4-10-2023

The Exploration of Barriers and Facilitators for Black Families Seeking to Privately Adopt Black Infants

Eric Harlin

THE EXPLORATION OF BARRIERS AND FACILITATORS FOR BLACK
FAMILIES SEEKING TO PRIVATELY ADOPT BLACK INFANTS

by

Eric Harlin

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Social Work

Major: Social Work

The University of Memphis

May 2023

Acknowledgements

I want to thank all the members of my dissertation committee for devoting time and effort to my dissertation. Your advice, consultation, constructive feedback allowed me to create a dissertation that I'm very proud to present to others.

I am extremely grateful to Dr. Minhae Cho for agreeing to chair my dissertation. The quality of mentorship and guidance was exactly what I needed to take this dissertation journey. I felt a sense of safety to be vulnerable about my struggles through this process and your encouragement always helped me recenter and continue to make progress. I could always count on you to help me and that was invaluable to me as a student, person, and professional.

To my spouse, thank you for supporting me on this journey. So many challenges occurred throughout this process, however you were always there to provide encouragement and take on more family responsibilities.

One of the major inspirations for my dissertation is my two beautiful, kind-spirited, loving children. There is nothing better feeling than coming home to two toddlers screaming your name and wanting all your attention. Adoption has changed my life for the better.

To our children's birth mom, thank you for choosing us and trusting us with the children. I'm so grateful that you remain a part of our family.

Lastly, I would like to thank Kristen for not allowing me to give up. Her words of encouragement reminded me who I am and that I am enough. It was an honor and pleasure to take on this dissertation journey together.

Abstract

The adoption of Black children by White parents remains a common practice in both public and private adoption throughout the U.S. Laws such as the Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 were enacted based on research of the foster care system that indicated it takes twice as long to secure a permanent placement for Black children compared to other children. For over 50 years, the National Association of Black Social Workers has expressed staunch opposition to transracial adoption and held that Black children should be placed only with Black families. Between the opposing views on transracial adoption, there has been a lack of research about the experience of Black families seeking to adopt privately.

This phenomenological qualitative study explored the barriers and facilitators that Black families experience when seeking to privately adopt Black infants. Semi-structured, individual interviews with 24 adoptive parents were conducted to obtain qualitative data. The participants' discussions revealed a number of barriers in the adoption process, including the cost associated with adoption, lack of access to private adoption information, cultural incompetence of adoption facilitators, unethical adoption practices, negative experiences with adoption facilitators, transracial adoption impacting Black adoptive families, and stigma about adoption in the Black community. The participants described facilitators that helped them to successfully navigate the adoption process, including the adoption community's access to adoption information, ethical adoption practices, fulfilling a need in the Black community, and the advantages of adopting Black children. Using an antioppressive practice framework, this study provides a theoretical framework for adoption facilitators to evaluate their adoption practices to improve equality and equity in private adoption.

Keywords: private adoption, Black infants, Black families, phenomenology

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Chapter 1: Introduction

According to the Child Welfare Information Gateway (2017), private domestic adoption is "an adoption arranged between a birth family and an adoptive family without using a public agency" (p. 1). Although private adoption makes up 38% of all adoptions (Vandivere et al., 2009), it remains a mostly minimally regulated multimillion industry (Kahan, 2006). The U.S. government has a history of enacting controversial adoption laws, particularly regarding Black children (Raleigh, 2018). For example, the Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 (MEPA) eliminated "race matching" when placing children with adoptive families while also requiring diligent efforts to recruit a more diverse pool of adoptive parents by child welfare agencies (Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, 2020). As a result, transracial adoption, or placing children with adoptive parents whose race or ethnicity differs from the child's, remains a common practice, although it is highly debated in the child welfare field.

In a private adoption, birth families and adoptive parents have many options for adoption facilitators, such as adoption attorneys, adoption consultants, and adoption agencies. Adoption facilitators can provide services to both birth and adoptive families that include but are not limited to pre- and postadoption counseling, the creation of a demographic profile book, referral to adoption legal services, and facilitating contact between all parties (Fedders, 2009). In addition, adoption facilitators assist with establishing "matches," which is when a birth family chooses an adoptive family for their child. Thus, adoption facilitators play a vital role in each step of the adoption process for all parties.

Although most private adoptions are of White infants by White adoptive parents, Black children make up 25% of private adoptions, but only 19% of these occur with Black adoptive parents (Vandivere et al., 2009). Racial disproportionality between children and parents in

adoption is of significance because it is in direct conflict with the position statement National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW, 1972), which "vehemently stands against the placement of Black children in White homes for any reason" (p. 1). The NABSW stance has not changed, and 50 years later, Black children continue to be placed with White adoptive parents. Furthermore, research regarding the life outcomes of transracial adoptees remains inconclusive (Barn, 2013). All the while, little research exploring the experience of Black families who seek to privately adopt has been published. This phenomenological qualitative study explored the barriers and facilitators for Black families seeking to privately adopt Black infants. After a brief review of the history of adoption, a thematic data analysis of 24 interviews provides insight into Black parents' experience with the private domestic adoption of Black infants.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Brief History of the Adoption of Black Children in America

Kahan (2006) explained the reform during the Progressive Era (1900–1917) of child welfare to address the deficiencies in the adoption process, including the unethical act of splitting up intact biological families in favor of adoption. The 1909 White House Conference on the Care of Dependent Children led to the U.S. recognizing its responsibility to engage in child welfare that focuses on "the family as a whole, rather than rescuing the needy child" (Kahan, 2006, p. 57). According to Carp (2002), America had a high infant mortality rate during this time due to crowded cities with unsanitary practices and inadequate medical knowledge. These conditions created a "market" for childless couples seeking to adopt children. This era also included "the growth of sectarian child welfare institutions, the professionalization of social workers, the standardization of adoption procedures, and an expanded state role in regulating adoption" (Carp, 2002, p. 7). In 1912, the U.S. Children's Bureau was established and became the nationwide leader in providing adoption information. Ultimately, social workers and state governments became formal gatekeepers to adoption, replacing doctors and lawyers. Social workers were tasked with preserving biological families, ensuring that biological parents consented to paternal rights terminations, and completing comprehensive evaluations of adoptive parents before placement of a child, management of which was moved to newly established juvenile courts (Kahan, 2006). Private adoption drew mainstream notoriety in 1917 after the publication of a study by Chicago's Juvenile Protective Association. The study highlighted the commercialization of exchanging money for children as a practice called "baby farming" (Kahan, 2006, p. 60). In an effort to reform unethical adoption practices, the Child Welfare

League of America was established in 1921 as a private nonprofit that set adoption standards for public and private agencies (Carp, 2002).

The prosperity of the roaring 1920s ended with the worldwide economic crisis known as the Great Depression in 1929. In response to the crisis, the Federal Emergency Relief Act in 1933 and the Social Security Act in 1935 were enacted to provide the funding needed for welfare services, including child welfare. By the end of the 1930s, 44 states enacted revised or new adoption laws. These laws established state child welfare departments and licensed adoption agencies that were required to complete social investigations, now known as home studies, before placing a child with an adoptive family (Carp, 2002).

World War II (WWII) began in 1939 and boosted the number of adoptable children due to parental desertion, death, divorce, and refugeeship, and an increased number of children born out of wedlock (Carp, 2002; Potter, 2014). From the end of WWII until the late 1950s, the baby boom era saw a dramatic rise in marriages and increased the demand for adoptable children (Kahan, 2006). According to Carp (2002), the media at the time romanticized motherhood, resulting in childless couples feeling ostracized. Due to advances in medicine, couples could be diagnosed as physically sterile early in their marriage, thus increasing adoption applications.

Simultaneously, the Great Migration, which occurred in the U.S. from 1914 until 1970, was underway, entailed a mass exodus from the South by both Black and White Americans to the North and West Coast states. For Black Americans, the decades following the Civil War included oppression, discrimination, segregation, and institutional racism that deprived their communities of quality education, provided little to no political power, and saw the growth of lethal organized crime (Alexander et al., 2017). During this time, the demand for adoptable children increased alongside a coincidental increase in the number of out-of-wedlock births

among minorities. The adoption industry shifted to providing services to Black children who had been ignored in favor of White children. By 1965, transracial adoption became more prominent, with some adoptive families requesting Black infants, whereas others would agree to adopt a Black child at the suggestion of their social worker (Carp, 2002).

Although the concept of adoption grew in popularity, it also faced public criticism. Potter (2014) noted that the concept of "black-market babies," or wealthy families buying the children of low-income families, continued to gain national coverage. Adoption agencies and social workers began to establish fee schedules to draw a clear connection between paying for a service to facilitate adoption and fees paid to a mother to buy her child. In other words, the exchange of money was to cover the costs associated with adoption. Furthermore, Potter stated that transparency about cost also helped adoption facilitators to distance themselves from the black-market baby stereotype often criticized by the public.

From the 1970s until the end of the 20th century, the demand for adoptable children remained high. Access to birth control, the legalization of abortion with *Roe v Wade* in 1973, advances in the feminist movement, and a decrease in the stigma of unwed motherhood decreased the supply of adoptable children. In response to the shortage of adoptable children, the adoption industry expanded to better include children with special needs, transracial adoptions, specifically the adoption of Black children by White families, and intercountry adoptions (Carp, 2002; Potter, 2014). According to Mapp et al. (2008), the MEPA and the Interethnic Placement Act of 1996 eliminated the practice of same-race matching regarding the placement of foster youth. At the time, Congress sought to address that it took twice as long to find permanency for Black children in foster care compared to other children.

Since 2000 adoption practices have shifted from adoptees being wholly disconnected from their biological families to open adoptions that encourage a connection between adoptees and their birth families (Grigoropoulos, 2022). The Donaldson Adoption Institute (2017) found that adoption reform was supported by both the adoption community and the general public. For example, the Supporting Adoptive Families Act of 2015 provided federal funding for pre- and postadoption services, including mental health services. Adoption from foster care continues to be the primary focus of research, resulting in new legislation and policies. Private adoption has received less attention, particularly regarding the higher rates of adoption of Black children by White families compared to Black families (Potter, 2014).

Black America and the Private Adoption Industry

Following WWII, a significant shift to transracial adoption occurred. The belief was that any child could be adopted by any adoptive family if they could meet the child's needs (Potter, 2014). In a countervailing movement, enacting the Civil Rights Act of 1964 led to a rise in Black nationalism that challenged the notion that White parents could successfully raise Black children (Kahan, 2006). Determining the best interest of Black children who need permanent placement remains a point of contention.

Rooted in African culture, the tradition of informal kinship adoption remains present in Black American culture (Sandven & Resnick, 1990). The NABSW's (1972) *Position Statement on Trans-Racial Adoptions* presented the organization's stance that Black children should be placed only with Black families. Besides concerns about White families being able to support a Black child in what the NABSW described as a racist society, the NABSW challenged the public perception that there was a lack of Black adoptive families. Instead of viewing transracial adoption as a solution to Black children lingering in foster care, the NABSW stated that

transracial adoption was simply the last resort for White families seeking to adopt (NABSW, 1972). According to Carp (2002), transracial adoption sharply declined following the public outcry from the NABSW and the Black community. In *Preserving African American Families*, the NABSW (1991) highlighted that historically the African American community often cared for children who lacked adequate care. Drawing from a historical framework, the NABSW encouraged kinship placement as the preferred option if out-of-home placement was unavoidable. Due to the lack of research, it is unclear how the private adoption industry ultimately responded to the accusations surrounding transracial adoption. However, two factors may provide some insight into the current relationship between Black adoptive parents and the private adoption industry—the cost associated with adoption compared to Black wealth and the home study process.

Cost Associated With Adoption and Black Wealth

Fedders (2009) noted that the cost of private adoptions ranges from $4,000 to $100,000, and costs vary drastically depending on the adoption facilitator. Adoption facilitators establish their own fee schedule; thus, each adoptive family pays a different price based on several factors. The Child Welfare Information Gateway (2022) provided a non-exhaustive list of fees associated with private adoption, including the home study, adoption facilitator placement fee, birth parents' expenses, medical fees, attorney fees, and court and legal fees. The variance in fees is challenging to research because fees associated with adoptions are frequently not published. Furthermore, adoption cases remain legally closed to the general public, hindering the review of adoption expenses in court filings.

The dismantling of slavery greatly affected the history of Black wealth in America. According to Baradaran (2017), the market value of slaves was $1.3 billion. Almost overnight,

enslaved Black people went from valued property to a free poverty-stricken minority with little to no substantial income or wealth. McIntosh et al. (2020) noted that much of the wealth of White Americans is rooted in the unequal treatment of Black Americans, both during slavery and since. The overall economic plight of Black Americans is complex; however, centuries of discrimination and exploitation remain a hindrance to building Black wealth.

The U.S. Federal Reserve found that 29% of White families and only 10% of Black families received an inheritance, and more than half of White families owned equities (averaging $50,600) compared to just under 34% for Black families (averaging $14,400), and the liquid saving funds disparity between White and Black households varied from $2,000 or less to $8000 or more; thus, the median and mean wealth for White Americans was $188,200 and $983,400, respectively, compared to $24,100 and $142,500 for Black Americans (Bhutta et al., 2020). In 2019 the median income for Black households was $44,000 compared to $76,000 for White households (Tamir et al., 2021). Although more in-depth research is needed to confirm a direct correlation between the cost associated with private adoption and Black wealth, there is a high likelihood that financially Black adoptive families are negatively impacted.

Home Study

According to the Child Welfare Information Gateway (CWIG, 2019), every state requires a home study to be completed before a child can be placed with an adoptive family. The CWIG (2019) noted that the home study prepares and educates prospective adoptive families, assesses the capability and suitability for placement, and gathers information to assist with matching children and families to best meet the children's needs. At the end of the home study process, families are either approved or denied placement of a child based on the adoption facilitator's findings. A major challenge with using home studies as the standard for determining

placement is that each agency and state has different requirements and processes (CWGI, 2021). In response to the lack of standardization and concerns about unethical practices, the National Adoption and Foster Care Home Study Act (2019) called for "establish[ing] a methodology for a researched-based home study." Although a national home study standard is being developed, the private adoption industry continues to set its own standards.

Household income and expenses are typically evaluated during the home study process, but no widely accepted formula or standard is used to determine if an adoptive family can afford an adoption and the long-term care of a child. The Structured Analysis Family Evaluation (SAFE) is a prominent home study training for social workers, and its practices are widely used in both the private and public child welfare sector. When asked to comment solely on the financial portion of a home study, the SAFE Program Coordinator shared, "SAFE does not have any ratio or formula when addressing the family's ability to provide financially as this is always at the discretion of the individual agency and/or state that is performing the home study" (B. Belobrow, personal communication, March 19, 2021). The lack of standards highlights adoption facilitators' wide discretion.

Theoretical Framework

An antioppressive practice (AOP) framework guided this study in identifying and addressing inequalities in private adoption of Black infants. Dominelli (1996) defined AOP as a method of social work practice where both service providers and service recipients are mindful and sensitive to the oppression experienced by disenfranchised groups and collaborate to address social divisions and systematic inequalities (pp. 170–171). AOP embraces a person-centered philosophy based on an egalitarian value system that focuses on acknowledging and actively dismantling the harmful effects of societal inequalities. AOP can be traced back to the 1980s and

1990s as a direct response to serious civil unrest. Marginalized groups began congregating and protesting for change by exposing the systematic discrimination experienced in their communities (McLaughlin, 2005). The protests addressed unethical policing practices, unfair treatment in the judicial system, education disparities, and inequitable housing policies. Even the social work profession was criticized for its practices, particularly concerning its treatment of Black people. In response, the social work profession began promoting an antiracist approach to acknowledge and address past practices that may have perpetuated racism and sexism. Over time, antiracism expanded to include all oppressed groups. Incorporating antiracism into service delivery eventually led to AOP because it concentrates on both process and outcomes. Implementing AOP requires adoption facilitators to evaluate their current business structure to identify systemic racism and oppressive behaviors in the adoption of minority children and create practices that establish equity. AOC can provide a framework for adoption facilitators to evaluate and create initiatives to address oppression in the private adoption industry.

The primary critique of AOP is its inattention to colonialism, which is "a practice of domination, which involves the subjugation of one people to another" (Kohn & Kavita, 2023). In the U.S., colonialism includes cultural assimilation, which is when minorities become socially indistinguishable in society due to ascribing to the dominant group culture (Dominelli, 1996). Welbi (2017) explained that colonialism is often not addressed and leads to a loss of culture, spirituality, and strength of a minority community. The critique of AOP is that it does not necessarily protect minorities' culture and does not lead to decolonization. In other words, AOP is helpful in challenging oppressive behavior, but it does not necessarily preserve the culture of minorities.

Significance of the Current Study

The lack of research surrounding the placement of Black children with White adoptive families provides the basis for this study. Adoption-focused laws such as MEPA are based on the assumption that not enough prospective Black adoptive families are available to foster and adopt Black children without reasonable efforts to recruit prospective Black adoptive families. To facilitate discussions over the recruitment strategies for policy makers, professionals, and scholars, this study explored the barriers and facilitators that Black adoptive parents experience when seeking to privately adopt Black infants. This study provides vital insight into the experiences of Black adoptive families and could contribute to adoption research regarding the Black community's presence in private adoption.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Study Design

A phenomenological qualitative method was employed to investigate the experiences of Black families in the private adoption process to gain insight into the imbalance in the ration of Black children being adopted by White families. Neubauer et al. (2019) defined phenomenology as investigating a phenomenon from the viewpoint of those impacted by it. It is imperative to learn about the domestic adoption experiences of Black families directly from them to understand the phenomenon of Black children being more likely to be adopted by White families than Black families. According to Bhangu et al. (2023), qualitative research can be used to investigate a phenomenon without depending on numerical or statistical data. Qualitative research can be conducted using various methods, including interviews, observation, and archive record research. The goal of qualitative research is to understand a nonquantifiable phenomenon based on the experiences of those whose lives have been directly affected by it. Phenomenology focuses on the felt sense that is elicited by the spoken word of the study participants. This method was useful in learning something new about the experience shared by Black adoptive parents in the private adoption of Black infants. A phenomenological qualitative study was appropriate for this study, which sought to acquire insight into the experiences of Black families in the domestic private adoption process. In this phenomenological study, concrete descriptions of experiences from the study participants who have undergone the private adoption process were obtained.

Sampling Method

Purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants for this study. Palinkas et al. (2015) defined purposeful sampling as identifying and selecting participants who possess knowledge or

have experience with a phenomenon being studied. My original plan was to recruit 35 participants. Marshall et al. (2013) stated that the sample size is difficult to determine in qualitative research. However, the goal is to have enough information from the participants to conduct credible data analysis with findings. For this study, data saturation was used to determine how many participants were needed. Chitac (2022) noted that data saturation could be detected when data replication or thematic redundancy occurs, and the addition of more interviews does not provide significant new information. Data saturation was met at around interview 18; however, I completed all scheduled interviews for a total of 24. All interviews were analyzed to confirm further the effectiveness of using data saturation as a benchmark.

Researcher

I am a Black licensed clinical social worker with over ten years of clinical experience in the child welfare field, including foster care, adoption, and adolescent mental health; I served as the researcher for this study. In addition, I am a parent of two Black children whom I privately adopted with the assistance of an adoption agency. As a current social work doctoral candidate, I have served as an instructor for master's level social worker research methods and as a lead research assistant for a faculty-led qualitative study. My overall personal and professional experience with adoption has provided me with a wealth of knowledge and access to engage the Black adoption community.

Ethical Considerations

This study (PRO-FY2022-95) was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Memphis (Appendix B). The IRB process included a Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative training and a full review of the study, including the study goal, literature review with citations, possible contribution, method, and procedures, investigators'

qualifications, information about study human subjects, recruitment plan with a copy of the study announcement, risk-benefit analysis, privacy and confidentiality plan and declaration of any collaboration, engagement, and sponsorship. Once the study proposal was approved, recruitment and interviews commenced.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited from nationwide online adoptive parent groups on Facebook. The online adoptive parent groups have an open forum for group members to share and discuss their adoption journey. In addition, the groups provide support and resources. Most groups are private, meaning a request to join must be sent before acceptance into the group. The group's main timeline is available to all members to create a post and respond. Using social media for study recruitment is supported by a study conducted by Watkins et al. (2016), who found that web-based research studies build trust and increase participation in the Black community. They found that Black participants sought out equitable exchanges where their input would benefit their community. In addition, web-based research decreases and eliminates barriers to participation, such as scheduling and transportation.

Recruitment consisted of announcing the study on the main timeline. The announcement provided information about the study, criteria for participation, and researcher contact information. Criteria for participation were identifying as Black/African American or multiracial with Black/African American ancestry, being at least 18 years old, planning to or have used an adoption facilitator to adopt domestically, and having a preference to adopt a Black infant (under the age of 1). No monetary incentive was advertised or provided; however, the benefits of the study of contributing to filling the gap in research on Black adoption were included in study announcements (Appendix C).

Once a participant commented on their interest in participating in the study, I sent a private message to request their e-mail address. Next, I sent an e-mail with an overview of the study, then a link to the prescreening survey, informed consent form, and participant demographic survey. The prescreening survey included four categories of adoptive parents: (a) potential (interested in adoption and researching options), (b) prospective (home study approved, may have a pending adoption or seeking a self-match), (c) adoptive parent (have legally adopted and may be seeking to adopt again), and (d) failed adoption (a disruption in prospective adoption). Once all surveys and forms were signed, I e-mailed the participants to schedule a time to conduct an interview through Zoom videoconferencing. After scheduling the interview time, an e-mail with the link to the Zoom meeting was sent to the participant. Last, the participant received a reminder by e-mail the day before and by text the day of the interview.

The Participants

The study focused on the perspectives of Black families through adoptive parents recruited through purposive sampling on Facebook. Purposeful sampling is seeking participants with knowledge or experiences with a phenomenon (Palinkas, 2015). The inclusion criteria for participants were identifying as Black/African American or multiracial with Black/African American ancestry, being at least 18 years old, planning to or have used an adoption facilitator to adopt domestically, and having a preference to adopt a Black infant (under the age of 1). At the time of their interview, participants were in the following stages of adoption: two were preadoption, four were home study approved and waiting for a match, one had matched with a birth family, and 17 were postadoption. From the participants ($n =12$) who shared the wait time between their home study being approved to being matched with a birth family was an average of 20.25 weeks or about 4.5 months with a range of immediate (0 days) to 13 months.

Table 1 presents the participants' demographic characteristics. The participants' ages ranged from 26 to 64 years old, with the majority in their 40s. All participants identified as Black/African American, with one participant identifying as multiracial with Black/African American ancestry. Ninety percent (*n*=22) of participants identified as female and two as male. There were 23 participants who identified as heterosexual and one as LGBTQIA+. For highest education attainment, two participants had earned an associate degree, six had a bachelor's, eight had a master's, and eight had a doctorate. For marital status, 70% (*n*=17) were married, one had a cohabiting/domestic partnership, one was divorced, and six were single. Four participants had a household income of $50,000 to $99,000, the majority (*n*=16) of $100,000 to $249,999, and four of $250,000 or more. The neighborhood type that participants resided in was six in urban areas, 17 in suburban areas, and one in a rural area. According to the *Census Regions and Divisions of the United States* for reference, 17 participants resided in the South, four in the West, two in the Northeast, and one in the Midwest (U.S. Department of Commerce Economics and Statistics Administration, n.d.).

Table 1

Participants Demographics

Variable	Frequency/range
Age (in years)	26–39 (5) 40–53 (20) 55–64 (3)
Race/ethnicity	Black/African American (23) Multiracial with Black/African American ancestry (1)
Gender	Female (22), Male (2)
Sexual orientation	Heterosexual (23), LGBTQIA+ (1)
Highest education attainment	Associate's (2), Bachelor's (6), Master's (8) Doctorate (8)
Martial status	Single (6), Cohabiting/Domestic Partnership (1) Married (17), Divorced (1)

Annual household income	$50,000–$99,000 (4), $100,000–249,000 (16), $250,000+ (4)
Neighborhood type	Urban (city living) (6), Suburbs (17), Rural (1)
U.S. Census Region	South (17), West (4), Northeast (2), Midwest (1)

Data Collection

Guided, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were used for data collection. Patton (2002) explained that open-ended questions allow participants to share what is meaningful without requiring them to stay in a framework. The interview questions were developed based on the eight typical stages in the domestic adoption process: (a) preadoption— steps taken to research private domestic adoption such as utilization for search engines, peer referral, and consultation and information sessions with adoption professionals; (b) home study—the completion of the home study process usually includes background checks, biographies, medical clearance, income records, character references, and adoption-focused training and usually has to be updated on an annual basis; (c) the wait— the time between a family's home study being approved and when they are contacted regarding a potential match; (d) the match—a birth family officially chooses an adoptive family. Both the wait and the match may occur more than once, depending on the case. For example, a birth family could match with an adoptive family but choose to parent rather than place their child for adoption. Thus the wait would start again until another match occurs; (e) the call—when the birth mother is in labor or the child has been born, and the prospective adoptive parents are notified; (f) the meeting— When the adoptive family meets with the birth family and child, usually at a hospital or respite nursery, though some adoptive parents and birth families meet prior to labor and delivery; (g) Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC)—if the child is born in a different state than the adoptive parents, then the adoptive parents and child must remain in the child's birth

state until ICPC is approved. According to the American Public Human Services Association ([ca. 2022]), ICPC determines if the placement of a child across state lines is in the best interests of each child. It is a process between the home state and receiving state and could take hours to weeks to be approved; (h) postadoption—the time immediately after bringing the adopted child home until finalization of the adoption via the final adoption decree. The study interview questions can be found in Appendix D.

First, I addressed questions raised by study participants, a brief review of the informed consent and then confirmed with them that the interview would be recorded. I guided the discussion using the private adoption stages. I opened the interview by exploring what inspired each participant to pursue private adoption. At each stage, the participants shared the events that occurred and their evaluation of their experience. For example, when discussing the preadoption process, many participants shared how they used Google to research private adoption. The participants shared how they researched and then evaluated the process, usually positive, neutral, or negative. The last portion of the interview was an open discussion about thoughts, feelings, and experiences regarding the Black community and its relationship to private adoption. As the interviews concluded, participants were informed that I would review the transcripts and complete a verbatim transcript. Once complete, participants received an e-mail from me highlighting the themes in their interview to allow them to provide feedback on the findings.

Each interview was video recorded and included a transcript provided by Zoom. All three files were saved directly to a passcode-protected folder on the University of Memphis OneDrive cloud. All the files were then deleted from Zoom. Once on OneDrive, each file was given a unique title that included the date of the interview, the number of the interview, and then the first and last initial, for example, 2142023-6-TN. Transferring the information to OneDrive fulfills

the plan approved by IRB to protect participants' information as it is secure and HIPAA compliant.

All surveys and forms were completed using Qualtrics. The only form where the participant's name appeared was on the informed consent form. Once signed, the form was downloaded, uploaded to OneDrive, then deleted from Qualtrics.

The interviews were scheduled for 60 minutes, with an average interview duration of about 52 minutes. A total of 47 individuals expressed interest in participating in the study, and 28 completed the informed consent form. Ultimately, 24 prospective or actual adoptive families participated in the study. Failure to complete an interview after signing the consent form was due to no response from the participants to schedule the interview.

Data Analysis

Inductive thematic analysis was used to code and identify emergent themes in the data. Patton (2002) defined inductive analysis as finding themes, patterns, and categories based on a researcher's interaction with the data rather than using an existing framework. In addition, inductive analysis requires that findings and themes emerge without a researcher's assumptions (Patton, 2002). In other words, a researcher should remain neutral when reviewing data and allow the themes to emerge.

Thomas (2006) provided a five-step inductive analysis procedure that I implemented. First is *data cleaning*, which included ensuring all the interviews were verbatim. Next was a *close reading* of each interview to familiarize me with the data and begin to elucidate themes. Third was the *creation of themes,* which was accomplished by multiple readings of the interviews. For this study, I reviewed each interview at least three times to fully interpret each quote's context to determine if it should be labeled a barrier or facilitator. *Barriers* were themes

that participants had a negative impact on the participants, which was usually expressed by the participant sharing their thoughts and feelings (displeasure, mistrust, suspicion of malicious intent) and vocalizing a hindrance to the adoption process. Similarly, *facilitators* were identified by participants' thoughts and feelings (satisfaction, trust, and good intentions) and by expressing helpful assistance with the adoption process. Fourth was *overlapping coding and uncoded text*, which includes examining each code to find similarities and overlaps and examination of text not coded. Using this strategy, I consolidated similar codes and then reviewed uncoded text to confirm that valuable information was not excluded. The final step was continuing *revision and refinement of the theme system*, including identifying subthemes if appropriate, considering contradictory statements, and choosing quotes that best capture the essence of the theme.

Table 2 from Thomas (2006), adopted from Creswell (2002), provided a chart for the inductive analysis used for this study.

Table 2

Inductive Analysis

Initial read-through text data	Identify specific segments of information	Label the segments of information to create categories	Reduce overlap and redundancy among the categories	Create a model incorporating the most important categories
Many pages of text	Many segments of the text	30–40 categories	15–20 categories	3–8 categories

I used Microsoft Excel spreadsheets to organize and analyze the data. Patton (2002) suggested that each interview should be reviewed independently of the other interviews. I reviewed each interview multiple times. Cross-case analysis can occur only after each interview is thoroughly reviewed to discover themes and patterns in the data set.

I transcribed the video and audio-recorded interviews verbatim. Using the verbatim transcript, each comment from the participant was added to a row in a spreadsheet in Excel: Quote, Page #, Barrier or Facilitator, and Theme Code. Table 3 shows an example of the coding spreadsheet.

Table 3

Coding Spreadsheet

Quote	Page #	Barrier/facilitator	Theme code
"The judge that did the adoption, he stopped the proceedings. He was like, 'This is too much. Y'all need to do something about this. This is looking like we are paying for children.'"	10	B	CAA

Each quote was evaluated to determine if the quote should be considered a barrier or a facilitator. Any quotes not identified as a barrier or facilitators were not included in the data analysis. I identified concepts, their dimensions, and relationships between the concepts through the "open coding" process. Open coding allows the creation of codes by continually reviewing the data (Patton, 2002). As I noticed a theme across the data set, I created thematic codes throughout the analysis. Due to this, once all interviews were coded, I reviewed the interviews again to confirm the codes. Finally, convergence, or grouping recurring regularities of thematic codes, was consolidated (Guba, 1978). Guba (1978) noted two criteria to assist with convergence: internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity. Internal homogeneity refers to themes being cohesive in a manner that makes them meaningful. External heterogeneity requires the theme to be bold and distinctive. To meet both criteria, I continually reviewed the quotes in the interview and repeatedly evaluated if the appropriate code was listed.

Credibility, Trustworthiness, and Transferability

I attempted to enhance the credibility of the interpretations of participants' discussions through member checks, peer debriefing, and the use of detailed quotes from the participants (Patton, 2002). For member checking, I provided all participants with an overview of the themes found in their interview. I provided each participant with a report that included the themes identified from coding the interviews with quotes as support. Participants were encouraged to check to see if I captured themes regarding their adoption journey and provide feedback regarding the research topic. Participant feedback strengthened the validity and accuracy of the data analysis.

Chenail (2016) addressed researcher bias. First, the researcher's role as a research instrument and their ability to facilitate the interview highly influences the richness of the data and must be acknowledged. Next, interviewing a researcher can benefit both researcher and the participant, especially in formulating and finalizing the open-ended questions. For this study, I was well-trained in interviewing and conducted interview simulations with a colleague of mine who has experience with interviewing and qualitative research using the initial interview protocol created for this study. Modifications were made to exclude questions that were closed-ended, leading, included researcher assumptions, or problematic for other valid reasons. After several revisions and practice interviews, a list of clear open-ended questions was established. Chenail (2016) indicated that interviewing a researcher improves data collection due to them identifying personal feelings, appreciating participant vulnerability, learning patience, and identifying researcher assumptions.

Additionally, I used peer debriefing to address biases during all stages of the study, from planning to execution. Debriefing occurred during the literature review, study design,

recruitment strategies, interview question development, a reflection of own adoption experience, theme identification, post-interview processing, and exploring researcher bias and assumptions throughout the research process. Spall (2016) explained that peer debriefing should include an unbiased peer and extensive discussions about all parts of the research process. My dissertation chair and a clinician with expertise in child welfare and adoption were chosen. With my dissertation chair, we thoroughly reviewed the interview transcript of my first three interviews, focusing on researcher bias and ethical practices throughout the interviewing process. Minor adjustments were made to the research questions to avoid leading questions. I would meet with my dissertation chair periodically to discuss progress, bias, and early themes. As advised by Spall (2016), reflexive journaling was implemented by the clinician and me to keep a record of reflections and updates on progress. We would meet after each interview, and the clinician would probe me about my bias and interpretations of the information received. Spall (2016) notes peer debriefing complements other strategies, such as member checking to address researcher bias. Peer debriefing challenges the researcher to be mindful of biases throughout the study process. Ultimately peer debriefing increases the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings and interpretations.

Chapter 4: Findings

Barriers

With each interview, the participants shared their experiences as they discussed each stage of their adoption journey. Although the participants were able to prevail over barriers, experiencing them had a profound impact, including one participant strongly considering not continuing with their adoption journey. The barriers included the costs associated with adoption, lack of access to information about private adoption, unethical and questionable adoption practices, negative experiences with adoption facilitators, cultural incompetence of adoption facilitators, transracial adoption impacting Black adoptive families, and negative stigma about adoption in the Black community.

Costs Associated with Adoption

The cost associated with adoption was mentioned by all of the participants, with each expressing dismay about the overall exorbitant cost of private domestic adoption. Each discussed different fee schedules and the difficulty of justifying paying the fees compared to the services that were being provided to the birth family, the child, and the adoptive family. Many expressed concerns about "selling babies" or "human trafficking" due to the prominence of fees in the adoption process. For example, one adoptive mother stated, "I think Black folks are very sensitive because it feels like a slave auction, and we don't know what we're doing." Some adoption facilitators required adoptive parents to pay all of the listed fees at the beginning of the adoption process, whereas others allowed participants to break the payments into installments; however, by the time a child was placed, all fees had to be paid. Several participants discussed fees for postadoption services. In all interviews, the participants mentioned being appalled by the

fee schedule. Two participants described the issues regarding adoption fees as the economic disadvantages that are present in the US. For example, a prospective adoptive mother stated:

> I think it goes back to just so much like the history of this country, how White families have had generations longer to build wealth, that we've [Black/African American] only had four, five, maybe six generations maybe, to build wealth and have that 20, 30, 40, $50,000 available, especially for private adoption.

Although a "pay as you proceed' option is available with some adoption facilitators, the majority of participants shared that at some point in the adoption process, they had to pay a large sum of money at once. One adoptive mother vividly recalled how she paid fees:

> I gave them a check. And this one, I remember because it was freaking huge. $20,000 or 25,000 when [the child] was born, because it was the placement fee. So, everything before that was piece by piece. It was like this is how much it cost to do this step.

After sharing that they withdrew from her spouse's retirement account to pay the adoption fees, one adoptive mother shared that they were considering a withdraw from her retirement due to postadoption fees.

> We are fortunate. He has retirement, we basically borrowed from his retirement. We still have lingering charges we're now still figuring out. I'm taking a small sum out of my retirement to pay some of the additional fees that we incurred.

One standout experience involved a prospective adoptive mother who was matched with a birth mom. The participant and her husband were constantly being requested to provide more funding for the birth mother's expenses. In the end, the birth mother chose to parent, resulting in the adoptive family not having a placement and losing all the funds they contributed due to the

common policy disallowing refunds by the adoption facilitator. The prospective adoptive mother stated:

> That had been our experience throughout the entire pregnancy. The times that [he adoption agency] would reach out to us is really when it came down to something financial. We get an email saying, "Hey, the birth mother's expenses have increased." By that time, the birth mother had already told us that she was having a hard time getting her funds on time [from the adoption agency]. There were times where her check was delayed. We were never given a breakdown of what those expenses were. We questioned it [the consistent increase in birth mom expenses] and then spoke to the lawyer that was working with the agency. He said, "Well, sometimes she runs out of money for her food. She tends to spend $150 to $200." It was things like that but not ever anything concrete to ask us for several thousand more. When I asked if anything in particular had increased, he couldn't confirm that. She had not moved. Nothing had gone up. At the end she was asking for $6,000, which would cover the remainder of the pregnancy, which would be 2 months, and the postpartum period.

Lack of Access to Information About Private Adoption

A Google search or a personal referral was the most common starting point to learn about private adoption for all of the participants. With Google, many participants found a wealth of information that was helpful for an overview of private adoption; however, it was difficult to decipher what information pertained to the participant. Most participants felt there was a lack of in-depth information about the adoption process, adoption facilitators, the adoption of Black children, and state adoption laws. In contrast, personal referrals to adoption facilitators usually resulted in the participant using that adoption facilitator. Overall, a theme emerged of a lack of

information and the need to learn more by engaging in the adoption process rather than researching it prior to starting. One adoptive mother, in particular, was concerned if the information online was applicable to Black families:

> Googling can give you an overwhelming response, overwhelming in that I'm here, I'm seeing these things, but is that my reality as a Black person? There's a lot of stuff about adoption, but does that apply to me?

After doing extensive research on private adoption, a few participants referred to applicable information about adoption as secretive and only available to certain individuals. One adoptive mother who had newly adopted a child shared her research journey:

> It's very interesting. I will generally say I feel like adoption information is very like secret squirrel. Like, that was my thing. It's like this. Where do you find information, where do you start? You don't know where to find information? It's just when you have the idea or the notion to do it [adopt] and you're not familiar, information needs to be planted. It's like you need a passcode or something to get to see the right information.

The representation of adoption in the media, which often does not portray the many steps in the domestic adoption process, was frequently discussed. In particular, the matching process was unclear to the majority of participants. One adoptive mother shared how the ignorance of others reminded her of how she started the adoption process:

> One of my little [mentees], was like, "I want to go to the hospital with you to pick a baby." At a very rudimentary level, that's what I thought you do. You look at profiles. In certain situations for international adoption, that's what you're doing but not in domestic adoption, it's the reverse.

Unethical/Questionable Adoption Practices

Although a social work degree may be associated with child welfare, adoption facilitators come from different professional and academic backgrounds, so it is difficult at times to label adoption practices as unethical based on any established code of ethics. During the interviews, participants shared about actions taken that they would usually refer to as unethical or questionable, depending on the participant's background. Even participants who expressed an overall positive experience with their adoption would mention an event occur that made them question the actions of the adoption facilitator. One prospective adoptive mother in the match stage of adoption shared how questionable behavior transitioned into unethical behavior from the point-of-view of the adoptive parent:

> Then we get to the point of her [the birth mom] telling me that she was getting frustrated because her lawyer wanted to contact the birth father. There was a long-drawn-out story about the birth father but he was not in the picture. We get an email from her lawyer that says, "We don't believe that she's going to place. She's been dishonest with us about the birth father. We don't believe that he exists." Apparently, he told her, and he admitted that he told her he couldn't go through with the adoption unless he had made contact with the birth father. She [the birth mom] sends this text to me saying, "I'm still going to place the babies. I don't understand why he keeps looking for someone who doesn't want to be found. He [the lawyer] called me a liar. She sent me the screenshots between her in the lawyer. The screenshot says "The lies have got to stop." That's what caused her to get angry.

Another point of contention between adoptive parents and the adoption facilitators centered on the preferences of the adoptive parents. Typically, during the home study process,

each adoptive family completes a preference page to choose the factors about a birth mom or child they are willing and unwilling to accept. For example, the preference page may list several medical and mental health diagnoses of a birth mom, such as schizophrenia, alcohol use, or HIV. The adoptive family indicates which conditions they are comfortable with and which they are not. Several participants shared that at some point in the adoption process, they were approached about possibly changing their preferences and feeling pressured to do so. One adoptive mother shared her experience feeling that her preferences were constantly being challenged. She and her spouse have careers in mental and physical health and expressed they were firm about their preferences for the adoption facilitator. The adoptive mother mentioned:

> It was just kind of like, so basically, there is a potential situation, we want to show your profile. But you have that you're not open to a parent having bipolar. Just as an FYI, we're seeing more Black women come in with a diagnosis of being bipolar. So we just want to let you know. Here's some more information if you want to reconsider

Another adoptive mother shared an incident that almost discouraged her from proceeding with the private adoption. Ultimately, she worked with another adoption facilitator after this incident:

> I never got a placement. When the social worker came to my house, the White social worker, he encouraged me to take the Down syndrome baby. I said, if I was married, I could take that on, but I'm by myself. I really don't want a Down syndrome baby. So he got mad with me. And he threw down the paper. And he said, "I can't believe that you wouldn't even consider a Down syndrome baby," and this, that, and the other, and I said, "Well, you know, I need the healthiest baby as possible."

Negative Experience with Adoption Facilitators

The majority of the participants collaborated with multiple adoption facilitators, such as an adoption agency, a consultant, and an attorney. A common theme emerged of negative experiences with one or more facilitators, which impacted the participant. Participants shared feelings of mistrust, being overwhelmed, and suspicion about the motives of the adoption facilitators. One prospective adoptive mother shared her experience with an adoption agency she had used for a year before the following incident:

> With the [homes study] renewal, I got the associate that works with the lady who did our initial. She was coming behind the work of her colleague. She was very aggressive in collecting information. When it came down to financials is when I felt like we were getting abused. She was like, "I know that you've done this already but I need more clarification. You need to break down your sources of income." We provided our tax statement. Everything is in there. They said in addition to our tax statements, she needed the breakdowns of each of our incomes, every entity, anyone who was listed as an employer. We are medical professionals who work at multiple clinics and hospitals. I'm thinking this lady doesn't believe our income. That was my initial thought, she doesn't believe the income. She knows that we're doing a home study renewal. Our income didn't change. Our employers didn't. Why are you digging even deeper?

A prospective adoptive mother shared about meeting with a White psychologist as part of her home study process and feeling disrespected by what she felt were inappropriate questions and statements:

> One of the first questions he asked me was how would I feel or respond if my child asked why I bought him like a slave? I was just shocked, really bothered by this. I think I was

bothered because it was happening to me. I was just instantly worried about all the other

Black women, White women, any women who have to engage with this person and this is

the line of questioning. My hope is that it was just me. I hope he doesn't do this to

everybody, but that's probable.

The participants identified hospitals as playing a key role in the adoption process once the child

is born, although they do not independently facilitate adoptions. A hospital can add a layer of

stress that already exists due to the nature of adoption. An adoptive mother shared feeling judged

by the doctor delivering her adopted child:

But the doctor that actually delivered [the baby]. She was horrible. She was actually [an]

African American lady. She was real short and real curt with us because she thought that

we were a certain way because it's an urban hospital in an urban area, but that's not who

we were. Since we are in an urban area, y'all probably from that area, that type.

The biases of medical providers, staff, and hospitals can make it seem adoption is clearly not

supported, and the medial providers' behavior demonstrates this sentiment. Several parents

spoke about the nurses and social workers involved with the birth of their child. One adoptive

mother described her experience as getting worse the longer her adopted child remained in the

hospital:

And my [child's] birth mother said that she did not want to see [the child] going to the

nursery. And still they pushed her past the nursery. And they were like, "Do you want see

[the child]," and she's like, "No, I don't want to," and she said it several times, "I don't

want to," and I was like "She said she doesn't want to go this way." It's like they wanted

her to change her mind or something. And it was just so inappropriate.

The same participant and a few others experienced hospital policy that could have led to them being unable to care for their child:

> At one point, [the child] was crying. And I went in, and I asked them if they had a pacifier. And they said, "We're a baby friendly hospital." And I said, "what on earth does that mean?" And they were like, "Well, we believe in breastfeeding. So, we don't encourage use of a pacifier." I said, "I'm adopting the baby." And then they all stared. And then one of them said, "She's not breastfeeding. If she wants a pacifier, give it to her." And so, then they gave me a pacifier. And I was like this place.

Cultural Incompetence in Adoption Practices

Black culture was a prevalent theme for most participants, especially when they encountered adoption facilitators who had a limited understanding of Black culture. Many participants felt adoption facilitators made culturally insensitive comments due to ignorance rather than malicious intent. Participants felt it was important for adoption facilitators to understand Black culture as it pertains to both the birth family and adoptive family. One adoptive mother suggested:

> They [the private adoption industry] need to find Black people to talk to. Just like everything else in this country. How are those experiences different? Black adoption is a whole different cup of tea.

The participants felt that the lack of Black representation in the private adoption sector hinders its ability to reach Black families in a culturally competent manner. Participants wanted more than just seeing happy Black adoptive families in marketing material but Black individuals involved with all parts of the adoption process. The lack of cultural competence had varying outcomes on how an adoptive family interpreted the actions of the adoption facilitator, with most

reporting feelings of mistrust. One prospective mother shared feeling that she and her spouse

were a rare occurrence based on the interaction with an adoption facilitator:

> We felt as though we were this Black unicorn, they didn't know exactly what to do with
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> us. Although we checked off all the things in their boxes, it was like we were so rare.
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> Figuring out a placement for us seemed to be hard. That's at least how we felt.

Many participants expressed curiosity whether Black birth families were being provided Black

adoptive families for placement. A prospective adoptive parent stated:

> And we have culture as a Black, we have Black culture. And Black people, if I'm a birth
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> mother and I've chosen adoption, I probably 9 times out of 10, want my child to grow up
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> Black. And that's okay.

One prospective adoptive mother shared about a failed attempt made by an adoption facilitator to

demonstrate cultural competence:

> He [adoption facilitator] inquired how I would address a child who has more melon or
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> less melon. He was clearly meaning melanin because I said that I was okay with a
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> biracial child, but that Black or African American had to be a part of [the child's]
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> makeup. He mixed up melanin and melon. I thought that was funny, but I didn't laugh.
>
> Several participants shared concern about private adoption practices and expressed

feeling that systematic and institutional racism was embedded in the adoption process. Their

experiences of racism were more nuanced in the adoption practice context. For example, an

adoptive mother shared how she felt the entire adoption process had a racist undertone due to the

oversaturation of White adoption facilitators:

> Well, they could find White parents who are looking for light-skinned kids or maybe
>
> even medium skin-colored kids. They didn't want it too Black. Second of all, you have to

put yourself out there and be judged by White people. It's almost always White people. It's just like, somebody White's going to come in your home and tell you whether you're worthy enough to have a Black child. Really?

Four other participants (three adoptive and one prospective adoptive mother) directly spoke about the entire domestic adoption industry being racist, including the adoption facilitators. One adoptive mother shared about being overlooked for placement of the infant sibling of the child she adopted:

I mean, it's like structural institutional racism, isn't it? They'd have to scrap it and start all over again. Because these Whites go to school and they're trained not to look at functionality, but they're trying to look at dysfunction. So, they look at Black people as dysfunctional. Or they look at people who are not able to raise their children as dysfunctional. I think that Black people try to get involved with adoption, but they come in face with the stop gaps and racism of White people, White social workers. And we didn't have one Black person involved in our case, not one. Now when I first got [my child], they kept on saying, "Well, we have to make sure you're a good fit, we have to make sure." As soon as the White women got [the other Black siblings] "Oh, they are perfectly good candidates to raise these Black [children]." But me, they have to make sure I'm a good candidate. They're not sure I'm a perfectly good candidate, but those White women were perfectly good candidates. They didn't even offer [adoptive child's infant sibling] to me. At that point I wanted children, but they didn't even offer [the Black infant sibling] to me. They gave them [the infant sibling], to a White woman.

Transracial Adoption Impacts on Black Adoptive Families

The participants expressed a range of responses about whether transracial adoption, from believing transracial adoption should not be done to approving it only as a last resort. A major concern was that Black birth families were not offered Black adoptive families as an option. A majority of the participants felt that adoption facilitators had chosen to try to educate White families on transracial adoption rather than to make significant efforts to recruit Black families. One adoptive mother stated:

> I think number one are the adopted agencies. I wonder how many are actually seeking Black parents for the Black babies. How many are in that savior type role where they're matching these birth moms with White families and probably telling them they can do the job or they have nanny, whatever it is.

Two participants spoke at length regarding other minorities being able to police their children who are up for adoption. In particular, they spoke about how Native Americans have the legal right to take an active role in the adoption of their children, whereas Black families are not provided the same right and protections. One adoptive mother stated:

> I'm completely against transracial adoption. I think when you look at it again, Native Americans know that their children are stolen away from them. And they fight against transracial adoption. We are so blind, I guess, you know, and uneducated to the state taking away Black children and giving them to White families.

Another topic of discussion was surrounding mainstream media portrayals of transracial adoption. The public celebration of White celebrities adopting Black children was a notable concern for a large segment of the participants. One adoptive mother stated:

Because I can remember when [a White celebrity] adopted that cute little Black boy on

the *People Magazine* cover, and I was like, wow I think back to it. I was like, "Oh, I

could have taken him home with me," but I feel like—I don't think it's [transracial

adoption] is a bad thing, how can I put this? It's not a lot of White babies to be adopted. I

feel like it's more and I could be wrong, I feel like it's more of a minority maybe.

Stigma About Adoption in the Black Community

Discussion of stigma about adoption in the Black community appeared in most of the

interviews. Participants spoke about insensitivity and condemnation of adoption in the Black

community and shared that they felt judged, depressed, anxious, and irritated. As a result,

participants chose to be very private about their intentions to adopt. Infertility was a common

catalyst for many participants to consider adoption, and they often did not want to share this with

members of the Black community due to experiences discussing family planning. Participants

reported feelings of shame, inadequacy, sadness, and anger. One adoptive mother shared the

insensitivity that she experienced in her support system regarding infertility and adoption:

And that, again, something is wrong with you if you can't produce a child, biologically

you can't conceive or you can't carry a child to term, and how that is... I think it's getting

better, but for a long time it's looked down upon, that you're looked at negatively if you

have infertility issues and consider adoption. This older gentleman at the church, he says

something to husband like, "When you going to have a baby?" He said, "What's wrong

with you? You shooting blanks?"

Several participants provided various reasons behind the stigmatization that tended to correlate

the lack of information to a negative outlook on adoption. In private adoption, stigmatization

includes both the adoptive family and the birth family. One adoptive mother shared an experience with her child's birth mother and the birth mother's parents:

> Her [birth mom] parents tried to convince her to keep the baby. She blocked them from her room. The only person that could come to her room was me. I feel like people just look at it like, No, you shouldn't give away your kid, but it's a selfless act. I just think it's a stigma that comes with it [adoption]. It's a bad thing.

One participant shared how her family attempted to discourage her desire to adopt, which was mostly based on fear of the unknown. The extended family's disapproval did begin to subside until after about a year of the child being with the participant:

> Once I started sharing with my parents that I've submitted my application [to the adoption agency], that's where I started hearing feedback of those are the crackhead babies, those are the throwaway babies. There was a lot of opposition for it. They didn't understand that nuance between foster to adopt and private adoption. The family response was "You don't know these people." They did have an intervention. My mom comes from a large family. She felt that it was important that we bring me wanting to adopt to the family to the aunties and the uncles. In the right context that could be a very supportive thing, but it also felt very overwhelming. I don't know. There were questions like we don't know these people, we don't know what kind of family they are, if they're good people or not. Why are you doing this? Like, you should wait to get married. All the reasons.

Facilitators

Facilitators were discussed by the participants and the essential role they play in private adoption. Facilitators often helped participants overcome barriers. Themes for facilitators

included the adoption community, access to adoption information, ethical adoption practices, fulfilling a need in the Black community, and the advantages of adopting a Black child were facilitators for Black adoptive families.

Adoption Community

The significance of having an encounter or connection with the adoption community as a whole was prevalent in most of the interviews. From family or friends who were adoptees or adoptive parents connecting with strangers in online social media adoption groups, participants were highly influenced by the adoption community. Some family stories of adoption were revealed by surprise, as one adoptive mother shared:

> I first really learned about adoption, interestingly, about 20 years ago, when we found out a family member, the one that I adored had created an adoption plan for a child that nobody ever knew about. We didn't know until they called, we were all gathered for some holiday at my parents' house. Someone called [the adopted child of the family member] and asked for my father, the person on the phone explained what was going on, and my family member was actually there.

When a participant had a connection to adoption in their support system, it was common for them to consider adoption as a normal occurrence. A prospective adoptive mother shared:

> My [parents] always talked a lot about adoption in a positive way so there was that background. I never heard anything negative about it. My [family member] adopted. I never had a chance to interact with [them] much, but I knew that [they] had adopted, so there was a positive sense of it in family.

Participants who had a positive impression of adoption tended to have a very close connection with a person who adopted or was adopted. This connection provided positive reinforcement and directly challenged negative portrayals of adoption. An adoptive mother stated:

> My [parent] was adopted, obviously many moons ago, and so I always just found it fascinating, someone can adopt. I feel like it can be beneficial on both ends. Now, my [parent] is probably the ideal situation, [they] had a very loving family. [They] never knew [their] biological family and to be honest, [they] didn't talk much about being adopted. I always just thought, that's great obviously, [they] parents gave her a loving and wonderful home.

Due to social media being the site for recruitment, all the participants shared how connecting with other adoptive parents, adoptees, and adoption facilitators online played a major role in choosing adoption. An online adoptive community provided a platform full of diverse individuals with different adoption stories. From the prospective adoptive parent who is researching adoption options to postadoption support, online adoptive parent groups provide information, peer support, and opportunities. Most participants had a very similar story as to how they discovered the online adoptive groups. One prospective adoptive shared:

> The other thing that I did was social media. I got on several different adoption groups. Then I just started asking questions. Really, at first I just lurked and listened and saw what people were talking about, what agencies they were going to, what worked, what didn't work, and I just started taking my notes. I actually reached out to several other people in the groups.

Access to Adoption Information

Even with personal referrals to adoption facilitators, all participants shared that they still engaged in some form of online research, from a Google search about the adoption process to reading reviews about different adoption facilitators. Although the online adoption information requires discerning judgments for accuracy, participants still found doing independent online research was relevant and beneficial. One adoptive father detailed his research process before he signed with an adoption agency:

> I got to that point and then I watched some videos all night, did a bunch of research. I just went in did all the research, looked online, looked at the scams, and researched that and the international adoptions. I looked at a bunch of agencies, but I settled on this one in particular because the way they marketed their services, they had webinars, and it was easy for me to understand. Just recognizing that wasn't going to be a better way and then I looked at some of their Google reviews and so forth, and they had a lot of positive ones but quite a few negative ones as well. Then I went to some other agencies and they just didn't seem as interested. They were like, "Well, you just need to do this and this.

The value of the information provided impacted how participants chose an adoption facilitator. Participants expressed being provided information that expanded their knowledge on options for adoption. One prospective mother shared:

> What's interesting about this adoption group is a lot of those people have adopted in ways that I didn't even think about

Attending informational or orientation meetings was frequently used by a large majority of participants to obtain information. These informational meetings usually included an overview of

the adoption process and the services the adoption facilitator provided. Many chose to attend several meetings before choosing their adoption facilitator. One adoptive father shared,

> I definitely went to several ones [adoption agencies], they actually interview us. I guess it's a two-way interview, you're asking questions as well but we actually had about four interviews, Zoom calls with these different agencies. I felt like for the most part, they were all good calls f but I just felt a better connection with [one adoption agency]. Then really, to be honest, just the interview process, I felt like they were going to be good at holding my hand, which this whole process is overwhelming. There's thousands of agencies and information out there and I just felt like they were going to champion for us and do everything that they can to make this happen.

Ethical Adoption Practices

The majority of participants felt ethical adoption practices were essential when deciding to adopt. However, the criteria of what was ethical were individualized based on the perspective of the adoptive family. Nevertheless, participants who perceived the adoption practice as ethical reported more satisfaction with the overall adoption process. Many participants expressed that the highest priority with ethical adoption practices was for the Black birth family to have an opportunity to choose a Black adoptive family. Participants shared that adoption facilitators that made efforts to recruit and work with Black adoptive families were acting in the best interest of Black birth families and children. Although acknowledging the short supply of Black adoptive families, participants felt that all efforts should be exhausted before moving to transracial adoption as an option. One adoptive mother shared what she asked about the process for birth families to choose adoptive parents:

I specifically asked about them working with Black families, Black birth mothers, Black babies. They were very forthright. They said, "I'll be very honest with you we don't work with a lot of Black families, and we're trying to figure out what we can do to increase the number of Black families who are interested in adoption. When we have Black birth mothers, we can show their profiles first." As you add ethnicity, race, and ethnicity, the numbers go down, but they were very forthright at that. They didn't try to hide it. I was very forthright in my disgust and she understood it. She wasn't taken aback or frustrated by it. She understood it, and she allowed me to voice my frustration.

 The more research the participant conducted, the more critical they became when deciding between adoption facilitators. Participants shared concerns about discernment with confirming ethical adoption practices. One adoptive mother interviewed multiple adoption facilitators to understand their process in detail. She chose to work with a Black adoption advocacy group due to what she perceived were ethical adoption practices:

They [the Black adoption advocacy group] provided assurances, like they could double check and make sure everything was above board. That the first mom wasn't being pressured. They knew which states were child centered and not, "Here's a baby, any baby." Yes, we had to pay [the Black adoption advocacy group] but it was worth it because I wanted to know that my adoption was going to be ethical, that this wasn't going to be something that I'd regret. [The Black adoption advocacy group] said, "We don't play that game. We are here to place children, not light children or dark children, with whoever."

Fulfilling a Need in the Black Community

       With the frequent discussion regarding the birth family having Black adoptive families as an option, there was always an overwhelming sense that Black adoptive families were fulfilling a need in the Black community. In other words, Black adoptive families met the desire of the birth family while also caring for the children in the Black community. Rather than transracial adoption, Black adoptive families represented the Black community taking on the responsibility of raising Black children. One adoptive mother shared a unique story about receiving a call from a friend about a child born who the birth mother could not care for:

       One day I was at work and my friend called. Said someone, one of her friend's daughters was at the hospital. She had a baby and basically, she couldn't take—Her mother said she couldn't—She already had one kid and she couldn't bring the baby home. I was recently married. I think I had been married for like 2 years. She said would you take the baby? I said, sure.

       Once at the hospital, the participant discovered that social services were also involved and the child was at risk of entering the foster care system. The birth mother wanted her child adopted by a Black family rather than enter foster care. Moreover, participants who had actually adopted all recommended that more Black families do the same because they perceived a shared understanding that there was a need in the Black community. A few participants referred to Black children being disproportionately represented in U.S. foster care system as a call to action. One adoptive mother suggested:

       I definitely would encourage other people to adopt and to pursue it. I do think that it is a needed thing for our community. I've said it to others full disclosure, because, I believe in paying it forward. And had a lot of people talk to me when I was going through the

adoption process. So sometimes people will call me saying "So and so is speaking of adopting, will you talk to them?" I'm like "Sure."

Another major topic of discussion centered on the history of Black families engaging in kinship adoptions, which are often not as formal as obtaining a final adoption decree. In other words, it is not that Black people do not adopt but rather do so informally. Some participants identified the Black community's mistrust of the government and resistance to publicly bring attention to the biological parents as reasons why Black families do not use formalities of family court for kinship adoptions. An adoptive mother explained:

> I think disproportionately, we as a community, have circumstances which lead people to feel that Black people don't want to parent their children or that they can't. And that's just the overall burden of being Black in America. So, there is a lot of kinship adoption in the adoption community. There's a lot of adoption that was never formalized. So and so raise so and so's baby, but they never adopted them. So, we don't consider it adoption, although clearly it is.

Another adoptive mother added the civil unrest as part of her motivation to adopt Black children. She spoke passionately about caring for and protecting Black youth in what she called a racist society. As many participants shared, adoption facilitators would make statements about how Black boys were less desirable, which in turn would lead to quicker matches between birth families and Black adoptive families:

> It is very clear, it is marked in our file that we want little Black children. In the very beginning, this is around the time when George Floyd was murdered, we specified, I want a little Black boy. We were upset, but it just kind of goes along with what we've

seen in US history throughout. I was like, "Little Black boys are not typically chosen? I feel some type of way, so give me those."

Advantages of Adopting a Black child

The participants described their strong desire to adopt Black children and detailed the advantages despite certain challenges of the adoption process. Although there are long-term advantages of adopting Black children, it came with strong feelings of ambivalence while navigating the complexities of private adoption. A shorter wait time for placement and reduced fees associated with the adoption of Black children are two advantages that are more complex than they initially seem. Although being informed that the wait time for placement would be shorter, almost all participants struggled to reconcile their feelings. On the one hand, a shorter wait time is an advantage compared to adopting a White child. On the other hand, what does it mean to have a shorter time? One adoptive mother shared her experience with the intention of adopting a Black boy:

> The wait for a White child is so much longer than for a Black child. And I mean, it was it was encouraging and disheartening at the same time. How many times I was told, "Oh, but you want a Black baby so your process will go faster, or you want a Black baby, so it'll be easier for you."

The top remark made to all the participants by adoption facilitators indicated a shorter wait time and overall ease with matching a Black adoptive family. Several mentioned how adoption facilitators were enthusiastically optimistic. An adoptive mother shared, "Adoption professionals will say, 'Oh, you're a Black family, and you want to Black baby. Oh, you'll be matched in like, no time.'"

In conjunction with the adoption facilitators, many participants shared that when they talk with prospective adoptive parents, they mention the shorter wait time, although it still is a point of contention. Adoptive parents acknowledge that a shorter wait time would be ideal; however, they feel a sense of sadness, as shared by one adoptive mother:

> And I have told them, I'm like, if you adopt the brown baby, you know, the wait period is different. This is what happens. It's just, it's sad that that's the case."

Next, many participants described reduced fees for adopting Black children as one of the advantages that abet their adoption, whereas others felt somewhat of an ethical concern. The participants acknowledged the overall financial benefit for Black families to have reduced fees. Some participants even saw reduced fees as the adoption facilitator making an effort to recruit Black families who historically do not have the income needed for a typical private adoption. Even so, many participants struggled with mixed feelings about the reduction in fees for Black children, as shared by one adoptive mother:

> I don't think there's a positive in it, outside of the fact that we may keep $15,000 more dollars in our pocket, but I don't think there's a positive ever in having someone tell you that a Black child is not—it almost made me feel like slave auctions. There's no positive in that. It just reminded me that our society is still ingrained in systematic racism. There's no positive. I found no positive. Because even for—it's still expensive as hell.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the barriers and facilitators for Black adoptive parents seeking to privately adopt Black infants. The study results confirm that there are Black adoptive parents who are interested and engage with the private adoption industry to adopt Black children for a variety of reasons. By exploring barriers and facilitators, the private adoption industry can make concrete efforts to include Black adoptive families in the recruitment of adoptive families; knowing the barriers and facilitators in the private adoption process will benefit Black families who pursue private adoption, especially Black infants. As the first known study on Black adoptive families and their overall experience with the private adoption industry, this study could advance the knowledge base on adoption and Black families and communities. Facilitated by a Black clinician who is an adoptive parent, the interviews acted as a safe space for participants to tell their entire adoption story while providing insight for the private adoption industry about the needs of Black adoptive parents. Many participants expressed enthusiasm to have a Black researcher involved, which provides unparalleled access to Black adoptive families.

The results of this study are separated into two categories: barriers and facilitators. First, the barriers reflected in this study highlight issues that occur in the adoption process for Black adoptive families. The costs associated with private adoption were identified in all the interviews, with an overwhelming consensus that it needed to be addressed on levels. As shared by the participants, once adoptive families receive the fee schedule from an adoption facilitator, it can instantly lead to Black families quitting the adoption process. Comparing Black wealth and income to White wealth and income suggests financial inequity between Black and White adoptive families. The lack of access to information about private adoption provides an opportunity for private adoption facilitators to evaluate their recruitment efforts. Although

information can be obtained by using a standard online search engine such as Google, the available information can be overwhelming, difficult to comprehend, and not state-specific enough to provide adoptive families with enough information to make well-informed decisions. Unethical, questionable adoption practices suggest a need for standardized adoption practices that are transparent, informative, and culturally competent. Participants tended to refer to their own beliefs and the experiences of others to evaluate whether what they were experiencing was ethical. Establishing standard practices will allow adoptive parents to advocate for themselves and file formal grievances when unethical behaviors occur.

The majority of participants experienced the cultural incompetence of adoption facilitators. However, the participants tended to excuse cultural incompetence as a lack of knowledge. The results suggest there should be a concern that adoption facilitators work with Black birth families but demonstrate cultural incompetence with Black adoptive families. Transracial adoption impacting Black adoptive families brings attention to the efforts being made by the private adoption industry to educate White families on Black culture. The overarching concern was the lack of effort to recruit Black families and using transracial adoption as a last resort. The topic of transracial adoption induced intense ambivalence; however, all agreed that a Black adoptive family should always be the priority for a Black child. Last, the negative stigma about adoption in the Black community was an introspective moment where Black adoptive parents. Although informal kinship adoption is common in the Black community, formal adoption seems to carry a stigma that is difficult to explain. All the participants expressed support for educating the Black community on private adoption. In addition, it was recommended that birth families, adoptees, and adoptive parents be more open about their adoption stories to normalize adoption as an option.

Regarding facilitators, this study provides insight into what factors promote the participation of Black adoptive families. Participants who have a personal connection to adoption, whether it be the adoptive parent being adopted or knowing a family or friend who is adopted or has adopted a child, was a facilitator for Black adoptive families. Being exposed to adoption made it a realistic option because they had access to basic adoption information and individuals to support the adoptive family. In addition, all participants were recruited from online adoptive parent groups, where they all reported that the online adoption community significantly contributed to their decision to adopt.

Participants also remained in the online adoption groups for parenting support. Access to adoption information allows participants to understand the adoption process, including the types of adoptions available (foster-to-adopt, private adoption, independent adoption, etc.) and the costs associated with adoption (the home study, matching, etc.). Black adoptive parents wanted to be well informed before choosing adoption. Ethical adoption practices played a significant role in the choice of an adoption facilitator. Black adoptive parents wanted to ensure that Black birth families were not being coerced, that the Black adoptive family would be treated fairly, and that the overall adoption process was legal, ethical, and in the best interest of the birth family and child.

Fulfilling a need in the Black community refers to the Black adoptive family feeling that by choosing adoption that they were not simply expanding their family but providing a safe home for a child whose parents were unable to care for them and did not want the child in the foster care system. Participants tended to refer to kinship adoption as similar to private adoption, which was more formal and legally binding. All participants expressed the cultural and social needs they feel Black children require to build a positive self-image and self-esteem, which

would be more challenging in transracial adoption. The NABSW (1972) stated the same reasons to support their stance to reject transracial adoption as a practice. The benefits of adopting a Black child created a feeling of ambivalence. From one point of view, having a shorter wait time and lower cost associated with adopting a Black child was a benefit for Black families who statistically are economically disadvantaged compared to White families. From the other point of view, participants felt that the benefits of adopting a Black child devalued Black children as if they were not as valuable as White children, which is supported by multiple stories about adoption facilitators. A common example is adoption facilitators telling Black adoptive parents that the adoption of Black infant males will go fast and the cost associated will be less due to the difficulty of finding adoptive families for them. Most participants shared that they still have not fully reconciled their feelings regarding the perceived benefits of adopting Black children.

Last, social workers remain a significant profession in a private adoption, and practices would benefit from further research and recommendations. Social workers abide by the National Association of Social Workers (2015) Code of Ethics and cultural competence standards. Standard 6.04 promotes the theory of intersectionality, which encourages the examination of "oppression, discrimination, and domination as they manifest themselves through diversity components" (NASW, 2015, p. 16). Intersectionality promotes a holistic approach that encourages social workers to view clients from the micro-, mezzo-, and macrolevels. With each level, the social worker must consider many factors about the client, such as racial background, religious and spiritual belief systems, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation. Applying a holistic approach to private adoption, social workers need first to consider the listed cultural factors of each adoptive and birth family on a micro level. Second, on the mezzo level, is the question of whether an assessment of the adoption practices of the social worker regarding the

adoption community they serve. Last, there is an opportunity for adoptees, birth families, adoptive parents, social workers, the NABSW, and the NASW to establish a coalition to create culturally competent adoption standards that address systemic and institutional racism on local, state, and federal levels. The coalition would likely have to challenge current standards and laws. For example, MEPA was implemented primarily for adopting children from foster care, yet it applies to all adoptions. Additionally, the lack of oversight of private adoption could be another focal point of the coalition.

Limitations

Findings from the current study need to be considered with several caveats. First, the lack of previous research exploring Black adoptive families' experiences provides an opportunity for this study to contribute to the literature on child welfare. Consequently, the lack of research created a challenge for me to decide how best to engage the population, craft the questions that needed to be asked, and determine the study's overall purpose. In other words, I need to determine what the public needs to know about the experience of Black families and how best to obtain this information. In that sense, this study is preliminary and exploratory. Still, the findings from this study focusing on facilitators and barriers provided an opportunity to learn what the adoption industry was doing well and what needed improvement.

Second, two aspects of the data collection method created limitations as the study participants were a hard-to-reach population: I conducted recruitment only online during a 2-month period, which excluded members of the Black adoptive community who may not use social media. In addition, the two months included recruitment and completion of the interview. After the close of the data collection period, several adoptive parents contacted me to participate.

If interviews had resumed, the sample size would have grown, possibly resulting in either new information being discovered or further confirmation of the information already obtained.

The final limitation was my bias, which was challenging to manage throughout the data collection, especially during the interviews. My race and personal and professional experience with adoption provided a sense of relatability with the participants. The conversational nature of the interview may not have captured the cultural information being provided. For example, I would often say, "I know what you mean, but could you please explain it as if I was a stranger" so that the information could be clearly recorded in the transcript. I sent each participant the analysis of their interviews with the facilitators and the barriers listed for further feedback to ensure accuracy. Throughout the study process, I continued to address bias by engaging in ongoing reflection, peer debriefing, and discussion with the dissertation chair.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Using an AOP framework provides several opportunities for adoption facilitators to improve the adoption process of Black children for both Black birth families and Black adoptive parents. The first step is for adoption facilitators to evaluate their current adoption practices with an emphasis on equality and equity. Many of the facilitators and barriers identified in this study could benefit from the implementation of AOP. AOP includes principles for direct practice and organizational structure.

Clifford (1995) outlined five principles for direct practice, social difference, linking the personal and political, power, historical and geographical location, and mutual involvement. Social difference acknowledges disparities of power and divisions, which tend to be based on concepts such as physical characteristics, race, gender identity, and culture. Adoption facilitators should be transparent about disparities in Black adoption. For example, adoptive parents and the

general public should be aware of the number of Black birth families who seek out adoption and the tangible efforts made to find a Black adoptive family before moving to transracial adoption. Linking the personal and political acknowledges that a person's life is part of many different social systems (family, friends, community, etc.) and should be viewed as complex and interconnected. The assessment of the birth family and adoptive family should acknowledge the many social systems involved and their influence on the adoption process. Power is the acknowledgment that there are power imbalances in society. Power is accumulated from historically oppressing minority groups. Power is multifaceted and always present. From the moment a birth family or adoptive family seeks out adoption facilitators, adoption facilitators should be mindful of the existing power dynamics.

Dominelli (1996) explained that AOP is rooted in creating an alliance between service providers and service recipients that is focused on providing resources and empowerment to change one's current circumstance, even with barriers caused by oppression. Historical and geographical location requires a service provider to analyze the behaviors of service recipients based on a specific time and place so that it is understood in an accurate context. In other words, the history of Black America and a service recipient's location should be considered when providing services. Mutual involvement requires constantly adapting one's approach with consideration for culture and power differentials, including between social worker and client. The lack of cultural competence and power differentials was identified as an essential factor by participants of this study. Hinds (2019) stated that AOP reinforces that social workers' actions do matter, and they should be mindful of the power they possess, which should pertain to all adoption facilitators.

Karabanow (2004) provided an outline of how to structure organizations so that they can function in an AOP framework, which includes "locality development; social development; active participation; structural definition of the situation; consciousness raising; and social action (p. 53). First, locality development speaks to meeting the immediate needs and emergency concerns of clients before completing any formal process. While assisting a client, social workers should be compassionate and genuinely care for the client's well-being and create a "safe space." With Black private adoption, the needs and treatment of the Black birth family remain a major concern. The fear is that Black birth families could be coerced to make a decision. Next, social development is a "strength-based" approach to meeting the client's needs. Social workers and clients analyze the outside influences (political, economic, etc.) while remaining focused on the strengths and empowering the client to meet his or her goal. Both Black birth and adoptive families would benefit from adoption facilitators meeting them where they are, helping them identify their strengths, and empowering them to choose the best path. In addition, there is an opportunity for a focus on the mental health of Black adoptees and adoptive parents. As shared by the participants of this study, the adoption process is very complex. Therefore, having mental health support throughout the process and post-adoption could benefit Black adoptees and adoptive parents. Third, active participation means clients provide input and actively engage in the organization's functioning. Doing so builds an alliance between social workers, their clients, and the community. In a private adoption, Black individuals should be involved in advisory and consultant roles to assist with how the adoption facilitator operates. A few participants in the study spoke about how rare it was to have a Black professional involved in their adoption. Fourth, the structural definition of the situation is a nonjudgmental approach that does not focus on the perceived negative behaviors but rather the environment that oppresses

individuals, which leads to survival behaviors that are often misinterpreted. In private adoption, more evaluation is needed when exploring adoption with Black families. With a history of economic disadvantages, an adoption facilitator must assess if a birth family is choosing adoption due to a lack of resources and if resources are available that would change the birth family's adoption plan. Fifth is consciousness-raising, when an organization creates an environment where individuals can self-reflect, process past and present experiences, and create and recreate a sense of self-worth, identity, and community. Due to the many professionals involved in adoption, adoption facilitators should engage in professional development to reflect, address bias, clarify their role in adoptions, and learn about the community they serve. Last, social action pertains to an organization actively advocating for disadvantaged populations and committing to improving resources and fair treatment for all. Advocating for birth families, adoptees, and adoptive parents is an area for improvement in private adoption. The adoption of Black children would benefit from adoption facilitators making an effort to connect with the Black community and provide the resources needed to recruit Black families when a Black birth mother requests them.

Implications for Future Research

The lack of existing studies regarding the private adoption of Black infants provides an opportunity for future researchers to explore the experience of Black birth families, adoptees, adoption facilitators, and the family courts that finalize adoptions. The private adoption industry continues to operate with minimal oversight from the government; however, more research is needed to ensure that the best interest of the birth family and adoptees remains standard practice. There is an opportunity to research each of the eight private adoption stages individually.

More empirical studies are needed to begin the process of the standardization of adoption practices. Even with different state laws, there should be standard practices that protect birth families, adoptees, and adoptive parents, such as transparency about the cost associated with adoption, consistency with the home study process, and documented efforts to provide birth families with resources prior to moving forward with an adoption plan. Last, there is an opportunity to study the outcomes for Black adoptees who are adopted by Black families. The voice of adoptees is vital to understanding what is truly in the best interest of Black children.

Conclusion

The private adoption of Black infants by White families has been occurring for over 50 years. Overall, limited research exists regarding transracial adoption and the experience of Black families seeking to privately adopt Black infants. With laws like MEPA assuming a lack of Black adoptive families to adopt Black children from foster care, the efforts to recruit Black adoptive families remain unclear, yet transracial adoptions continue to occur. The current study sought to contribute to the existing research about private adoption and provide insight directly from Black adoptive parents about the barriers and facilitators they encounter.

The study's results could help to encourage more Black voices to take an active role in all levels of the private adoption industry. The participation of Black adoptive families in this study proves that the Black community is interested and actively engaged in private adoption. Ultimately this study highlighted the need for more oversight and guidance to establish and maintain ethical adoption practices mindful of the plight of the Black community while also prioritizing what is truly in the best interest of all in private adoption.

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Appendix A: Adoption Terms

In the adoption community, many terms are used interchangeably. For this study, the following terms are defined to enhance comprehension (Appendix X).

Adoption: permanent legal custody of a child by a final adoption decree

Adoption facilitators: aspects of the adoption process that make the process easier; the opposite of adoption barriers.

Adoption barriers: aspects of the adoption process that make the process more difficult; opposite of adoption facilitators.

Adoption agency: agency licensed by a state family and children services department that facilitates the adoption of children

Adoption facilitators: organization and people who assist families with the process of adoption, including adoption consultants, attorneys, independent adoption social workers, and other specialists.

Birth family: the biological family of the child.

Guardianship: the status of a child who is legally placed with an adoptive family pending a legal adoption.

Home study: the evaluation of an individual or family's ability to adopt a child, including background checks, health/physical clearance, home visits, and training.

Home study approved: the formal approval of an individual or family to adopt a child after an adoption facilitator has completed the home study process.

Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children: an agreement between states that allows for the legal transport of a child from one state to another in a foster or adoption placement.

Matching: The process of a birth family choosing a prospective adoptive family.

Postadoption visit: a visit by a licensed social worker with the child and adoptive family, usually in the adoptive home

Profile book: a scrapbook or website by the adoptive family that is shared with the birth family.

Self-match: A adoptive family and birth family match without the assistance of an adoption facilitator.

The Call: When the prospective adoptive family is contacted about a "match" with a birth family.

Appendix B: Institutional Review Board Approval

Date: 2-2-2023

IRB #: PRO-FY2022-95
Title: Excluded: The exploration of Barriers and Facilitators for Black families seeking to adopt Black infants privately
Creation Date: 9-10-2021
End Date:
Status: Approved
Principal
Investigator: Eric
Harlin Review Board:
University of Memphis
Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type	Review Type	Decision	Approved
Initial	Expedited		

Key Study Contacts

Member Minhae Cho	Role Co-Principal Investigator	Contact	mcho1@memphis.edu
Member Eric Harlin	Role Principal Investigator	Contact	eharlin@memphis.edu
Member Eric Harlin	Role Primary Contact	Contact	eharlin@memphis.edu

Appendix C: Study Announcement

THE UNIVERSITY OF
MEMPHIS.

University of Memphis

Volunteers Wanted for a Research Study

The Exploration of Barriers and Facilitators for Black families seeking to privately adopt

Black infants

The purpose of this research is to explore barriers and facilitators for Black families seeking to privately adopt Black infants and will be conducted via a videoconference (e.g., Zoom). The interview will take about 1 hour to complete.

Eligibility:

- Prospective and actual Black and/or African American families who seek or have adopted a Black infant.

- Be at least 18 years old

- Plan to or have used an adoption facilitator

- Plan to or have adopted domestically

Benefits: The opportunity to provide more insight into the experience of Black adoptive families with the private adoption industry.

To learn more about this research, contact Eric Harlin at eharlin@memphis.edu

Appendix D: Interview Questions

**Exploring Barriers and Facilitators for the Adoption of Black Infants by Black families
Interview Questions**

Pre-Adoption

1. How did you conduct research on private adoption?
2. What factors played a role in you choosing private adoption?
3. In regard to race, did you have preference in the race of a child? If so, explain.
4. What was your experience like when contacting private adoption agency or adoption professionals for more information about their adoption process?
5. What factors played role in choosing the adoption agency or adoption professional?
6. Was any information provided about the availability of children, in particular, Black infants? If so, please share.

HOME STUDY
1. How was experience with beginning the home study process?
2. What did your home study process consist of such as background check, fingerprinting, in home inspection, etc.)?
3. Did the outcome of any background check (finger printing, employment confirmation, etc.) affect your home study process?
4. How would you describe the training portion of the home study?
   a. Did you find it to be helpful? Please explain
   b. Did it consist of a cultural awareness/sensitivity section? Please explain
5. How would you describe the in-home inspection portion of the home study process?
   a. Did the outcome of the inspection affect your home study process? If so, how so?
6. Did the age of you or your partner effect your home study process? If so, please explain.
7. Did the gender/sex of you or your partner effect your home study process? If so, please explain.
8. Did the sexual orientation of you or your partner effect your home study process? If so, please explain.
9. Did the health status (physical and/or mental) of you or your partner effect your homes study process? If so, please explain.
10. Did the educational attainment of your or you partner effect your home study process? If so, please explain.
11. Did the martial/relationship status of you and your partner effect your home study process? If so, please explain.
12. Did your geographic area (where you live) have any effect on your homes study process? If so, please explain.
13. Did you household annual income affect your home study process? If so, please explain.
14. In regard to the cost of the adoption, what was the range of cost that you were quoted?
15. What were (or are) your thoughts about the cost associated with the home study?

"The Wait"
MATCHING
1. Adoption attorneys are needed for most adoptions, what was your experience with finding legal counsel to advise and provide services during the adoption process?
2. What kind of access did you have to "situations"? "Situation" pertains to receiving information about child available for adoption.
3. Describe you experience with being "presented" to birth families? "Presented" pertains to when an adoption agency/professional presents profile of adoptive parents to birth family.
    a. How often?
    b. What factors did you consider before requesting to be presented?
4. What were some of the reasons (if any were provided) that you were not chosen by a birth family?

PLACEMENT/MATCH
1. Were you matched with an African American/Black child?
2. How long was your wait time from being home study approved to placement of the child?
3. What was your experience after being "matched" with the following:
    a. Interactions with the adoption agency/adoption professional
    b. Interacting with the birth family
    c. Interactions with medical staff at the hospital
    d. Interactions with legal counsel for you or the birth family
    e. Interactions with any type of state division of children and family services (DCFS)
    f. Interactions with family and friends

Post Adoption/Bringing Baby Home
Describe your experience of bringing baby home? Did you have to wait for ICPC (Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children) approval?
How was your experience with the post adoption visits by a social worker?
What was your experience with the legal process leading up to the final adoption decree?
What was your experience with interactions with the adoption agency/adoption professional?
Has your adoption been finalized?
What services were provided to you post adoption?

What's your thoughts about the total cost of the adoption?

Cultural Sensitivity/Competency

Do you feel that the professionals involved with your adoption process were culturally sensitive/competent when working with Black/African American adoptive parents? Please explain?

Did the adoption professionals involved make an effort to learn about your culture to better understand you as adoptive family?

Transracial Adoption

Definition: refers to the act of placing a child of one racial or ethnic group with adoptive parents of another racial or ethnic group.

What are your thoughts on transracial adoption?

Do you feel that transracial adoption has any impact on Black families seeking to adopt?

Conclusion

Final Thoughts