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Degener, Clementine J.; van Bergen, Diana D.; Grietens, Hans W. E.

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The ethnic identity of transracially placed foster children with an ethnic minority background: A systematic literature review

Clementine J. Degener[1] [ID] | Diana D. van Bergen[2] |
Hans W. E. Grietens[3,4]

[1]Department of Social Work, Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences, Rotterdam, The Netherlands

[2]Department of Pedagogics, University of Groningen, Groningen, The Netherlands

[3]Special Education Research Unit, KU Leuven, Leuven, Belgium

[4]Department of Special Needs Education and Youth Care, University of Groningen, Groningen, The Netherlands

Correspondence
Clementine Degener, Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences, Rotterdam, The Netherlands.
Email: c.j.degener@hr.nl

Abstract

Background: Ethnic minority foster children are frequently placed in families with ethnic majority backgrounds. In the international literature these placements are most commonly called transracial placements.

Aims: With this study, we aim to obtain an encompassing view of the empirical scientific literature on how transracial placements may affect the ethnic identity of foster children.

Materials and methods: To gain insight into the ethnic identity of transracially placed foster children and the way they are ethnically socialized, we conducted a systematic literature review. We thereby followed the guidelines of the PRISMA statement.

Results: Transracially placed foster children may experience higher fluctuations in their racial/ ethnic identity over time than adolescents with a minority background in the general population. They also seem to be prone to experience disconnection from, or on the contrary, connection with the birth network; and some transracially placed foster children struggle with societal messages they receive about minority ethnicity and race. They may have an increased awareness of their minority ethnic background because of different physical appearances between themselves and the foster family. Foster parents can play a pivotal role in these processes, since culturally competent foster parents may

guide foster children in their ethnic identity development by being open towards children's cultural minority background as well as being self-reflective regarding their own cultural values and beliefs.

Discussion: The ethnic development of transracially placed foster children seems to be influenced by intersecting mechanisms of being in foster care and having a minority ethnicity. Although the selected articles assume that foster parents impact the ethnic identities of their ethnic minority foster children, none of them measured the impact of foster parents' skills and knowledge on foster children's ethnic identity development directly.

Conclusion: Being transracially placed impacts the ethnic identity of foster children. Foster parents need to be cultural competent to encourage their foster children's ethnic identity development.

KEYWORDS

ethnic minority identity, foster carers, foster children, transracial placements

INTRODUCTION

To gain insight into the ethnic identity of transracially placed foster children, we conducted a systematic literature review. Findings show that foster children's awareness of ethnic differences, disconnection from or connection with ethnic minority backgrounds and societal messages on ethnicity, impact their ethnic identity. Foster parents can play a pivotal role in these processes, since culturally competent foster parents can guide foster children in their ethnic identity development. This includes skills to involve birth parents in their foster children's lives, who in their turn may serve as connectors with minority ethnicity.

In many western European and northern American countries and Australia, children with ethnic minority backgrounds are overrepresented in the child welfare and foster care systems (Krakouer et al., 2018; Nuttgens, 2013; Padilla et al., 2010; Schick et al., 2016). Actual legislations are directed towards foster children's retainment of links with their ethnic minority backgrounds (Thoburn, 2010, p. 30). However, ethnic minority foster children are frequently placed in families with ethnic majority backgrounds due to a shortage of foster parents with minority backgrounds (Padilla et al., 2010). In the international literature these placements are most commonly called transracial placements (DeBerry et al., 1996; Thoburn et al., 2000, p. 24). For foster children, being transracially placed may be complex. Internationally, most foster children in general have experienced maltreatment, abuse and/ or neglect by their birth parents (Thoburn, 2010, p. 34), and they may experience feelings of loss, grief and trauma because of having been removed from their birth parental homes (Mitchell, 2017). These experiences can lead to the impairment of their identity development or to identity losses (Kools, 1997; Thomas, 2014). Because a strong identity is positively related to psychological development and well-being, challenges with one's ethnic identity may create affronts to the mental health (Crocetti, 2018).

Positive ethnic in-group attitudes are related to a high self-esteem (Ferrari et al., 2015; Phinney et al., 1997) and to psychological well-being (Yasui et al., 2004).

Ethnic identity

Especially during adolescence, processes of identity development become important. Adolescents try to find out who they are, what they stand for and where and to whom they belong (Meeus et al., 2012; Verschueren et al., 2017). Ethnic identity mainly focuses on the subjective sense of belonging to a group of people with a same-ethnic background (Phinney, 1990), and is based on the conviction that roots, history, culture, norms, language and religion are shared with other members of an ethnic group (Hughes et al., 2008). Phinney et al. (2007) state that ethnic identity develops during a process of maturation, in which people explore their ethnic identity and/or decide where and to whom they belong. In this process, they can be in a state of diffusion (no exploration, no commitment), foreclosure (commitment without exploration), moratorium (exploration without commitment) or ethnic identity achievement (exploration and commitment) (Phinney et al., 2007). The construction of ethnic identity is a lifelong, dynamic and reciprocal process, which develops through interaction with the social and societal context a person is situated in (LaFromboise et al., 1993; Phinney & Ong, 2007). Ethnic identity is therefore a social identity (Verkuyten, 2018, p. 79). Social identity consists of three related components: (a) social classification of people into groups, (b) specific behavioural and normative consequences and expectations bounded to a category and (c) societal or peoples' judgements related to the category someone belongs (Verkuyten, 2018, p. 80). In western European, Australian and North American societies, people with ethnic minority backgrounds may, according to societal and people's judgement, be perceived as inferior (Aarons & Pietsch, 2012, pp. 1–14; Lavalette and Penketh, 2013). These mechanisms also occur in the youth care systems (Hollingsworth, 1997). Historically, this is visible in the adoption and foster care systems of the USA, Canada and Australia, where ethnic minority children like First Nations were adopted or taken into foster care in the 1960s and 1970s in order to provide them a 'western' socialisation (Krakouer et al., 2018; Nuttgens, 2013).

Transracial placements of ethnic minority children and ethnic identity

Little knowledge seems to exist about the ethnic identity of foster children, but lessons can be learned from the field of transracial adoption, as these two phenomena share similarities. In both transracial adoption and foster care, the primary carers and children have different ethnic backgrounds and may show dissimilarities in their appearance (e.g., skin colour). Evidence exists from the field of adoption that being transracially placed impacts the ethnic identity of children (Hrapczynski & Leslie, 2018; Montgomery & Jordan, 2018; Umaña-Taylor & Hill, 2020). They showed disconnection from their ethnic backgrounds and family, and ethnicity losses (Barn, 2018; DeBerry et al., 1996; Lee et al., 2018; Montgomery & Jordan, 2018). Furthermore, the way adopted children internalise their minority background in their ethnic identity, is related to the way their adoptive parents transmit ethnic minority messages (Baden, 2002; Langrehr et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2018; Manzi et al., 2014). Ethnic majority adoptive parents may, however, not always possess sufficient skills or knowledge to guide their ethnic minority children in developing their ethnic minority identity (Langrehr et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2018). They for example do not always successfully prepare their children for survival in a society where racism and discrimination occur (Barn, 2013, 2018; Smith et al., 2011; Snyder, 2012).

Although international foster care systems differ from adoption systems (Berrick et al., 2015), we may assume that knowledge from adoption studies may be transferrable to foster care. Transracially

placed foster children, like adoptees, are confronted with ethnicity differences between themselves and their caregivers (Manzi et al., 2014). Thereby, adoptees in countries like the USA and England may share a similar history with foster children of being placed out of home. In these countries, it is a more common practice to place children with a foster care history in an adoptive family than for instance in mainland European countries, where foster children more frequently stay in long-term family foster care (Berrick et al., 2015; George et al., 2003). Thereby, a more active policy exists to keep birth parents involved in the lives of their children (Thoburn, 2010, p. 34). This last reason shows why outcomes in foster care may differ from outcomes in the field of adoption. In foster care, more emphasis is placed on remaining ties with the birth family. In contrast to birth parents who sign up their children for adoption, birth parents of foster children can keep the (shared) authority over their children. Sometimes, reunification with the birth parent(s) may follow after placement in a foster family (Burns et al., 2016; Vanderfaeillie et al., 2017). This may imply that foster children have more possibilities to stay connected to their ethnic backgrounds than adoptive children through their birth families, which possibly influences their ethnic identity.

To comprehend the insights of the body of research in this field, we conducted a systematic literature review. We aimed to obtain an encompassing view of the empirical scientific literature on how transracial placements and transracial parenting affect the ethnic identity of foster children. The review addresses the following question: How do transracial placements in foster care influence the ethnic identity of foster children with an ethnic minority background?

Methods

Databases, search terms and inclusion criteria

We followed the checklist and flow diagram of the PRISMA statement (Moher et al., 2010). The search was carried out in four electronic databases: Psycinfo, ERIC, SOCindex and Web of science. We searched for peer-reviewed articles with primary data (quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods), that dated from January 1990 to April 2020. The search terms are shown in Table 1.

All search terms were in English. Based on a quickscan of the literature, we expected a small literature base and therefore chose for a variety of search terms. We carefully discussed the selection of each search term and included frequently used synonyms for foster care and foster children that are linked to foster care. We furthermore did not limit our search to 'ethnic identity', but also searched for 'cultural identity' and 'racial identity'. In the international literature, studies are found on ethnic, racial or cultural identity, or combinations of these concepts. Although the concepts differ, conceptual and empirical relatedness exists, and they are frequently used interchangeably in the literature (Verkuyten, 2018, p. 49; Williams et al., 2012). International consensus exists about the concepts' being socially constructed (Markus, 2008), and that ethnic, racial and cultural identity formation processes follow similar development trajectories (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Furthermore, all concepts

TABLE 1 Search terms

Search terms	
First	Foster child *or* Care leaver *or* Looked after child *or* Out of home placement *or* Foster care *or* Adoption from care *or* Non-kinship care *or* Foster youth
Second	Ethnic *or* Rac *or* Cultur
Third	Identi

refer to a community or group to which someone feels a sense of belonging and commitment (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014; Verkuyten, 2018, p. 56). The most important differences to distinguish ethnic, racial and cultural identity, as mentioned in the literature, is that ethnic identity refers to a subjective sense of belonging to a group of people with a same-ethnic background (Phinney, 1990). Ethnic identity more frequently reflects human values, or 'ways of living' (Markus, 2008). Racial identity focuses on belonging to a group of people with a same racial background and is frequently used in studies about racism, power differences, discrimination and coping mechanisms (Markus, 2008; Phinney & Ong, 2007). Cultural identity tends mainly to refer to a sharing of roots, history, norms, language and religion with people of a same cultural background (Hughes et al., 2008). Furthermore, the use of these concepts is context dependent (Markus, 2008). In the social context of the USA for example, it is proposed to combine the concepts ethnic and racial identity (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). In midland Europe, however, the constructs of 'race' or 'racial' are used much less than in the United States, because of historical events and trauma's related to the Second World War (Siebers, 2017).

Search outcome and exclusion criteria

The overview of the study identification and selection process is shown in a PRISMA flow diagram (Moher et al., 2010) (Figure 1). Four members of the research team ran the search in the databases. This was monitored by the first and the second author, who also performed the inclusion check. All outcomes were recorded. In a team of four researchers the titles of all hits were thoroughly scanned. We removed the duplicates and excluded articles with a topic that was not considered relevant for this review. We read the abstracts and in some cases the method section and excluded articles that did not meet the criteria. After thorough reading and discussions in the research group, 12 articles were considered relevant. Reasons for exclusion were that papers were not on transracial placements *and* not on foster care *and/or* not on ethnic, cultural or racial identity. Papers that did not present empirical data, like discussions, policy papers or systematic reviews were also excluded. As a final step, we checked the reference sections in order to examine whether we could have missed relevant titles during the search process. In this way, we first identified three additional relevant titles, of which we at the end selected two articles. This lead to 14 articles to be included in this review.

Data abstraction and synthesis

Each selected article was read in full text by the first two authors. A descriptive summary was made of each article (Centre For Reviews & Dissemination, 2009). These summaries were placed in a matrix (Table 2), providing general information of the study, study characteristics, participant characteristics and outcomes. We compared the outcomes of the articles and searched for overarching themes in the articles. Through this process, we found the following themes which influence the ethnic identity of transracially placed foster youth:

1. Racial/ethnic identity fluctuations
2. Disconnection from, and connection with the birth network
3. Societal messages on ethnicity and race
4. Awareness of ethnic backgrounds because of different physical appearances between the foster child and the foster family
5. Foster parents' need of skills and knowledge to encourage ethnic identity development
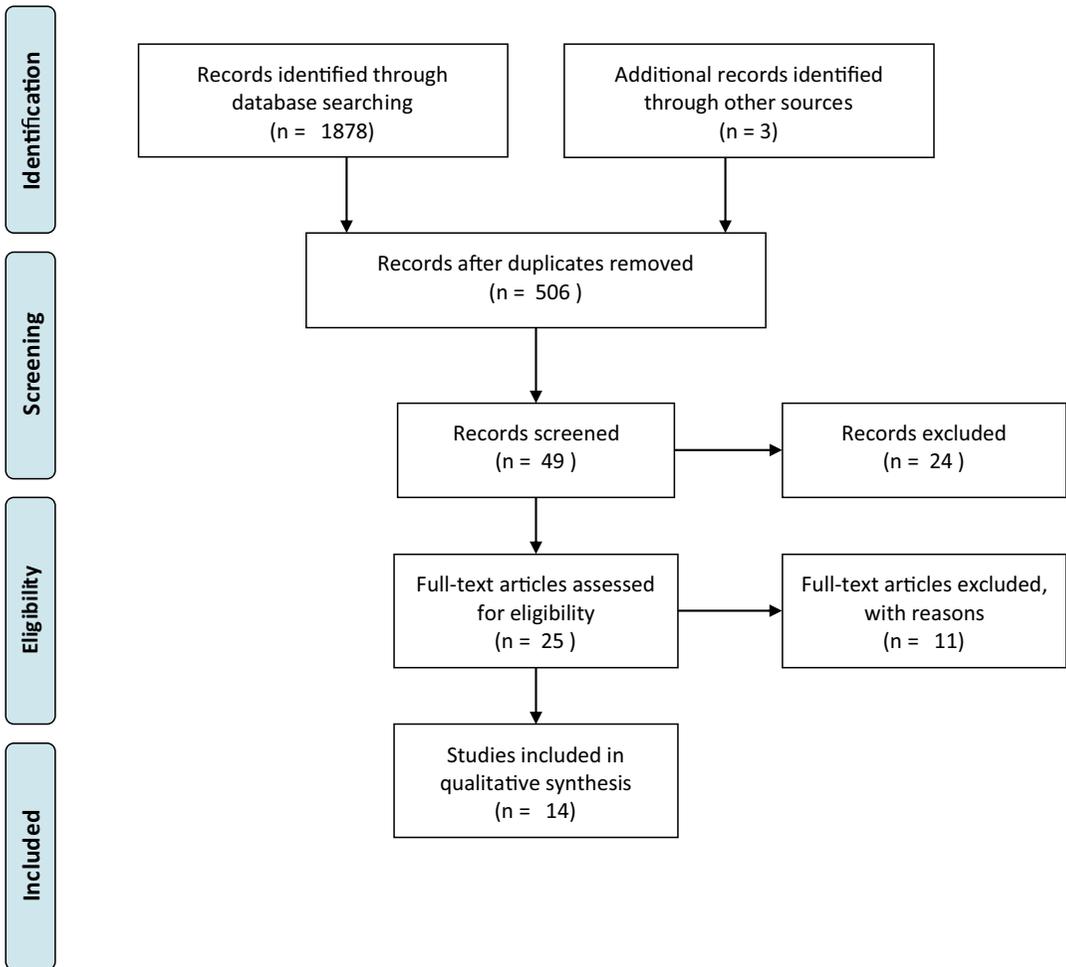
FIGURE 1 PRISMA flow diagram

Results

Racial/ethnic identity fluctuations

One article reported racial/ethnic identity fluctuations. Schmidt et al. (2015) studied the racial/ethnic self-identification among youth in foster care in the USA. The authors (Schmidt et al., 2015) abstracted data from a larger evaluation which consisted of a survey on racial/ethnic identity, which was held twice with a break of 1 year. Schmidt et al. (2015) found that 19% of the foster youth with a minority racial/ethnic background between 16.5 and 18.5 years of age reported a change in their ethnic identity, which showed higher fluctuations in the racial/ethnic identity of foster youth in comparison to adolescents with a minority background in the general population.

Disconnection from, and connection with the birth network

Six articles showed how ethnic, racial or cultural identity of foster children can be impacted by being disconnected from, or connected with their birth network (Barn, 2010; Brown, Arnault, et al., 2009; Clark, 2000; Mitchell Dove & Powers, 2018; Moss, 2009; Waniganayake et al., 2019). In five articles, authors reported disconnection from ethnic, racial or cultural backgrounds due to separation from family and community (Barn, 2010; Brown, Sintzel, et al., 2009; Clark, 2000; Moss, 2009; Waniganayake et al., 2019). Barn (2010) compared foster children in kinship care with foster children in non-kinship care by conducting semi-structured interviews and group discussions with 36 former foster children from the UK with different racial/ethnic backgrounds. In contrary to foster children who were placed with ethnic minority relatives, children who were transracially placed described processes of racial/ethnic identity confusion or 'identity stripping'. Because of being disconnected, they missed ethnic minority role models in order to explore their racial/ethnic minority identity. Brown, Sintzel, et al. (2009) interviewed 61 Canadian foster parents and clustered the outcomes through concept mapping with 13 foster parents about challenges of transcultural parenting. Their foster children could feel no sense of belonging to the foster family or could loose connection with, or were not interested in their own cultural backgrounds and cultural traditions. Clark (2000) conducted a qualitative study, and held in-depth interviews with seven Australian aboriginal foster youth. Foster youth experienced identity losses and a fragmented aboriginal identity, due to disconnection from their aboriginal backgrounds. Disconnection was also reported by Moss (2009). Her study on identity and negotiation between indigenous and mainstream Australian culture of 20 Australian children with indigenous backgrounds, was based on narrative art therapy. She compared children with indigenous backgrounds in foster care with indigenous children who were not in foster care. In contrast to the non-foster children, most of the children in foster care felt disconnected from their birth family and from any cultural background, including the indigenous one. Waniganayake et al. (2019) suggested, because of the possible risk of cultural disconnection when foster children are transracially placed, about the desirability of cultural maintenance in Australian foster families in order to protect the sense of belonging, culture and religiosity of the foster children. This was an outcome of focus group interviews with 15 caseworkers and 26 foster carers in matched and unmatched foster care placements with foster children from Anglo-Australian, Arabic, Turkish and Vietnamese descent.

One study provided insight into how connection with the birth network could lead to transmitting of ethnic minority knowledge. Mitchell Dove and Powers, (2018) conducted a qualitative study with 11 female adolescents with African-American backgrounds in foster care in the USA about hair care and showed how these adolescents' hair, and haircare was related to their African-American female identity and self-esteem. Because they had consistent relationships with their birth network, haircare knowledge was passed on, which strengthened the foster youth's African-American female identity.

Societal messages on ethnicity

Societal messages on ethnicity impacted the identity of transracially placed foster youth, as was shown in two studies (Clark, 2000; Mitchell Dove & Powers, 2018). Clark (2000) analysed how a negative societal discourse about aboriginality in Australia impacted their aboriginal identity. Foster children were on the one hand being told by people outside of the foster family to be 'lucky' because of being placed in a non-aboriginal family. However, in their foster homes, they were being treated as inferior

TABLE 2 Selected articles

	Authors	Year	Country	Ethnic background of foster children	Type of recruitment	Methods
1	Barn	2010	UK	African-Caribbean African Asian Mixed parentage European-American	Selection from a larger study	Qualitative semi-structured interviews and group discussions
2	Brown, St Arnault, George, & Sintzel	2009	Canada	Not mentioned in article	Randomised list of phone numbers of foster parents	Qualitative telephone interviews and Concept mapping
3	Brown, Sintzel, Arnault & George	2009	Canada	Not mentioned in the article	Randomised list of phone numbers of foster parents	Qualitative telephone interviews and Concept mapping
4	Clark	2000	Australia	Aboriginal	Personally known by researcher/ introduced by Aboriginal community in South Australia	Qualitative in-depth interviews
5	Coakley & Gruber	2015	USA	Not mentioned in the article	Foster parent associations and Department of Social Services, North Carolina.	Quantitative cross-sectional study Questionnaires
6	Coakley & Orme	2006	USA	Not mentioned in the article	State and local foster parents associations	Quantitative questionnaires a.o. the cultural receptivity in fostering scale (CRFS)
7	Daniel	2011	Canada	Not mentioned in the article	Flyer via social service agencies	Qualitative open ended semi-structured in-person or telephone interviews

because of their aboriginal backgrounds. This lead to aboriginal identity losses of the transracially placed foster children. Mitchell Dove and Powers (2018) showed in their study that African-American female foster youth received many societal messages in the media and by other people about long and straight hair versus natural hair. The participants in the study, where very sensitive and aware of these messages, which shows, according to the authors (Mitchell Dove & Powers, 2018), that these messages probably influenced their hair choices.

Participants	Subject of study	Relevant outcomes
36 foster care leavers from several ethnic groups placed in families with the same ethnic or different backgrounds	Social capital and relation with racial and ethnic identity of foster care leavers	Transracially placed foster children reported racial–ethnic identity stripping. They missed ethnic minority role models they needed to explore their racial/ethnic minority identity.
Interviews with 61 foster parents, concept mapping with 13 foster parents	Cultural receptiveness and competence of foster parents	Being open, understanding and being sensitive towards the cultural identity of the child and balancing between own cultural values and that of the foster child
Interviews with 61 foster parents, concept mapping with 13 foster parents	Cultural receptiveness and competence of foster parents	Understanding different cultures, agency support, training, self-awareness, open discussion and support by community services
7 participants from 30 to 40 years old who were in foster care from early childhood	Aboriginal identity of foster youth	Feelings of being different; Negative societal discourse about aboriginality; identity losses and a fragmented aboriginal identity; search for aboriginal life and identity; conflicting aboriginal and non-aboriginal identities
78 Foster parents	Predictors of cultural receptivity of foster parents	Foster parents' race, education level, dedication to fostering, available time to foster, understanding of foster parent roles, and knowledge of transcultural parenting activities
304 Foster mothers	Cultural receptivity of foster parents	The Cultural Receptivity in Fostering Scale is an effective tool to measure cultural receptivity of foster parents
9 Foster parents	Cultural receptivity of foster parents	Foster parents struggled whether they should pay attention to cultural differences between themselves and their foster child(ren)s' background

(Continues)

Awareness of ethnic backgrounds because of different appearances between the foster child and the foster family

Two studies showed how daily confrontations with differences in physical appearances impacted the ethnic minority identity of foster children (Clark, 2000; White et al., 2008). The aboriginal youth in the study of Clark (2000) sensed to be different than their foster parents because of dissimilar physical appearances,

TABLE 2 (Continued)

	Authors	Year	Country	Ethnic background of foster children	Type of recruitment	Methods
8	Folaron & McCartt Hess	1993	USA	European-American African-American Biracial: African-American and European American. The article had a focus on biracial European-American (mother) and African-American (father) youth (N = 10)	Selection from the department of Health and Human Services in eight counties of Indiana.	Qualitative individual interviews
9	Mitchell Dove & Powers	2018	USA	African-American	Child welfare case workers	Qualitative, individual interviews
10	Montgomery	2019	USA	African American Asian-American Latin American Native American Biracial unknown	Foster and adoptive parent support groups and advertisements	Mixed method: Cultural quantitative questionnaires (a.o. CRFS), and qualitative semi-structured interviews
11	Moss	2009	Australia	Aboriginal children	Foster care and child protection agency workers	Qualitative narrative art interviews with children Open interviews with practitioners
12	Schmidt et al.	2015	USA	American Alaskan Native Asian African-American European-American Pacific Multiracial	Selection from a larger study	Quantitative assessments and data from electronic databases Long-term research

and being told by 'others' to look different than their foster parents. As a result, they became more aware of their aboriginal identity. White et al. (2008) studied ethnic identity of 188 foster children aged between 14 and 17 with Hispanic, African-American or European backgrounds through a survey. They found that

Participants	Subject of study	Relevant outcomes
62 foster families: interviews with foster children, one of their birthparents, foster parents and social workers	Racial identity and racial socialisation of foster youth of mixed racial parentage	Foster youth received no support from youth services regarding race, foster parents report to lack knowledge about how to ethnically socialise their foster youth
11 Self-identified African-American female adolescents in foster care, between 13 and 17	Hair, haircare, ethnic identity and racial socialisation of African American female foster youth	Hair and haircare is important for African-American female identity; being in foster care could lead to a loss of proper hair care; contacts with birth family members were important to transmit knowledge about hair care
51 transcultural foster and adoptive parents (quantitative) Qualitative interviews with 15 participants	Testing a training for culturally competent parenting	Cultural competence can be trained.
20 Children in foster care/not in foster care 11 Practitioners in foster care	Cultural identity issues for children in trans-ethnic foster care	Lack of cultural knowledge, loss of cultural and spiritual identity.
122 youth in foster care	Stability in self-reported ethnic identity versus foster care agency categorisation	Ethnic identity of foster youth is fluid/changes over time.

foster children with a minority ethnic background had stronger commitment on their ethnic identities than foster children with a majority ethnic background. The reason authors (White et al., 2008) gave, was that these foster children were being reminded of differences of physical nature on a daily basis.

TABLE 2 (Continued)

	Authors	Year	Country	Ethnic background of foster children	Type of recruitment	Methods
13	Waniganayake et al.	2019	Australia	Anglo-Australian Arabic Turkish Vietnamese	Staff or client channels of an Australian non profit organisation for out of home care	Qualitative focus group interviews
14	White et al.	2008	USA	African-American Latin American European- American Other	Selection from a larger study	Quantitative questionnaire: Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure

Foster parents' need of skills and knowledge to encourage ethnic identity development

Most articles paid attention to foster parents' need of skills or knowledge to encourage the ethnic identity development of their foster children (Brown, Sintzel, et al., 2009; Coakley & Gruber, 2015; Coakley & Orme, 2006; Daniel, 2011; Folaron & McCartt Hess, 1993; Mitchell Dove & Powers, 2018; Montgomery, 2019; White et al., 2008). In the articles, the concepts cultural competence and cultural receptivity frequently arose (Brown, Arnault, et al., 2009; Brown, Sintzel, et al., 2009; Coakley & Gruber, 2015; Coakley & Orme, 2006; Daniel, 2011; Montgomery, 2019). Cultural competence is perceived by one of the authors of a paper included in the review as the 'effort parents are willing to put forth to learn and seek help for culturally competent parenting practices with transracial foster and adoptive youth' (Montgomery, 2019). Cultural receptivity is found as a precursor of cultural competence, and is 'a construct which measures foster parents' openness towards participating in activities that promote children's cultural development (Coakley & Orme, 2006).

Coakley and Orme (2006) measured the concept of cultural receptivity among 304 foster mothers in the USA through evaluating the Cultural Receptivity in Fostering Scale (CRFS). The CRFS consists of a list of concrete activities of foster parents, spread over four domains: (a) understanding of different cultures, (b) willingness to become aware of children's need for cultural identity, (c) efforts to learn about availability of resources to support children's identities and (d) appreciation of other cultures. Outcomes showed that the CRFS is an effective tool to measure cultural receptivity of foster parents. Next, Coakley and Gruber (2015, USA) studied a sample of 78 foster parents and examined factors that are related to cultural receptivity of foster parents. Valuing diversity and egalitarianism and the encouragement of cultural pride were examples of factors with positive outcomes on cultural receptivity of foster parents. Montgomery (2019) conducted a mixed method study with 51 foster and adoptive parents in transracial placements in the USA. He used the CRFS to evaluate a web-based culturally competency training for foster parents. The author (Montgomery, 2019) reported that foster parents were after being trained more open towards the cultural backgrounds of their foster children.

Participants	Subject of study	Relevant outcomes
15 Caseworkers and 26 foster carers in matched and unmatched foster care	Cultural identity in foster care placements	Desirability of cultural maintenance: in unmatched placements sense of belonging/ culture/religiosity is at stake
188 Foster youth	Ethnic identity development foster youth	Latin American and African-American youth reported a stronger ethnic identity than European-American youth in foster care. 69,3% had a wish to learn more about their ethnic background (placement disruptions seemed to influence this negatively) two in five respondents (especially Latino and African-American) stated that developing an ethnic identity in foster care is difficult

In our literature review we encountered a number of specific skills which were related to cultural competence and cultural receptivity, and relevant for foster parents to guide their foster children in their ethnic identity development. (Brown, Sintzel, et al., 2009; Daniel, 2011; Folaron & McCartt Hess, 1993; Mitchell Dove & Powers, 2018; White et al., 2008). A first skill was being able to balance between own cultural values and beliefs, and those of the foster children. Brown, Sintzel, et al. (2009), found that foster parents on the one hand had to be open and understanding towards the cultural backgrounds of their foster children, and on the other hand needed to compromise between teaching their own cultural values and beliefs, and learning from those of their foster children.

A second skill was foster parents' skill to bond with birth parents of their foster youth (Brown, Sintzel, et al., 2009; Daniel, 2011). Daniel (2011) conducted semi-structured interviews with nine Canadian foster parents about guiding the cultural development of foster children. Both Brown, Sintzel, et al. (2009) and Daniel (2011), reported birth parents as important persons to connect foster children with their cultural backgrounds. At the same time, relationships between foster parents and birth parents could be challenged by negative attitudes towards each other. Foster parents therefore seemed to miss skills to overcome these attitudes, and bond with birth parents.

A third skill foster parents need, is the skill to engage their foster youth with ethnic minority practices. Mitchell Dove and Powers (2018) provided insight into specific resources foster parents could lack in order to take care of the hair of their foster children. Although some foster parents taught their foster youth how to take care of their hair properly, most of them lacked the knowledge about caring of their foster children's hair.

A fourth skill which we derived from the literature, is a skill to guide foster children in becoming more acquainted with their ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Brown, Arnault, et al., 2009; Daniel, 2011; Folaron & McCartt Hess, 1993; White et al., 2008). Brown, Arnault, et al. (2009) interviewed 61 Canadian foster parents about what resources they needed to improve their skills in guiding children from culturally diverse backgrounds. The researchers clustered the outcomes through concept mapping with 13 foster parents. Foster parents indicated that they needed to understand the cultural backgrounds of their foster youth. Foster care agency support and training would be helpful in this process. Daniel (2011) found culturally aware foster parents who paid attention to the cultural

backgrounds of their foster youth. However, according to them 'identity is not simple', but multi-layered and consists of, for example religion and ethnicity. Foster parents could struggle whether or how they should pay attention to these ethnicity or religion differences. Folaron and McCartt Hess (1993) studied transracial placement experiences through qualitative interviews with foster children, birth parents, foster parents and social workers from the USA in 62 foster families, and focused their analysis on 10 foster children with biracial backgrounds. Because the foster parents lacked resources and support from service providers, they missed knowledge about the African-American backgrounds of their foster children, and as a result, their foster children experienced little exposure to their backgrounds. Last, the study of White et al. (2008) on 188 foster children aged between 14 and 17 with Hispanic, African-American or European backgrounds showed that the majority of the transracially placed foster youth told that some attention was paid to cultural traditions by their foster parents. The foster youth stated that they had wished to learn more about their ethnic backgrounds.

Discussion

This systematic literature review examined empirical peer-reviewed studies about the ethnic identity of transracially placed foster children. We addressed the following research question: How do transracial placements in foster care influence the ethnic identity of foster children with an ethnic minority background?

Our review shows that ethnic development of transracially placed foster children is influenced by intersecting mechanisms (Crenshaw, 1991) of both being in foster care, and minority ethnicity. Because living in a foster family with a dissimilar ethnic background, foster youth were disconnected from their ethnic minority backgrounds (Brown, Sintzel, et al., 2009; Clark, 2000; Moss, 2009; Waniganayake et al., 2019). They had a sense to be different because of being confronted with different physical appearances of themselves and their foster parents on a day to day basis (Clark, 2000; White et al., 2008). They thereby received existing negative societal messages on race and ethnicity (Mitchell Dove & Powers, 2018), which could include messages from foster parents (Clark, 2000). These mechanisms may result, in terms of Phinney and Ong (2007), in relatively few possibilities for foster children to explore their ethnic identity.

The outcomes of this review are reflected in studies from the adoption literature (Barn, 2018; DeBerry et al., 1996; Lee et al., 2018; Montgomery & Jordan, 2018). Thereby, and specific for the context of foster care, birth parents may serve as connectors with their children's birth culture, and enable them to explore their ethnic minority as well as its intersection with gender identities (Mitchell Dove & Powers, 2018). This correlates with a foster care study of Moyers et al. (2006), who found that the identity of foster children was connected to the relationship with their birth parents.

Although none of the studies in this review measured the impact of foster parents' skills and knowledge on foster children's ethnic identity development directly, foster parents may have a large impact on the ethnic identities of their ethnic minority children. Their openness, skills, knowledge and efforts towards participating and engaging their foster children in activities that promote their cultural development are thereby perceived as important (Brown, Arnault, et al., 2009; Brown, Sintzel, et al., 2009; Coakley & Gruber, 2015; Coakley & Orme, 2006; Daniel, 2011; Montgomery, 2019). Authors presented specific skills or knowledge foster parents need in order to guide their foster children in developing their ethnic minority identities. Largely in line with adoption literature (Barn, 2013, 2018; Smith et al., 2011; Snyder, 2012), foster parents need skills to teach their foster youth how to deal with societal discrimination (Clark, 200). They thereby need skills and knowledge to bond with the birth parents foster children (Brown, Sintzel, et al., 2009; Daniel, 2011), to engage foster children

with ethnic minority practices (Mitchell Dove & Powers, 2018), and to teach their foster children about their cultural and ethnic backgrounds sufficiently (Brown, Arnault, et al., 2009; Daniel, 2011; Folaron & McCartt Hess, 1993; White et al., 2008). According to Vonk (2001), who studied cultural competence of parents of transracially adopted children, important parenting skills parents need are 'multicultural planning', which includes skills to expose ethnic minority children to contacts and activities with people of their birth culture. So as well as for adoptive parents, multicultural planning is an important skill for foster parents. In foster care, emphasis thereby relies on cooperation with birth parents to overcome cultural differences (Brown, Sintzel, et al., 2009; Daniel, 2011).

In this review, we were mindful of potential differences between ethnicity, race and culture, and thus closely abided the concepts as used by the authors in our result section. We also made several observations regarding the concepts in the studies we included. First, some articles did not study ethnic, racial or cultural, but 'aboriginal identity' (Clark, 2000), or 'African-American female identity' (Mitchell Dove & Powers). The results, however, may be seen as results on cultural, racial or ethnic identity, because they discuss the experiences of discrimination, societal messages on ethnicity or race, differences in physical appearances between foster parents and foster children, a search for belonging to a same ethnic or racial group, or disconnection from one's cultural community. Second, all articles where foster parental skills and knowledge were under investigation, focussed on the term 'culture' rather than race or ethnicity (Brown, Arnault, et al., 2009; Coakley & Gruber, 2015; Coakley & Orme, 2006; Daniel, 2011; Folaron & McCartt Hess, 1993; Mitchell Dove & Powers, 2018; Montgomery, 2019; White et al., 2008). However, authors of the aforementioned studies argue that cultural competence also includes for instance, racial awareness of foster parents (Montgomery, 2019). The same is true for a term like 'transracial placements'. Since 'transracial placements' in the literature also included cross-ethnic as well as cross-cultural placements, and accompanying differences between foster parents and their foster children on these aspects, we argue that the term transracial should be perceived and interpreted as an umbrella term.

We found limitations in the studies under investigation. An important limitation concerns firstly that only one study was part of a longitudinal research project (Schmidt et al., 2015), while this type of study would provide the most accurate information about ethnic identification over time, as ethnic identity formation is a process of exploration and commitment (Phinney & Ong, 2007). Secondly, most studies on ethnic, racial and/ or cultural identity addressed only perspectives from either (former) foster children, while most studies on transracial parenting only captured views of foster parents. This is a missed opportunity as foster children's perspectives and foster parents' views on ethnic, identity development and transracial parenting may diverge or supplement each other. Thirdly, perspectives of birth parents are underrepresented in the studies of this review. Only the study of Folaron and McCartt Hess (1993) included birth parents in their study as participants.

A final limitation to note was that our search only retrieved studies from the USA, Canada, the UK and Australia. A reason for this may that we only used English search terms. We therefore missed articles from other parts of the world, which shows a gap in our study.

Conclusions and implications for research and practice

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first systematic literature review with a focus on ethnic identity in foster care and therefore it contributes to understanding scientific insights to this relevant scientific field. The systematic literature review shows that a transracial placement in foster care influences the ethnic identity of minority foster youth and that both foster parents and birth parents can be expected to play a pivotal role in this process. Because cultural competence and cultural

receptivity among foster parents seem to be important for guiding ethnic minority foster children in their ethnic identity processes, in future more attention should be paid to these concepts in the field of research and to practical implications. Foster parents can be trained to become more culturally competent, and in the USA, training programmes already have been developed and proved to be successful (Montgomery, 2019). These training programmes should be further investigated and developed for other geographical areas, and consequently be made available for more foster care agencies. Further attention should thereby be paid as to how foster parents can carefully include birth parents in the lives of their children as cultural connectors. In this way, foster care agencies can better assist foster parents in guiding the ethnic identity development of their ethnic minority foster children.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST
We have no conflict of interest to disclose.

ORCID
Clementine J. Degener https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1093-358X

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