The significant number of transracial adoptions into the US has sparked questions about the adoptees’ identity development—specifically their racial and ethnic identity development. Researchers have explored the racial preferences and identities of Asian adult transracial adoptees (Mohanty, Keokse & Sales, 2007; Tuan & Shiao, 2011) yet few have explored the preferences of very young transracial adoptees from Asia. Simon (1974) included young Asian transracial adoptees in her sample, yet her work did not focus specifically on this group. Simon found that the Asian adoptees had a preference for their own race, and generally identified with Asian-looking dolls. Spencer (2008) notes that many tests of racial preferences of demographic groups assume all members of a given group have similar preferences for the same reasons. Spencer suggests that researchers should go beyond these assumptions and explore the “how” and the “why” of racial preferences of children. She posits that this requires considering all of the ecological systems working in the child’s life to help understand both the child’s preferences as well as some predictions about how those preferences were formed.

The present research aims to address the racial preferences of a demographic not well explored—young transracial adoptees of Chinese descent—while also delving past the surface of the presented preferences to find possible predictive elements. The present study examined the racial preferences of 39 transracial adoptees from China, aged 6-10 years old. The study used a modified version of the Clark Doll Test (Clark & Clark, 1947) to test for racial preference. The children were presented with Asian-looking, Black and White dolls and asked a series of questions about their opinions of, and preferences for, the dolls. Data were collected about each family’s community diversity from the 2000 US census. Child and parent interviews were conducted and transcribed. The child interview was coded for the child’s ethnic self-label (ESL) and parent interviews were coded for parental acknowledgement of ethnic and racial difference (ackERD). These variables—ESL, ackERD, and community diversity—were used to identify group differences of the children in the sample based on their doll preferences.

Preliminary analyses found that the majority of the children in the sample showed a preference for the Asian-looking dolls (64.1%) or had no preference (23.1%). Additional analyses suggested that children of parents with low ackERD (i.e. “colorblind” parents) showed a stronger preference for Asian-looking dolls, whereas children of parents with high ackERD were less clear in their preferences. Trends in the data suggested that children who preferred the Asian doll were from slightly more diverse communities than were the children who did not show a preference for any particular doll. ESL did not appear to relate to racial preferences.

Findings have not been statistically significant—likely due to the small sample size—but trends will be reported. The findings from this study appear to support Spencer’s (2008) proposition that children’s racial preferences may be influenced by familial and community differences. This study may contribute to the understanding of young transracial adoptees’ racial preferences.