

Reimagining Transracial Adoption Practice in Europe through the AFDiT Framework

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Folklore

- In a European context, ancient stories, often thousands-of-years-old.
- Fairy tales, myths, sin, greed, and legends.
- Cinderella-type, ghosts and beasts, fairies, elves, people transforming into birds, German Shockheaded Peter, who refused to groom himself, and became isolated etc...
- Phenomenological, helping us to understand morality.
- Life experiences and the impact on cognitive experiences of reality positively or negatively.
- Which behaviours, or identities are normal or desirable
(Archibong, 2023)



Shona Folklore : Tsuru na Gudo



Tsuru

Learns how to survive and everyone calls it success.



Gudo

Big overpowering, and a gatekeeper of what safe looks like.

Adaptation can hide distress

“He is doing well and he is safe.” Internally, something is off.

Just because a child adapts does not mean they are okay. Good intentions are not enough.

Baboon helps, teaches and protects.

Identity does not disappear with adoption; it waits.

Hare does not “become” a Baboon. Identity is often suppressed, delayed, or disconnected.

Being unseen is its own form of rupture and psychological harm.

The deepest issue is invisibility.
Baboon never asks: “Who are you?”

Asking Different Questions

Should we now stop asking “Is the adoptive home good enough ?

And instead ask:

“What will this child have to give up to stay here.”

- If a child cannot see themselves reflected, what is the risk ?
- If parents and family cannot navigate racism, is it a risk.
- If identity, race, culture and heritage are minimised, is that also a risk of harm and risk to race trauma.
- Is it time we now see identity not as an add on but protection.

Background Research to AFDiT



A qualitative co-creation study in England between February and May 2023.

Engaged a collective total of 55 participants through co-creation workshops via Teams.

Sessions included lived experience and adoption professionals. RQ: What can we do differently?

Thematic analysis of qualitative data.

Findings led to the formulation of a framework for decision making in transracial adoption (AFDiT).

Findings from Adoptees

- Reflections on child rescue narratives from those internationally adopted.
- The 'fairy tale narrative' including domestic and international adoptees.
- Colour-blind, and culture-blind parenting causing double consciousness and code-switching and identity confusion.
- Parents not well equipped to parent transracially.
- The eventual loss of culture, familiarity, language and national identity etc
- Inconsistencies in adoption histories and the need for DNA testing.
- Inaccuracies in adoption documents.
- Rupture linked to systemic failures, racism and microaggressions
- Rupture and 'dissonance' linked to the tension between past, and opposing information.
- Race trauma, who am I ? In-betweenness and lack of belonging here or there...

Professionals

We had a case where we realised later in the adoption process that we lacked crucial information about the child's ethnicity and cultural background. In fact, some of the identity factors were incorrect. Usually, by the time the case is with the adoption team parents are less engaging, so we have to scramble to get information. (Social worker)

It should be from initial enquiry stages and pre-approval, asking about understanding of transracial adoption and its impact on identity, otherwise it can be too late in the process to start teaching and getting a real understanding about whether they can do it. The cultural issues, race, identity, all of it. (Adopter and social worker)

Professionals

Social workers should make sure they say to adoptive parents, if a family member doesn't accept them adopting transracially or something or a different looking child then well it would likely [be] problematic ...adoptive parents should try as much as possible to explain to the extended family, the situation with race, ethnicity and the nationality... (Adoptee)

As social workers, we rely on adopters while assessing a family. They might say, 'We have got lots of people of Black or Asian backgrounds in our family'. But what we do not know is what their experiences are like. What is their lifestyle like? Do they talk about racism?

Do they address the issues in any way?

We can not assume that just because this family has got lots of people in their network they are also aware and able to address these issues for the child, ...

(Adopter, adoptee and social worker)

Post-racial phantasmagoria

- The illusion that race does not matter in assessments, matching and beyond.
- Deceptive narratives around racial inequality in the adoption system and society.
- Post-racialism makes racism invisible and non-existent.
- Racism, specific cultural identities and heritage downplayed in language and records.
- Rejecting post-racial phantasmagoria enables a more culturally responsive approach.
- 'The deceptive package of legislation' refuses to see ethnicity or race without giving clear guidance about how to deal with identity issues and related trauma.
- Professionals' lack of confidence to question or caution adoptive parents against post-racial phantasmagoria. *"don't ask me about saviourism again, I know about it..."*
- Post adoption, the fear of asking about racial identity development and race trauma
- They are skilled in parenting, fear of undermining and contrary - *"no such thing as a Black mummy; mummies can only be white..."* (Cane and Puhan, 2026)

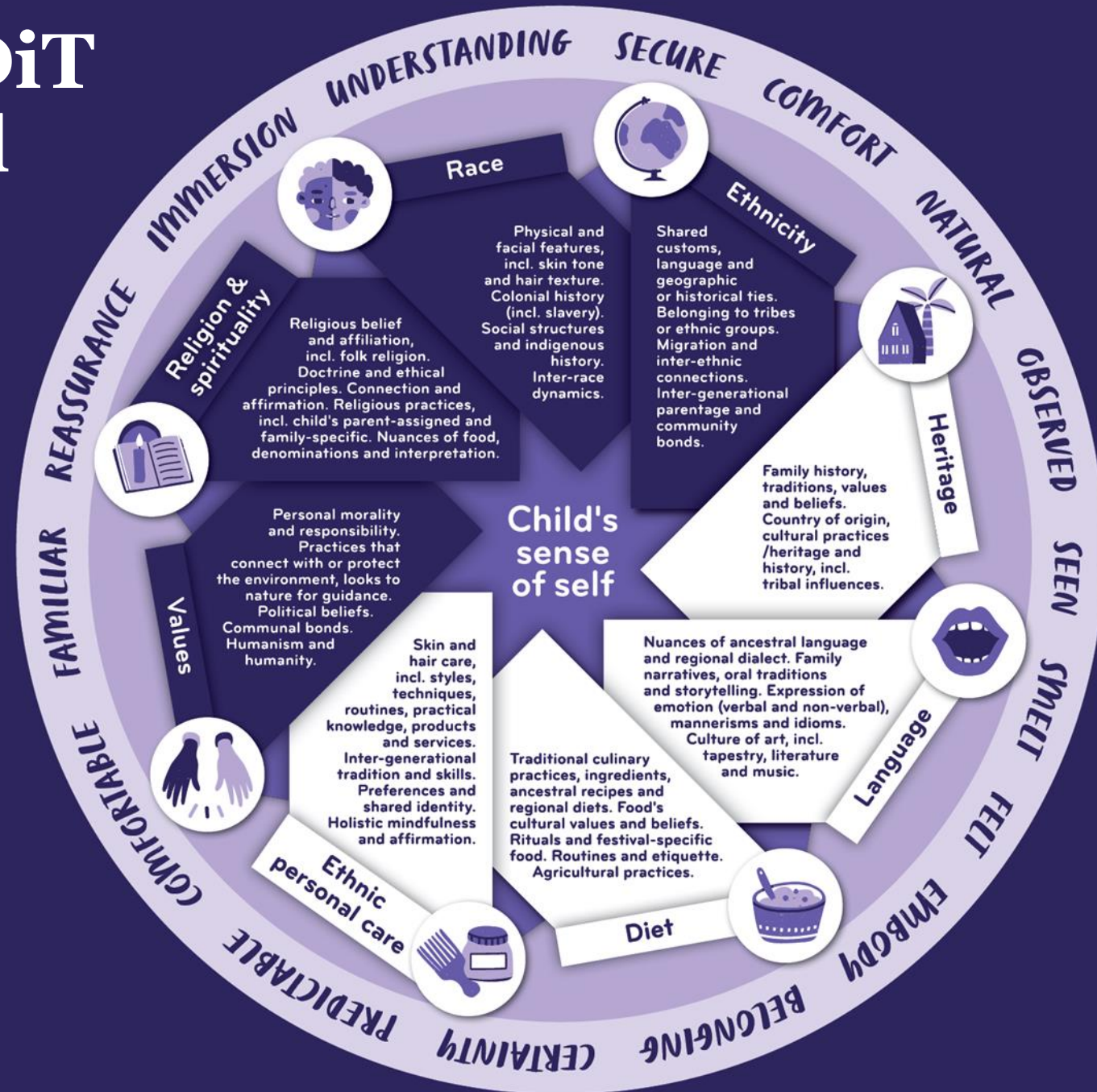
The AFDiT Framework

Grounded within two measurable conceptual frameworks:

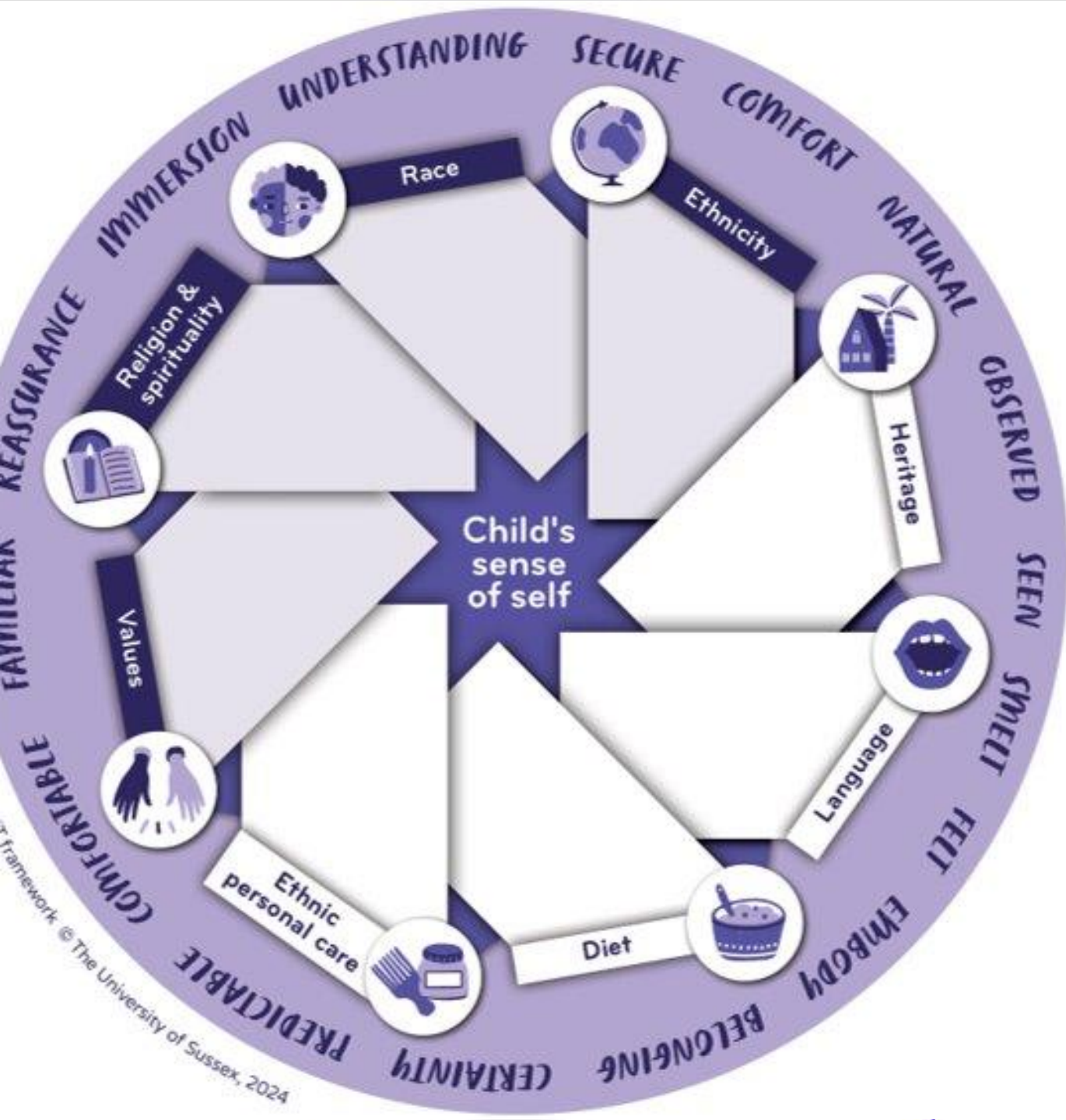
1. Racial consciousness and the need for **increased awareness** about difference (Cane and Tedam, 2023).
2. Race and cultural intentionality and that there is a need for **deliberate actions and actual consideration and provision** to for the child's identity needs (Tedam and Cane, 2024).
3. And the AFDiT Wheel for assessing identity or direct work.

Reference: transracialadoptionframework.uk

The AFDiT Wheel



The AFDiT Wheel: Inner Layer



Outer Layer

Highlights emotional and sensory dimensions that support continuity

✓ Familiarly, reassurance, etc

Inner Layer

Focuses on core elements that contribute to the Child's Sense of Self

✓ What constitutes race, ethnicity, heritage, language, etc and how to provide for them.

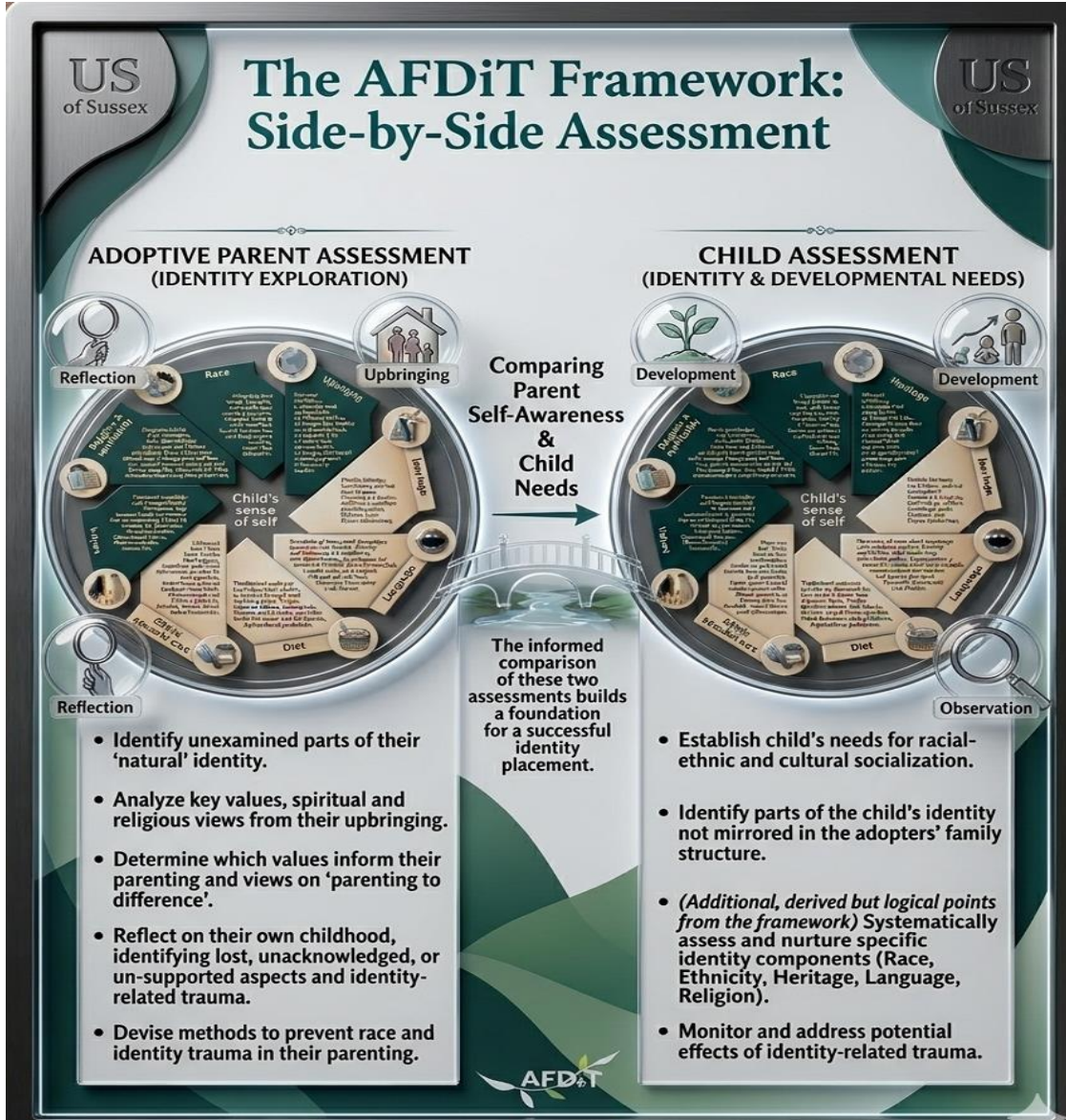
The Wheel With Parents

- Going around the wheel to explore their identities and reflections.
- Which parts of their identity feel natural that they do not usually think about them ?
- What values, spiritual or religious views were most important in their upbringing?
- Which ones they carry into their parenting and views on 'parenting to difference' ?
- Their reflections on themselves 'as a child' and what aspects were lost, not acknowledged or supported and identity-trauma related trauma experienced ?
- How would you work to prevent race and identity trauma in parenting ?

Application of AFDiT to The Child

- Around the wheel, establishing what the child's 'specific' identity facets and engaging birth parents.
- Identifying specific needs for racial-ethnic and cultural socialization.
- What parts of the child's identity might not be mirrored in the prospective adopters' family set up/structure and community?
- What are the short term and long-term risks of identity loss and the impact on the development of their core-self ?
- What race and identity trauma can we foresee, name and include in the adoption support plan to mitigate the risks.

Matching and Adoption Panels



Tsuro na Gudo...and Gudo as a bridge

What went amiss?

is the evidence in the reports good enough and convincing ?

What else do we need to see?

What quality assurance processing can help strengthen accountability?

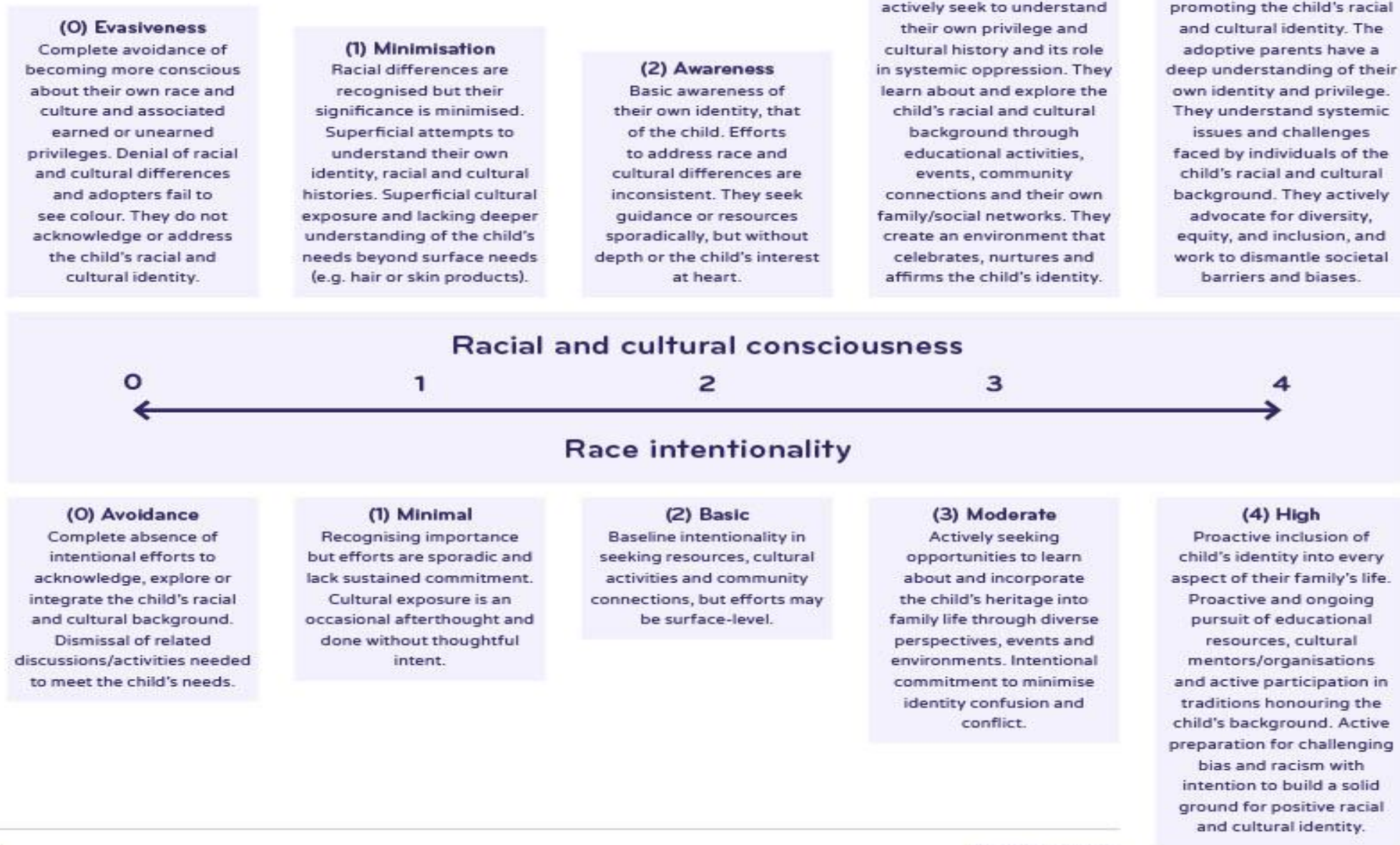
We suggest assessing each component separately and then combining assessment rankings to make an overall judgement and provide recommendations.

Ratings and definitions:



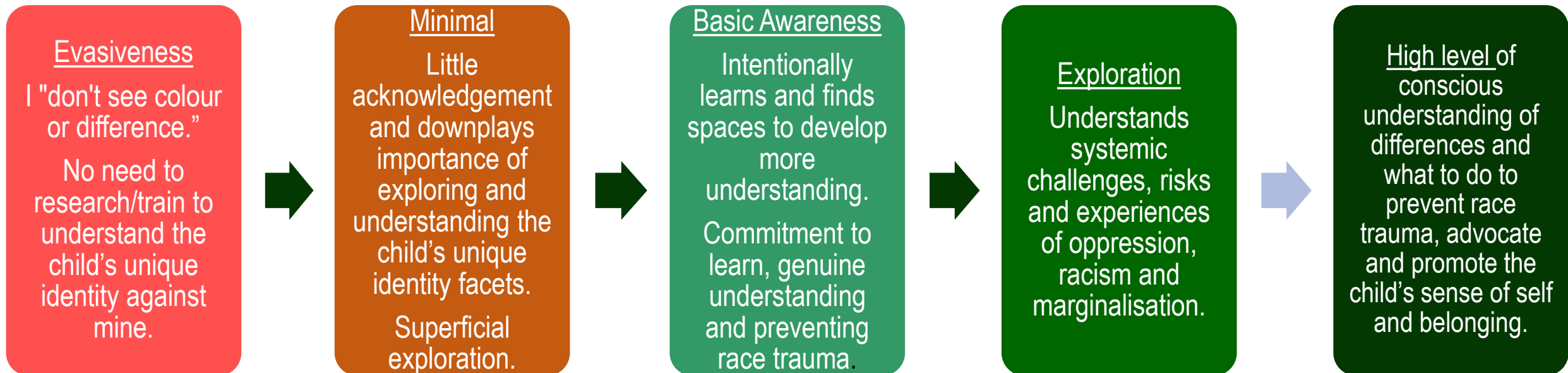
Tip:

Adoptive parents can also use this for self-assessment.



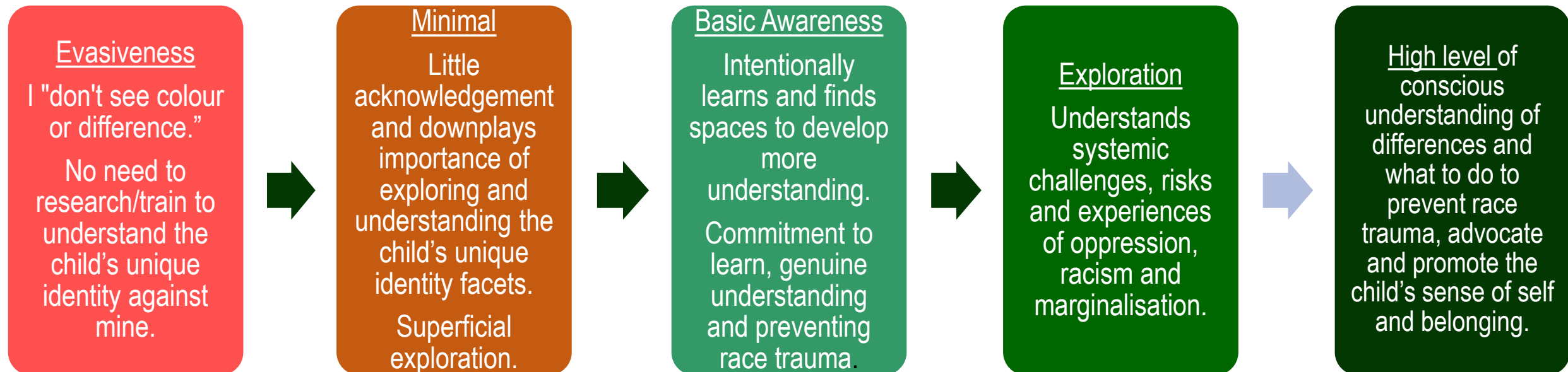
Assessing Consciousness

- This is about racial awareness and understanding of differences.
- Understanding of differences in lived experience of oppression, privilege, marginalisation and the reality of racism.
- There is no evasiveness or fragility about identity but deeper commitment to understand the other and affirm their identity.
- Ongoing learning, seeking of educational resources around race, culture, heritage and impact of in-betweenness or dual-language/cultural dynamics.



Case Study Example

Georgia and Rene, were looking to adopt an Asian, Muslim boy of Mali background-Mo. They are White English and Scottish. They had limited understanding or consciousness of the impact and realities of religious hate, racism and their impact on Black boys. Also how this will shape his everyday experience compared to their own identities. Their focus was fitting in with the family and nationality. The assessment was minimal consciousness. They needed support to recognise likely future exposure to Islamophobia, racism, discrimination, intersexuality (race, gender, religion) and the importance of proactive preparation and protection. They needed help through preparation for bias training and other relevant training.



Assessing Intentionality

- Intentional and purposeful provision of resources that promote identity pride, and affirmation.
- Consideration of diversity geographical location, access to racial mirrors, food, hair, skin, books, music, language, and other religious and cultural resources etc.
- Diversity in social networks, schools, cultural communities, and engagement beyond tokenism.
- Non-tokenistic visits to the child's birth country, as well as contact with birth-family and siblings etc.
- Proactive efforts to challenge and address racism and microaggressions within family and beyond.

Evasiveness

No providing of resources to support race or culture.

We "don't see colour or difference" -colour-blind.



Minimal

Little acknowledgement and downplays importance of race, culture.

Provision is occasional and superficial.



Basic

Intentionally and routinely providing resources e.g. diverse school, books or communities.

Commitment to learn, genuine understanding and preventing race



Moderate

High level of provision, sustained engagement and advocacy that promotes the child's sense of self and belonging.



Highest level

Integration and sustained learning engagement with the child's race and cultural affiliations. Can access related systems of support. Has accessed training and is equipped to discuss racism.

Case Study Example

Georgia and Rene... Here, the assessment is focused on intentionality with Zola, a Black, South African child of Christian background. They suggest that Zola will be white at heart. They say she will internalise their family values, culture and worldview instead of focusing on the racist societal attitudes. It won't do her any good. They suggest focusing on assimilation and acculturation. No need to provide resources that focus on her Black South African identity. They live in a non-diverse isolated village where Zola is less likely exposed to people who look like her. Can this attitude shift?

Evasiveness

Not providing resources to support race or cultural understanding.
Colour-blind and culture-blind, rejecting the Chinese heritage/identity.



Minimal

Little cultural symbols, or discussions about culture or impact of racism.
Cultural celebrations are occasional and superficial-
Chinese new year.



Basic

Intentionally and routinely provides resources and representation through e.g. diverse school, books or communities.
Learns Chinese culture and traditions and



Moderate

Engagement is deeper.
Open conversations about race, racism, identity. Birth family and birth country contact. Promotes pride and feels connected to their birth-culture and identity. Experience belonging.



Highest level

Integration is sustained. Child is fully supported and has an affirmed sense of self. Ongoing learning. Provides racial mentors, and support groups. Challenges microaggressions and racism in all areas of her life.

Reframing Our Approach

- Strengthening confidence in exploring issues of race, identity, religion by rejecting phantasmagoria
- Challenging race and culture blindness and helping adoptive parents to see difference but with the aim to promote belonging and identity confidence and not discrimination
- Good enough parenting not good enough if parenting results in racial and identity trauma
- Feeling, thinking, acting, and eating the 'child's minority status'
- Increasing consciousness and intentionality without taking a universalist approach to race-ethnic-cultural socialisation
- Teaching the history of slavery and colonisation and its legacy and impact on identity
- Addressing lack of diversity in communities, schools, providing successful role models and how to actively access them beyond Mr X in the neighbourhood
- Intentionality and consciousness as strategies to help us understand lived experience.

Returning to Our Shona Folklore : Tsuru na Gudo



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Thank you...

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