get a new kid at your school, and we placed them with this Caucasian couple, and the child is African-American or Hispanic for instance.”

P011: She reported SATr *identification* mainly through SATr themselves as in the following example, “At times it just comes up if I'm meeting with a student and they talk about their background.”

Hidden. Several elementary school counselors in this study indicated that SATr *identification* is “not obvious”, often *hidden* until they have direct observation of a child with

their parent or receive information directly from tellers. P005 reported they would not necessarily know about SATr status, "But other than that if it's not informed through the parent or the child we really don't have knowledge." P009 reinforced the hidden aspect of *identification* and acknowledged that sometimes it is "not always easy to pinpoint."

Figure it out as I go ← → it varies. A majority of elementary school counselors utilized multiple *strategies* to determine the school counseling needs of SATr and their families. Several elementary school counselors considered the *social emotional* needs of SATr and how it affects school performance to determine school counseling needs.

Strategies. Determining needs for SATr as an evolving process that ranges from simple things to those that are more complex. The strategies included talking to the students, building rapport, collaborating with teachers, asking teachers for recommendations for small groups, becoming familiar with the social histories of SATr, noticing what may be needed, and balancing the SATr's needs in regard to race/ethnicity while avoiding offending the SATr family. Examples that demonstrate the *strategies* utilized by elementary school counselors **determining needs** include the following:

P001: She described it as "It's like you're just figuring it out as you go along."

P007: She described *strategies* to determine SATr school counseling needs include "participating in meetings about the SATr, observing academic issues, collaborating with teachers, asking teachers for recommendations for small groups, and by building a good rapport".

P009: She offered *strategies* to include "talking to the students", and "Sometimes knowing the social case histories as we're preparing the screening, issues will come up and a lot of it is similar to the way that we help other kids, too."

Socio emotional. In regard to addressing socio emotional concerns, P002 recounted taking a systemic approach to evaluate the impact on *socio emotional* development, "Again, balancing that I'm not a therapist, I see how that might affect their social emotional academic development in other areas." P009 determines *socio emotional* needs "By doing some reading on adoption, just like any other population that we work with, and being familiar with the needs, particularly as they go through the identity phase of development" P010 reports, "I'm just trying to be open to the child's *emotional* need. If they bring it in, then I'll be willing to listen."

Q3: What counseling approaches and techniques have worked well with this population?

Elementary school counselors discussed multiple school counseling interventions and approaches to working with SATr and their families. The following section will present the categories and themes highlighting participant examples to offer depth to their examples.

A variety of ways ← → it's no different. Most elementary school counselors shared *ways to connect* with SATr and their families. Some indicated that they most often connect with SATr and family through student focused meetings (i.e., Individual Educational Plan meetings). P010's comment, "It's not just really one method" accurately captures the broad range of elementary school counselors' experiences.

Variety of ways. Elementary school counselors recounted *ways to connect* from more passive practices such making it known that school counselors are a resource to more active engagement, particularly if a SATr family reached out seeking services. Others described the following methods utilized to begin building relationships: finding different ways to reach families, having a lot of contact with a SATr, taking a stand, being authentic, open, and honest, connecting via small groups for kindergarten and actively working with SATr families in collaboration with other school staff members. Several school counselors reinforced the notion that connecting with SATr is no different than connecting with any other student and occurs organically. Examples that underscore *ways to connect* by elementary school counselors include the following:

P004: She stated, "I mean, I would reach out to them just like I would any other family, but I wouldn't reach out to them for that specifically unless they kind of approached me with it first."

P005: He stated, "I think the connection is just a natural connection like any other student that's been there and worked with."

P007: She reported how "The teacher and the principal reached out, and we sort of came up with a plan to connect with the family."

Meetings/Screenings. Other elementary school counselors reported the primary way to connect with SATr is through some type of meeting in the school. Several elementary school counselors reported that connections are often made with SATr and their families at various *meetings* for the SATr including Individual Educational Plan meetings and child study

screenings. P001 described connecting via Individual Development Plan meetings, “A couple times it’s been in an IEP meeting, as in the instance of the two children from India.”

Group ← → nuts. In regard to *approaches and strategies*, all of the elementary school counselors in this study engaged in *consultation and collaboration*. Many provided a variety of *responsive services* to SATr including *classroom guidance, individual, and group counseling*. Some elementary school counselors employed *adoption sensitive services* within their services.

Consultation and collaboration. Elementary school counselors engaged in *consultation and collaboration* with various persons and resources such as families, teachers, multicultural helpers, mentors, and outside resources, including outside therapists and post adoption services. Examples that highlight the broad range of *consultation and collaboration* services include the following:

P005: He described helping families to “buy into the need” for collaboration, building a cohesive relationship with the family and child, and trying to get a “full picture of the child’s background”.

P008: She described the benefits of working with families, “I feel like it’s been a great collaboration that I’ve had with the mother as a result of her actually being a mother of a trans-racially adopted child.”

P010: He discussed his work with one SATr family in response to a family crisis, “Being with them in their grief. Because here you are, you’ve done everything you’re supposed to do, and yet it happened anyway. That was hard. That’s probably the most difficult situation I’ve had.”

Elementary school counselors enlisted a multicultural helper or mentor in *consultation and collaboration* who may share commonalities with the SATr. For example, P001 reported, “We also had a social worker at the time who was Indian. She was able to share with mom a few things, culturally, that the children might have been exposed to in their country.” Likewise, P004 shared, “With one of the situations I had, an extended day staff member [of the same racial background as the SATr] who was actually there, and I had her talk to the mom about it, because he had kind of noticed it too, you know, like the dry skin, and it was kind of bothering her so I said ‘Can you talk to the mom? Could you reach out and just offer your help?’ with that kind of thing.” P007 described consultation and collaboration with a mentor for the SATr, “I paired her

with a mentor last year which really seemed to make a world of difference last year. She met with a role model every single day that was giving her a lot of positive feedback.

Another form of *consultation and collaboration* utilized was accessing support via outside resources. These include outside referrals sources, such as mental health therapists and post adoption services that include efforts to connect SATr with their cultural heritage. The examples that follow share elementary school counselors' *consultation and collaboration* experiences with outside resources.

P003: She shared, "I do think parents need post-adoption contacts. I think some contact outside school, in addition to the ones they casually are aware of are adopted as well, where the adoption issues are really dealt with, the kids do better. Kids that go to, like, a school where they learn something about their native culture from people that are really from that native culture, you know. Those kids, and families, I think, have more support."

P005: He described accessing support via outside resources, and collaboration with pyramid and area counselors for better service delivery. He stated, "I also very much try to establish outside support for the child and the family. Developing that communication with the outside people is equally as important so that we're all on the same page, talking the same language, using the same methods, trying to support the family."

P009: She reported on collaboration with a nonprofit group to educate families about adoption related information, "We coordinated with an organization and we did a couple of workshops for the families."

Responsive services. Elementary school counselors employed *responsive services* to include classroom guidance, group counseling, including lunch groups, individual counseling to address the needs of SATr, and if needed, their siblings, to normalize issues related to racial/cultural differences and to offer support to SATr. Examples that demonstrate the various ways elementary school counselors utilized *responsive services* include the following:

P003: She reported providing adoption specific group counseling, "I was at a school in South Arlington where I ran several groups just for adopted kids"

P005: He emphasized the importance of individual counseling, "I think really one, you have to be in the supportive counseling relationship to really understand it."

P007: She described working with a recently immigrated SATr on adjustment, "I met with her individually as far as adjusting to the school"; "She and I touched base one on one. We had lunch sort of checking in to see how things were going with her."

P010: He described using classroom guidance to address both positive and challenging events in students' lives, "The way classroom guidance, the structure, the way I do it, every kid sees me in some sort of classroom guidance setting for 30 minutes a week."

Several elementary school counselors described counseling specific techniques such as journaling so that the SATr may maintain connection with the school counselor outside of individual and group counseling times, building trust, writing, charts, family tree activities, game playing (ie. Jenga), bibliotherapy and social story helpful interventions with SATr.

Adoption sensitive. Elementary school counselors found *adoption sensitive* counseling strategies that emphasized "normalization" of common SATr experiences to be effective with SATr. Many of these experiences related to holidays, adoption days, or disclosing adoption status. Examples of how elementary school counselors employed *adoption sensitive* counseling include the following:

P003: She stated, "We do reminders, that's the other thing we're big on, like reminders around Mother's Day and Father's Day, because you often get, you know, very much a sense of loss around those kind of holidays."

P010: He described utilizing *adoption sensitive* approaches in response to a SATr sharing of her adoption story that included a mention of a "plane day." He said, "That's one of those things as me being open to say, "I don't know what a plane day is. Can you tell the rest of us"?"

P011: She shared how her collaboration with one SATr family member resulted in planning to tell a SATr she is adopted, "I even had a parent who wants to tell her child [that she is adopted], but hasn't yet and just wasn't sure how to do it. She lit up and wept for joy when I told her that I was adopted, and I would be happy to work with her on a strategy. She said absolutely in the fall, she wants to do that, and make plans to collaborate with me to make that happen."

Strengths ← → limitations. When considering the *elementary school counselor role*, all of the school counselor participants offered *advice* to other elementary school counselors who

may work with SA Tr and their families. Most of the respondents in this study detailed *multicultural counseling* knowledge or skills that they found useful or needed to improve upon when working with SA Tr. Similarly, most described *challenges* related to limitations to their roles that revolved around system wide issues as well as inherent bias towards adoption in general.

Advice. Elementary school counselors offered recommendations to other school counselors that ranged from active to more passive actions. Some suggested school counselors maintain a preventative role, listen, express curiosity, pay attention, remain observant, seek out information, not be too involved, act as a change agent, find out more about the family dynamic, find a sensitive way to have better understanding about the family dynamics and know what to expect in the developmental process of SA Tr and families and how to support them. Others advised professionals to engage in continuing education about adoption, use adoption sensitive language, learn from the family, learn from the student, hold or offer a parents workshop, do your own reading, and look for a pattern when working with a different family. Still others suggested that school counselors should provide any support one can, put a lot of time and effort to meeting the SA Tr at their level, place oneself in the child's shoes, go through it through the child's eyes, be 100% accepting of their thoughts and beliefs, advocate for the child, advocate for resources, find out more about their specific needs, just to being open to it, seek out resources based on what the need is, and collaborate, when possible, with an outside adoption agency.

Multicultural counseling. Many of the participants offered recommendations and considerations that related to *multicultural counseling* competencies. These include managing the race related situations with adoptive parents and SA Tr as well as being reflective about their own racial background. Examples that illustrate elementary school counselors' experiences with *multicultural counseling* include the following:

P001: She reported, "Having that cultural background from the counseling end is helpful."

P002: She highlighted the importance of continuing to develop multicultural skills and competences, "I think just continuing developing their multi-cultural skills and competencies I think is important and then seek out support of mental health clinicians, of all kinds of ... just educating themselves first and then see what might be happening".

P008: She recommended that school counselors facilitate classroom guidance on skin tone, maintain resources for anything culturally competent in general, and use children's literature to help raise awareness about racial identity. She also indicated that when working with race related issues, school counselors should be “self-reflective on what their understanding of their own race is and how their experiences of race have been shaped as they've grown up in this society that we have and to look inward and reflect.”

P010: He recommended the following, “Every town has a barber shop that caters to ethnic hair, and a Caucasian person should go once” so that they may experience “what it’s like to be ‘othered’. You’re going to feel uncomfortably other.”

P011: She recommended that school counselors develop an interest with students about their racial/ethnic backgrounds and remain sensitive to potential racial/ethnic discrimination and racism experiences of SATr. She stated, “I would just encourage and make sure others are very sensitive in working with these families, and realize that there may be some limitations, and the ideal may not happen, but just figure out little by little, where they can be helpful. We also at some point have to ... We're working with minors, so we have to take care with those boundaries.”

Challenges. Elementary school counselors described *challenges* to their roles as school counselors that varied from limited resources, collaborating with teachers, and responding to SATr bias or stigma.

P003: She indicated that her biggest *challenges* related to managing and addressing teacher bias and adoption related stigma. “The teachers are the hardest part about this job as an elementary counselor. You know, that their biases are going to negatively impact the child.”

P005: He reported on limitations related to time, “There's just not really enough time to give each and every individual student the time they need.”

P007: She suggested, “Its also important to make sure you are taking each case on its own because there is a lot of differences there. It is important to not generalize that just because the child is being adopted of another race that negative things are going to be happening.”

Core Category: A Continuum of Comfort and Confidence

The elementary school counselors in this study provided thoughtful reflections and responses to their work with SATr and their families. The responses fall within the study's conceptual background of (a) multiculturalism and multicultural competency related to counseling, (b) human development related to psychosocial and identity frameworks for middle childhood, (c) adoption in the US and multiple heritage youth, and (d) elementary school counseling programs and services. Elementary school counselors experienced their work with SATr and their families within a continuum of conceptual frameworks that inform their practice. Foundational education and training in school counseling service delivery and middle childhood psychosocial human development provided the base by which elementary school counselors approached SATr and their families. Secondary to this, elementary school counselors relied on multicultural counseling skills to attend to racial/cultural aspects with SATr and families; however, approaches varied dependent on their level of comfort and confidence. Finally, perceptions and experiences related to the categories *personal connection*, *SATr experiences*, and *SATr families* enabled elementary school counselors in this study to develop approaches and considerations of SATr and their families within an adoption related context. Figure 4.1 is a visual depiction of the core category.

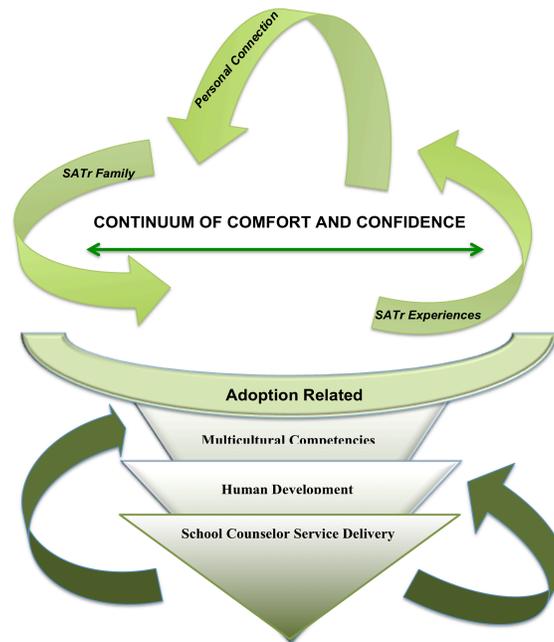


Figure 4.1. Core Category: A CONTINUUM OF COMFORT AND CONFIDENCE

Summary

Eleven elementary school counselors were interviewed for this qualitative study. The participants responded to questions regarding their perceptions and practices with SATr and their families. The interviews were completed in rounds, allowing for analysis between each round. Ultimately, five rounds were completed. The last interview confirmed that saturation had been achieved. From the coding analysis, eight major themes emerged. Each theme was represented by a continuum of experiences reported by elementary school counselors.

The lived experiences of elementary school counselors working with SATr and their families are represented by a **“CONTINUUM OF COMFORT AND CONFIDENCE.”** This continuum reflects elementary school counselors' strong reliance on foundational skills, such as various school counselor services and psychosocial human development of middle childhood, to enable them to attend to and address issues unique to SATr and their families. Issues and concerns specific to SATr and their families require multicultural counseling competency and adoption related sensitivity. Although the elementary school counselors' responses reflected differences within a **“CONTINUUM OF COMFORT AND CONFIDENCE”** to address multicultural and adoption related areas with SATr and their families, all utilized knowledge, skills, and application of foundational school counseling services and psychosocial human development as a base to further refining those secondary skillsets.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

A review of the literature emphasized that, despite increasing research on transracially adopted persons and their families, little is known about how elementary school counselors work with this population. Elementary school counselors manage and deliver comprehensive school counseling programs in order to provide developmentally appropriate and multiculturally sensitive services in support of academic achievement and socio emotional growth for all students (ASCA, 2009, 2012a). In addition, elementary school counselors are prepared to work with a variety of concerns such as divorce, bullying, grief, anxiety, and multiple heritage youth (Bauman, 2008; Eppler, Olson, & Hidano, 2009; Maxwell & Henriksen, 2012; Richardson & Rosen, 1999; Thompson, Robertson, Curtis, & Frick; 2013). Therefore, they are uniquely qualified to serve students adopted transracially (SATr) and their families. However, information that exists on school counselor practice with SATr and their families is outdated and does not feature the voice of elementary school counselors (Myers & James, 1989; Myers, James, & Streets, 1987; Ramos, 1990; Zirkle, Peterson, & Collins-Marotte, 2001, Purvis, 2007).

In order to address this gap in the literature, the aim of this study was to explore the lived experiences of 11 purposefully selected elementary school counselors and their practice with SATr and their families. I chose to undertake a phenomenological study to capture the essence of the participants' experiences. The open-ended interview format allowed me to meaningfully connect with each participant so that authenticity about his/her interactions with SATr and their families became known. Despite a lack of specific training in adoption-sensitive counseling practice, these counselors relied on their school counseling service delivery competence in meeting the needs of SATr and their families. Although generalizations cannot be made about all elementary school counselors, the participants in this study demonstrated a continuum of comfort and confidence as professional school counselors when working with students adopted transracially and their families.

This chapter will provide a synthesis of the findings of the research study. Next, a triangulation of the results that demonstrates convergent and divergent findings when compared to the literature is presented. Implications for mental health counselors, school counselors, and counselor educators will follow. Recommendations for future research will be presented that is followed by the chapter summary.

A Synthesis of the Results

The essence of elementary school counselors' lived experience when working with SATr and their families is a "CONTINUUM OF COMFORT AND CONFIDENCE." This continuum is representative of how elementary school counselors rely on foundational school counseling service delivery knowledge, skills, and application to inform their approaches related to human development, multicultural competencies, and adoption related practices with SATr and their families. More specifically, elementary school counselors in this study depended upon their personal and professional lived experiences with transracial adoption to refine their approaches and practice interventions within an adoption related context.

Perceptions

The 11 elementary school counselors in this study offered a range of perspectives on SATr and their families through their individual worldviews dependent on their personal connections to transracial adoption. For example, those with more intimate connections to transracial adoption, such as being a transracially adopted person or being a parent to a transracial adoptee, perceived SATr and their families through a lens of being distinctively qualified to identify and comprehend the racial and adoption related complexities shared by this population. Conversely, those with more distant connections, such as through extended family members or friends who have adopted transracially, described these experiences minimally preparing them to work with SATr and their families.

The participants shared significant professional school counseling experiences with SATr and their families that have shaped and informed their perceptions. Their stories featured students adopted transracially representing a broad range of adoptive backgrounds. These included international adoptions from China, Ethiopia, India, Korea, and South America as well as domestic adoptions from foster care to kinship arrangements. Some framed the SATr experiences within an adoption related developmental context by noting that common holidays, which are universally celebrated like birthdays, Mother's and Father's Day, are notable grief and loss triggers and should be addressed with sensitivity. Others normalized and wondered about typical adoption related developmental milestones, such as questions about adoption stories, birth parents, and fitting into their adoptive families.

Many of the participants demonstrated a strengths-based counseling perspective when noting the myriad ways that SATr are capable of acclimating to a number of new situations.

These range from immigrating and then acculturating to a new country, losing first/birth parents, experiencing or witnessing trauma, moving from foster to adoptive homes, and transferring to a new school. They noted how SATr, despite facing numerous barriers, progressed and in some cases flourished academically and socially. While it is important that the elementary school counselors in this study were attuned to and noted strengths evident in SATr survival skills, this did not diminish their comprehension of the difficulties many SATr have encountered.

All 11 elementary school counselors poignantly described the challenges and hurdles they have witnessed and, in many cases, experienced with SATr. Some of these centered on academic deficits, including diagnoses such as ADHD that hindered SATr abilities to be successful in the classroom. Many recounted instances where SATr grappled with the complexities of their racial identities. Others observed how SATr struggled with forming stable friendships that were often impacted by tumultuous pre-adoptive backgrounds. Finally, elementary school counselors in this study revealed a deep sense of empathy towards SATr when experiencing emotional difficulties resultant of adoption related grief and loss, poor self esteem, trauma, or severe mental health symptoms. After describing an experience with one SATr and his family burdened by the weight of pre-adoption sexual abuse, one elementary school counselor admitted, "But he's one that haunts me. I wonder where he is and what's become of him."

Elementary school counselors' experiences with the families of students adopted transracially ran the gamut from highlighting their strengths, noticing parenting differences that seemed to affect SATr, and describing the challenges they experienced with SATr families. As one school counselor revealed, "Honestly, I don't know if this is going to sound awful or not, but in these two cases I think the parents were my biggest challenge." Other participants, to varying degrees, echoed these sentiments. While several participants described SATr families attending to their child's needs in a comprehensive way that extended to strong collaboration with elementary school counselors, many more noted adoptive parenting differences that contributed to the enrichment or stagnation of SATr development. For example, many opined that those families who actively contributed to acknowledging their child's racial and cultural heritage and adoption status were in better positions to support SATr than those electing to promote assimilation and maintained a more closed stance.

Participants offered an array of examples that highlighted the challenges they have experienced with families of students adopted transracially. These included instances when attempts to support SATr in the school setting were rebuffed by families who were seemingly uncomfortable with counselor involvement or were unprepared in general to accommodate the needs of their child. Some school counselors found that their perceptions of SATr progress were disparate from families who held high standards for SATr without considering acculturation or other factors. One school counselor expressed her frustration in these scenarios. She stated, "The expectation that all of that will be erased, and they will magically be able to take care of academics in the way an American child is sometimes hard to help them understand." Others described the fine line they walked when simultaneously attempting to attend to SATr needs without inadvertently offending their families.

Needs and Concerns

Before school counseling needs specific to SATr can be identified and addressed, elementary school counselors must be aware of SATr status. And this awareness, according to the participants in this study, is not always "easy to pinpoint." They reported relying on a combination of visual observation to gathering information from various sources (i.e., parents, siblings, teachers, SATr) to confirm SATr identification. Some admitted that often they simply do not know which students may be transracially adopted and found there is not one reliable way to glean that information.

Once SATr identification is established, the participants in this study depended on various strategies that included building relationships with SATr, collaborating with teachers, and outreaching to families to determine what school counseling interventions could be beneficial. Some relied on assessing how SATr socio emotional influenced their academic efforts to further determine school counseling needs. As they shared their experiences working with SATr, one counselor's comment, "It's like you're just figuring it out as you go along," is an accurate reflection of the broad number of circumstances, concerns, and needs that would compel a SATr or his/her family to seek a school counselor's assistance.

Practice

The elementary school counselors in this study described a plethora of interventions that they have found to be helpful when working with SATr and their families. Foundational school counseling services that included consultation and collaboration, classroom guidance, and

individual and group counseling were the predominant modes by which school counselors worked with SATr and their families. More specifically, they detailed adoption sensitive practices that normalized, validated, and encouraged SATr experiences and described a number of counseling techniques they found helpful. These included friendship, lunch, or adoption groups; journaling; family tree drawing; charts; playing games; and bibliotherapy.

Participants viewed their roles as elementary school counselors in terms of active engagement with students, families, teachers, and the community. They highlighted the importance of being accessible to all students and emphasized the crucial role multicultural competencies held in their practice. For example, many expressed appreciation towards a counseling foundation that included courses on multicultural and diversity issues as they found those skills useful for negotiating the racial/cultural aspects of a SATr and their families. Most, while acknowledging their foundational skills, would like ongoing education and training to include transracial adoption and multicultural competency. The participants drew attention to the challenges and limitations in their roles as school counselors. These included time available to address student needs, large caseloads, and limited resources. Specific to SATr, many noted confronting teacher bias or adoption stigma as another challenge they must negotiate and address. One school counselor's recommendation is a valuable reminder to all working with this population, "It is important to not generalize that just because the child is being adopted of another race that negative things are going to be happening."

Triangulation of Findings

The following section will further validate the study's findings by providing corroborating evidence based on the literature review. Those areas that reflect studies found in the literature with convergent information will be discussed first followed by a review of the differential findings (i.e., divergent).

Convergent

Counselor preparedness. Of the 11 participants in this study, 64% reported no graduate or post-graduate training in adoption or transracial adoption. One participant indicated that her school counseling graduate school training included a discussion on adoption within the diversity/multicultural course. This lack of coursework reflects the findings in Weir, Fife, Whiting, and Blazewicks' (2008) study that examined training on adoption and foster care within community (now referred to as clinical mental health) counseling, marriage and family therapy,

and social work accredited programs. Practice articles on counseling transracially adopted persons (Bradley & Hawkins-Leon, 2002; Malott & Schmidt, 2012) include recommendations for both clinical mental health and school counselors to have an awareness of transracial adoption history in the United States, knowledge of adoption related developmental tasks, and ongoing refinement of multicultural competences. The participants in the current study, despite the lack of formalized training in transracial adoption, demonstrated to some degree their comprehension and application of many of the proposed recommendations found in the practice articles.

Elementary school counselors. The types of services elementary school counselors in this study provided to SATr and their families reflected the current practice definitions and recommendations outlined by the American School Counselor Association (2012a). Specifically, these include the school counseling core curriculum for classroom guidance, individual student planning, responsive services that includes individual and group counseling, and indirect student services, such as consultation and collaboration. The participants described approaches and interventions that aligned with these practices. In addition, several studies on elementary school counselor tasks (e.g., Barna & Brott, 2011; Hardesty & Dillard, 1994; Trolley, 2011) underscore the majority of time spent in consultation and collaboration and responsive services that address a wide array of academic and socio emotional student concerns. The elementary school counselors in this study described an assortment of approaches and interventions that encompassed consultation and collaboration with SATr family members, teachers, and outside resources and responsive services that included individual and group counseling.

Multicultural counseling competencies. School counselors are ethically obligated to maintain knowledge, skills, and application of multicultural counseling competencies (ASCA, 2010). Included within the competencies are specific social justice recommendations that school counselors act as advocates and allies for students and communities to identify and alleviate oppressive conditions that affect a variety of populations (ASCA, 2010, E.2.b, p. 5). The participants in this study referred to multicultural counseling competencies as both helpful and necessary when working with SATr and their families. Many recommended that more training in multicultural counseling is crucial to refining their knowledge and skills and such training would benefit from including instruction on transracial adoption. In regard to social justice, participants suggested that the elementary school counselor role include advocacy work to include being a

“change agent” for the school, advocating for SATr and their families, and addressing racial micro-aggressions and discriminatory incidents. Several participants specifically addressed confronting teacher bias related to adoption stigma. For example, one participant described how she responded to a teacher who, when describing a SATr difficulty, said, “You get what you pay for” by calling her out on the disparaging remark and providing education.

SATr school counseling needs. Research results have suggested that adopted children overall are at higher risk for academic difficulties that require special education services (Brodzinsky, 2013; Howard, Smith, & Ryan, 2004; Meese, 2005; Raleigh & Kao; Ringeisen et al., 2009). Other researchers have indicated that adopted children from all types of adoptive backgrounds (i.e., international, domestic, kinship) have an increased risk of special academic needs and behavioral and emotional concerns (Howard, Smith, & Ryan, 2004), need educational and mental health intervention upon school enrollment at higher rates than non adopted children (Ringeisen, Casanueva, Cross, & Urato, 2009), and demonstrate delayed school performance (van IJzendon, Juffer, & Poelhuis, 2005). The elementary school counselors in this study recounted experiences with SATr that reflected difficulties similar to those described in the research. For example, the participants described higher incidences of SATr diagnoses of ADHD that required special education services and resulted in behavioral challenges within the classroom. All shared recollections of SATr struggling with socio emotional concerns that were resultant of pre-adoption circumstances, dramatic environmental changes (e.g., new foster homes, new country, new school), and from managing normative adoption related developmental tasks (e.g., grief and loss issues). In addition, the participants in the current study described the effectiveness of providing referrals and resources to SATr families for post-adoption support including mental health counseling.

School counselor SATr sensitive practices. The research highlights many adoption sensitive practices for both clinical mental health and school counselors. Many of these practices overlap with how the elementary school counselors in this study provided services to SATr and their families.

Individual and group counseling. Although somewhat outdated, previous literature (Myer & James, 1987; Myer, James, & Street, 1987; Purvis, 2007; Zirkle, Perterson, & Collins-Marotte, 2001) described school counselor strategies for SATr to include individual and group counseling. In the current study, participants continued to utilize these responsive services to

address SATr concerns. Some relied on individual counseling to assist SATr to adjust to their new environments, build self esteem, and offer a safe space for sharing concerns. Others found group counseling helpful to practice social skills, promote self-esteem, and provide a space exclusively for adopted children. Counseling techniques employed by the elementary school counselors in this study included journaling, family tree drawing, charts, playing games, and bibliotherapy. Many of these same techniques were reflected in the literature (Becker, Carsoon, Seto, & Barker, 2002; Maxwell & Henriksen, 2012; Purvis, 2007) as practice strategies for working with both transracially adopted students and multiple heritage youth.

Classroom guidance. Previous literature on school counselor services with SATr recommended classroom guidance celebrating racial and cultural differences as a mechanism to welcome internationally adopted students (Myer, James, & Street, 1987) and to disseminate inclusivity and acceptance of adoptive families (Evan B. Donaldson Institute, 2006). Current classroom guidance practices described by the participants included diversity training (Teaching Tolerance) to promote acceptance of students from all backgrounds and family types. Other classroom guidance sessions were structured to offer opportunities to encourage students to share any personal news with their classmates. One elementary school counselor took advantage of these opportunities for an open discussion on typical adoption related milestones shared by SATr.

Consultation and collaboration. Most of the research on school counselor services with SATr has emphasized the value and importance of frequent consultation and collaboration with families, teachers, and outside provider (EDBI, 2006; Zirkle, Peterson, & Collins-Marotte, 2001, Purvis, 2007; Myers & James, 1989; Ramos, 1990). Consultation and collaboration remained a heavily utilized school counselor service delivery method as participants in this research reported frequent utilization to address SATr and their families' needs. Examples included active engagement with adoptive parents, teachers, other school counselors; adoption support agencies; and outside mental health providers. Consultation was also useful for the elementary school counselors to retrieve pre-adoptive information, receive relevant information on behavior at home, and provide referral information to families; all of these activities have been recommended as school counselor interventions when working with internationally adopted students (Purvis, 2007).

Adoption sensitive. Research suggests that transracially adopted persons have unique identity developmental models that encompass adoption related developmental tasks (Brodzinsky, 1987); adoptive status identity (Grotevant, 1997); and ethnic, racial, and adoptive identity development (Baden, Treweeke, & Alhuwalia, 2012). The participants in this study recognized the developmental needs of SATr within these frameworks. They identified racial identity integration as one area of difficulty for SATr. Many detailed ways in which SATr grappled with their adoptive identities and its impact on their relationships with their families and peers. Others described normalizing adoption related tasks and having an awareness that certain holidays (e.g., birthdays, Mother's and Father's Days) could trigger grief or sadness. Although most of the participants did not have formalized adoption training, they relied on their experiences with SATr in combination with their knowledge on psychosocial development and multicultural competencies to intuitively develop awareness around common SATr needs and concerns.

Divergent

Previous literature focused on how to address SATr school counseling needs with the supposition that SATr status was a known factor. The participants in this research highlighted the complexities encountered when attempting to determine transracial adoptive status of their students. Many indicated that, unless SATr, parents, teachers, or siblings directly told them, they may not ever know about these students. Therefore, this aspect of working with SATr and their families from the perspective of elementary school counselors is important to note when discussing counseling practices.

Departing from the literature, the participants in this study did not specifically focus on issues related to stigmatizing assignments or topics at school. These include issues related to infancy, genetics, families, heritage, timelines, family life education, baby picture homework, and literature with stigmatizing adoption themes that can marginalize SATr (EBDI, 2006; Fishman & Harrington, 2007; Meese, 2012). While participants did report providing adoption sensitive counseling practices, consulting frequently with teachers and families, and promoting acceptance of all types of backgrounds and families, including transracial adoptive families, the subject of stigmatizing assignments or topics was not addressed.

Much of the existing literature has described family consultation as an important component of service delivery to SATr (EBDI, 2006; Myers & James, 1989; Purvis, 2007;

Ramos, 1990; Zirkle, Peterson, & Collins-Marotte, 2001); however, previous accountings did not address how school counselors may respond to challenges presented by SATr families. The participants in this study described multiple problematic areas with families that interfered with relationship building and intervention efforts with SATr. Challenges related to preparing families pre-adoption, addressing racial and cultural differences, managing discrepant academic situations, and getting families to “buy into” school counseling assistance were all mentioned as areas of difficulty.

Another area related to working with families that previously was not acknowledged in the literature was family socio economic status (SES) and its impact on SATr needs. While the stereotype remains that adopting parents are economically well off, the participants in this study described a range of SES dependent where in the community their school was located or its geographic region. For example, one school counselor noted that she was tasked to provide more services through individual and group counseling for SATr in a part of the county with a generally lower SES than in her current school setting. She surmised, “I think they also have more resources so they take their kids to outside treatment if they feel like they need it more so than the other school I was at where, basically, I was kind of the only game in town because they couldn't afford outside services.” Another, described the overall lower SES of SATr families and minimal level of services offered by county agencies to support and maintain adoptions. Therefore, she has tried to fill in the “gaps” as much as possible to address SATr and their families’ counseling needs.

Limitations of the Study

The results of this study should not be generalized to all elementary school counselors. Participants were purposely selected from Northern and Southern Virginia and West Virginia. While the expansion to Southern Virginia and West Virginia broadens the scope of the responses, the ability to generalize findings remains limited. Despite purposeful sampling targeting elementary school counselors of color, only two participants self identified as persons of color in this study with the remaining self identified as White or of no racial category. However, given the lack of any empirical study on elementary school counselors working with students adopted transracially, this study provides important information on their perspective and practices that can promote awareness for other elementary school counselors.

Further, the findings from this study were based on participants' self report that could contribute to bias in their responses. However, I purposely utilized open-ended interviews for relationship building in an effort to elicit authentic and genuine responses. The interview sometimes included issues related to race and ethnicity, which may have influenced participants to skew their responses in a positive light. However, I am confident that the participants were authentic and genuine as many indicated this was the first time they had an opportunity to consider how they work with students adopted transracially.

Implications

The findings from the current study demonstrated that elementary school counselors experience a "CONTINUUM OF COMFORT AND CONFIDENCE" when working with SATr and their families. They depended on foundation school counselor service delivery methods, such as responsive and indirect student services, based on their knowledge, skills, and application of psychosocial human development, multicultural competencies, and adoption related practices. Their personal and professional experiences with students adopted transracially and their families influenced their approaches and interventions with this population. This study contributes to what we know about the lived experiences of elementary school counselors when working with SATr and their families. Based on these findings, there are implications for mental health counseling practice, school counselors, and counselor educators. Suggestions for future research are included.

Mental Health Counseling Practice

Although this study revealed the perceptions and practices of elementary school counselors, the findings are pertinent to mental health counselors as well. Research indicates that transracially adopted persons are overrepresented in receiving mental health services (Brodzinsky, 2013; Miller et al., 2000). In addition, researchers have suggested that school counselors engage in consultation and collaboration with outside mental health providers to best serve SATr. This study's findings support this recommendation as evidenced by the frequent reported use of consultation and collaboration by the participants. Clinical mental health counselors should be familiarized with the needs and concerns presented at schools by SATr and their families to better inform counseling work. They should also be open to and welcoming of collaboration with the elementary school counselors to coordinate and plan services. Finally, clinical mental health counselors may provide family counseling opportunities to further explore

those issues that the elementary school counselors found challenging when working with SATr families. Perhaps mental health counselors can provide a safe, neutral environment that can shed light on SATr family perceptions that may contribute to the challenges experienced by elementary school counselors in this study. They may also provide consultation to elementary school counselors on how to work with SATr family challenges so that school counselors can still effectively provide services.

Elementary School Counselors

This study found that elementary school counselors rely on foundational school counseling skills in the absence of specific knowledge about working with SATr and their families. These skills are then used to inform their psychosocial human development and multicultural practice. Hence, elementary school counselors have the basic knowledge and skills to effectively work with SATr and their families as a starting point. Like the elementary school counselors in this study, they may depend on their personal and professional experiences with SATr to further refine their practices and strategies. Many participants in this study suggested that continuing education in multicultural competency and training specific to transracial adoption would be beneficial supplements to their skillsets. To that end, participants recommended that their school district incorporate training on transracial adoption within their professional development curriculum or, at minimum, provide a written guide on common developmental tasks and situations most likely to impact SATr and their families. As one elementary school counselor stated, "How should I be addressing those? Is there a good way? It'd be nice to have some guidelines for that."

The participants in this study strongly endorsed the school counselor role to be one of prevention and advocacy for SATr and all students. Elementary school counselors must advocate for SATr students and their families. Advocacy can include promoting acceptance and inclusion of transracially adopted students, confronting racism and discrimination, addressing adoption bias and stigma with their school communities, and assisting SATr and their families to access resources beneficial to their academic and social development.

Counselor Educators

Both previous research (Taymans et al., 2008; Weir, Fife, Whiting, & Blazewick, 2008) and findings from this study reflect the lack of training in issues related to adoption in general. One participant in this study reported having some coursework on adoption in her

diversity/multicultural counseling class; however, most often is the case that this area is neglected within graduate counseling curriculums. Counselor educators in both school and clinical mental health counseling programs can incorporate information on individuals adopted transracially and their families in a variety of courses within their graduate programming. These include human development, family systems, and diversity/ multicultural counseling. Furthermore, the transracially adopted population should be included in discussions related to multicultural and social justice competencies for all counselors to reinforce awareness.

Research

Future research could explore how middle and high school counselors work with students adopted transracially and their families. It would be helpful to learn more about what needs remain prescient and what new concerns may be discovered within differing developmental periods for SATr. Given the information found in this study about some of the perceived challenges experienced by school counselors with SATr families, research focusing on SATr families' experiences with school counselors may prove helpful to promote improved understanding and acceptance. The findings of this study underscore elementary school counselors' desire for more educational training on working with students adopted transracially and their families. Future research could assist in the creation of professional development training for school counselors.

Summary

Elementary school counselor's perceptions of and practice with students adopted transracially were previously missing in the literature. The aim of this study was to feature the voices of elementary school counselors to shed light on how they practice with this population. The findings revealed that elementary school counselors, despite their lack of training specific to transracial adopted persons, depended on their core school counseling skills and knowledge of human development, multicultural competency, and adoption related practice to inform their service delivery. Their lived experiences illuminated how they perceived students adopted transracially by honoring diverse backgrounds, strengths, needs, and areas of difficulty. Elementary school counselors should continue to rely on foundational counseling skills and multicultural competencies to guide their practice with this population. In addition, professional development and training specifically addressing the common needs and suggested practice strategies for elementary school counselors should be implemented. Finally, elementary school

counselors should continue to promote multicultural and social justice principles by advocating for students adopted transracially and their families.

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APPENDIX A

Transracial Adoptive Parent Cultural Competence (Vonk, 2001)

Racial Awareness (p. 252)

1. I understand how my own cultural background influences the way I think, act, and speak.
2. I am able to recognize my own racial prejudice.
3. I am aware of stereotypes and preconceived notions that I may hold toward other racial and ethnic minority groups.
4. I have examined my feelings and attitudes about the birth culture and race of my children.
5. I make ongoing efforts to change my own prejudiced attitudes.
6. I have thoroughly examined my motivation for adopting a child of a different race or culture than myself.
7. I am knowledgeable of and continue to develop respect for the history and culture of my children's racial heritage.
8. I understand the unique needs of my child related to his or her racial or cultural status.
9. I know that transracial-cultural adoptive parenting involves extra responsibilities over and above those of racial parenting.
10. I have examined my feelings about inter racial dating and marriage.
11. I know that others may view my family as "different."
12. I know that my children may be treated unkindly or unfairly because of racism.

Multicultural Planning (p.253)

1. I include regular contact with people of other races and cultures in my life.
2. I place my children in multicultural schools.
3. I place my children with teachers who are racially aware and skilled with children of my child's race.
4. I understand how my choices about where to live affect my child.
5. I have developed friendships with families and individuals of color who are good role models for my children.
6. I purchase books, toys, and dolls that are like my child.
7. I include traditions from my child's birth culture in my family celebrations.
8. I provide my children with opportunities to establish relationships with adults from their birth culture.
9. I provide my children with the opportunity to learn the language of their birth culture.
10. I provide my children with the opportunity to appreciate the music of their birth culture.
11. I have visited the country or community of my child's birth.

12. I have demonstrated the ability for sustained contact with members of my child's racial or ethnic group.
13. I seek services and personal contacts in the community that will support my child's ethnicity.
14. I live in a community that provides my child with same-race adult and peer role models on an ongoing basis.

Survival Skills (p. 253)

1. I educate my children about the realities of racism and discrimination.
2. I help my children cope with racism through open and honest discussion in our home about race and oppression.
3. I am aware of the attitudes of friends and family members toward my child's racial and cultural differences.
4. I am aware of a variety of strategies that can be used to help my child cope with acts of prejudice or racism.
5. I know how to handle unique situations, such as my child's attempts to alter his or her physical appearance to look more like family members or friends.
6. I help my children recognize racism.
7. I help my children develop pride in themselves.
8. I tolerate no biased remarks about any group of people.
9. I seek peer support to counter frustration resulting from overt and covert acts of racism toward my children, my family, or me.
10. I seek support and guidance from others who have a personal understanding of racism, particularly those from my child's race or birth culture.
11. I have acquired practical information about how to deal with insensitive questions from strangers.
12. I help my children understand that being discriminated against does not reflect personal shortcomings.
13. I am able to validate my children's feelings, including anger and hurt related to racism or discrimination.

APPENDIX B

Adoption Counseling Competencies and School Counselor Interventions

Adoption Competency	School Counselor Intervention
Separation and loss	Group school counseling (Kizner & Kizner, 1990) Adopted individual and group school counseling addressing grief/loss (Zirkle, Peterson, & Collins-Marotte, 2001)
Developmental challenges	Awareness of post institutionalization affects (Purvis, 2007)
Development of multiple service systems	individual counseling, staff consultation, parent consultation (Myer & James, 1987) collaboration, adoption consultation with specialists, community resource referral (Ramos, 1990) Teacher consultation, adoption related individual and group school counseling, and coordinate school resources and programs (Zirkle, Peterson, & Collins-Marotte, 2001) Parenting workshops (Maxwell & Henriksen, 2012) Identify needs for referral to appropriate providers (Purvis, 2007) Collaboration with music and art teachers to develop theme based projects (Moss & Davis, 2009)
Family formation and differences	Collaboration, group school counseling (Kizner & Kizner, 1999) Classroom guidance that promotes diverse families, similarities, and differences among all persons (Moss & Davis, 2008)
Abuse, neglect, & trauma	Awareness of post institutionalization affects (Purvis, 2007)
Cultural competence	Eight session classroom guidance lessons with group activities to address and prevent racial discrimination and negative stereotyping towards SATr (Myer, James, & Street, 1987) Family counseling assists the family to support a child's exploration of multiple heritage background to eliminate the burden of the child needing to choose one heritage over the other (ASCA, 2010; Harris, 2009) E.2.b School Counselor Ethics: "Develop competencies in how prejudice, power and various forms of oppression, such as ableism, ageism, classism, familyism, genderism, heterosexism, immigrationism, linguicism, racism, religionism and sexism, affect self, students and all stakeholders." (ASCA, 2010, E.2.b, p.5)

Success in supporting strengths	Advocacy promote a student's strengths, to integrate identified strengths into the IEP, and to promote school wide strengths to support the student (Gelter & Leibforth, 2008)
Range of therapies for healing	Individual counseling, AP consultation, and staff consultation for adopted students (Myer & James, 1989) Play, music, art and bibliotherapy (Harris, 2009) Genograms, journaling, connecting with ancestors, building self-esteem, coping strategies, group counseling (Maxwell & Henrisken, 2012) Assessment, behavioral journals, relationship building activities (Purvis, 2007)
Evidence based approaches	Social Skills Group Intervention (Bostick & Anderson, 2009)
Advocacy	Awareness of adoption sensitive practices to reduce stigma (Taymans et al., 2008)

APPENDIX C

Recruitment Letter

School Counselors' Perceptions of and Practice with Students Adopted Transracially

My name is Susan Branco and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Counselor Education at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and University. I am also a Licensed Professional Counselor with an independent practice in Northern Virginia. I am currently conducting a research project for my dissertation under the direction of Dr. Pamela Brott and I would like to invite you to participate in my study. The study is titled School Counselors' Perceptions and Practice with Students Adopted Transracially and has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and University (IRB #: _____).

You are eligible to participate in this study if you can answer yes to the following study criteria: 1) have at least one year of elementary school counseling experience, 2) have worked with a student(s) who is adopted either domestically (private or from foster care) or internationally at any age (infancy to older child adoptions), 3) the adopted student is of color (racial category other than White), and 4) the student's adoptive parent(s) are of a different race/ethnicity than the student.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to better understand the lived experiences of elementary professional school counselors working with students adopted transracially. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to participate in an audio-taped interview that will last approximately 30-60 minutes. The meeting will be held at a mutually agreed upon location or by phone. During the interview, we will discuss your experiences working with elementary school students adopted transracially. All participants will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card for their time.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you can withdraw from the study at any time. Your participation in the study will also remain confidential. While the results may be published, your identity will be protected. I am happy to answer any questions you may have about the study. You may contact me at sbranco@vt.edu.

If you would like to participate, please send an e-mail to me as soon as possible. In the email please include your contact phone number and the best times to reach you. I will call you to further discuss the details of the study.

Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,

Susan Branco, LPC

Department of Counselor Education

703-302-0769 sbranco@vt.edu

Principal Investigator: Dr. Pamela Brott, NCC, ACS

pbrott@vt.edu

APPENDIX D**Response to Interested Participants**

Dear _____,

Thank you for your interest in participating in my research, Elementary School Counselors' Perceptions of and Practice with Students Adopted Transracially. I would like to schedule an interview with you at your earliest convenience. Please provide some dates, times, and locations (or indicate if your preference is to be interviewed via phone) so that I may set up your interview. I anticipate that interviews will be approximately 30-60 minutes in length, though I will be respectful of your schedule.

Please note that interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed to assist in analysis. You will be able to view your transcript once it is complete to make any changes or additions. Your name and other personally identifying information will be treated as confidential and will not be included on any transcripts or written in any results. Also, your participation, whether you complete the interview process or not, includes a \$25 Amazon gift card for your time.

Please let me know if you have any further questions. Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research, and I hope to hear from you soon!

Sincerely,

Susan Branco
Doctoral Candidate
Virginia Tech
703-302-0769
sbranco@vt.edu

APPENDIX E

Participant Demographic Questionnaire

Participant Name: _____

Gender: _____

Age: _____

How do you identify yourself racially/ethnically? _____

State or District of School Counselor Certification: _____

1. Please list the number of years you have practiced professional school counseling. _____
2. Please list, approximately, how many elementary students adopted transracially with whom you have worked. _____
3. Was the topic of adoption or transracial adoption something you have received previous training in either through your graduate education, continuing education credits, or other training opportunities?
4. If so, how was it helpful (or not) to your experiences working with students adopted transracially and their families?

APPENDIX F**Informed Consent for Participants**

Title of Project: School Counselors Perceptions of and Practice with Students Adopted Transracially

Investigator(s):	<u>Susan Branco</u>	sbranco@vt.edu	<u>7033020769</u>
	Name	E-mail	Phone number
	<u>Pamela Brott</u>	pbrott@vt.edu	
	Name	E-mail	Phone number

I. Purpose of this Research Project

The proposed research study is to gain a fuller understanding of the perceptions, experiences, and practices of elementary professional counselors when working with students adopted transracially. This study is being undertaken by the principal researcher to satisfy requirements needed for the dissertation process in order to complete a doctoral degree in Counselor Education and Supervision. The research study aims to interview between eight to ten participants who are elementary school counselors, with a minimum of one year of professional experience, and with direct experience working with students adopted transracially. For the purposes of this study, students adopted transracially are defined as those students who were adopted domestically, internationally, privately, or via the public child welfare system, at any age, who are a different race than their adoptive parents.

II. Procedures

Should you agree you will be asked to respond to interview questions, which will take approximately 30 minutes to 60 minutes to complete. This interview will be recorded and can occur in a mutually agreed upon location, including your school counseling office, or by telephone. I also understand that a transcript will be created from this

interview and will be available to other research team members, including Ms. Branco's Committee Chair, Dr. Pamela Brott, and other committee members. However, all of my identifying information will be removed from the transcript. I understand that I will be able to read through the transcript of my interview, at which time I can make changes such as omissions, clarifications, or additions to the interview. The audio/tape of the interview will be destroyed after it has been transcribed. Any additional information collected will be kept confidential and will be destroyed at the completion of the study. I also understand that I may withdraw from this project at any time.

III. Risks

There are no foreseeable risks to participation in this research study interview process.

IV. Benefits

Participation in this study may have positive implications for school counselor training, professional practice, and students adopted transracially. No promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage you to participate.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

The demographic form collected will contain identifiable information; however your participant interview responses will be coded to maintain confidentiality and anonymity. All hard copies of demographic information will be maintained in a locked filed stored separately from other research materials. All electronic information, including transcripts and demographic information, will be encrypted and stored on a password protected laptop. The principal and co-investigator and committee members will have access to de-identified data. At no time will the researchers release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent. The Virginia Tech (VT) Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view the study's data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human

subjects involved in research.

Note: in some situations, it may be necessary for an investigator to break confidentiality. If a researcher has reason to suspect that a child is abused or neglected, or that a person poses a threat of harm to others or him/herself, the researcher is required by Virginia State law to notify the appropriate authorities. If applicable to this study, the conditions under which the investigator must break confidentiality must be described.

VI. Compensation

Participants in this research study will receive a twenty five dollar Amazon gift for their time.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

It is important for you to know that you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. You are free not to answer any questions that you choose or respond to what is being asked of you without penalty.

Please note that there may be circumstances under which the investigator may determine that a subject should not continue as a subject.

Should you withdraw or otherwise discontinue participation, you will be compensated for the portion of the project completed in accordance with the Compensation section of this document.

VIII. Questions or Concerns

Should you have any questions about this study, you may contact one of the research investigators whose contact information is included at the beginning of this document.

Should you have any questions or concerns about the study's conduct or your rights as a research subject, or need to report a research-related injury or event, you may contact the VT IRB Chair, Dr. David M. Moore at moored@vt.edu or (540) 231-4991.

IX. Subject's Consent

I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

_____ Date _____
Subject signature

Subject printed name

(Note: each subject must be provided a copy of this form. In addition, the IRB office may stamp its approval on the consent document(s) you submit and return the stamped version to you for use in consenting subjects; therefore, ensure each consent document you submit is ready to be read and signed by subjects.)

APPENDIX G
Interview Protocol

Time of Interview: _____

Date: _____

Place: _____

Interviewee: _____

Introduction: Brief description of the project and consent for participation

1. What, if any, personal connections do you have to adoption? (If there is a connection) How do you see your connection or lack thereof impact your perceptions of SATr and their families?
2. In your role as a school counselor, how do you most commonly identify students who are adopted transracially?
3. How do you, if at all, as a school counselor, connect with SATr and their families?
4. How do you, if at all, determine the school counseling needs of students adopted transracially and their families?
5. What do you think are some of the most helpful counseling approaches/ strategies when working with SATr and their families? Why do you think these approaches/ strategies are most helpful?
6. What are the biggest challenges for you, as a school counselor, when working with SATr and their families?
7. Think about a significant moment in working with SATr and describe the experience to me. Why do you think this moment stands out?
8. How have your experiences with SATr and their families impacted your views on transracial adoption?
9. What advice would you have for school counselors who might want to learn more about how to help transracially adopted student and their families?
10. Is there anything else you would like to add about working with SATr?

APPENDIX H
Reflexive Journal Protocol

Date:

Participant ID _____

Location:

1.) Initial thoughts

2.) Thick, rich description (including context):

3.) Notable Quotes:

4.) Self Reflexivity

Prompts: "What do I know? How do I know what I know? What shapes and has shaped my perspective? How have my perceptions and my background affected the data I have collected and my analysis of those data? How do I perceive those I have studied? With what voice do I share my perspective? What do I do with what I have found?" (Patton, 2002, p. 495)

5.) Reflexivity about participants

Prompts: "How do those studied know what they know? What shapes and has shaped their world view? How do they perceive me, the inquirer? Why? How do I know?" (p. 495)

6.) Reflexivity about audience

Prompts: "How do those who receive my findings make sense of what I give them? What perspectives do they bring to the findings I offer? How do they perceive me? How do I perceive them? How do these perceptions affect what I report and how I report it?" (p. 495)

APPENDIX I

Amended IRB Approval

DATE: June 1, 2015**TO:** Pamela E Brott, Susan F Branco**FROM:** Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires April 25, 2018)**PROTOCOL TITLE:** Elementary School Counselors' Perceptions of and Practice with Students Adopted Transracially**IRB NUMBER: 15-182**

Effective May 29, 2015, the Virginia Tech Institution Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the New Application request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

<http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

Office of Research Compliance

Institutional Review Board North End Center, Suite 4120, Virginia Tech 300 Turner Street
NW Blacksburg, Virginia 24061 540/231-4606 Fax 540/231-0959 email irb@vt.edu website
<http://www.irb.vt.edu>

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As: **Expedited, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 5,6,7**

Protocol Approval Date: **February 19, 2015**

Protocol Expiration Date: **February 18, 2016**

Continuing Review Due Date*: **February 4, 2016**

*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

APPENDIX J

Coding Iteration for Participant P004

Significant Statements	Open Coding	Category (Theme)	Sub-Category	Theme
“At the school that I work in now it’s pretty easy to get to know the kids and their families, it’s a walking school, so I just get to know them when they drop the kids off, that kind of thing.”	<u>just get to know them when they drop the kids off</u>	Identification	<i>Observed</i>	you don’t always know ↔ they stick out
“It’s been, in particular, I think of parents maybe who have reached out to me.”	<u>parents maybe who have reached out to me.</u>	Identification	<i>Teller</i>	you don’t always know ↔ they stick out
“One family in particular, the mom reached out to me because she felt like her daughter was having some self-esteem issue and didn’t like the color of her skin.”	<u>mom reached out to me because she felt like her daughter was having some self-esteem issue</u>	Identification	<i>Teller</i>	you don’t always know ↔ they stick out
“I mean, when I think of the families that I’ve worked with pretty closely, I would say if I’ve reached out to them it’s because there was a problem in the in the school.”	<u>I’ve reached out to them it’s because there was a problem in the in the school.</u>	Determining Needs	<i>Strategies</i>	Figure it out as I go ↔ it varies
“There’s been a couple situations, and this isn’t just with different races, this is with just, adopted families in general, but, I’ve just noticed a lot of times parents just need some resources.”	<u>noticed a lot of times parents just need some resources.</u>	Determining Needs	<i>Strategies</i>	Figure it out as I go ↔ it varies
“I guess because we’re talking about race sometimes and you never know how people, you know? It’s probably a cultural competence thing, you know? It’s just, it’s tricky. Not wanting to	<u>also to make sure that the kid’s needs are met,</u>	Determining Needs	<i>Strategies</i>	Figure it out as I go ↔ it varies

<p>offend anyone, and also to make sure that the kid's needs are met, and the balance of it."</p>				
<p>"There's been a couple of situations and this isn't just with different races, this is with just, adopted families in general, but, I've noticed a lot of times parents just need some resources. That's kind of a way to refer out, I guess."</p>	<p><u>That's kind of a way to refer out</u></p>	<p><i>Approaches & Strategies</i></p>	<p><i>Consultation & Collaboration</i></p>	<p>group ← → nuts</p>
<p>"Like I can think of two situations where there was not a father, there was a mother who had adopted, I think both moms just, kind of wanting to do it all, and not really realizing their limitations and me trying to kind of encourage them to seek some help."</p>	<p><u>to kind of encourage them to seek some help</u></p>	<p><i>Approaches & Strategies</i></p>	<p><i>Consultation & Collaboration</i></p>	<p>group ← → nuts</p>
<p>"With one of the situations I had, <u>an extended day staff member who was actually there, and I had her talk to the mom about it, because he had kind of noticed it too, you know, like the dry skin, and it was kind of bothering her so I said 'Can you talk to the mom? Could you reach out and just offer your help?' with that kind of thing."</u></p>	<p><u>an extended day staff member who was actually there, and I had her talk to the mom about it, because he had kind of noticed it too, you know, like the dry skin, and it was kind of bothering her so I said 'Can you talk to the mom</u></p>	<p><i>Approaches & Strategies</i></p>	<p><i>Consultation & Collaboration</i></p>	<p>group ← → nuts</p>
<p>"As far as for that particular situation, I ended up putting that little girl in a small group, self esteem kind of group, and there were some other kids in that group just for having self esteem issues, but I know there was one other girl who wasn't adopted but she was bi-</p>	<p><u>in a small group, self esteem kind of group</u></p>	<p><i>Approaches & Strategies</i></p>	<p><i>Responsive Services</i></p>	<p>group ← → nuts</p>

racial and there were some similar things going on with her household, you know, with her comparing herself to her mom and that kind of thing.”				
“I would say, I guess <u>my personal experience, I’ve learned a lot from their experiences about the attachment process and some of that.</u> ”	<u>my personal experience, I’ve learned a lot from their experiences about the attachment process</u>	Personal Connection	<i>Awareness</i>	Families are families ← → better qualified
“Professionally when I’ve worked with kids that have been adopted, if they’re struggling, <u>I might take some of those into account maybe.</u> ”	<u>I might take some of those into account</u>	Personal Connection	<i>Awareness</i>	Families are families ← → better qualified
“ <u>Talk to some families that are experiencing it</u> ”	<u>Talk to some families</u>	Elementary School Counselor Role	<i>Advice</i>	strengths ← → limitations
“It’s tricky to talk to parents about that, because <u>we’re talking about race sometimes, and you never know how people, you know? It’s probably a cultural competence thing, you know?</u> ”	<u>we’re talking about race sometimes, and you never know how people, you know? It’s probably a cultural competence thing</u>	Elementary School Counselor Role	<i>Multicultural Counseling Skills</i>	strengths ← → limitations
“I’m White and I feel like, <u>would it come better from someone of color, to say, ‘hey’? How to address those in a ways that would be comfortable for the parent, comfort level with talking about hair and skin and differences and stuff.</u> ”	<u>White and I feel like, would it come better from someone of color, to say, ‘hey’? How to address those in a ways that would be comfortable for the parent, comfort level with talking about hair and skin and differences</u>	Elementary School Counselor Role	<i>Multicultural Counseling Skills</i>	strengths ← → limitations
“Just how to address those		Elementary	<i>Multicultural</i>	strengths

things in a way that would be comfortable for the parent. I guess depending on how well I know the parent would be my comfort level with talking about hair and skin and the differences and stuff.”		<i>School Counselor Role</i>	<i>Counseling Skills</i>	← → limitations
“I guess the only impact it’s had is <u>how should I be addressing those? Is there a good way?</u> Like, it’d be nice to have some guidelines for that maybe.”	<u>how should I be addressing those? Is there a good way</u>	<i>Elementary School Counselor Role</i>	<i>Challenges</i>	strengths ← → limitations
“Well, because we are talking a lot about cultural competency in our county. <u>And it’s just like, that’s not really something that we’ve brought up, but I think it’s interesting. Just in talking to you about this and putting it out there, I’m thinking, ‘We’ve never really talked about that in cultural competence’, but that’s a huge thing we could talk about.”</u>	<u>talking a lot about cultural competency in our county. And it’s just like, that’s not really something that we’ve brought up.</u>	<i>Elementary School Counselor Role</i>	<i>Multicultural Counseling Skills</i>	strengths ← → limitations
“I mean, <u>I would reach out to them just like I would any other family, but I wouldn’t reach out to them for that specifically unless they kind of approached me</u> with it first.”	<u>I would reach out to them just like I would any other family, but I wouldn’t reach out to them for that specifically unless they kind of approached me</u>	<i>Ways to Connect</i>	<i>A Variety of Ways</i>	A variety of ways ← → it’s no different
“One family in particular, the mom reached out to me because she felt like her daughter was having some self-esteem issue and <u>didn’t like the color of her skin.”</u>	<u>daughter was having some self-esteem issue and didn’t like the color of her skin.”</u>	<i>SATr Experiences</i>	<i>Difficulties</i>	A totally different animal ← → through the looking glass self
“As far as for that particular situation, I	<u>you know, with her comparing</u>	<i>SATr Experiences</i>	<i>Difficulties</i>	A totally different

<p>ended up putting that little girl in a small group, self esteem kind of group, and there were some other kids in that group just for having self esteem issues, but I know there was one other girl who wasn't adopted but she was bi-racial and there were some similar things going on with her household, <u>you know, with her comparing herself to her mom and that kind of thing.</u>"</p>	<p><u>herself to her mom and that kind of thing."</u></p>			<p>animal ← → through the looking glass self</p>
<p>"I think that the only way that it may have changed it is, you know, what we were talking about, <u>just how to address those kinds of things in a way that would be comfortable for the parent.</u> I guess depending on how well I know the parent would be my comfort level with talking about hair and skin and the differences and stuff."</p>	<p><u>just how to address those kinds of things in a way that would be comfortable for the parent.</u></p>	<p><i>SATr Families</i></p>	<p><i>Adoptive Parenting Differences</i></p>	<p>A-Ha moments ← → erasing the past</p>

APPENDIX K

Final Codebook Summary

“families are families ← → better qualified”

Personal Connection

<i>Influence on Connections</i>	Elementary school counselors' personal connections to adoption suggested little to no impact to strongly enhancing their relationships with SATr and their families.
<i>Awareness</i>	Elementary school counselors' described their personal connections to adoption as heightening their sense of awareness surrounding SATr and family experiences.
<i>Types</i>	Elementary school counselors reported a range of degrees of connection to adoption type. These included being a transracially adopted person, an adoptive parent, having a grandparent who is adopted, having a niece (s), great uncle, cousins, close friends, and colleagues/co workers who are adopted or have adopted children transracially.

“strengths ← → limitations”

Elementary school counselor role

<i>Advice</i>	Elementary school counselors offered a broad range of active and passive suggestions and advice to other school counselors working with SATr and their families. These actions included providing any support one can, putting a lot of time and effort to meeting the SATr at their level, placing oneself in the child's shoes, go through it through the child's eyes, be 100% accepting of their thoughts and beliefs, advocate for the child, advocate for resources, finding out more about their specific needs, just to being open to it, learning from the family, looking for a pattern, doing your own reading, and seeking out resources based on what the need is. Other actions included school counselor being a preventative role, maintaining curiosity, paying attention, remaining observant, seeking out information, not being too involved, being a change agent, finding out more about the family dynamic, finding a sensitive way to have better understanding about the family dynamics, using adoption sensitive language, and knowing what to expect in the developmental process of SATr and families and how to support them.
<i>Multicultural Counseling Skills</i>	Elementary school counselors recommended multicultural competencies when working with SATr and their families. These included the need to continue to develop multicultural counseling skills to broach with families, manage the “tricky” situations regarding race/ ethnicity, be self reflective and aware, consider the implications of their own racial/ethnic background, and be knowledgeable to identify and address racial micro- aggressions or discriminatory incidents.
<i>Challenges</i>	Elementary school counselors explained challenges related to limitations of their roles as school counselors that included the struggle to be perceived as competent to provide mental health aid, time and budget constraints and large caseloads. Some indicated that the lack of training in adoption and transracial adoption was a limitation to working with SATr and families. While others described their biggest challenges to center around managing teacher and staff

adoption subtle and direct bias and / or stigma towards adoption.

“you don’t always know ← → they stick out”

Identification

<i>Observed</i>	Elementary school counselors reported most commonly relying on visual observation of SATr with their families in order to identify SATr within their school communities.
<i>Hidden</i>	Some elementary school counselors indicated that unless a parent, teacher, or SATr tells them they would not necessarily know about or feel uncertain about SATr status at their schools.
<i>Tellers</i>	Most elementary school counselors are informed of SATr status by a parent, teacher, sibling, or SATr, Child Protective Services, and upon enrollment to the school.

“a totally different animal ← → the looking glass self”

SATr experiences

<i>Types of Adoption</i>	Elementary school counselors described working with SATr from various types of adoptive backgrounds. These include foster care adoption, international adoption, kinship adoption, and both open and closed adoption.
<i>Adoption Related Developmental Tasks</i>	Several elementary school counselors described SATr experiences within the context of typical adoption related developmental tasks. These include questions about pre adoption history, reactions to birthday/adoption day/ holidays, and experiencing feelings of loss.
<i>Adapting/Adjusting/Survival</i>	Many elementary school counselors related their experiences observing SATr adjusting to new foster and adoptive families, new schools, acculturation, and adapting to these contexts. Some specifically recalled noting SATr progress in many of those areas. While others witnessed SATr struggle in this area.
<i>Difficulties</i>	Elementary school counselors indicated that SATr experience difficulties and challenges in multiple facets of their lives. These include physical limitations, behavioral issues, including ADHD, that interfere with school performance, racial identity integration, struggles with peer relationships, and socio emotional obstacles that ranged from grief, loss, and trauma to severe symptoms of suicidal ideation.

“a variety of ways ← → it’s no different”

Ways to connect

<i>A Variety of Ways</i>	Elementary school counselors described multiple ways that varied from passive to more active interventions to connect with SATr and their families. These ranged from building a natural connection, having a lot of contact with SATr, collaborating with school staff members to make a plan to connect, ensuring SATr and families know they are available to them, and responding to families who are seeking out services. Some school counselors met SATr through running groups for other topics, such as friendship and kindergarten groups.
<i>Meetings/Screenings</i>	Some elementary school counselors reported that connections are often made with SATr and their families at various meetings for the SATr including Individual Educational Plan meetings and child study screenings.

“figure it out as I go ← → it varies”

Determining needs

Strategies

Elementary school counselors utilized multiple strategies to determine the school counseling needs of SATr and their families. These strategies were represented by one dimensional and multidimensional interventions from talking to the students, building rapport, collaborating with teachers, asking teachers for recommendations for small groups, becoming familiar with the social histories of SATr, noticing what may be needed, and balancing the SATr's needs in regard to race/ethnicity while avoiding offending the SATr family.

Socio emotional

Some elementary school counselors considered the severity of the social emotional impact on the SATr and how it is impacting school performance to determine school counseling needs.

“group ← → nuts”

Approaches & strategies

Consultation & Collaboration

Elementary school counselors engaged in consultation and collaboration with families, teachers, multicultural helpers, mentors, and outside resources, including outside therapists and post adoption services.

Responsive Services

Elementary school counselors provided a variety of responsive services to SATr including classroom guidance, individual, and group counseling. Specific counseling techniques employed by some elementary school counselors include friendship, lunch, or adoption groups, journaling, family tree drawing, charts, playing games, and bibliotherapy.

Adoption Sensitive

Some elementary school counselors employed adoption sensitive services such as developing an awareness of typical adoption related tasks and normalizing and validating adoption related experiences and attending to milestones and holidays that could trigger loss feelings in SATr.

“a-ha moments ← → erasing the past”

SATr families

Strengths

Elementary school counselors described SATr family strengths that focused on families' demonstrating emerging insight to being highly attuned. Examples fell within the contexts of good collaboration with the school, accessing resources, being seamless in the transition period to adoption, and managing the different needs of SATr well.

Adoptive Parenting Differences

Elementary school counselors noted parenting differences in the following contexts: open versus closed in regard to acknowledging adoption within the family, differences in addressing racial/ethnic/ and cultural needs, and the influence of socio economic differences among SATr families.

Challenges

Elementary school counselors described challenges experienced with SATr families ranging from unrealistic academic expectations, not acknowledging or addressing the SATr pre adoption history, being unprepared for adoption related tasks, and demonstrating resistance to school counselor assistance.
