

Youth Identity in Transracial/Multiracial Families: A Workshop for Parents and Religious Professionals

Video and Discussion Guide

How to Use This Workshop

The animated video, [Support for Youth Who Have Been Transracially Adopted](#), uses a talk show format, with animated characters, to introduce topics related to youth of color being raised by white parents. This one-hour workshop invites a group of parents and/or religious professionals to view the video together, and then:

- share information and understanding about multiple aspects of transracial adoption and multiracial family life and how these affect youth;
- become more aware of their own roles and racial/ethnic identity perspectives with regard to youth of color with whom they have a parental, mentor, or pastoral relationship; and
- develop action steps to strengthen the support they can offer youth of color in their families and/or faith communities.

A presenter of this material can be of any racial/ethnic identity. It is essential that they be comfortable with their own racial/ethnic identity. The ideal facilitator has done explicit work examining racial/ethnic identity issues in society and within themselves. Facilitators with little or no experience doing racial/ethnic identity self-examination are encouraged to fill out a Cummings Identity Map (Handout 4). All presenters should view the video and ask themselves the discussion questions before leading the workshop.

The creator of the animated video and the Cummings Identity Map is Reverend Dr. Monica L. Cummings, UUA Director, Ministry to Youth and Young Adults of Color. On request, the Rev. Dr. Cummings will participate in this workshop in person or via Skype.

Materials

- Chalice and lighter, or a battery-operated LED candle
- Computer with Internet access and large monitor or digital projector
- Handout 1, Opening Reading
- Handout 2, Resources for Supporting Transracially Adopted Youth
- Handout 3, Closing Reading
- Handout 4, Cummings Identity Map
- Optional: Newsprint, markers, and tape

Creating a Safe Environment

Identity work can be empowering. It can also be painful. It is recommended that your minister, a lay minister or chaplain, or another adult experienced in pastoral care be present. You can also arrange for Rev. Dr. Monica L. Cummings to participate.

If the group has already made a covenant, refer participants to it at the start of the workshop. If any participants have not worked together before, immediately after the Opening guide the group to affirm a simple covenant. Make sure these points are included:

- Confidentiality: What is said in this group stays in this group.
- Speaking from personal experience: Speak for yourself, and allow others space to speak for themselves.
- Affirming everyone's right to their experiences and opinions: When needed, respectfully agree to disagree.

Video

Gather the group where all can see and hear the video. Play the video.

Opening

Light the chalice with opening words of your choice, or lead the reading provided in Handout 1.

Discussion

Lead the group to discuss these topics:

Feelings and attitudes about adoption (10 minutes)

- What are some reasons people decide to adopt children?
- Do you think you will adopt in the future?
- Why do you think people adopt children of a different ethnicity/race?

Racial/ethnic identity (10 minutes)

- What is your race/ethnicity?
- In what ways, formally or informally, have you worked on your racial/ethnic identity?
- Who in your life is supportive of your racial/ethnic identity?
- How does a young person build their own racial/ethnic identity? What role do parents play? Extended family? Community?
- In what roles in your life can you support someone who has been transracially adopted or someone who is growing up in a multiracial family? What are appropriate and helpful ways you can give support?

Difference Matters (10 minutes)

- Share about a time when you were the only person in the room with your racial/ethnic identity. Or, think of a time when you were the only one of your gender, sexual orientation, generation, or another significant personal attribute.
 - What made you notice your difference from the others?

- What did you feel?
 - How frequently do you have similar experiences? Do you look forward to these opportunities? If so, why? Do you dread times when you may be the only one in the room? If so, why?
 - What might you have thought or felt if someone had prepared you for the experience of being “the only one?” What words might you have appreciated? What words might have actually made the experience more difficult for you?
- In your congregation and/or community, how frequently do you observe situations where a child or youth of color is—or might feel like they are—“the only one in the room?” Have you ever talked with a child or youth of color about their experiences being “the only one?” Who approached whom? What did you experience and/or learn from your conversation?
 - How comfortable are individuals in your family/congregation/youth group talking about members’ different experiences related to ethnicity?
 - What are the signs that individuals are comfortable? What are the signs that someone is not comfortable?
 - Who do you think is comfortable? Who do you think may not be?
 - What factors do you think make people comfortable, or uncomfortable?
 - How can you find out whether your perceptions are correct?
 - What actions can you take to help more individuals become more comfortable talking about different experiences related to ethnicity?

Next Steps

Distribute Handout 2, Resources for Supporting Transracially Adopted Youth.

If this is an ongoing group, invite members to suggest specific actions one or more of them can take to build the group’s capacity to support the healthy racial/ethnic development journeys of youth of color who have white parents. Encourage participants to identify and commit to “next steps.”

If the workshop is a one-time event, invite participants to take a moment to reflect on a personal action they might take to explicitly support the racial/ethnic identity health of a youth with whom they already have a relationship. Encourage them to write down and commit to one action.

Check-out and Closing

Re-light the chalice, if needed. Share closing words of your choice, or read aloud the closing words from Handout 3.

Handout 1: Opening Words

Legal Alien

by Pat Mora

Bi-lingual, Bi-cultural,
Able to slip from “How’s life?”
to “Me’stan volviendo loca,”
able to sit in a paneled office
drafting memos in smooth English,
able to order in fluent Spanish
at a Mexican restaurant,
American but hyphenated,
viewed by Anglos as perhaps exotic,
perhaps inferior, definitely different,
viewed by Mexicans as alien,
(their eyes say, “You May speak
Spanish but you’re not like me”)
An American to Mexicans
a Mexican to Americans
a handy token
sliding back and forth
between the fringes of both worlds
by smiling
by making the discomfort
of being pre-judged
Bi-laterally.

“Legal Alien” by Pat Mora appears in *encounters: poems about race, ethnicity and identity* (Boston: Skinner House Books, 2010; Paula Cole Jones, ed.). Originally published in Mora’s collection *Chants*, this piece is reprinted with permission from the publisher (© 1985 Arte Público Press, University of Houston).

Handout 2: Resources for Supporting Transracially Adopted Youth

Books for Children

Racism Explained to my Daughter, by Tahar Ben Jelloun

Carolyn's Story: A Book About an Adopted Girl, by Perry Schwartz

After the Morning Calm: Reflections of Korean Adoptees, Sook Wilkinson and Nancy Fox, eds.

Books for Adults

Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White by Frank H. Wu

Wanting a Daughter, Needing a Son: Abandonment, Adoption, and Orphanage Care in China by Kay Ann Johnson

Raising Nuestros Niños: Bringing Up Latino Children in a Bicultural World by Gloria G. Rodriguez, PhD.

I'm Chocolate, You're Vanilla: Raising Healthy Black and Biracial Children in a Race-conscious World by Marguerite Wright

The Primal Wound: Understanding the Adopted Child by Nancy Newton Verrier

Weaving a Family: Untangling Race and Adoption by Barbara Katz Rothman

Multiracial Child Resources Book: Living Complex Identities, Maria P.P. Root and Matt Kelley, eds.

Interracial Intimacies: Sex, Marriage, Identity, and Adoption by Randall Kennedy

Online

Adoptive Families' website suggests resources on transracial adoption including books, articles, and websites. <http://www.adoptivefamilies.com/transracial-adoption.php>

The Mixed Heritage Center provides information and resources for people of mixed heritage. <http://www.mixedheritagecenter.org/>

Listen to "Ministry and Support with Transracially Adopted Youth," a December, 2012 webinar hosted by the Ministries and Faith Development staff group of the Unitarian Universalist Association. <http://www.uua.org/re/youth/identity-based/color/index.shtml>

Handout 3: Closing Words

Each Day

by Kristen Harper

Each day provides us with an opportunity to love again,
 To hurt again, to embrace joy,
 To experience unease,
 To discover the tragic.

Each day provides us with the opportunity to live.

This day is no different, this hour no more unique than the last,
Except...Maybe today, maybe now,
 Among friends and fellow journeyers,
Maybe for the first time, maybe silently,
We can share ourselves.

“Each Day” by Kristen Harper appears in *Voices from the Margins: An Anthology of Meditations* (Boston: Skinner House Books, 2012; Jacqui James and Mark D. Morrison-Reed, eds.). Used with the author’s permission.

Handout 4: Cummings Identity Map

Some of our values, beliefs, and behaviors are conscious. We hold others without awareness. The Identity Map is a tool for developing self-awareness related to the cultural influences that have shaped and informed the values, beliefs, and behaviors we use to engage the world. The Identity Map was created by Rev. Dr. Monica L. Cummings, influenced by the work of Pamela A. Hays.

The Identity Map consists of:

- *Year Born/Age—significant cultural influences.* For example, for Baby Boomers (born between 1947 and 1961 in the U.S.), a significant cultural influence may have been the Vietnam War. A significant cultural influence for Generation X (born 1961-1972) is computer generated games and text messaging. For an immigrant to the U.S., a significant cultural influence could be living through a civil war or the assassination of a President.
- *Geographic Areas Lived, childhood and adult.* A sample answer for this element is a person who was raised on a Reservation and now lives in a major urban area.
- *National Identity.* American, El Salvadorian, Puerto Rican, South Korean, etc. *Ethnicity/Race, first language, language spoken at home* requires the person to answer the question “What do I want to be called?” for example, Native American or American Indian; Latino/a or Hispanic; Black, or African American, or Caribbean, or Cape Verdean; etc.
- *Religious/Spiritual Orientation, childhood and adult.* A sample answer for this would be a person who grew up Protestant and now identifies as Unitarian Universalist.
- *Socioeconomic Status, childhood and adult.* For instance, a person who grew up lower middle class and now is middle to upper middle class, or someone who grew up in the upper class and now identifies as a member of the working class.
- *Disabilities* includes mental, physical, and acquired disabilities.
- *Sexual Orientation* includes Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual people.
- *Gender* includes female, male, and transgendered people.

For more about this type of analysis of cultural influences, see the ADDRESSING Framework adapted from P.A. Hays, “Addressing the Complexities of Culture and Gender in Counseling,” *Journal of Counseling and Development* 74 (March/April 1996), 332-38 © American Counseling Association.

Cummings Identity Map Example

<p><u>Year Born/Age—significant cultural events:</u></p> <p>30 years old; Facebook; Obama’s election; Occupy movement; text messaging. (1)</p>
<p><u>Geographic areas lived, childhood/adult:</u></p> <p>Live in a suburb outside Milwaukee, Wisconsin. (6)</p>
<p><u>National Identity:</u></p> <p>American (9)</p>
<p><u>Ethnicity/Race, first language, language spoken at home:</u></p> <p>White; English is my only language. (2)</p>
<p><u>Religious/spiritual orientation, childhood/adult:</u></p> <p>Believes in something more powerful than humans. (4)</p>
<p><u>Socioeconomic status, childhood/adult:</u></p> <p>Parents are both college graduates. (5)</p>
<p><u>Disabilities:</u></p> <p>None (8)</p>
<p><u>Sexual Orientation:</u></p> <p>Heterosexual. (7)</p>
<p><u>Gender:</u></p> <p>Female (3)</p>

Cummings Identity Map Worksheet

<u>Year Born/Age—significant cultural events:</u>
<u>Geographic Areas Lived, childhood/adult:</u>
<u>National Identity:</u>
<u>Ethnicity/Race, first language, language spoken at home:</u>
<u>Religious/Spiritual Orientation, childhood/adult:</u>
<u>Socioeconomic Status, childhood/adult:</u>
<u>Disabilities:</u>
<u>Sexual Orientation:</u>
<u>Gender:</u>