

# A Qualitative Study of Racial and Adoption Microaggressions Experienced by Adoptive Families with Children from China

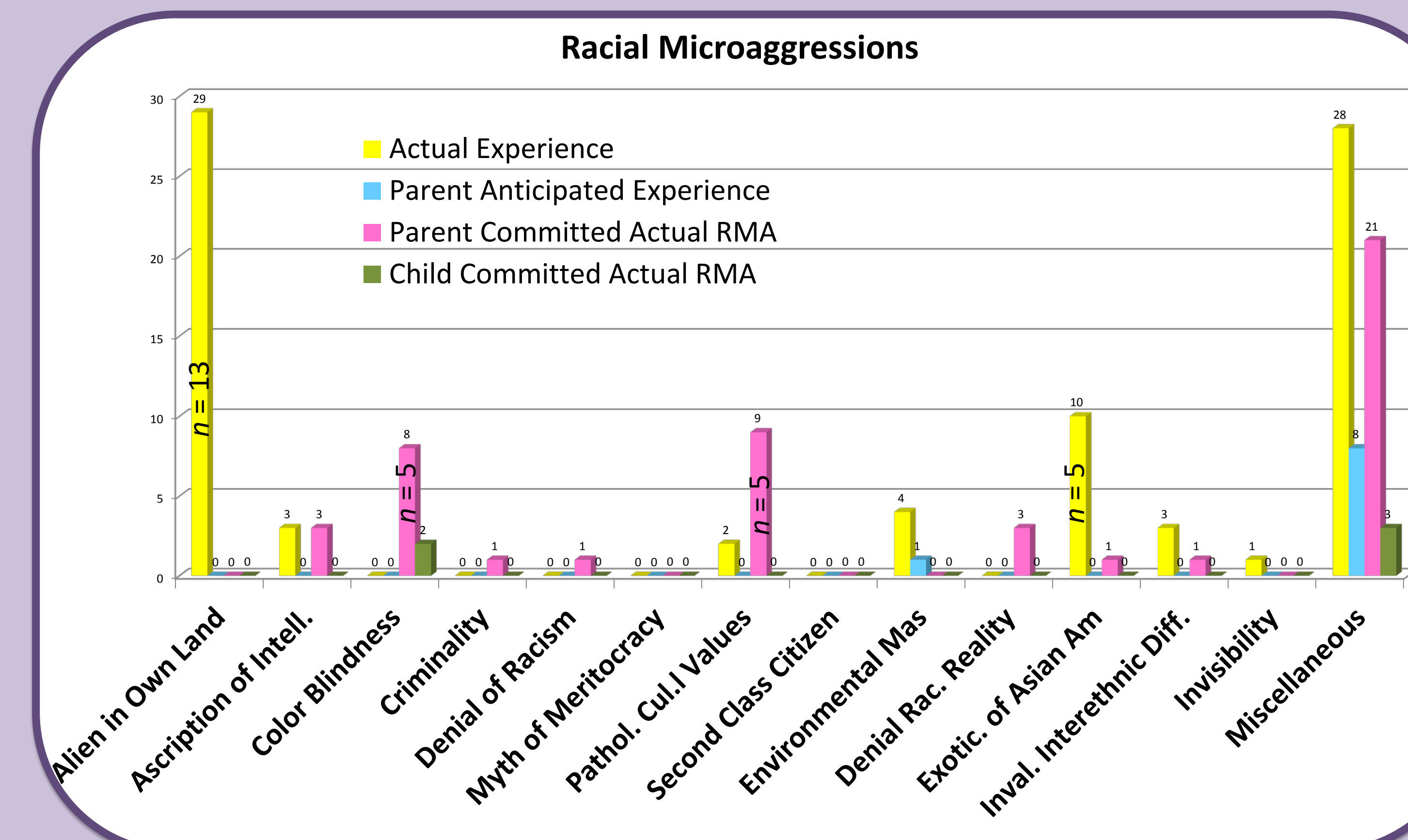
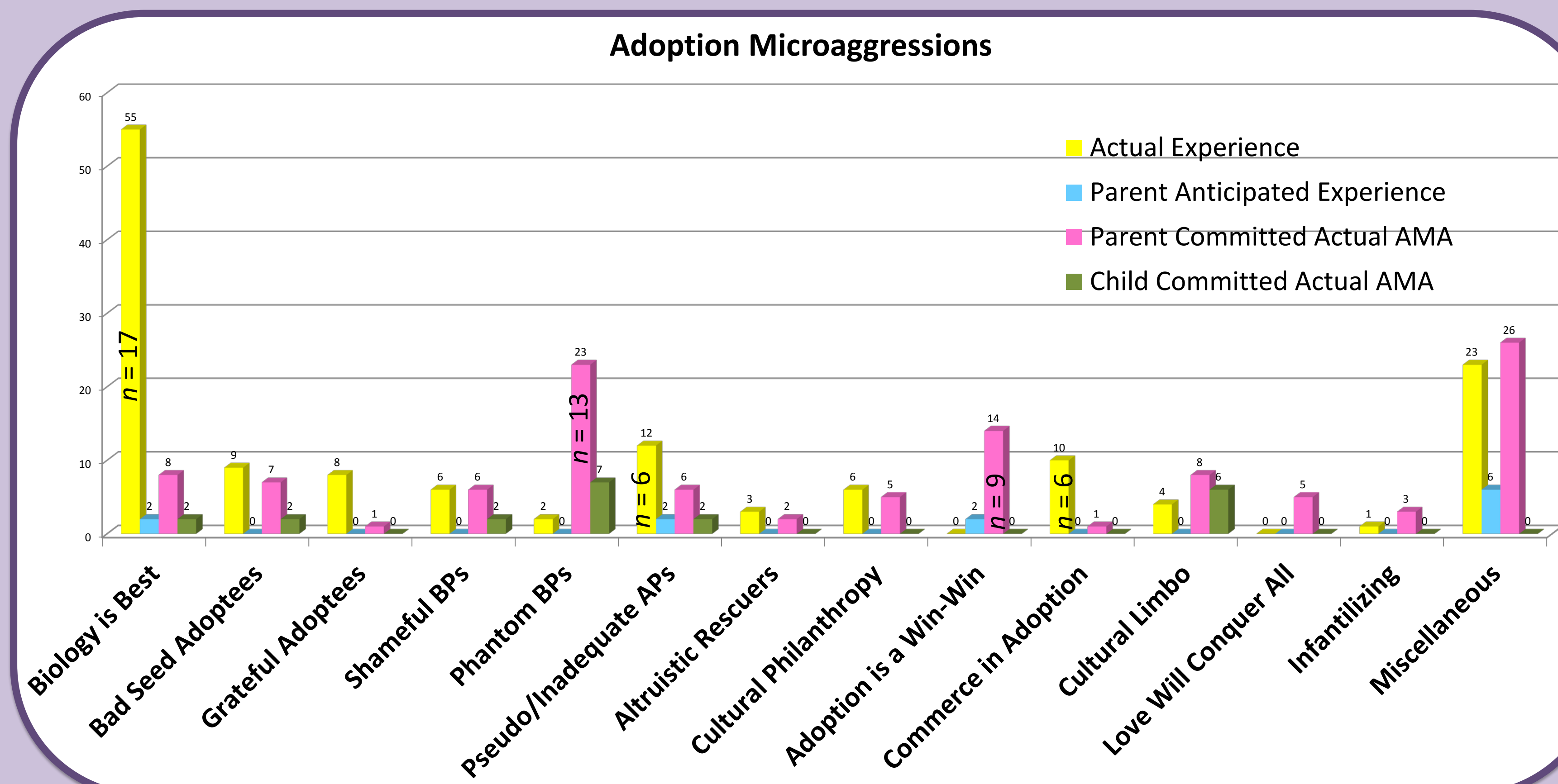
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## Introduction and Method

- Transracial adoptions are 40% of all US adoptions, and typically involve White parents adopting children of color (Transracial and international adoptees, TRIAs). TRIAs and their families encounter frequent microaggressions that invalidate their family.
- Microaggressions are insults, behaviors, and slights that communicate derogatory and hostile attitudes and beliefs, whether or not intentional (Sue et al., 2007).
- Drawing on this racial microaggression model (Sue et al., 2007) and an adoption microaggression model (Baden, 2010), this poster examined racial and adoption microaggressions in the lives of TRIAs and their families.
- This poster also examined parents' Preparation for Bias (Pfb) behaviors (Hughes et al., 2007), designed to help children cope with these experiences of stigma.

**Sample:** Community sample of 46 families; current sample for poster: 19  
**Family Types:** Mom & Dad: 47% Two-Moms: 16% Single Mom: 37% **Child Age:** M=7.5 (5-8 years)  
**Parent age range:** 42-54 years **Race/ethnicity:** 95% White, 5% Asian **Education:** Graduate degree: 74%  
**Areas of residence:** Urban: 42% Suburban: 42% Rural: 16%

**Measure**  
 • Semi-structured parent interview covering range of themes  
 • Interviews qualitatively coded for microaggressions, PFBs by teams of 2 coders who were extensively trained and then discussed codes to agreement



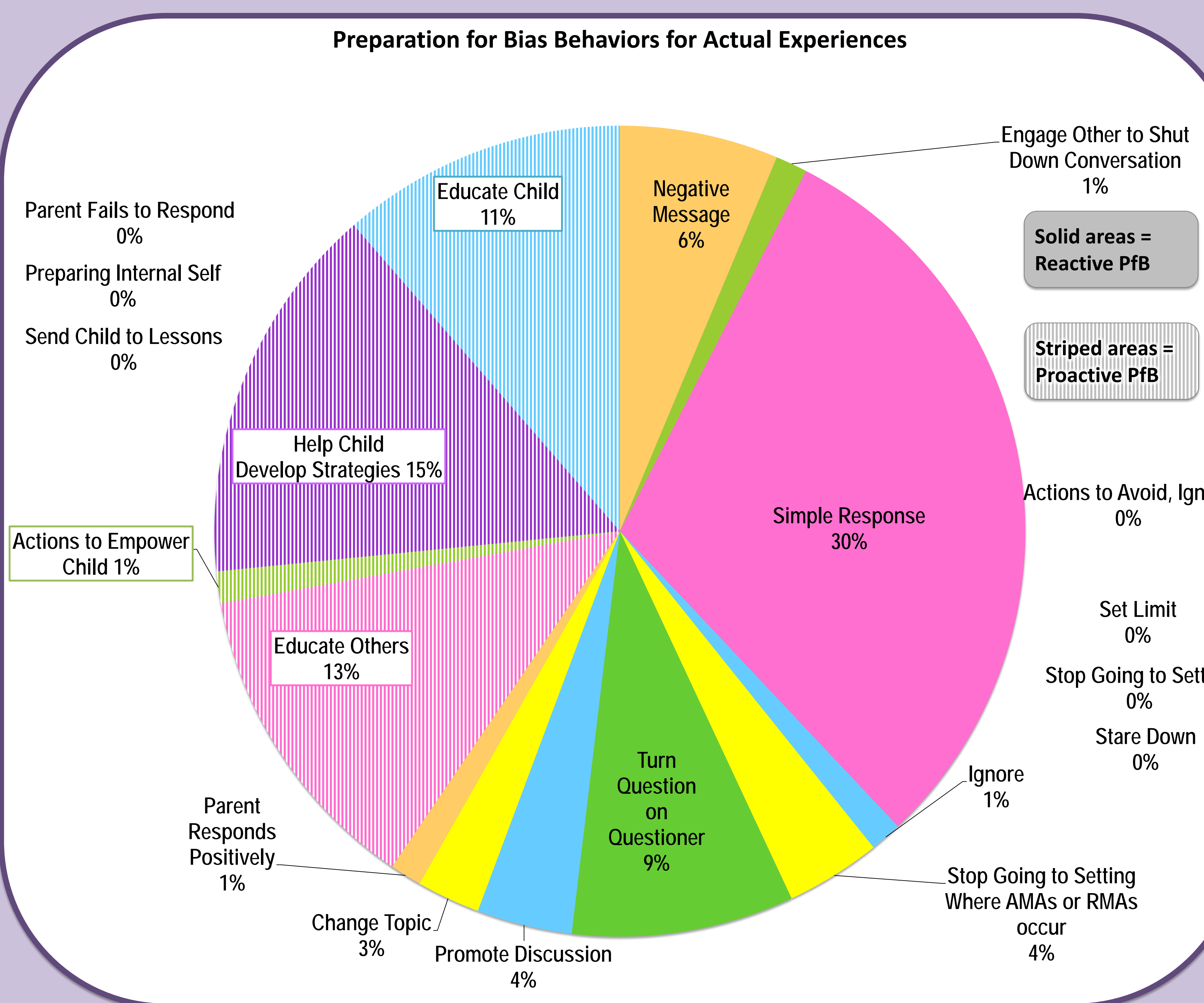
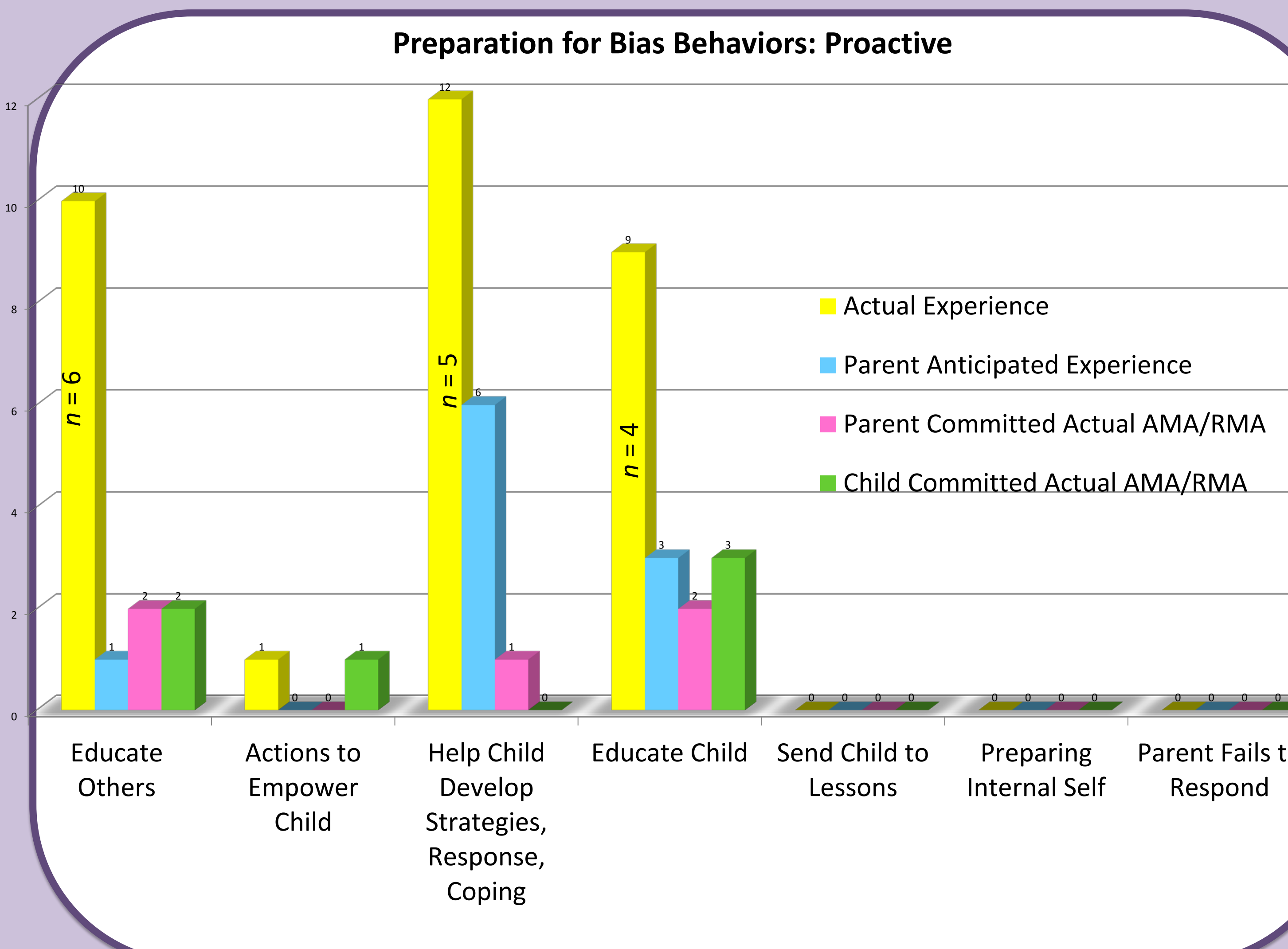
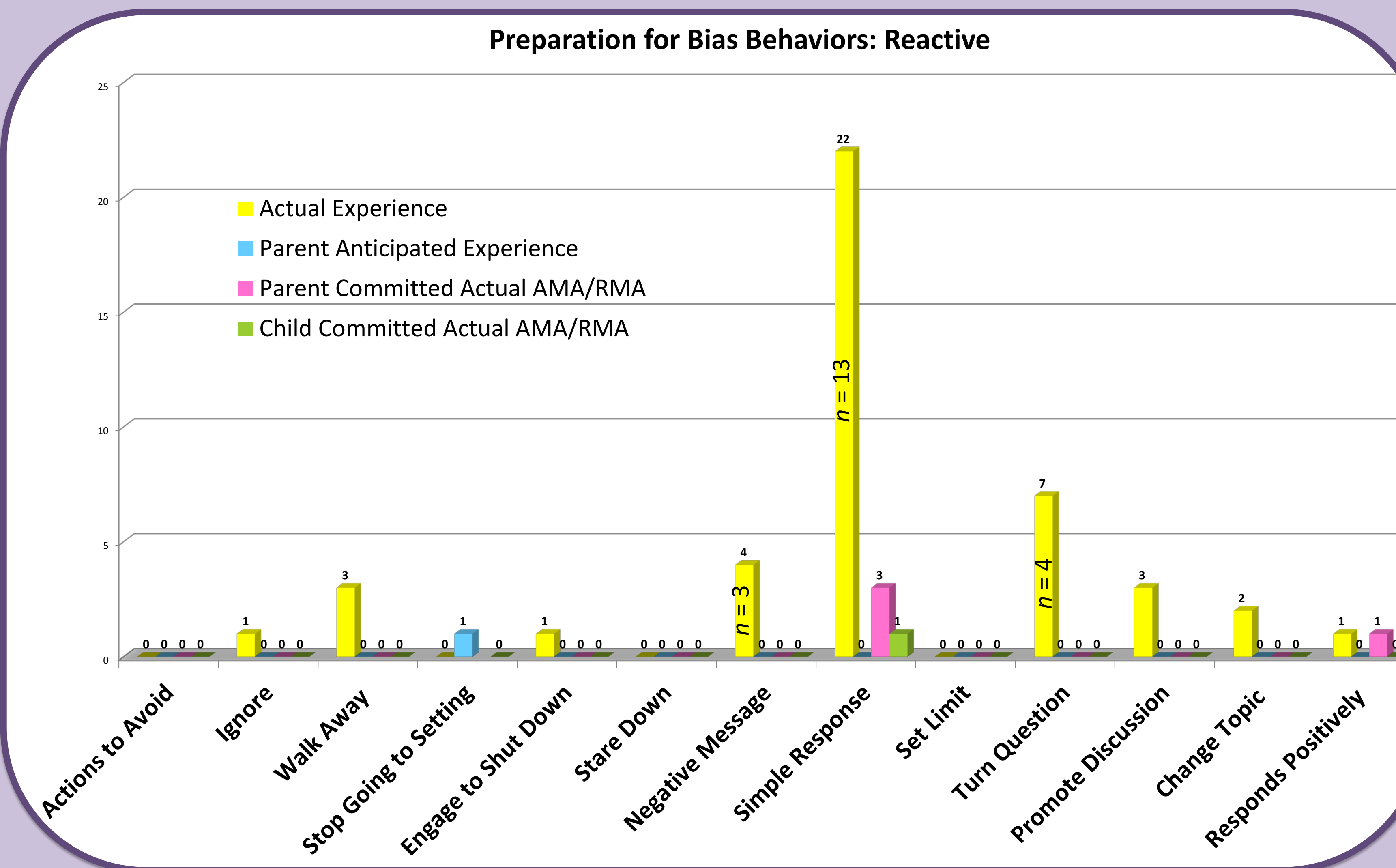
## Adoption Micro-aggression

Adoption Micro-aggression	Examples From Interviews
Biology Is Best/Normative	Is she yours?
Bad Seed Adoptees	Having worked in mental health in the United States and as a child's therapist, I was somewhat afraid to adopt in the United States.
Grateful Adoptees	You hear a lot from people when the kids aren't around. You know, how lucky they are.
Shameful/Inadequate Birth Parents	The kids did say to her, oh, your parents are probably dead or sick somewhere.
Phantom Birth Parents	She knew at that point that she had a birthmother and that the birthmother was no longer a part of her life.
Pseudo/Inadequate Parents	She was saying I was not her real mother.
Altruistic Rescuers	Some people just wanna like make you a saint. I mean it just, it just so minimizes the kids. You know, um, "Oh god bless you for this."
Cultural Philanthropy	It's not to make them grateful for the things they have, but it's more that I don't want them to be China, Guatemala, of these culturally, these impoverished countries.
Adoption Is A Win-Win Situation	But then I talk about the fact that even though that she was adopted, I don't think for a minute she was a mistake. She was always destined to be my daughter.
Commerce In Adoption	I've been asked how much she costs.
Cultural Limbo/Invalidation Of Heritage	You know I forget she's Chinese. It's funny. I don't think of her as Chinese. Um, except when people are asking me about my daughter and I'll say, well I adopted her from China, but it's funny. Every now and then, I'll look at her and I'll think, Oh, she's Chinese! You know? It doesn't, I don't think of her as Chinese ever. It's weird.
Love Will Conquer All	And there are so many kids who don't have families to love them--why not?
Infantilizing Adoptees And Birth Parents	Why do they keep pointing at me and saying things to you? You know because also they'd say "she is" instead of even "you."

## Racial Micro-aggression

Racial Micro-aggression	Examples From Interviews
Alien In Own Land	She's adopted? She's from China? You're her real mother?
Ascription Of Intelligence	If anything [she] fills a lot of the positive stereotype of Asian girls, she's sort of quick, she's very verbal,
Color Blindness	I'm just like, who cares what color your skin is?
Criminality/Assumption Of Criminal Status*	A person of color is followed around the store A White person waits for the next elevator when a person of color is on it.
Denial Of Racism	And um, it's funny I think it probably has more to do with gender than with race because I do see black men, um not as many, but I see the black men getting advanced faster and in larger numbers than white women.
Myth Of Meritocracy*	I believe the most qualified person should get the job.
Pathologizing Cultural Values/Communication Styles	Little girls don't get educated in China
Second Class Citizen*	Person of color is mistaken for a service worker. A taxi passes a person of color to pick up a White passenger.
Environmental Microaggressions	That's really challenging cause, I mean, I just look at just, she is a minority in a white majority culture. I mean it's just everywhere in terms of advertising the media
Denial Of Racial Reality	Interviewer: So- right now you don't think ethnicity is a problem for her? Parent: No, not at all
Exoticization Of Asian American Women	There's a funny line between like saying, "Your daughter is beautiful" you try to sort that out. Is it because she's Asian exotic?
Invalidation Of Interethnic Differences	And you don't want to sort [of] have people tell you about someone they know who was Chinese...it's like "okay."
Invisibility	I said, "Well [she's] not- [she] was born in China." Um, and she said, eh, eh...but to a four-, five-year-old...five, I think they were five then, maybe six...so...I guess the only difference from white is black.

\* Racial Microaggressions for which no examples were given in parent interviews.



## Discussion

- Microaggressions: Families experienced **326 microaggressions in 212 incidents**
- More actual AMAs than RMAs – Is race more taboo than adoption?
  - **Racial Microaggressions**
    - Do others perceive Asians as not real citizens?
  - **Adoption Microaggressions**
    - *Biology Is Best* and *Pseudo/Inadequate Parents* were most common actual AMAs, making adoptive parents top victims of actual microaggressions
    - *Phantom Birth-Parents* and *Adoption Is Win-Win* were top parent committed AMAs
      - These sever adoptees' connections to birth parents, and make BPs victims
    - Adoptees' AMAs were *Cultural Limbo* and *Phantom Birth Parent*
      - Are adoptees internalizing negative messages from adoptive parents?
  - **Preparation for Bias Behaviors**
    - Reactive behaviors: Parents give *Simple Responses*.
      - Are parents experiencing the pull to be polite? How much does context matter?
    - Colorblind messages – Do parents see their child as "honorary white person" and see no need for PFB skills in their community?
    - Proactive behaviors: *Educate Others, Education Child, Actions to Empower Child*.
      - These behaviors, while reactive to certain events have some expectation for change.
  - **Limitations**
    - Extant data set used with cross-sectional design and retrospective accounts.
    - Sample is limited in size and region.
    - Limited to families with young children who were adopted from China

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**References**  
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