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## MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS TRANSRACIAL ADOPTIONS

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MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS' ATTITUDES  
TOWARDS TRANSRACIAL ADOPTIONS

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A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Social Work

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by  
Matthew Ford  
Luis Flores  
June 2017

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## ABSTRACT

This study explored Master of Social Work students' attitudes towards transracial adoptions (TRA). The literature suggests that when children of color are transracially adopted, they are often deprived of the opportunity to learn and express their birth culture, and to develop a strong sense of self. The researchers decided to survey this population because MSW students are future foster and adoptive professionals. As such, they will have the opportunity to directly influence macro policies around TRA and adoptive families in micro practice. The researchers utilized a quantitative self-administered survey, with thirty-three questions to ascertain the attitudes of a diverse pool of MSW students at Cal State San Bernardino. Eighty-eight students completed the online survey. The researchers used descriptive and inferential statistics, including a t-test and one-way ANOVA to analyze the survey data. MSW students possess positive attitudes towards transracial adoption. Female respondents held significantly more positive attitudes towards transracial adoption than male respondents. Similarly, Black, White, and Latino/a participants held more positive attitudes towards TRA; however, these findings should be interpreted with caution due to the small number of Native American participants in our sample. We did not find significant differences in attitudes based on participants' age, parental status, or life experiences related to diversity. Our findings are limited as our sample may not generalize to all MSW students or to social workers in general. The study suggests that MSW students, who are future social workers, view TRA as a

positive option for children in need of families. Therefore, we suggest that schools of social work continue to provide and to expand their curriculum related to TRA so that future social workers are prepared to meet the needs of parents and children in TRA families.

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We would like to thank the MSW students at California State University San Bernardino. Without you taking the time to complete our survey we would have nothing. Thank you for your honesty and allowing us the opportunity to examine your feelings and trusting us with your responses.

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– Matthew Ford

Thank you to the beautiful and amazing people I have met throughout this journey. You have all impacted my life like you would never imagine. Ya'll believed in me and gave me a hand when I had lost hope and that means the world to me. You are loved and cherished. Thank you to Susan Culbertson, Dr. Janet Chang, and Dr. Deirdre Lanesskog for your support and encouragement throughout this project. Thank you to my family and friends who are part of my life and were patient with me throughout these two years. Lastly, thank you to all the beautiful black and brown people who inspire me daily. Our struggle continues but remember our Existence is our Resistance. Thank you, Gracias, Tlazokamatli.

– Luis Flores



## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the friends that encouraged me, allowed me to sleep on their couches, loved me, fed me, and accepted me for who I was. Thank you for seeing my potential when I couldn't and giving me the confidence to shine and be myself. Your love and support was never ignored and without it I would not have made it. I hope I was able to make you all proud! Charles, Abraham, Amanda, Victor, Vanessa, Raylene, and Harry, I love you all. All of you have become the family I needed and I don't know where I would be without any of you.

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– Matthew Ford

To the children in search of who they are and where they belong. Keep searching, let the Spirit call you and guide you, follow the red road.

– Luis Flores

We are free to be who we are—  
To create our own life  
Out of the past and out of the present.

We are our ancestors.  
When we can heal ourselves,  
We also heal our ancestors,  
Our Grandmothers, our  
Grandfathers and our children.

When we heal ourselves, we heal Mother Earth.

~Dr. Rita Pitka Blumenstein'

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Problem Statement

By definition, transracial adoption (TRA) is the adoption of a child by parents of a different race. Historically, it has been a controversial topic specifically when discussing the disproportionality of children of color being transracially adopted. There is a long history of racial disproportionality in child welfare services, most notably in the foster and juvenile justice systems (Coakley, 2007). The disproportionality of children of color in child welfare systems refers to both the overrepresentation of children of color in these systems as well as the disparate outcomes children of color experience compared to non-minority children. Such outcomes include remaining in foster care longer, longer criminal sentences, and being adopted by parents of a different race, culture, or ethnicity more than non-minority children (Coakley, 2007).

When children of color are transracially adopted there are concerns of children being deprived the opportunity to develop the culture, values, attitudes, and self-concept of being a person of color living in a racialized, inequitable society (Fenster, 2002). It is crucial for transracially adopted children to develop healthy cultural and racial identities that will provide connection to their heritage, holistic racial socialization, and consciousness of racial dignity. It is here where

professional social workers can have the most impact with adoptees; pragmatic practice strategies must be developed and implemented for social workers to better service youth, families, and communities. Just as there are micro practices that influence the TRA process, there are also policies and frameworks that impact the process of transracial adoptions.

Two of the most influential policies regarding TRA include the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) of 1978 and the Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) of 1994 (Jennings, 2006). While the ICWA was designed to prevent the removal of children from their tribal connection, the MEPA was implemented to forbid agencies receiving federal funds from solely considering race, culture, and ethnicity in making foster and adoptive placement decisions (Curtis & Alexander, 1996). Though both were responses to social and political concerns of the times, both were formulated and implemented from a legal basis to address the subjective and discriminatory child welfare policies and practices of the past, as pertaining to Native American and African American children (Kessel & Robbins, 1984). This can be seen in the ICWA itself, which states:

an alarming high percentage of Indian families are broken up by the removal, often unwarranted, of their children from them by non-tribal public and private agencies and that an alarmingly high percentage of such children are placed in non-Indian foster and adoptive homes and institutions. (Indian Child Welfare Act, as cited in Kessel & Robbins, 1984)



These removals occurred under legal doctrines such as the Lewis Meriam Report that indicated Native American Americans lived in conditions of extreme poverty, suffering, discontent, and would likely have a shortened life span (de Bourbon, 2013). Such reports were subjective because they used high socioeconomic standards and western values as a basis of comparison; they ignored cultural and sociopolitical factors.

Under the MEPA, current national policy prioritizes faster adoptions over matching children with same race adoptive parents because of the high number of children in foster and adoptive care. This policy, however, functions under the concept of “outcomes” as the measure of “success”. The “outcome” has been the transracial adoption of Black and Native American children and the acquisition of permanency is viewed as “success”. This act of permanency is viewed as benevolent to children and results in the obfuscation of larger issues that contribute to the disproportionality of Black and Native American children in the child welfare system (de Bourbon, 2013).

Because TRA continues to be a topic of discussion, further research is needed to guide the controversial and contrasting views of TRA policy and practice. Also, since social workers are well positioned in agencies at the macro and micro level it is important for them to be included when developing policies and procedures. However, few research studies have assessed the attitudes and knowledge of TRA among social work students. It is crucial to identify the attitudes and knowledge of prospective social work professionals beginning with

graduate students. This group will go on to provide direct services to children and families in the adoption process. Therefore, exploring the attitudes of MSW students is necessary.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine a cohort of MSW students' attitudes towards TRA, to assess student's understanding of racial socialization of adoptees, and to measure the level of importance students place on TRA and its impact on children. Researchers discussed the implications for social practice and added to the small body of research on student attitudes towards TRA. The attitudes of social work students were important to explore because social worker students are the next generation of professional workers who will be making important decisions in the adoption process (Fenster, 2002). Their attitudes as students can translate into professional power that can decide the lives of many children.

Transracial adoptions continue to be a controversial topic where people often have dissenting opinions. Although professional organizations such as the National Association of Black Social Workers have clearly stated their professional stance of transracial adoptions being a last resort, research is needed to identify how and if individual workers' attitudes influence practice (Fenster 2002; Jennings, 2006). Although acts like the MEPA and ICWA exist, neither identifies penalties, excluding lawsuits, towards agencies or workers if policies are not followed (Hollingsworth, 1998). In the studies that exist about

TRA, researchers have determined further education and continued dialogue on issues of race and ethnicity are needed by social workers in order to lessen the levels of dissension and to clarify opposing stances (Kirton, 1999). A specific area of research to be further studied is the role social workers play in transracially adopted children's development of racial and cultural identity; this research intends to do just that. Researchers have previously focused on practicing social worker attitudes, yet this study focused specifically on MSW student's attitudes. Students' attitudes have implications for current and future policies and practices related to TRA.

In order to investigate how MSW student attitudes may influence future practice, this study assessed what attitudes and knowledge students held towards TRA. This study surveyed current MSW students via an online, self-administered questionnaire. In order for the findings of this research to be generalized, researchers sought to acquire as many participants as possible with a target of 80 surveys. Lee, Simic-Crolley, and Vonk (2013) previously developed the questionnaire with high organization and structure to accurately measure the variables questioned. The questionnaire was developed for quantitative analysis. The survey also gathered participants' demographic information and whether the participant intended to work in child welfare.

#### Significance of the Project for Social Work

The study explored the attitudes of MSW students towards transracial adoptions. It was important to explore their attitudes since MSW graduates

comprise a large percentage of the workforce in the overarching child welfare system, all with the potential of influencing practice. Findings of the study will contribute to social work practice by helping schools of social work and social work practitioners better understand the nature of students' perceptions, thereby providing opportunities to alter curriculum and practice models to address those perceptions.

It was also important to know students' attitudes since Master's and Bachelor's level social work students often participate in the federally funded Title IV-E program that provides professional education and financial incentives in exchange for a commitment to work for a public child welfare agency (California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC), 2017). This consortium of schools and agencies contributes a major portion of the workforce servicing foster and adoptive care systems, making student attitudes an important topic to have studied. MSW graduates are line workers, supervisors, administrators, and policymakers all having a direct impact on the services provided to TRA adoptees and parents. MSW students' attitudes will likely influence the quality of service and service delivery in child welfare programs. It is important to study students' attitudes since these future professionals may reach a position to directly enforce and create TRA policies towards more positive outcomes, they will also yield the political power needed to influence the attitudes of other professionals (Fenster, 2002). Despite this political power, social workers have so often shifted their professional opinions and judgment on TRA that it is crucial

to have current data and knowledge about social workers' attitudes towards TRA (Howard, 1984). This project intends to contribute to the literature on TRA by identifying students' attitudes on TRA before they enter the workforce.

Since foster and adoptive care workers are responsible for ensuring the safety and well-being of adopted children, it is important to research the potential mismatches or inconsistencies between student beliefs and existing policies around TRA. The results of this study will lay the groundwork for suggesting additional curriculum or training needed at the MSW level to prepare students to practice in ways that do not contribute to disparities. In conclusion, this project seeks to measure the understanding and attitudes of master of social work students' towards TRA. More specifically, this project measures students' understanding of racial identity, racial dignity, and racial socialization of transracial adoptees; as well as what influences their attitudes.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

Chapter two presents a review of literature surrounding the topic of transracial adoption and its impact on children. This study draws upon Conflict Theory, Critical Race Theory, and Racial Identity Theory to develop a framework for exploring TRA. The chapter ends with a summary of goals, a short discussion of the goals of the researchers, and interpretation of the literature.

#### Attitudes Towards Transracial Adoptions

Lee, Crolley-Simic, & Vonk (2013) used a quantitative approach to determine MSW student's attitudes and their understanding of transracial adoption. Lee and colleagues (2013) asked three questions that guided their study: (1) What are the attitudes toward transracial adoption among MSW students? (2) How is race and ethnicity related to attitudes toward adoption? (3) How are personal experiences related to attitudes toward transracial adoption among MSW student? The team incorporated the use of cross-sectional design in order to compare the results between the two cohorts with convenience sampling. The results found that most MSW students had positive attitudes towards transracial adoption and had some understanding of the topic. The study also showed that the students believed that a child from a different ethnic group could have a healthy childhood with parents who are racially different. The

survey was designed to test the attitudes of the students and the results successfully correlated. Since we are replicating this study, the researchers plan to see similar results.

Whatley, Jaiiangardi, Ross & Knox (2003) surveyed 188 undergraduate students' attitudes toward TRA by distributing a quantitative questionnaire surrounding transracial adoptions. The survey asked the participants 15 questions about their upbringing and familial background. The participants responded to each of 15 items on a seven-point scale from (1) Strongly Disagree to (7) Strongly Agree with lower scores representing more positive attitudes and higher scores representing more negative attitudes toward transracial adoption. The results of the study were that female respondents had more positive attitudes towards transracial adoptions than male respondents; students who have dated interracially held more positive attitudes toward transracial adoption than those who would not consider interracial dating and that college students tend to have more supportive views towards acceptance of dating and parenthood with those outside of their racial classification.

Historically, controversies surrounding TRA centered on African American children being adopted by White families; much of the TRA research focuses on this specific type of transracial adoption. This topic received much more attention by researchers during the political time of the 1990's when the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) firmly expressed their position on the effects of the MEPA and IEP (Fenster, 2002). Their stance was that black

children were more likely to acquire the necessary skills to survive in a racist society in a black family than in a white family, thus, should only be placed with a white family as a last resort. Fenster (2002) asserted that prior to the MEPA, the NABSW had heavy influence in the adoptive care system. The stance that only black families were able to provide black children the values to develop a healthy racial identity, that would help them survive in a racist US society, had so much influence that TRA was uncommon. The political discourse around TRA during this era prompted many research studies to measure the attitudes of various groups towards TRA.

One study of 363 NASW members found that white social workers were more in favor of TRA than black social workers (Fenster, 2002). It also found that members of the NABSW (as a group) had less favorable attitudes than black social workers who were not members (Fenster, 2002). These findings were consistent with attitudes in the general population: black individuals who more strongly identified with their own ethnic group were less supportive of TRA than were white individuals. Similarly, Kirton (1999) found that Black social work students more strongly supported same race adoption than did their white peers.

In summary, TRA is a topic that is limited in research. The few studies that do exist have measured the attitudes of the general population, professional social workers, NASW members, NABSW members, and so forth yet not many studies that have measured the attitudes of MSW students. The limited amount of research that does exist has focused on determining social work students'



stances on TRA and how students' own race and personal experiences are related to those attitudes. Although Lee, Crolley-Simic, & Vonk (2013) were the first empirical study to explore American MSW student's attitudes towards TRA, there was a previous study by Kirton (1999) that studied British MSW student's attitudes. In Lee and colleagues (2013) study, they found a majority of social work students supported TRA while comparably a significant number of students lacked knowledge of the effects of TRA. They also found personal experiences such as supporting transracial dating and knowing a TRA adoptee had more positive attitudes towards TRA. It is also important to note this study found white students were more supportive of TRA than students of color. Similarly, Kirton's study (1999), found stronger support for same race adoptions among minority ethnic students than their white counterparts.

Additionally, Kirton (1999) found that student experiences in multicultural environments and education towards TRA were positively correlated to supporting same race adoptions amongst all students. While both these studies indicated MSW students generally demonstrated a more positive attitude towards TRA, they also emphasized white students were more supportive of TRA than students of color due to a stronger racial and cultural identity amongst students of color.

## Transracial Adoptions: Child and Family Needs for Support Services

Vidal de Haymes & Simon (2003) addressed the needs of families who make the choice to adopt transracially. They note that the Multiethnic Placement Act and the Interethnic Adoption Provisions removed barriers in placements and adoptions of multi-ethnic children, but providing supportive services related to TRA has not yet become a priority. The researchers conducted interviews with 20 participants who had been transracially adopted to uncover whether or not they felt they were receiving information on their specific culture and their experiences. The study addressed the following questions: What are the primary concerns and issues identified by transracial adoptive families? What supports do adoptive parents indicate are helpful to families that adopt transracially? The findings were that the children were overall happy with their adoptive parents but that adoptive parents stated that they wished they received more information on how to implement cultural interventions to teach their children their cultural and racial history.

Curtis and Alexander (1996) described some of the implications the Multiethnic Placement Act had in the practice of transracial adoptions soon after it was enacted. The MEPA was enacted in 1994 declaring agencies receiving federal funds could not solely consider race, culture, and ethnicity in making foster care and adoption placements. The law included the basic premise that children should be placed with a fitting family as soon as possible, rather than waiting to match a child with a family of the same race because doing so harms

the child. The article placed great responsibility on social workers, as they are the leading professionals involved in the adoption process. Although the authors place this responsibility on social workers, they deemphasized a social worker's position to make the best decision based upon their own assessment of the case. The authors instead stated social workers must legally follow the guidelines of the MEPA with not much room to utilize their professional judgment. The authors also stated there is no evidence to “assert that all African American children are psychologically harmed by their fostering and adoption by White parents or that an African American family is the best family for an African American child” (Curtis & Alexander, 1996, p.406).

In 1996, though, there existed numerous studies demonstrating the implications and sometimes consequences children experienced when being placed with a family of a different race. The authors did not account for the historical context of institutional provisions that perpetuated the disproportionality of children of color in child welfare. The article concluded by stating “social workers need to be sure that their professional assessments and decisions are within the law and legally justifiable because of potential legal liability for social workers found to have discriminated against a prospective family” (Curtis & Alexander, 1996, p. 408). Social workers are indeed liable for their assessments but also have the responsibility to integrity and importance of human relationships to decide the best interest of the child. Informed practice,

comprehensive assessments, in addition to adherence to MEPA should be the foundation of determining a child's placement.

Jennings (2006) utilized an empirical lens to examine the complex issues of privilege and adoptions. The author interviewed infertile white women to explore how social privilege shaped their responses to transracial adoption as a path to parenting. The study analyzed the colorblind approach to race relations and found that the system inadvertently centers White, middle-class values as normative and thus works to deny the salience of racial differences (Jennings, 2006). This study accounted for the assumption that white adoptive parents prioritize children of color or that it is not a complex issue for all parties involved (child, parent(s), and social workers). This study provided an empirical look at race relations, racial privilege, and oppression that exists in our culture. In analyzing the MEPA and IEP, Jennings found that:

by situating the MEPA-IEP in a simplistic discourse, the legal community missed an opportunity to better serve the interest of children by forging racially progressive adoption policies. Also, children of color may have been better served if the MEPA-IEP mandated funding for the recruitment of families of color. (Jennings, 2006, p. 577).

The findings of this research describe a complex picture of race and adoption as related to the MEPA and IEP.

A major component of TRA is the development of racial and cultural identity among children raised in a family of a different race/ethnicity. Qian (2004)

surveyed the identity of biracial children who were mixed African American and white, Asian American and white, Latino and white, and Native American and white children. The results were children of African American and white couples are least likely to identify, as white, while children of Asian American and white couples are most likely to identify as white. Intermarried couples in which the minority spouse is male, Native American born, or has no white ancestry are more likely to identify their children as minorities than are those in which the minority spouse is female, foreign born, or has white ancestry. In addition, neighborhood minority concentration increases the likelihood that biracial children identify as minorities. This study tells us parents have a heavy influence in the racial identity of a child and that children can have a wide range of racial identities. This study demonstrates the variance of racial identities in children and how it can be a personal choice as much as it is a biological choice.

Langrehr (2014) examined the moderating role of transracially adoptive parents' cross-racial friendships in the relationship between their color-blind attitudes and views toward cultural and racial socialization. They found that cultural and racial socialization is a fundamental part of preparing children to function in society with children of diverse backgrounds. For transracially adoptive families this task is often difficult because many families are unaware how to prepare minority children for racial discrimination they may face. Langrehr (2014) asserts that children living with parents who are ethnically the same, are taught to value their heritage and be prideful but some researchers saw this as

an installation of bias. They claim that parents should teach their children to treat everyone respectfully and fairly. The issue with that is society is not fair. Ethnic families teach their children to have pride in the culture as a way of protection and survival. Learning history does not mean installing superiority rather pride and empowerment.

Additionally, Langrehr addressed the issue of colorblindness. Langrehr (2014) suggests that parents with color-blind ideologies have feelings of ambivalence toward cultural socialization practices and were less likely to make an effort to talk to their children about their race. The study was conducted to see if TRA parents' cross-racial friendships contributed to color-blind attitudes. Findings suggested that having at least two cross-racial friendships lowered the color-blind ideologies meaning TRA parents were more likely to be sympathetic to the racial and cultural needs of their minority child.

### Theories Guiding Conceptualization

Conflict theory is a way of studying society that focuses on the inequalities of different groups within it (Crossman, 2014). It is based on the ideas of Karl Marx, who believed a society evolves through a series of stages and is divided into groups. The basic argument made by conflict theorists is that class-based conflict is an inherent and fundamental part of society. These theorists argue that racial and ethnic conflict are tied to class conflict and that in order to reduce racial and ethnic conflict, class conflict must first be reduced (Crossman, 2014). In the United States, the past struggles between the poor, ethnic minorities and

the wealthy white ruling class have resulted in protest, civil rights policies, and integration, among other outcomes. This theory applies to TRA because those same historical racial struggles play a vital role in the lives of ethnic minorities today. The history of people of color in America, including the pains and hardships, left a legacy to value and celebrate the history and traditions; that conflict is part of racial identity. Children who are transracially adopted deserve to be raised with authentic knowledge of historical racial conflicts in this country.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged in the 1970s and is a theoretical model stating that racism is ingrained into American society and legal practices. CRT addresses the role of race and racism in institutions as well as exposing facets of racism in everyday life. CRT asserts that white privilege often clouds an individual's judgment, making it difficult for them to see aspects of inequalities (Brainard, 2009). This theory is beneficial to the current study by creating dialogue parents who may adopt transracially can have about racial and ethnic differences. White privilege and the idea of colorblindness shields white individuals from the blatant inequalities people of color face. CRT encourages the development of policies and solutions that will be able to facilitate change, equity and open the door to constructive discussions about racial inequality in the social welfare system. CRT is a way of understanding an individual's racial identity and shedding light on the everyday social practices that take place in America.

Social identity theory was created by Henri Tajfel in 1979 as a way to analyze individual perspectives, intergroup relations, and group structure process

(Phenice & Griffore, 2000). Social identity theory involves stereotyping and categorization, which cause individuals to be grouped together by similarities and develop a positive sense of self based on intergroup comparisons. This assumes that members have a positive view of their group as a whole, and develop a strong sense of ethnic identity by associating with similar members. A strong sense of ethnic identity begins to develop at a young age and becomes a part of the individual around adolescence. The child learns value in their group's cultural and ethnic practices from older group members which contribute to the child forming a positive ethnic identity and sound sense of racial dignity and pride in themselves.

### Summary

This literature review explored societal views on transracial adoption and the racial/ethnic development of individuals who have been adopted transracially. The literature includes evidence that supports transracial adoptions on the basis that cultural identity can be taught to a child. Conversely, the literature also suggests that children develop racial dignity when raised with parents with the same ethnic and racial background. In conclusion, by asking master's level social work students how they feel about this issue; the researchers hope to uncover students' general understanding, as well as any personal biases they may hold regarding transracial adoptions.



## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### Introduction

This chapter covered the description of the methods to be used in the study, the research design, and the sampling procedures. The researchers explained their research instrument and discussed its strengths as well as its limitations. An overview of the procedures, protection of human subjects, and discussion of the data analysis is provided.

#### Study Design

The purpose of this study was to examine masters level social work students' attitudes toward transracial adoptions using a quantitative web-based survey design. This sample population focused on master's level social work students who were currently enrolled in the School of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). Students from multiple cohorts including both full time and part time, as well as Title IV-E recipients and non-recipient students were given the opportunity to participate in this study in an effort to increase the sample size. The current research question remains: What are MSW students' attitudes towards transracial adoptions? The primary strength of this study was that by researching social work students' attitudes surrounding race and ethnicity, the potential reader would be able to determine trends the profession will take in the future. The attitudes of students were important to

explore because social work students are the next generation of professional workers who will be making important decisions in the adoption process. Their attitudes as students, whether positive or negative, can translate into professional power that can decide the lives of many children. A limitation of using this study design would be social desirability when completing the survey. Participants may want to appear different than they actually feel. Another weakness is that since the survey was emailed out, individuals had the option of ignoring the notification and not participating in the survey.

### Sampling

Currently, there are around two hundred graduate students currently enrolled in graduate MSW courses at CSUSB. The researchers gained approval from the Director of School of Social Work, Dr. Laurie Smith, to gain access to the email addresses of all current MSW students. Although there were about two hundred potential subjects to be surveyed, the goal of the researchers was to receive 80 completed surveys. The survey consisted of thirty-one questions, most of which used Likert-type scale responses. The survey also included demographic questions. The only criterion to participate in the study was that the participant be a current MSW student enrolled at CSUSB. Those students are future social work professionals and researching their attitudes about this will explore any level of bias, level of knowledge, cultural acceptance, and how important racial identity is to them. This study utilized convenience sampling, a non-probability method for participant selection.

## Data Collection and Instruments

Data were collected through the use of an online self-administered questionnaire that was also available as a hard copy. Researchers asked ten demographic questions to begin the survey in order to gain basic information about our participants. This nominal demographic data included: ethnicity, race, gender, and marital status, having children, Title IV-E recipients and household income. The interval demographic questions included year of education and age. Researchers used the Attitude Toward Transracial Adoption Scale, which had previously been constructed and validated, to study the same population. By replicating the study will the research that they will find similar positive attitudes in this state. In that study, the researchers divided the survey up into three categories: transracial adoption practice, transracially adoptive parenting, and transracially adopted children's racial identity (Lee, Crolley-Simic, & Vonk 2013). These researchers constructed their instrument measured on a five-point Likert type scales ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. A high score (5) indicated a more positive attitude towards TRA.

Lee, Crolley-Simic, & Vonk (2013) created the Attitude Toward Transracial Adoption Scale to address three categories: transracially adoptive parenting, transracially adopted children's ethnic identity, and transracial adoption practice. Negatively phrased questions were reverse scored; a sample question being "It is not possible for a transracially adoptive parent to be capable of providing racial socialization in their child's birth culture". The questionnaire was created to

broaden the information received from their participants. Each question is designed to elicit a thoughtful response but also allow the participant to be free of anxiety, worry, and the desire to want to please the researchers with a socially correct response.

### Procedures

The researchers of this study first sought approval from the Director of School of Social Work, Dr. Laurie Smith, to survey current social work students and then sought approval from the CSUSB Institutional Review Board to conduct the study. Once approval was granted, the survey questionnaire was distributed via email to all master's level students in the program. Hard copies were available, but none were requested for the study. Participants were informed the survey was available both online and hardcopy, stating participation in only one method was required and advising against duplicate participation. The questionnaire was available from January 1st 2017 to March 1, 2017. The participants were provided a consent form and confidentiality notice prior to taking the survey through a department wide mass email; they were then asked to check a box confirming they understood and consented to participate. The survey required approximately five to ten minutes to complete. There was no compensation for participation in the survey.

## Protection of Human Subjects

The researchers of this study took the following precautions in order to protect the confidentiality of all participants. First, both the online and hard-copy surveys were designed to be completely anonymous and did not track names, contact information, IP addresses, or any other personally identifying information. The participants were notified participation was completely voluntary and that they could withdraw participation at any point for any reason. Participants were also notified they could refuse to answer any question without penalty. Participants were required to check a box confirming they consented to participate. The data collected was stored in a password protected USB flash drive that only the researchers had access to. Once all data was collected and processed, all data and records were destroyed and deleted from the USB flash drive to ensure confidentiality was not compromised.

The Informed Consent form that was presented to all participants declared the study was designed to examine the attitudes of master's level social work students regarding transracial adoptions. It identified the researchers as well as the faculty member supervising the study. It provided sub headings describing the purpose, description, participation, confidentiality, duration, risks, benefits, results, contact information, and stated the study had been approved by the Institutional Review Board Social Work Sub-committee, California State University, San Bernardino. Lastly, the form provided a Confirmation Statement

to certify participants had read and understood the information provided, and, thus, consented to participate in the study.

### Data Analysis

This study utilized quantitative data analysis techniques to analyze student attitudes towards TRA. Various inferential statistical tests, such as t-tests and one-way ANOVA tests, were used to analyze the data collected. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the demographic characteristics of the participants. Additionally, t-tests were conducted to determine if there were significant differences among the different racial/ethnic groups, age groups, gender groups, participants who stated they had dated a person of a different race or ethnicity or not, participants who had a sibling of a different race or ethnicity or not, and students with children. Additional statistical tests, such as Pearson correlation coefficient, were used to analyze the relationships among the attitudes and level of knowledge of transracial adoption practice, transracially adoptive parenting, and transracially adoptive children's racial identity.

### Summary

This study explored the attitudes and knowledge of CSUSB MSW students towards transracial adoptions. This chapter provided an overview of the methodology used in conducting this research study. Study design, data collection, procedures, confidentiality, and statistical analysis were presented and discussed. This study explored the attitudes of MSW students with the goal of

adding to research base of TRA and its implications on children and the social work field.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

This chapter provides the results from the study. First, we provide demographic information about the study's participants. Second, we present participants' responses to the survey. Additionally, we present inferential statistics from the t-tests and the one-way ANOVA tests we used to analyze differences in responses based on participant demographics and experiences. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the findings. All analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS 23 Statistical Software.

#### Presentation of Findings

##### Demographics

Data used for this study was drawn from 88 survey responses, all of which were utilized for analysis. Of the 88 responses, 59 respondents (67%) were ages 18 to 30, 24 respondents (27.3%) were ages 31 to 45, and 5 respondents (5.6%) were above the age of 46.

The study included 78 respondents (88.6%) who identified as female, 10 respondents (11.4%) who identified as male, and 0 respondents (0%) who identified as transgender female, transgender male, or gender variant/nonconforming.



The study included 38 respondents (43.2%) who identified as Latino(a)/Hispanic, 29 respondents (33%) who identified as White, 11 respondents (12.5%) who identified as Black/African-American, 5 respondents (5.7%) who identified as Asian/Pacific Islander, 3 respondents (3.4%) who identified as Indigenous/Native, 0 respondents (0%) who identified as Arab/Middle Eastern, and 2 respondents (2.3%) whose ethnicity/race was not listed.

The study included 41 participants (46.6%) who responded they have never married, 28 participants (31.8%) who responded they are married, 12 participants (13.6%) who responded they are living with another, 5 participants (5.7%) who responded they are divorced, 1 participant (1.1%) who responded they were separated, 1 participant (1.1%) who preferred not to answer, and 0 participants (0%) who were widowed.

The study included 42 participants (47.7%) who responded they have birth children only, 28 participants (31.8%) who responded they have birth and adopted children, 11 participants (12.5%) who responded they have no children or do not plan to have children, 4 participants (4.5%) who responded they have only adopted children, 2 participants (2.3%) who preferred not to answer, 1 participant (1.1%) who had child(ren) in guardianship, and 0 participants (0%) who had foster children.

The study included 34 respondents (38.6%) who are CalSWEC Title IV-E recipients, 53 participants (60.2%) who are not CalSWEC Title IV-E recipients,

and 1 participant (1.1%) who did not answer the question. The study included 15 participants (17%) who responded their household income is under \$10,000, 25 participants (28.4%) who responded their household income is between \$10,000 and \$29,999, 16 participants (18.2%) who responded their household income is between \$30,000 and \$49,999, 11 participants (12.5%) who responded their household income is between \$50,000 and \$69,999, 7 participants (8%) who responded their household income is between \$70,000 and \$89,999, 6 participants (6.8%) who responded their household income is between \$90,000 and \$99,999, 7 participants (8%) who responded their household income is over \$100,000, and 1 participant (1.1%) who did not answer the question.

The study included 35 respondents (39.8%) who intend to work in the child welfare system, 31 participants (35.2%) who do not intend to work in the child welfare system, and 22 participants (25%) whose response was maybe to intentions of working in the child welfare system.

The study included 44 respondents (50%) who have siblings or family members of a different race or ethnicity, and 44 respondents (50%) who do not have siblings or family member of a different race or ethnicity. Further, our participants included 72 respondents (81.8%) who have dated someone of a different race or ethnicity, 15 participants (17%) who have not dated someone of a different race or ethnicity, and 1 participant (1.1%) who did not answer the question.

Our survey instrument measured attitudes towards TRA using Likert-scale responses. We coded these responses from 1 to 5 with 1 indicating negative responses and 5 indicating positive responses. Overall, the participants had slightly positive attitudes towards transracial adoptions as evidenced by an overall mean of  $m = 4.09$  (see Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Attitudes Toward Transracial Adoption

Overall TRA Attitudes				
		N	Mean	s
All - ( $\alpha = .91$ )	Participants	85	4.09	0.54
	Excluded	3		
Gender	Female	75	4.15	0.42
	Male	10	3.70	1.03
Dated someone of a different race	Yes	70	4.10	0.57
	No	15	4.07	0.40
Sibling of a different race	Yes	43	4.09	0.62
	No	42	4.09	0.44
Race/Ethnicity	Asian	5	3.69	1.02
	Black	11	4.09	0.67
	Latina	37	4.22	0.33
	Native	3	2.90	0.85
	White	27	4.12	0.38
	Not Listed	2	4.09	0.80
Age Groups	18 - 30	57	4.04	0.55
	31 - 45	23	4.23	0.49
	46 and older	5	4.10	0.65
Children	Yes, birth children	42	4.10	0.55
	Yes, adopted children	4	4.65	0.42
	Yes, birth & adopted children	27	3.98	0.55
	No	11	4.14	0.43
	Prefer not to answer	1	4.00	

*Note: Descriptives for Overall TRA Attitudes per groups showing samples, mean, and standard deviation*

### Differences in Overall Transracial Adoptions Attitudes

We analyzed the study data to determine whether participants' responses varied significantly based on demographics and life experiences. We used independent sample t tests and one-way ANOVA tests to analyze participants' responses based on gender, race, age, and life experiences such as dating someone of a different race/ethnicity, having a sibling of a different race/ethnicity, or having children. Independent sample t tests were used to analyze responses based on participants' gender, whether they had dated someone of a different race/ethnicity, and whether they had a sibling of a different race/ethnicity. We used one-way ANOVA tests to analyze participants' responses based on their race/ethnicity, age, and whether or not participants had or planned to have children.

Independent sample t test showed that on average, female respondents had higher overall attitudes towards transracial adoptions,  $m=4.14$ , when compared to male respondents,  $m=3.70$ . This difference was statistically significant,  $t(83)= 2.52$ ,  $p= .014$ .

Independent sample t test showed on average, respondents who stated they had dated a person of a different race or ethnicity had higher overall attitudes towards transracial adoptions,  $m=4.09$ , when compared to respondents who had not dated a person of a different race or ethnicity,  $m= 4.07$ . This difference was not statistically significant,  $t(83)= .217$ ,  $p= .828$ .

Independent sample t test showed participants who had a sibling of a different race or ethnicity,  $m = 4.097$ , had the same levels of overall attitudes towards transracial adoptions than participants who did not have siblings of a different race or ethnicity,  $m = 4.097$ . This difference was not statistically significant  $t(83) = 0.00$ ,  $p = 1.0$ .

A one-way ANOVA test was conducted. There were significant differences between participants of different race/ethnicity on overall attitudes towards transracial adoptions  $F(5,79) = 4.826$ ,  $p = .001$ . Post hoc analyses revealed that overall attitudes towards transracial adoptions were significantly higher,  $p = .005$ , for Black participants,  $m = 4.09$ , than Native American participants,  $m = 2.90$ . Analyses also revealed that overall attitudes towards transracial adoptions were significantly higher,  $p < .001$ , for Latina(o)/Hispanic participants,  $m = 4.23$ , than Native American participants,  $m = 2.90$ . Analyses also revealed that overall attitudes towards transracial adoptions were significantly higher,  $p = .001$ , for white participants,  $m = 4.13$ , than Native American participants,  $m = 2.90$ . These results should be interpreted with caution as our sample included only 3 Native American participants. No other significant differences were found based on participants' racial/ethnic groups.

A one-way ANOVA test was conducted. There was no significant difference between age groups on overall attitudes towards transracial adoptions  $F(2,82) = 1.005$ ,  $p = .371$ . Since there was no significant difference between age groups, no post hoc tests were conducted.

A one-way ANOVA test was conducted. There was no significant difference between respondents who had or plan on having children on overall attitudes towards transracial adoptions  $F(4,80)= 1.418, p= .236$ . Since there was no significant difference between respondents in this group, no post hoc tests were conducted.

The Attitude Towards Transracial Adoption Scale had a very high reliability, Cronbach's  $\alpha= .912$ .

### Summary

This chapter presented the data collected from the Attitude Toward Transracial Adoption Scale as well as the results of selected t-tests and one-way ANOVA tests. Overall, MSW student's responses demonstrated slightly more positive attitudes towards TRA. Female respondents revealed significantly higher attitudes towards TRA than male respondents. Black, Latina(o), and White students revealed significantly higher attitudes towards TRA than Native/Indigenous students. There were no significant results in attitudes towards TRA from age groups, participants who stated they had dated a person of a different race or ethnicity, participants who had a sibling of a different race or ethnicity, and students with children.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings presented in chapter four, and the study's limitations, and recommendations for social work curriculum and future research.

#### Discussion

The study intended to explore the attitudes of MSW students at California State University San Bernardino towards transracial adoptions. The pool of participants varied in age, ethnicity, gender, and experiences related to race/ethnicity. The majority of participants were between 18-30, were female and classified themselves as Latina(o).

In general, the student's overall attitudes were slightly positive towards transracial adoptions. The results of the study indicated participants had neutral responses in the questions that measured transracially adopted children's ethnic identity  $m = 3.51$ . The results also indicated more positive attitudes in the questions that measured attitudes of transracially adoptive parenting  $m = 3.91$  and transracial adoption practice  $m = 4.40$ . After conducting both t-tests and one-way ANOVA tests on the response data, it was determined that there were few significant differences in responses. Even though the responses were generally similar, female respondents did have a more positive view of the transracial



adoptions process. It is also important to note that the researchers noticed that only 11 individuals selected African American as an ethnicity, the majority of that population disagreed with the idea of the idea of people adopting children of a different race or ethnicity.

Upon analyzing the data, it revealed MSW students at CSUSB have an overall positive attitude towards TRA, as evidenced by a mean score of 4.09 on the Overall Attitudes scale. This score is consistent with Lee and colleagues' (2013) whose study indicated a mean score of 3.90. When analyzing the differences in attitudes amongst racial groups, the researchers found that Black, Latina(o), and White students revealed significantly more positive attitude towards TRA than Native/Indigenous students. It is important to note that there were very few Native students and that could have affected the results of the study. The data also indicated that participants who identified as African American tended to have slightly less positive feelings about transracial adoptions, but this difference was not statistically significant. Additionally, there was no significant differences between respondents who indicated they have a sibling of a different ethnicity, in fact, their responses were nearly identical. The study found no additional significant differences between a student's ethnicity and their attitude toward transracial adoption. Lee, Crolley-Simic, & Vonk (2013) found that students who have dated interracially or have friends of different ethnicities reported positive attitudes towards transracial adoptions. The researchers asked the same questions, and discovered a small positive

correlation between students' responses and the transracial adoptions however it was not statistically significant.

It was interesting that there were significant differences in attitudes between gender groups. Female respondents had significantly more positive attitudes toward TRA than the male participants. This could suggest that the males in the study were more conservative or that the females feel a child's ethnicity is secondary to a permanent home. It is however, more likely due to the considerably higher number of female students in the MSW program compared to males.

Overall, the results indicated that the MSW students at California State University San Bernardino had positive attitudes about transracial adoption. Many participants indicated "middle of the road" responses such as "agree" or "disagree" indicating that they did not feel strongly either way. We believe our study builds on the existing literature by studying social work students' attitudes as they represent future social workers. In terms of understanding transracial adoptions, almost none of the participants selected the "neither agree nor disagree" option which would have indicated a lack of knowledge on the subject matter or a lack of willingness to answer the question. In any case, a student could have simply decided to end their participation in the study or skipped the questions. The current study suggests that MSW students at this specific institution believe that while racial identity is important to the development of a

child, having a permanent home and getting the child out of the foster care system is a positive thing.

### Limitations

The study has several limitations. First, the researchers inadvertently failed to include one of the questions from the original survey instrument in the Qualtrics survey. Second, the results may be skewed by social desirability. It is possible that the respondents may have selected answers they thought would be pleasing to the researchers. Third, the relatively small size of the sample likely limited our ability to explore subtle differences in attitudes, as participant responses did not vary greatly. Similarly, this small sample size included an over-representation of female participants and of students who had dated. Fourth, the study's convenience sample of MSW students at may not generalize to other MSW students or to social workers in general. Lastly, the researchers utilized a research instrument created by researchers in another state. The original creators of the instrument pulled items from other surveys to formulate the survey instrument. The reliability of the instrument proved to be sufficient but the validity had not been determined.

### Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy, and Research

This study's findings have implications for CSUSB's social work courses and for social work research in general. As mentioned in the first chapter, expanded macro social work courses could examine the MEPA legislation and

explore its current implications on domestic adoptions. Expanding the Macro practice courses to include sections on cultural diversity, white privilege, racial microaggressions, systemic racism and child identity development within adoptive families could foster students to take interest in policy development, and lobbying for legislation related to race and ethnicity. Micro education courses could be expanded to include curriculum on working directly with families who have adopted children of different ethnicities and cultures, and educate them on the importance of holistic racial socialization and racial dignity that is best fostered through cultural humility when raising their child. It may even be possible for human development courses to include the development of children who have been adopted transracially and the importance to develop healthy racial and cultural identities.

With the exception of a couple studies in the country, this topic is not often researched and information on children who have been transracially adopted is scarce. MSW students specifically should be encouraged to explore areas of race, ethnicity and the development of children in order to be fully aware of issues potential clients may face. The results for this study indicate that the students feel transracial adoptions are a positive social work practice therefore providing students with more information regarding ethnic identity development could be beneficial. After providing students with the new information, research studies should be conducted to ensure the information is not only beneficial to their education but also covered by instructors in a respectful manner. Finally,

the results of the study support research findings that social work education, social work professionals, and families could highly benefit from support services designed to enhance racial socialization and racial dignity of transracially adopted children.

Lastly, the research we conducted provided us with opportunities to explore an area of social work that is often overlooked. It is no secret that foster and adoptive social workers are busy and overworked. Adoptions workers specifically are taught to assess potential adoptive homes for safety, and whether or not the parents are a good match for a child. Also, social workers and agencies utilize the concept of best interest that prioritizes permanency over cultural importance. Workers want to place quickly and move on forgetting to speak with prospective parents about the child's ethnic and cultural practices. We were encouraged to find that the MSW student who participated in our study seemed to feel that a child's ethnic and racial identity was important and that TRA parents have the potential to address their children's needs in terms of identity development. As past, current, or future social workers, we ask that you take the time to speak with prospective adoptive parents about how to address their child's culture and ethnicity in a way that is educational, beneficial and respectful.

APPENDIX A  
QUESTIONNAIRE

## Demographics

1. What is your age?
  - 18 to 30
  - 31 to 45
  - 46 to 55
  - 56 or older
  
2. Please specify your ethnicity/race (Select all that apply)
  - Asian/ Pacific Islander
  - Arab/Middle Eastern
  - Black/ African-American
  - Indigenous/Native
  - Latino(a)/Hispanic White
  - Ethnicity/Race not listed
  
3. Please specify your gender identity
  - Female
  - Gender variant/ Nonconforming
  - Male
  - Transgender Female
  - Transgender Male
  - Not Listed
  - Prefer not to specify
  
4. What is your current marital status?
  - Divorced
  - Living with another
  - Married
  - Never Married
  - Separated
  - Widowed
  - Prefer not to answer
  
5. Do you have or plan to have children?
  - Yes, birth children
  - Yes, adopted children
  - Yes, birth and adopted children
  - Foster children
  - Children in Guardianship
  - No
  - Prefer not to answer

6. Are you a CalSWEC Title IV-E recipient?
  - Yes
  - No
  
8. What is your current household income in U.S. dollars?
  - Under \$10,000
  - \$10,000-\$29,999
  - \$30,000-\$49,999
  - \$50,000-\$69,999
  - \$70,000-\$89,999
  - \$90,000-\$99,999
  - Over \$100,000
  
9. Do you intend to work in the child welfare system?
  - Yes
  - Maybe
  - No
  
10. Do you have siblings or family members of a different race or ethnicity?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Prefer not to answer
  
11. Have you ever dated someone of a different race or ethnicity?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Prefer not to answer

#### MSW Students' Attitudes Toward Transracial Adoption Scale

Lee, J., Crolley-Simic, J., & Vonk, M. E. (2013). MSW students' attitudes toward transracial adoption. *Journal Of Social Work Education, 49*(1), 122-135.

1. Children adopted by families from other countries will suffer from loss of their birth culture.
2. Children adopted by parents of a different race have more difficulty developing socially than children adopted by parents of the same race.
3. It is very important for a transracially adopted child to develop pride in her/his own heritage.



4. Transracial adoption will lead to racial identity, psychological, and/or psychosocial problems in the adopted child later on in life.
5. Transracially adopted children lose their sense of identity when they are raised in adopted homes by parents of a different race.
6. It is not possible for an adoptive parent to be capable of providing cultural socialization in the child's birth culture
7. It is not possible for transracially adoptive parents to be capable of providing racial socialization in their child's birth race.
8. The parents of transracially adopted children should be prepared to teach their children to cope with racism.
9. Adoptive families cannot understand the problems transracially adopted children face in society.
10. Transracial adoption should be discouraged.
11. Transracial adoption can interfere with a child's well-being.
12. Multiracial families do not get along well.
13. Transracially adopted children need to choose one culture over another.
14. A person has to be desperate to adopt a child of another race.
15. Transracial adoption results in "cultural genocide."
16. I dislike the idea of a child being adopted by a different-race parent.
17. I am against transracial adoption.
18. I would never adopt a child of another race.
19. I think that transracial adoption is unfair to the child.
20. I believe that adopting parents should adopt a child within their own race.
21. I feel positively about parents adopting a different race child.

APPENDIX B  
INFORMED CONSENT



California State University, San Bernardino  
 Social Work Institutional Review Board Sub-Committee  
 APPROVED 12/19/17  
 CHAIR [Signature]

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences  
 School of Social Work

**INFORMED CONSENT**

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to examine the attitudes of master level social work students regarding transracial adoptions. The study is being conducted by Matthew Ford and Luis Flores, MSW students under the supervision of Dr. Deirdre Lanesskog, Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work, California State University, San Bernardino. The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board Social Work Sub-committee, California State University, San Bernardino.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of the study is to examine the attitudes of masters level social work students regarding transracial adoptions.

**DESCRIPTION:** Participants will be asked questions about their understanding of transracial adoptions, importance of racial/ethnic identity, personal level of comfort regarding transracial adoptions and some demographics.

**PARTICIPATION:** Your participation in the study is completely voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the study or discontinue your participation at any time without any consequences. This survey is available both online and hard copy, please complete only one method.

**CONFIDENTIALITY OR ANONYMITY:** Your responses will remain anonymous and data will be reported in group form only.

**DURATION:** It will take approximately 5 to 10 minutes to complete the survey.

**RISKS:** There are no foreseeable risks to the participants.

**BENEFITS:** There will not be any direct benefits or compensation to the participants.

**CONTACT:** If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Deirdre Lanesskog at 909-537-7222

**RESULTS:** Results of the study can be obtained from the Pfau Library Scholar Works (<http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/>) at California State University, San Bernardino after December 2017.

**CONFIRMATION STATEMENT:** This is to certify that I read and understand the information above, and decide to participate in the study.

This is to certify that I am 18 years or older and consent to participate in the study.

Place an X mark here \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

909.537.5501 • fax: 909.537.7079 • <http://socialwork.csusb.edu/>  
 5500 UNIVERSITY PARKWAY, SAN BERNARDINO, CA 92407-2393

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## ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE

This was a two-person project where authors collaborated throughout. However, for each phase of the project, certain authors took primary responsibility. These responsibilities were assigned in the manner listed below.

1. Data Collection: Matthew Ford
2. Data Entry and Analysis: Luis Flores and Matthew Ford
3. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings
  - a. Introduction and Literature: Luis Flores and Matthew Ford
  - b. Methods: Luis Flores and Matthew Ford
  - c. Results: Luis Flores
  - d. Discussion: Luis Flores and Matthew Ford
4. Supplemental Materials: Matthew Ford
5. Formatting: Luis Flores