

The New Brave World of Race? Interracial Adoption and the Issue of Racial Categorization

ABSTRACT

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE: The main idea of the article about using race as an analytical tool is to demonstrate how race can be a salient factor in how people experience, inhabit the world and consequently family. Interracial adoption is discussed as a phenomenon which borrows from the particular fears and order of a society. Therefore, it is considered how dominant discourses support to normalize some experiences of interracially adoptive families, and as such may contribute to the reproduction of folk theories on racial categorization and differences.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS: The research problem concerns the question of how the concept of racial categorization can be understood in a racially mixed frame of reference relating to the experience of interracial adoption. The article uses the method of critical analyses as well as the analyses of the reference literature.

THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION: The first section of the article discusses race as a social construct, the second indicates white as the unmarked category and shows that the rest of racial categories is marked in contrast to whiteness. The third part provides justification for a thesis that in racial categorization, as in other social classifications, one category tends to dominate, usually taken for granted as normative, typical and most desirable. It causes social and parenting problems for the adoptive family.

RESEARCH RESULTS: The result of the argumentation is that race is often socially recognized as inherent and inherited quality that is seen to fit an adopted child for a specific social situation. Children are assigned to race categories based on assumptions about descent. Regardless of the fact, the phenomenon of interracial adoption exposes the fragility of conventional meanings of human races.

CONCLUSIONS, INNOVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: The social acceptance of interracially adoptive families requires a society which does not define itself on the facts of blood and race allegiances, but on a set of deeply

humanistic ideals. Interracial adoption is still critically affected by traditional ways of constructing and contesting racial identity based on mono-racial loyalties.

→ **KEYWORDS: SOCIOLOGY OF UPBRINGING, INTERRACIAL ADOPTION, RACIAL CATEGORIZATION, FAMILY SOCIALIZATION**

The main idea of the article about using race as an analytical tool is to demonstrate how race can be a salient factor in how people experience, inhabit the world and consequently family. Interracial adoption is discussed as a phenomenon which borrows from the particular fears and order of a society. Therefore, it is considered how dominant discourses support to normalize some experiences of interracially adoptive families, and as such may contribute to the reproduction of folk theories on racial categorization and differences. The first section discusses race as a social construct, the second indicates white as the unmarked category and shows that the rest of racial categories is marked in contrast to whiteness. The third part provides justification for a thesis that in racial categorization, as in other social classifications, one category tends to dominate, usually taken for granted as normative, typical and most desirable. It causes some social and parenting problems for the adoptive family. Moreover, race is often socially recognized as inherent and inherited quality that is seen to fit an adopted child for a specific social situation. Children are assigned to race categories based on assumptions about descent.

Introduction

Contemporary families are more and more variable in composition (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2013). Nevertheless, a concept of adoptive families with racially different parents and children is still proven to stretch dominant ideas about families across racial and kinship lines. Issues of race and kinship are perceived as endemic to the very fabric of each ethnically diversified society (Smedley, 2007). In this sense, issues of race and kinship are permanently settled in public, academic and private discourses, and they will continue to be an area of importance in society and consequently family – which is usually conceptualized as the essence of society. Race and kinship are intimately implicated in the conception of social rules. The social world is constituted by rules of description and classification (Garfinkel, 2007). The idea of the joining of

racially different parents and children together in adoptive families will disrupt typical appearances and expectations surrounding the dominant picture of family. It can point to rare situations where the constitution of social life concerning family seems particularly to be treated as familiar, solid, unquestionable, and therefore widely accepted as normal and unproblematic. Unique experiences of transracial adoption can disclose the forms of classification which society will assume. Interracially adoptive families have something of a sensitivity to issues of race and kinship.

The reality of interracially adoptive families lie in the nexus of cultural constructions of race, family and socio-political power in an ethnically diversified society (Albański, 2016). It can lay bare that which is usually so presupposed that it is unnoticed, but it carries a heavy social load of historically produced truths linked to particular power relations that make possible certain claims (whilst excluding others). The character of that load is built on the past and present interracial relationships in a society. Historically interracial adoption was used by the state as an element of the coercive policies towards people of color (Bartholet, 1991). The trauma of the past experiences still haunt in current discussions of domestic interracial adoption (Bartholet, 1999). Discussions on interracial adoption are emotionally contentious, because a racial affiliation still explains the patterns of structural inequalities and power relations in ethnically diversified societies (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Desmond & Emirbayer, 2009). A large body of research on interracial adoption develops its conceptual argument that race matters within an interracially adoptive family and outside of it (Miranda Samuels, 2009; McCall, van Ijzendoorn, Juffer, Groark, & Groza, 2011; Quiroz, 2007). As a result, a language that describes interracial adoption is full of words, such as White privilege, transracial paradox, identity crisis, which suggest a vital framework of categorization and sifting (Albański, 2014).

Race as a social construct

Although human variation is real and necessary, the idea of human races does not explain biological variation (Templeton, 2007). The invention of race is that on a genetic level human races will determine the differentiation from each other and their potentialities. In fact, science proves it otherwise. Race neither explains variation nor is a reliable genetic construct. From the vantage point of scientific knowledge, race is a pernicious myth (Lewontin, 1972). Nevertheless, the idea of human races is socially shared. Race is socially constructed as a way to categorize and

rank groups. The idea is socially powerful because the belief in separate and unequal races provides justification for a different kind of inequality (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). In other words, human races still exist because they are socially constructed in the forms that they are perpetuated. From this perspective, human races are not biological units, but constitute a system of ideas, identities and relations that emerged from the past experiences of imperialism and are reinvented in the context of more contemporary ethnically diversified societies (Smedley, 2007). Regardless of general reference to physical appearances, races are social entities resulting from dominant discourses and actions.

In contrast to the popular belief in human race as an empirically validated and defining human quality concept, race was primarily designated to establish and control cultural boundaries and hierarchies (Allen, 1994). The difficult history of racial relations documents how forces of tradition, law and science conspired to define and influence the recognition of human diversity. Race ideology was developed to dehumanize low-status bearers and demote them in public eyes to inferiority, placing the onus of extermination and slavery on its victims (Fredricson, 2003). It appears that the racial imagination still plays a role in shaping social relations in the multi-racial society (Emirbayer & Desmond, 2011). Given the long, painful history of racial subordination, there is a strong appeal to the vision of a society in which race no longer correlates with privilege or disadvantage. Indeed, the constitutions of many countries are colorblind. However, the presence of racial neutrality has its double-edged meanings.

Colorblindness has changed from a progressive demand into a rightist one (Haney Lopez, 2007). A colorblind rule used to disclose classifications and distinctions based on race as morally and legally invalid. Nowadays, the rhetoric of colorblindness is used to refuse to look critically at discriminatory practices, and tolerate racial slurs as long as masked in cultural and behavioral terms as well as attack as racists all those who speak up about racial issues. Under the semiotics of colorblindness, only directly meaning skin color or the use of offensive words count as racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Colorblindness defines racism as the mention of race, whereas any reference to group culture is treated as a non-racist comment. As a result, colorblindness insists race is not involved so long as the focus is on spoiled cultures or problem behavior, even when whole populations are attributed to such deviant labels as welfare queens, sexual-predators, terrorists or illegals.

In contrast, the notion that race is always a matter of hierarchies and racial supremacy in which one group dominates others provides a battleground for so-called cultural wars and identity politics (Bernstein, 2005).

A group status-quo is seen as endlessly being subject to contestation and re-examination. The focus on separated identities will promote closed-mindedness and intolerance as well. It shows a chronic inability to escape from the limits of the racial imagination in ethnically diversified societies (Hauskeller, Sturdy, Tutton & Bliss, 2013). At the core of identity politics lies a powerful bias of belonging to one racial community (Roth, 2016). This belief is maintained in conjunction with a kind of racial fundamentalism that people who do not possess single racial allegiances are confused with its own racial identities. This kind of argument applies to any forms of racially mixed and thus uneven relations such as interracial marriages or interracial adoption. Sometimes it also targets integrated education. However, the confusion of racial roles in both mixed-racial status and interracial relationship is a primary concern. Therefore, interracial adoption touches what is signaled as a vast ocean of controversy around the issue of racial categorization.

Racial categorization is transmitted through discourse (Van Dijk, 1993). Racial categories are defined in words and phrases, while racial perception is reinforced in everyday uses of language. Race and racial classification are embedded in official terminology (used by institutions), standard terminology (used in public) and informal terms (used in private). Each term depends on its discourse history which explains how sensitive specific term is. References to race and beliefs about racial differences reinforce the use of language in the most ordinary ways (Harris, 2006). Racialized attitudes are routinely presented as common sense, through routine and everyday forms of talk (Hill, 2008). These everyday uses are particularly relevant to the experiences of interracially adoptees, because the engagement in communication is affected by the social circumstances in which they grow up, what they perceive as normal and acceptable, and finally how they assume the world around them works.

White privilege and the pattern of interracial adoption

The theorizing of interracial adoption is significantly bound up with racial identity (Albański, 2014). The link between the two is explained by concerns with the status of adoptive parents, treating middle-class whites as the standard beneficiary of the domestic and international adoption system against which to compare biological parents of color. Scholars have paid particular attention to the racially disadvantaged gap between adoptive and biological parents (Barn, 2013; Park & Green, 2000; Quiroz, 2007). These disparities are written in the discursive ways in which racial

categories are connected with power relations and status, where whiteness symbolizes dominance and success, and the otherness stands for the opposite. The term of White privilege defines a right or advantage that whites have in a multiracial society owing to socio-cultural and political affirmations of their racial appearance (Kendall, 2012).

The notion of race has never had its neutral meaning and the discourse on interracial adoption is profoundly affected by a judgement about how important race is (Albański, 2014). Interracial adoption provokes a storm of controversies arisen around issues of racism, inequity and hegemony (Patton, 2000). Interracial adoption has a historically appalling record (Bartholet, 1991). It used to be a coercive element of the domestic policies on people of color. Historically the dominant White family position was a result of the long-time hegemony of cultural standards, wherein whiteness constituted a socially appropriated family environment relative to other races. As a result, children of color were highly vulnerable to the coercive pattern of adoption. The colonial past of interracial relationships casts a deep shadow on the international adoption market (Albański & Krywult-Albańska, 2016). The history of colonialism was strongly associated with political, economic and cultural control over dependent countries. One of the colonialist practices was to drain colonies from their inhabitants. Tracking down the routes of international adoption one might see another stage of post-colonial dependency. Especially, when international adoption has given rise to a controversy over issues of baby selling, kidnapping and force labor (Carney, 2011).

The notion of race carries a lot of its traditionally ideological baggage (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1992). Nowhere are the language, assumptions, and passions for hegemony and subordination more entrenched than in racial relations, and nowhere is the fear that attend the prospect of a multiracial society more apparent. Each society which has a some kind of majority rule must be very careful to notice that the unspeakable power of the racial majority is not used in any form to subjugate racial minorities. The concept of interracial adoption thus have some important implications for members of an ethnically diversified society, because it refers to a general way of understanding what race is, why it exists, or a possibility to transcend dominant views on race. The assignment to a particular race has always affected the lives of people (Feagin, 2006).

The racial distinction generates a definite kind of explanation for race itself. It becomes evident that the pattern of interracial adoption in a society will be affected by the character of the boundaries which must be breached. Societies can be ranked by the emphasis which they put upon the racial boundaries. It is assumed that the racial distinction is about

the process determining which group(s) define and enforce social norms. Members of a racially disadvantaged category are commonly presented as outsiders to the virtuous group. It takes the guise of an antithesis to standardized expectations. Moreover, a significant part of the fascination of the binary opposition – we and them, is that the others help to confirm one's own identity. The racial classification and its meaning would be impossible without the continuing presence of its contrasts. Some racial categories seem to be basically inseparable twins and hence they are merely identified by key components of an identity that negate one another (for instance, Black and White). The manner in which they describe one another heavily relied on the dialectics of the racial hierarchy in a society. It has to do much with imagined or pretended than genuine properties of the described.

The system of racial classification manufactures certain cognitive biases against own group and others (Feagin, 2006). Since interracially adoptive families defy important separations and definitions within a society, it raise general concerns about the reality of everyday life in such families. The focus is on distinctly racial experiences facing interracially adopted children. They live in a welter of competing and contradictory worlds which are so often perceived by their social environment as no racially unified whole. Adoptees are visibly different from their adoptive parents. They contradict kinship and race norms that all family members embody a shared heredity and cultural environment. They are evidence of a diversity which others would repress in the name of racial conformity. Their situation can be better described as being referred to the concept of the stranger, which was coined by Georg Simmel (1980), to describe people whom one might classify as elements of a group, while at the same time they possess characteristics that differentiate them from that group. The fact that they possess such qualities make them particularly vulnerable to the group's aggression and it also carries of highly value-laden contributions. They may become scapegoated or victimized by racist neighbors. Simmel suggested that strangers may be conceived as people whose position in a group is radically affected by the fact that they do not initially belong to. The phenomenon of interracially adopted children recalls a classical instance of blood-environment dilemma. Adoptive families are perceived through different phenotypes which are biologically and culturally racialized, but at the same time, adoptees can be classified by their adoptive parents' cultural standards which shape a child's future prospects. Paradoxically, children may not be identified unequivocally as if they belong initially to one or another option, heredity or nurture. The norms of classification seem to be conditional, because

other members of a racially diverse group (and sometimes adoptees themselves) are likely to perceive them as if they are members of the adoptive parents' culture. At the same time, their color of skin can be used by their social environment to justify or rationalize their behavior. Therefore, adoptees are to be found in areas of ambiguity, where certain instances of their behavior may be described as a response to the apparent disorderliness of their everyday life. Some adoptees may experience the social world as racially unstable, because their racial status is itself described dialectically as a series of phases, relied on conformity or negation to one racial option, which supersede one another. Each phase reworks the significance of what has gone before.

Racially mixed ancestry and the socialization strategies

As a multiracial society changes and its racial boundaries will move, so companion forms of racially mixed ancestries will also prevail. Some researchers show that multiracial children are a hidden but the dominant group of interracially adopted children, because of their multiple-choice identification (Miranda Samuels, 2009; Tizzard & Phoenix, 1989). Reality and identity are profoundly transformed into meaningful figures of interracial adoption. Many prospective adopted parents declare that interracial adoption is a testimony to the civic movements in their country which have initiated the long process of racial integration (Barn, 2013; Zhang & Lee, 2010). They believe in a society that is the guardian of racial justice not only in its institutional structures, but subjectively, in individual consciousness of its members. As a result, the system of their beliefs produces the most likely explanation for a distinct preference of multiracial children. Children may be thought to legitimate racial integration in a society, becoming agents of social change. However, the choice in the multiracial children may also indicate some further parental socialization efforts. The body of literature shows the three primary beliefs (mentioned by adoptive parents) that support the choice in the multiracial children (Malott & Schmidt, 2012; Miranda Samuels, 2009; Vonk, Lee, & Crolley-Simic, 2010; Zhang & Lee, 2010). Firstly, they feel that they will have more in common with a multiracial adoptee, because they partially share a racial heritage. Thus, secondly, they are less likely to perceive themselves as those who take the child away from her/his community of origin. And, thirdly, they believe that a multiracial adoptee will be better incorporated into their own environment and therefore willingly accepted by relatives, neighbors and friends.

Those beliefs recognize the role of racial categories as a socially constructed system of meaning around which individuals form social identities. In their attempts to deal with perceived or experienced racial contradictions within their families, adoptive parents usually employ a mix of socialization strategies. The following socialization strategies were suggested by Richard M. Lee (2003) in his seminal article on the transracial adoption paradox. Cultural assimilation emphasizes a colorblind orientation, which tries to downplay the racial experiences of children. Children are intentionally exposed to parents' culture in order to internalize its values and norms. Enculturation likewise provides children with opportunities to learn more about their birth culture. Differences are mutually acknowledged and adoptive parents want to forge new links between adopted children and their ethnic heritage (for instance, travel to their children's birth country). Racial inculcation provides children with coping skills on how to deal with racial discrimination. Adoptive parents make an effort to stay in touch with members of the child's culture who may teach ways of coping with racial biases. Child choice promotes a belief that adoptive parents need to adjust their socialization efforts according to the children's wishes and interest. They initially expose children to cultural opportunities but ease off on this once children get older and begin expressing their own opinions on what activities they wish to engage in (Albański, 2016).

The socialization strategies emphasize the racial ambiguity of the parents-children position. The case of multiracial children can underline potential challenges in a way of thinking about socialization strategies. Gina Miranda Samuels (2009, p. 82) reports that adoptive parents seem to prefer the label "multiracial," because it helps them to posit a connection between the partially shared racial heritage and the choice of a cultural context. They usually socialize children into their own cultural standards in order to let children learn more about their social world. In this sense, their socialization efforts epitomize the classical conception of socialization as a process by which children learn to behave in a way that is acceptable in their cultural milieu. However, typically based on physical features, socialization in families occurs between parents and children who share the same racialized social status. Therefore, parents can have faith in their own and family's intergenerational experience for parental insight (Albański, 2014). One shade lighter skin color and racially mixed heritage become a key to solve the parental dilemmas, where interracially adopted children will find a familial context, sense of common experiences and a sense of belonging. However, Samuels shows in her study that those assumptions made by adoptive parents do not diminish

the role of a race in an adopted child's life. Notwithstanding, her findings suggest that multiracial children are viewed as racially different and experience a tribal stigma (in the Goffman's sense) related to their uncertain racial status.

The transgression of the widely accepted norms of kinship and racial boundaries have always been perceived as being anomalous from the perspective of both monocentric racial identity and racial heritage (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Feagin, 2006; Smedley, 2007). In many societies, sexual relations between people from other races were considered as morally and socially repugnant. Even today, some folk theories of race assert that miscegenation results in dire consequences of internal conflicts and confusion, particularly for offspring from interracial couples. Their certainty is built upon the belief that race provides clues about who a person is. In this sense, racial classification system must recognize its own. Therefore, the unity and clarity of racial classification is meant to defend against the collapse of racial meaning.

Multiracial children flatly contradict the notion of a core identity centered around highly racialized phenotypes and kinship. Therefore, their uncertain racial status is often translated into a symbolic refutation of allegiance to monocentric racial communities, which demands constant declarations of one's racial ties and authenticity. It seems that adoptive parents recognize that there is a worrying dark figure of racial classification which has to be ascertained in some fashion. Their socialization efforts are mentioned to provide a cultural anchor to keep racial biases at bay, in otherwise a very stormy ocean of racial controversy. Perhaps, it is little surprising that adoptive parents tend to choose their own cultural standards in order to provide a safe haven for their interracially adopted children (Albański, 2014).

The everyday alchemy of race and family resemblance

A number of studies that deals with the activities of interracial adoptees in the everyday life pays particular attention to some repeat questions about family resemblance and discordant views on racial allegiances (Hollingsworth, 1997; McCall et al., 2011; Mohanty, Keokse, & Sales, 2006). One of the significant findings is that the racially mixed heritage of a child does not facilitate a mutual racial connection between adoptee and adopters for the child. In fact, many interviewees experience a deep mark of distinction that they are others even in a diversified setting. From their standpoint, they are usually perceived as those who straddle racial

boundaries and thus any conduct is forced to become sooner or later the breach of some precept or principle of a racial order. Even in a pluralistic community, there are many settings that are condemned by those who belong to one racial option. In a principle, multiracial children view their neighborhood as a predominantly represented by one race. Rarely, they have met anyone who is both interracially adopted and multiracial. As a result, they describe themselves as people who are to be trapped in such areas of racial ambiguity that they feel alienated in lacking access to a community of others who understand their daily challenges and share their unique experience of race. Some of them are thus determined to voice their very own way.

Within the context of child-parent relationships, a societal focus on biogenetics relationships as a visible marker of family plays an important role in feeling discontent with their close environment among interracially adoptees. The cultural legitimization of family resemblance is strongly associated with very existence itself. The resemblance in physical and personal traits means continuity, belonging and authenticity. Interracially adopted children learn that their relationships with adoptive parents may be questioned due to ambiguous linkages. From such a perspective, the popular conception of racialized blood bonds overemphasizes where you belong to, as well as the extent to which who you are is genetically determined rather than individually chosen. This is a strongly represented view in the interviews with interracially adoptees. It seems that adoption is typically considered by them as unusual and less real compared to biological families. They also maintain the belief that the relationship which is real by birth is less likely to be severed because of the obvious visibility of biological connections. The common experience is that interracially adoptees feel disconnected with their adoptive parents they do not look like them racially. As it happens, a multiracial option does not help either. As Miranda Samuels (2009) shows, it is an opposite racial heritage, not a shared racial heritage with adoptive parents that is salient.

Being classified as multiracial seems to extend a feeling of unhappy with a chronic sense of otherness. Multiracial adoptees find themselves as subject of public scrutiny, including constant questions about who their key reference groups such as family or racial group are. As a consequence of this limited view of group membership, they usually face issues relevant to undermine the legitimization of adoption. According to them, kinship remains the standard against which child-parent relationships are compared, and the absence of biogenetical ties cause interracially adoptive relationships to be viewed as less legitimate in society. They reproduce certain discourses and views on the relationship between

kinship and race. At the same time, some adoptees declare that they do not need to be identified with their adoptive parents on how they feel to be different. Their racial distinction is their own way to follow.

Many interracial adoptees report that part of their life stories is the public fascination with their strangeness. Their everyday routine is riddled with repeated questions from others: what it is like being raised as both adoptee and racially different. Throughout their transition from childhood to adulthood, they have learnt on how to deal with this very awkward-to-them question. Some adoptees claim that a quick confession will help to avoid further controversies around their otherness. At least, they hope that others can understand to some point that it is not their own fault that they are different.

Conclusion

Critical race theorists perceive the issue of race as permanent to the social construction of a multiracial society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). In other words, they believe that issues of race are so deeply ingrained in society that race should be awarded a paramount significance, even in some social context when discussions concern broad questions. In this sense, meaning and social organization would be impossible without the continuous presence of bi- or multiracial contrasts. Although the preservation of distinctions between racial affiliations constitute a multiracial society, racial frontiers can move as a society changes. Nonetheless, the phenomenon of interracial adoption is always discovered outside the boundaries in conventional views on race, and that it is maintained regardless of each alternation of racial convention.

The contradictions of interracial adoption provide certain troubles of confusion and ambiguity. The racial categorization is embedded in contexts of meaning and offers condensed interpretations of the world. The social properties of interracial adoption are conferred on a disturbing exception from the outline of dominant racial categories. The issue endangers controversy. The racial categories that are recognize as separated must retain their separation. The very intrinsic of classification systems is to subvert such unmanageable cases that expose the fragility of conventional meanings. Thus the experience of interracial adoption is pushing on the fringes of conventional views on race.

Interracial adoption may reveal a glimpse of biases that lurk at the racial boundaries of society. Unlike most contemporary multiracial societies, the social acceptance of interracial adoptive families requires a society

which does not define itself on the facts of blood and race allegiances, but on a set of deeply humanistic ideals. On the contrary, cognitive biases embedded in culture and identity politics as well as real grievances over the history of interracial relations locate interracial adoption upon the boundaries of a multicultural society. The realities of interracially adoptive family life document all highly contentious issues on race and family such as the power of assignment to dominant social labels and commonsense reasoning behind the labelling process.

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