

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY  
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY & CRIME, LAW AND JUSTICE

ETHNIC IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN TRANSRACIALLY ADOPTED YOUNG  
ADULTS

JOSEPHINE SEUNG-AH LEE  
FALL 2013

A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements  
for baccalaureate degrees in Sociology and Visual Art  
with honors in Sociology

Reviewed and approved\* by the following:

Laurie Scheuble  
Senior Lecturer in Sociology  
Thesis Supervisor

Jeffery Ulmer  
Professor of Sociology & Crime, Law, and Justice  
Undergraduate Program Director in Criminology  
Honors Adviser

\* Signatures are on file in the Schreyer Honors College.

## ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the ethnic identities of transracially adopted young adults and the factors that contributed to their current identity. Eight adoptees between the ages of 18 and 27 were interviewed regarding their past experiences growing up as transracial adoptees and ethnic minorities. The main purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of socialization by the family and community on the adoptees' development of their ethnic identities. Comparisons of the adoptees' accounts revealed that many external factors such as family members, friends, strangers, and race-related experiences, as well as internal factors such as personality and personal interests all influenced their current perception of self. Three factors that seemed to be the most influential on their ethnic identities were parents, friends and peers, and the adoptees' personal interests in birth culture.

*Keywords:* transracially adopted, ethnic identity, socialization

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	iv
Introduction.....	1
Review of Literature.....	2
Research Questions.....	9
Research Methods.....	10
Participants.....	10
Interview Schedule.....	12
Demographics.....	12
Birth Parents.....	12
Parents.....	13
Siblings.....	13
Community.....	13
School/Peers.....	14
Race Awareness.....	14
Racial Cultural Background Interest.....	14
Current Identity.....	15
Concluding Questions: Personal Opinions on Transracial Adoption.....	15
Findings.....	15
Interview Results.....	15
Demographics.....	15
Birth Parents.....	16
Parents.....	17
Siblings.....	18
Community.....	21
School/Peers.....	24
Race Awareness.....	26
Racial Cultural Background Interest.....	34
Current Identity.....	38
Concluding Questions: Personal Opinions on Transracial Adoption.....	41
Individual Summaries.....	44
Marcy.....	44

Gwen.....	45
Liz.....	46
Fantine.....	48
Leah.....	49
Marvis.....	50
Leo.....	52
Sarah.....	53
Discussion.....	55
Parents.....	56
Friends and Peers.....	58
Interest in Birth Culture.....	61
Conclusion.....	63
Appendix A.....	65
References.....	71

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the eight adoptees who participated in my study and shared their experiences and views through interviews. I would also like to thank all of the Penn State professors who responded to my emails and shared my participant search announcement with their students. I also thank my friends who referred their transracially adopted friends to me as study participants. I thank my thesis adviser Laurie Scheuble and my honors adviser Dr. Ulmer for their guidance and feedback in developing this project from an idea to a completed work. I would not have been able to complete this project without the help of all of these mentioned, and I am very thankful for every one of them. Above all, I thank God for providing me with all of these people who helped me and for giving me peace and strength through the ups and downs I encountered throughout this entire project. I would not have finished without him.

## INTRODUCTION

For at least half a century, transracial adoption has consistently been a method of creating families within the United States (Simon & Alstein, 1994, pp. 1). Changes in reproduction practices such as the use of contraceptives and frequency of abortions decreased the number of White babies available for adoption. This in turn resulted in adoption agencies looking to pair ethnic minority babies with families regardless of physical characteristics (Simon & Alstein, 1994, pp. 1).

Transracial adoptions, as defined by the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, are “those in which parents reported that they (including both parents, for children living with two parents) are of a different race, culture, or ethnicity than their child” (Vandivere, Malm & Radel, 2007, Glossary). In 2010, there were about 1.5 million adopted persons under the age of 18 living in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). A few years earlier, in 2007, forty percent of adopted children were of a different race, culture, or ethnicity than their adoptive parents (Vandivere, Malm & Radel, 2007). These statistics suggest that there continues to be a large number of American children who grow up in families with ethnicities different from their own. Even as the United States diversifies through interracial marriages and immigration, transracial adoptees’ experiences remain unique as they become socialized into their adoptive culture and yet remain ethnic minorities due to their appearance (Lee, 2003). Adopted parents may or may not choose to teach their children about their ethnic origins depending on their background and experiences. The transmission of culture of origin from parents to their adopted children also tend not to be as natural as that of same-race parents due to the fact that they did not grow up within that culture themselves (Lee et al., 2006). While transracial adoptees may develop a healthy and stable ethnic identity, being ethnic minorities within their own families still may leave the potential for them to struggle with identity.

As people encounter others throughout their lifetime, from family to neighbors and peers, they adjust and modify their self-concept, or identity. This is especially relevant to ethnic identity (Elkin & Handel, 1989). Ethnic identity can be defined as a complex social construction that refers to one's "sense of self in as a member of an ethnic group" (Phinney, 2003, p. 63), an ethnic group being a category of peoples who share a common culture and are aware of that cultural bond (Andersen, 2008, pg 269). As racial diversity within the United States continues to expand with immigration, interracial marriage and transracial adoptions, notions of ethnic identity also continue to change and blur to the point where children may grow up uncertain about how to define themselves in terms of race, especially when living within the larger context of a racial majority.

My research examines the ethnic identity construction of American transracial adoptees. I focus on how socialization from family, community, and peers affected the transracial adoptee's perception of self while growing up. Data for this research was collected through intensive retrospective interviews of a convenience sample of young adult transracial adoptees.

## **Review of Literature**

### *Transracial Adoption within the United States*

In the early to mid 1900's, matching children with parents by race was the common practice in adoptions. Babies were placed with adoptive parent's who were as close to the child as possible in physical likeness, disposition, and religious background so that the adoption would seem "more natural" or biologically less obvious. It was believed that fewer problems would arise the more similar the children were to their adoptive parents (Herman, 2012b). An early example of issues involved with transracial adoption was the Indian Adoption Project (1958-67), by which the U.S. Children's Bureau began to assist in the adoption of Native

American children by non-Native American families (Fanshel, 1972, pp. 36). Opposition towards this program arose due to beliefs that White parents were unable to provide their adopted children with proper knowledge of their Native American culture. They argued that the adoption of their children by people outside their race was a robbing of their nations' culture. As a result, the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 was established, preventing the adoption of Native American children by non-Native American couples for the sake of preserving Native American culture and keeping children within their nation (Simon & Alstein, 1994, pp. 8).

The adoption of African American babies by White families was met by similar opposition by the African American community. The National Association of Black Social Workers argued that White parents would not be able to prepare their Black adopted children for future discrimination, and that the children also would lose their connection to the Black community due to their socialization into the White community (Simon & Alstein, 1994, pp. 39-40). However, due to the lack of minority families willing and able to adopt, there came an increased tolerance of having White parents adopt minority children.

Transracial adoptions also became more prevalent through an increase in intercountry adoptions. One cause of this was the number of orphans resulting from WWII in the 1940's and the Korean and Vietnam wars in the 1950's, 60's, and 70's (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2002). Publicity gained through international war, natural disasters, and major shifts in government opened the eyes of the American public to the number of orphaned children in afflicted countries, and international adoption became somewhat of a humanitarian act (Briggs, 2003). Up until 2011, China, Ethiopia, Guatemala, South Korea, and Russia have been the top five countries from which children have been adopted (Bureau of Consular Affairs, 2011b). Domestic transracial adoptions peaked in the 1970's and began to decrease in the years to follow. However, international adoptions increased throughout the 80's and 90's, the trends



being rooted in various social and economical reasons (Herman, 2012b). In more recent years (2005 – 2011), statistics have shown that international adoption has also been on the decline (Bureau of Consular Affairs, 2011b). Regardless of the apparent trends, transracial adoptees still consistently remain a part of the American population.

### *Parents and Socialization*

Socialization is a process that is crucial to the formation of individual and cultural identity. Through socialization, individuals learn the expectations of society and the culture – the norms, laws, and means of expression (Andersen, 2008, pp. 83). When focusing on the socialization of adoptees by the family, Lee (2003) in his study on transracial adoption research, uses the term *cultural socialization*, which he defines as entailing:

“...the transmission of cultural values, beliefs, customs, and behaviors from parents, family, friends, and community to children that foster racial/ethnic identity development, equip children with coping strategies to deal with racism and discrimination, and encourage prosocial behavior and appropriate participation in society” (pp. 720-721).

For transracial adoptees, socialization may also include conversations about their origins, participating in cultural events, interacting with people of the same ethnicity, and visiting the adoptee’s birth country (Galvin, 2003).

This process of internalizing the norms and language of society begins very early – at birth – and continues on throughout the lifespan. The parents become the first agents of socialization, helping children form an identity and socializing them into roles and expectations both within the family and greater society (Elkin & Handel, 1989, pg. 138-139). Language, customs, and norms are all set in place for children to internalize as soon as the parents begin to speak to their children and treat them in the way appropriate to their culture.

Transracially adopted children take on the culture of their adoptive parents because of this socialization. In a longitudinal assessment of 88 African American adoptees, DeBerry et. al. (1996) found that the adoptees mainly internalized the values and roles associated with the European-American community over African American values, especially during adolescence as they transition into adulthood, due to their greater exposure to European-Americans as agents of socialization.

Parents indirectly help teach children ethnic identity by controlling their external environment – which community to live in, school, etc. They can set boundaries and encourage the child to participate in specific cultural activities (Elkin & Handel, 1989, pp. 120). A child first begins to learn about ethnic differences and culture of origin through what the adoptive parents may teach it and the degree to which they stress its importance.

Andujo (1988) in a small comparison study between inracially and transracially adopted Hispanic children found that while the two groups did not differ significantly in self-esteem, they differed greatly in their attitudes towards their ethnicity. Children of high income parents in both groups were not very connected to their Hispanic culture. Children with Hispanic parents identified more with their ethnic origins than those adopted by White parents. Results suggested that children reference their parents in regards to how they viewed themselves in terms of values and culture.

In a study focusing on interviews with forty transracially adopted Korean children and their parents, Huh and Reid (2000) found that participation in cultural activities and ease of parent-child communication about the adoption were significant factors in the extent of ethnic identity in the adoptees. They found that as children began to question their ethnic differences at an early age, some parents would teach the child about his birth culture while others let the child pioneer his own curiosity. Those children who

participated more in Korean cultural activities tended to identify more strongly as Korean and Korean-American than those who did not. This suggests that parental enthusiasm and encouragement for learning more about ethnic culture is a strong influence on a child's participation and resulting views towards his ethnic origins.

While exposure to birth culture may increase the likelihood that adoptees will identify more with their ethnicity of origin, studies have shown that transracial adoptees that are psychologically well-adjusted tend to still identify strongly with their parents' culture, or American identity. Quintana and Lee (2005) found that exposure to the culture of their origin increased adoptee's perspective-taking ability regarding that culture without really affecting their ties to the culture instilled in them by their adoptive parents.

#### *Peers and racial awareness*

Young children may not realize their physical differences from their parents until they begin school – preschool or kindergarten (Deacon, 1997; Huh & Reid, 2000). Once children spend time outside of home, peers act as “important sources of approval, disapproval, and support” (Andersen, 2008, pg. 88). Comments, strange looks, and teasing from other children may open adoptees' eyes to the idea that they are not like everyone else. This may cause children to ask their parents questions about their appearances. The resulting conversations contribute to children's socialization and identity construction in that such entrance narratives build up into defining the children and how they contribute to the family, giving them a sense of belonging and value (Trolley, 1995). In a Swedish study, Cederblad (1999) found that positive peer relationships were connected to positive self-esteem and behavior in adolescents. Adoptees that felt more non-Swedish and were identified by other people as foreigners were found to have lower self-esteem than their counterparts. Research findings also show that transracial

adoptees are usually introduced to racial stereotypes through interaction with peers which may cause issues with perceptions of self (Huh & Reid, 2000).

In addition to the effect of the family and peers, studies have found that those who grew up in more ethnically homogenous areas had weaker ethnic identities than those who lived in more diverse areas. Growing up in a diverse neighborhood may be beneficial to a young transracial adoptee's perception of self (Song & Lee, 2009; Feigelman, 2000).

### *Racism and Coping methods*

Transracially adopted children are usually vulnerable to racial derogation, especially in predominantly White communities because they are racial minorities. Parents are usually the ones to teach children survival skills and coping methods in reaction to racism, however in most cases, the parents of transracial adoptees did not experience with racism (Galvin, 2009) so the extent to which parents will help the adoptee prepare for and cope with may be minimal.

In a small comparison study of inracially and transracially adopted Hispanic children, Andujo (1988) found that the parents who were the same ethnicity as their children taught their children about discrimination coping methods and survival skills while White parents either ignored incidents or tried to teach their children about human identity. Docan-Morgan (2010) found that adoptees whose parents were open and communicative with them about racial issues continued to communicate with their parents about them, and parental support was resultantly perceived as helpful and comforting as compared to those adoptees with parents who did not discuss these issues with them. Adoptees who thought their parents would not understand or had parents who were perceived as not helpful did not talk to their parents about racial issues and internalized them instead. Some parents have been found to promote ethnic pride in their children through activities and learning in hopes of producing a positive ethnic identity, which has been found to protect against the effects of racism (Lee, 2003).

A survey and gathering of adult Korean adoptees adopted after 1955 found a majority of them experienced various degrees of discrimination while growing up (Freundlich & Lieberthal, 1999). In events of discrimination, adoptees have been found to have varied reactions. Some were found to struggle with their identities (Cederblad, 1999). Others were found to not feel hurt while others learned to deny their birth heritage (Freundlich & Lieberthal, 1999).

### *Interest in Culture of Origin*

Adoptees tend to vary in the amount of interest they express toward their birth cultures. Females and those who were adopted at a younger age were found to be more likely to explore their birth culture than males and those adopted when they were older (Freundlich & Lieberthal, 1999). They also vary in the extent to which they explore their birth culture. During childhood, parents usually play a large role in exposing their children to their birth culture, exposing them to activities, camps, books, and events involving their birth heritage (Huh and Reid, 2000), but as children grow into adolescence, parents may cease to stress the importance of birth culture, many times in reaction to the child's own waning interest towards their roots (DeBerry, 1996; Simon & Alstein, 1994).

In a survey of 67 Korean adult adoptees, Song and Lee (2009) found that the three most common cultural experiences were interpersonal Korean associations throughout childhood into adulthood, organized Korean events during childhood and adulthood, and seeking more information about birth roots, usually during adulthood. They found that as the adoptees grew older, they tended to participate less in organized Korean events that perhaps their parents engaged them in and participated more in more autonomous activities as finding their birth roots and traveling to their country of origin, which would in turn contribute to their ethnic identity. They also found that the age at which adoptees engage in cultural activities is

important in forming a positive ethnic identity. Those who were exposed to cultural socialization especially during young adult years were more likely to have a stronger, positive sense of ethnic identity.

Similarly, Quintana and Lee (2005) found that cultural exposure in the form of traditions such as food and language seemed to be especially important for adoptees' perspective-taking ability at an early age and interests in other aspects of culture develop as the child ages. Cultural exposure was also found to have a positive relationship with a child's ethnic identity. Huh and Reid (2000) observed that Korean transracial adoptees who were most involved in Korean cultural activities scored higher in having a Korean identity than lower participators. Their study also suggests that high participators in cultural activities have a higher American identity as well, as they may see themselves strongly as Korean-American.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions are examined in my research:

1. What is the effect of socialization on ethnic identity?

Based on previous research, I expect that people who grew up in households where emphasis and attention was given to the respondents birth culture will be more likely to identify with that birth culture and have greater interest with the birth culture than those adoptees who grew up in households where birth culture was not emphasized (Cederblad et al., 1999; Quintana & Lee, 2005).

2. What factors were most influential in adoptees' development of ethnic identity?

Research suggests that parents' enthusiasm in exposing their children to cultural activities and learning has a positive effect on their child's development of a positive ethnic identity (Huh & Reid, 2000). I expect to find similar patterns in this study.

3. How influential are family relationships, peers, and community members on a transracial adoptee's ethnic identity?

Research has shown that all of these groups play a role in influencing how adoptees view themselves from an early age onward into adulthood. Peers and community of a racial majority provide the adoptees with an awareness that they are a racial minority despite their internalization of the majority culture, which was instilled in them by their adoptive families (Deacon, 1997; Andersen, 2008). I am examining this issue by asking the respondents about the effects that family, peers, and community have on how the adoptees feel about themselves.

4. What factors protect against discrimination?

Cultural socialization during childhood and young adulthood tends to result in a positive ethnic identity (Song & Lee, 2009). A positive relationship with parents, as well as positive peer relationships also contributes to resilience against racial derogation and a positive identity (Cederblad et al., 1999; Docan-Morgan, 2010).

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

### **Participants**

Participants were recruited through classes at a large northeastern university and also through personal affiliations outside of school. Emails about the research project and participant recruitment were sent out to professors in the Sociology Department and the Science Department. A number of interviews resulted from this process. The professors who gave permission for recruitment to take place among their students either sent an email to their classes via the course management system, or allowed for an announcement to be made in class. A number of interviews resulted from this process. Participants were also recruited by word of mouth. Respondents who were interested in participating in the study contacted me via

email. This research was approved by the Human Subjects Review Board at the university where this study was conducted.

In order to be considered for interviews, interested persons had to meet a set of requirements. These requirements were developed in order to develop a group of adoptees who had similar adoption experiences. This was done in order to remove differences based on the adoption experience itself. These requirements were:

- 1) Transracially adopted
- 2) Adopted by the age of five
- 3) Between the ages 18-35 at the time of the interview
- 4) Grew up primarily in the United States.

The people interviewed for this research are not representative of the transracial adoptee population in the United States since they are college students or young professionals. The focus of the research was to achieve detailed explanations from the respondent about their experiences.

Data for this study came from intensive interviews of a convenience sample of eight transracial adoptees. Intensive interviews were used to gather detailed information about the individuals. Since my research focuses on how interracial adoptees frame their life experiences, intensive interviewing of the study participants is an appropriate technique to examine the feelings and connections about growing up in a family with parents of an another race (Hochschild, 2009). In order to ensure confidentiality, all the adoptees are referred to by pseudonyms I assigned to them.



## **Interview Schedule**

Interviews consisted of approximately forty questions which were grouped into categories that focused on demographics, birth parents, socialization (parent relationship, sibling relationship, community, school), race awareness, racial/cultural background interest, current identity, and opinions on transracial adoption. Certain questions were not asked if they did not apply to the respondents. Follow-up questions were asked when applicable. Interviews were done either face-to-face in a quasi-public setting or over the phone. Detailed notes were taken during phone interviews while face-to-face interviews were either written down or audio-recorded then later transcribed. Interviews varied in length from approximately 30 minutes to 100 minutes. The interview schedule can be found in Appendix A.

### *Demographics*

Respondents were asked general questions concerning their race, their age at adoption, their adoptive parents' race, the location(s) where they were raised, their parents' and their own religious views, their family's financial stability, and their siblings. Whether or not they had siblings determined whether the respondents would need to answer questions regarding siblings. If the respondents had sibling(s), they were asked to indicate if their sibling(s) were adopted or non-adopted. Their responses determined which set of sibling questions would later apply to them in the interview-process.

### *Birth Parents*

This category concerned any memories of the adoptees' birth parents and native country. Respondents, especially those who had no contact with their birth parents, were also asked if they ever wondered about their birth parents while growing up, and how these thoughts influenced their feelings and views about themselves, especially about their ethnicity.

*Parents*

Respondents were questioned regarding their relationship with their adoptive parents. They were asked to describe their relationship in general and indicate if their parents' race influenced their ideas about their own race. Further questions prompted respondents to indicate how and to what extent their adoptive parents exposed them to their birth culture, as well as whether they had made contact with the respondents' birth parents.

*Siblings*

Respondents with siblings were asked if their siblings were also adopted and the appropriate set of questions were asked of them. Through this category, adoptees explained the nature of their relationship with their siblings. Adoptees with adopted siblings were asked about the extent to which they identified with their siblings regarding ethnicity and race-related experiences. Those with non-adopted siblings were asked regarding any perceived differences in treatment from parents, peers, and other siblings.

*Community*

This category consisted of questions concerning the racial dynamics of the adoptees' childhood communities and their racial experiences within those communities. Respondents were asked to recall any instances in which they were aware that others in the community and even extended family set them apart through stares, comments, or certain treatment. They explained how the situations made them feel at the time and the ways in which they coped. They were also asked about the extent to which they confided in their parents, siblings, or friends regarding any negative treatment from strangers, family, or peers. If this applied, respondents stated the extent to which this coping method helped them.

*School/Peers*

Similar to the community category, respondents were asked about the diversity of their schools from the elementary years into high school and any race related experiences. Respondents were prompted to recall whether they ever sought out peers of their race or of a racial minority, if the diversity within their school made this applicable. They were asked about the peer groups they associated with in school and the reasons for the choices they made.

*Race Awareness*

Questions pertained to adoptees' first realization of their ethnic minority status, past interactions with their ethnic group, attitudes towards that group, and how they identified themselves in regards to their same-race peers or neighbors. They were also asked about the diversity of their childhood friends and the extent to which race influenced the dynamics of these friendships. Respondents also indicated which racial group they were most comfortable with throughout childhood and adolescence.

*Racial/Cultural Background Interest*

Respondents were asked about their interest in their birth culture and the extent to which they investigated it on their own. They were also prompted to express their interest in visiting their birth country and finding and meeting their birth parents if they had not already done so. Those adoptees who did visit their birth country were asked to elaborate on their experience and associated feelings. Questions also focused on asking them if they had met or talked to their birth parents and family. These respondents were also asked if meeting their birth parents affected how they viewed themselves.. Those who did not know their birth parents were asked if they thought contacting them would affect how they perceived themselves in general and in respects to ethnicity.

### *Current Identity*

In order to gain a direct sense of how the adoptees identified themselves at the time of the interview, they were asked how they currently viewed themselves in regards to race and ethnicity. They were also asked if they thought it had changed since when they were younger, and if this was the case, they were asked elaborate on how their views had changed. To gain a sense of their self-esteem, the respondents were asked about their ethnic identification.

### *Concluding Questions: Personal Opinions on Transracial Adoption*

Adoptees were asked reflective questions about how being raised in a multiracial family affected their self-perceptions as well as their personal opinion of transracial adoption. They were also asked if they would ever transracially adopt and the reasons for which they may or may not. Those who said yes, they would adopt a child of another race were asked if they would raise the child any differently from the way their parents raised them.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Interview Results**

#### *Demographics*

The participants in this study consisted of two males and six females. Their ages ranged from about 18 to 26 years old. They were all born and adopted between 1985 and 1995. Five of the participants are college students while the other three had graduated from college and are currently working. Six of the participants were of East Asian descent, one was Columbian Hispanic, and one was Afghani. Of the East Asians, two were Chinese, two were Korean, one was Filipino and one did not know his specific ethnicity. Age at adoption ranged from one day old to one year old. All of the participants were adopted into White middle-class families and were raised in the East Coast. With the exception of one participant, the others have one or

more siblings. All but one of the adoptees has some form of religious view or have parents with religious views. Half of the adoptees mentioned their religious beliefs throughout the interview.

### *Birth Parents*

None of the participants had any memories of their birth parents from before their adoption because they were either abandoned or placed for adoption at such an early age. Only one believed he had a memory of his native country.

The respondents varied in their answers when they were asked, “Did you ever wonder about your birth parents?” A majority of the respondents had wondered about their birth parents throughout their childhood while a few stated that they did not. Of those who were curious about their birth parents, some were very curious as children while others only wondered about their birth parents sometimes during their childhood. In a few cases, such as Fantine’s, their curiosity waned as they grew older. *“I wondered about my birth parents all the time when younger. I heard in second grade that adopted children weren’t loved babies. I wondered about that for a time, but not after that.”*

Of the two who stated that they did not wonder about their birth parents, one adoptee, Marvis, explained that he had great adoptive parents, and he mentioned that his religious views played a large role in his placement with his adoptive family.

Respondents, such as Leah and Sarah, who were curious about their birth parents expressed a connection between the mystery of their birth parents and their own identities. Leah said: *“I was really curious, made me feel a little out of place at times.”*

Sarah: *“I wondered about my birth parents. I used to wish that my parents would come and tell me who I am. Now I’m indifferent. But I want to find them if possible.”*

When asked if wondering about their birth parents affected how they viewed themselves, the respondents once again varied in their answers. Sarah explained:

*“A little. I think I might be half [Korean] because I have been told I don’t look entirely Asian. I might have been the result of an affair. Being an adopted Asian girl made me feel different from others. I had to deal with the whole ‘adopted-why-did-you-give-me-up’ nonsense.”*

In response to the same question, Leo responded,

*“So basically I realized that the entirety of my life has been in defiance of my biological father whom I never knew. My idea of love is based on my mom’s side. All of my problems – I realized it is all in defiance of my father.”*

For Leah, her parents’ spirituality helped her to see her own adoption as a good thing.

*“I think that my parents because of our spiritual beliefs they would help me view it as a positive thing. I never saw negative connotations with it. I saw it as ‘God chose you for our family.’ I felt more special to them.”*

### *Parents*

All of the participants expressed that they had a very good relationship with adopted parents, the majority describing them as “close” and “strong” relationships. They all had some knowledge or awareness of their adopted status at a very early age. The majority of them mentioned that their parents talked to them about being adopted since they were very young.

When asked if their parents exposed them to their birth culture, respondents varied in their answers. The majority of the respondents replied that their parents did expose them to their culture through conversations, cultural objects, activities, and pictures. Two of the respondents have parents who were more enthusiastic than others.

Leah: *“In (city where she grew up) they would take us to the multi cultural festival and see the Indian dances. They exposed us as much as they could. My parents made friends with an Indian family, and we would go over their house for dinner. My mom would cut out pictures that would have to do with Afghanistan for me, and for my sister she cut out pictures of India.”*

Some parents talked about the respondent’s birth culture in response to their child’s questions and interests. For example, Fantine said,

*“As we got older, we started to ask more questions. That’s when they would tell us more. I had to ask to get answers. They explained that it wasn’t a good place, the place where we came from. They explained the orphanage and what happened to us there.”*

Respondents did not seem to feel that their parents pushed anything on them. A few parents told their children where they came from and helped them learn about their culture according to their children’s interests. One such adoptee was Marvis:

*“They stopped probably because there wasn’t much interest in it. I’m proud that I’m Korean, but I’m American. I didn’t really care. That’s probably why they stopped. Didn’t peak interest much.”*

### *Siblings*

All of the respondents with siblings reported having good relationships with their siblings, both adopted and non-adopted. They expressed that throughout childhood, they got along with their siblings and fought sometimes – a few of them labeled this as a normal sibling relationship.

Those who had adopted siblings were asked if they identified with those siblings in regards to their ethnic identities. Five of the adoptees grew up with adopted siblings, and four of

these expressed sharing race-related experiences and attitudes with their siblings. The shared experiences and attitudes provided these adopted siblings with a mutual understanding of one another which they could openly express to each other and bond over. As one of the male adoptees Marvis explained:

*“It’s a bond with someone you can’t really explain but it’s there. We all knew we were adopted, Asian, Korean – we can understand each other; it made us close.”*

Liz, who grew up with five other adopted siblings and four non-adopted siblings, seemed to especially connect with her adopted siblings over not only their shared ethnicity but also their shared adopted status:

*“Yeah actually, when we would get mad at our parents or white siblings we would joke together or seriously, there is a natural closeness to our mom and her biological children. We would sometimes get into fights about how they were treated differently. With my adopted siblings we would talk about how we felt in certain situations and about being in this kind of family. We bonded over that. We also talked about going to college and seeing so many different people.”*

Leah expressed similar feelings about her adopted siblings.

*“I feel like we could laugh at the same jokes in terms of just people being ignorant. I remember walking into a restaurant in the middle of nowhere and everyone looks at you. Having those experiences and having each other, there was an understanding about being the different one.”*

One respondent, Gwen, grew up with an adopted sister of her same ethnicity, Chinese, but she shared that neither of them had much interest in their culture.

*“Um, we’re both just very not into the Asian Chinese culture. We have no problem growing up in a White family.”*



Three respondents were raised with non-adopted siblings. In response to the question *Did you feel like [your sibling(s)] treated you differently from other sibling(s)/peers?* all three did not express having experienced discrimination from their non-adopted siblings. Liz explained that:

*“I feel like my Caucasian siblings because they were raised with us. In a way it made them more accepting towards different races. In a way they are color-blind too, they just treated everyone the same. They would have Asian friends and stuff. They would be more open to that than other people in school even regarding stereotypes.”*

Leo’s older brother, on the other hand, did treat him differently from other peers, but Leo explained that it was for his own greater good.

*“Oh yeah. He had this way of toughening me up, we wrestled, competed, it was fun. It’s what brothers do. He knew what was best for me...we had bullying. My brother did the most derogatory [things] to me. Got to the point where I would chase him around the house...He teased me for the greater good.”*

These adoptees were also asked if they felt that their parents treated them differently from their non-adopted siblings. Leo said no. Liz admitted that she sometimes felt that they did, that they “babied the Caucasian siblings a little more,” but she also said,

*“I don’t think my parents consciously did that though. I sometimes wanted to be mad at them for something.”*

Marcy, who had one non-adopted sister, said:

*“I’d say only racially it would be celebrating Chinese New Year’s or giving me more Asian things than her. Otherwise we were treated the same. Didn’t make me feel any different. I was special but not over-special.”*

## *Community*

The respondents were asked about the racial diversity of the communities in which they grew up. The majority of respondents grew up primarily in predominantly White neighborhoods. A couple of them experienced a change in diversity due to moving or changing schools or grade levels. In these situations, they were placed in environments that included more ethnic minorities.

The respondents were then asked if they were ever conscious of their physical appearance while they were with their family out in the community. The majority of the adoptees recalled being aware of their physical differences while out in the community. One stated that she was never conscious of her differences while out in the community while a few of them were aware sometimes but most times were not aware of it or bothered by it. Those who were conscious of their appearance while in public recalled comments made by strangers or confusion regarding the race of their parents versus their race.

*Fantine: "My mom always says when she had to go to the grocery store with two tan babies (both my parents are really white. Really, really white), she would get questions about who the dad was. Now that I'm older it doesn't bother me as much. People just ask me why I'm tan."*

*Marvis: "Uh, yeah definitely because people would say stuff. Mainly because I grew up in White places. Going to school, we were the one Asian family there. I felt different. Some people were mean, other people weren't."*

*Leo: "Absolutely. All the time really. Because like, for example, as a kid out in public, it was me walking with my mom and people would come up and say, 'You have the cutest kid in the world.' I was always aware that there was something about it, the cute Asian kid."*

When these respondents were asked to recall how they felt about these experiences, there were mixed responses, but none of the respondents developed any long-term negative emotions or attitudes from them. The majority of the respondents expressed that they were not bothered by the fact that they were recognizably different from their adopted families. Through their responses, most of them associated a positive self-esteem while out in the community with their sense of security being established within their adopted families.

For Marvis, who faced stereotypes and racism especially in middle school, through these experiences he identified with his older adopted brother.

*“It bothered me because I didn’t have anyone to identify with. In middle school it bothered me, though looking back it wasn’t really that pivotal. It has no real affect on me as a person. yeah. I probably [related to] my brother the most because we are both dudes. People made fun of him. I would identify with him. We would brush shoulders.”*

A few of the adoptees harbored a sense of pride regarding their adopted, ethnic minority status. Leo drew his sense of pride from the fact that he was recognizably different from his parents:

*“I feel great. Part of that was from being Asian and good looking. And standing out. Being different. I don’t know if different means special, but I have that correlation.”*

At a young age, Sarah was aware that through she was Asian by appearance, her adopted status separated her from other Asians, which gave her a sense of pride in that she was not like other Asian Americans, and her family was not an Asian family.

*“I think there was almost a pride in me as a kind that I didn’t sound Asian at all. I found difference between myself and American born Asians. I had no accent. I*

*had a kind of a pride that I wasn't actually Asian. When I would go hang out with parents, it wasn't 'Oh there's a Chinese family,' but I was adopted. I did have a bias against Asians when I was little."*

Adoptees were then asked specifically if they ever felt that peers or neighbors treated them differently. A couple of the adoptees did not seem to have been very aware of being treated differently while the rest were able to recall times in which they felt community members reacted to them according to their race and even their adopted status. These consisted of both negative and positive experiences. The adoptees' perceptions of this different treatment varied from ideas of being thought of differently or as a novelty, to being frequently stared at, ridiculed, avoided, asked questions, and in one case, being argued with over the topic of her ethnicity. Some of the respondents also described specific and general cases in which strangers were fascinated, ignorant, or ill-wishing.

*Sarah: "If you are in any place with a lot of people anywhere, and you're the minority, you are less likely to have someone come up and talk to you or welcome you. It's not like they're mean, I feel like they're just not as open to welcoming you. When I went to Korea they were more welcoming towards me. They wanted to teach me Korean."*

*Fantine: "I would get asked what are you? I would say Columbian, and people would say no, you're White. They would be like, you're the whitest Spanish girl we know. I always got 'You don't count as a Spanish girl'. I'd be like, 'I'm Columbian. I'm adopted.'"*

*Liz: "Yeah, but not in a bad way. People were always quite intrigued by our family. They would be interested in the story about how this all happened."*

Respondents were also asked more specifically if they were ever met with comments about their physical features or skin color. All of the adoptees recalled being asked questions about their ethnicity or having comments made about their features such as their eyes or skin color, though for a few respondents, it was very uncommon to receive any comments. Similar to their experiences regarding how peers and neighbors treated them, the comments and questions the adoptees received were derived from either positive, negative, or sometimes neutral intentions.

*Liz: “A lot of people would be like, ‘What are you?’ Not a lot of people outside of the Filipino community know what part of Asia I was from. It was an annoying question.”*

#### *School/Peers*

The racial diversity of the schools the adoptees attended usually reflected the diversity of the area in which they were living. Half of the adoptees at some point during grades K – 12 attended a school which they described as being ethnically diverse. The other half of respondents attended schools where most of the students were White.

I asked my research participants if they ever sought peers of their own race or of a racial minority. One of the adoptees, Leah, who is Afghani, shared that in high school and college, one of her good friends was Indian. She explained:

*“I think in a way I have gravitated towards women who are minorities because there is a level of relate-ability there – even though my parents are White – things relating to physical appearance and racial related stuff.”*

The seven other adoptees either stated or suggested that they did not intentionally seek out peers of racial minority. Sarah, one of the Korean adoptees, said she avoided Asians when

she was younger. Her reasons included self-protection. Not associating with too many Asians allowed her to avoid being associated with all their stereotypes as well.

*“I felt a complete outsider with Asians...they wouldn’t accept me. I did have some Chinese friends. There was a difference between 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Asians and adopted Asians. They were cliquy, especially the Chinese girls. I wasn’t part of it. I felt like an outsider with that Asian group.”*

Other adoptees did not seem to take much notice of race. A few of them did make friends of their race but said it was more through having similar classes or interests – ethnicity was not a determining factor in making friends. A couple of them said they made mainly White friends. These adoptees had a very small minority population in their school.

*Fantine: “Most of my friends were always White. When I moved to the more diverse school, my boyfriend happened to be Puerto Rican. We eat the same kind of food, and he’s really tan...I never really thought I should seek them out because they all spoke a different language.”*

*Liz: “I didn’t really take notice. There were some Asian people. All the Asians were in super-smart classes. I think that was the way it was with their culture. they were part of different clubs too. I was always hanging around the White people.”*

Adoptees were also asked if they ever tried to fit into specific peer groups while in school. All but one of them said no, they were willing to be friends with everybody and did not remain in one specific clique or group. Most of them described themselves as “floaters.” They expressed this ability to befriend different groups of people as part of their personality. Leah and Liz also mentioned that another reason for their “floating” was that they did not want to be

pinned to one group. Liz further associated her willingness to get along with different types of people with her upbringing in a large and unique family.

*“My family is so different from each other, so I got along with so many different people, and I didn’t know why people only hung out with one type of people...it was how I was raised.”*

Unlike the other respondents, Sarah recalled having tried to fit into a peer group in high school. She felt lost in middle school and high school, leading her to searching for a place to fit in. When asked when she decided to no longer conform, Sarah replied that it was when she became serious about Christianity during her freshman year in high school.

*“I started to join a fellowship and make friends. I was depressed before. I started to hang out with this group and they were not into all the normal teen things. They were about God, Bible, and modesty. To fit in with them, I tried not to fit into the secular.”*

#### *Race Awareness*

Adoptees were asked if they had a specific memory as to when they first realized that they did not look like their parents. Most of the adoptees could not recall a point of realization, but instead decided that they had somehow always known that they were different from the rest of the family. For the three adoptees having a memory of realization, all three recalled having not noticed until others indicated it to them.

*Fantine: “Yeah, in kindergarten, when you draw pictures of your family, I would always grab the brown crayon. I would pick the peach crayon for my parents. And someone pointed that out. I didn’t realize it until someone pointed it out. To my family it was funny. I thought it was funny. People would be like, ‘Why is she different color?’ but I learned, ‘Who cares? No one’s the same color.’”*

Liz: *“It’s really funny. I was like 3 or 4 and I was talking to my younger brother who’s White, he is just a year younger than me. We were having a conversation. He was like, ‘I came from mommy’s belly!’ I was like, ‘I came from her belly too!’ He said, ‘Nuh uh, ask mommy!’ So I went to her and asked, and she said it’s true. I was never aware of the difference in our skin color either. Dad was always tan. That was the first time I realized I was adopted. I think growing up, she always told us, but I didn’t pay much attention to it.”*

The adoptees who had same-ethnicity community members were also asked about their attitudes towards them. Responses were somewhat mixed. Gwen stated that she talked to them the same as she would anyone else. Leo’s response towards other Asians in school seemed to reflect his understanding of being a minority in a rougher White community, and he accordingly took on the role of a defender:

*“Being adopted, a lot of my childhood ran on defense...I didn’t want to defend all the Asians, but I wanted to treat them all very well. I was alone, they were alone. We all knew that, understood that.”*

Sarah restated her childhood resentment towards foreigners due to the fact that she did not want to be stereotyped with them.

*“There was some resentment towards the foreign students because they fit the [Asian] stereotype, so that would mean I would be stereotyped.”*

Leah saw her Indian friend as someone who saw her as a girl, not a brown girl, someone who she could be herself around.

*“My friend Lochmi, I knew she just saw me as a girl, not a brown girl. So I could be who I am in front of them.”*



Respondents were then asked a few questions about the extent of their past interactions with people of their race and whether they identified with them. All of the adoptees did interact with and observe peers of their race before going to college, some having friends of the same ethnicity in grade school while others had only brief encounters. These interactions or observations of their ethnic group affected how the adoptees viewed their ethnic group. The adoptees all developed a positive or neutral view towards their ethnic or racial group; however, one adoptee, Leo, explained that he saw characteristics in Asians that he did not want to have, and he therefore decided to be different in order to set himself apart, though based on his previous answers he was on friendly terms with other Asians.

*“Most Asians that I knew, they were here as immigrants. They were raised under their culture. They were shy and nervous in our culture. I looked at self and didn’t want to be like Asians who were shy and nervous. I wanted to be the opposite of them, the opposite of my dad. They made me not want to feel weak. This was an opportunity to separate myself from the rest.”*

When asked if he identified at all with Asians, he stated that there was some identification with Asians, but he did not know to what extent. Two of the adoptees, Sarah and Liz, eventually developed positive views towards their ethnicities, but their explanations differed from the other adoptees in that they did not feel like a part of their specific ethnic group. Liz did not really interact with Filipinos until college, and she expressed having felt opposed to mingling with them.

*“I was really resistant to being with people of my race. I didn’t like the idea of hanging out with a bunch of Filipinos because I don’t really feel Filipino...I just didn’t feel connected at all with Asians. I felt White. I want to be White. Sometimes wished I was White because that was the norm.”*

Sarah explained that while she was interested in learning more about her native Korea, she had developed an affinity for Japan, as well as identification with Japanese culture in shared values and even language.

*“With Koreans, I think I didn’t have much exposure. When I think of Korea, I think of my Korean friends. They weren’t like other Koreans, because they were studying abroad. I think of an innocence about them. Especially ones that study here. In that way I don’t think I identify with them. I am dark and a bit of a pessimist. The culture is a bit foreign to me. The language and values...I don’t identify with Korea much.”*

Most of the other adoptees identified with their ethnicity and expressed a certain affinity for people of their race or ethnic group. They described having positive relationships with friends of the same race and bonding over similar experiences and shared cultural aspects such as food and music. One adoptee, Gwen, said she saw people of her ethnicity as being like other people, but she did not see herself as being like them because she was more White than they were.

*“I probably compared it to whether they were more like me: like a White Asian, or if they followed the values and traditions of Chinese culture. It reminded me why I was different from the average Chinese person who may not have been adopted into a different race family.”*

The adoptees were also asked if they had ever sought out or interacted with other transracial adoptees of their ethnicity. Seven of the adoptees replied that they did not intentionally seek out other adoptees, though they were curious about them. They did not seek them out because they did not really think of it. In Leo’s case, there was a sense of fear in

seeking other Asian adoptees. Fantine was the one adoptee who said that she sought out other adoptees.

*“Yes. I definitely tried. I love being adopted. I like to let people who adopted know that they are not alone. My family friend, he had a hard time, my brother and I would support him. I want to be an adoption attorney.”*

Six of the adoptees did have connections with transracial adoptees outside of their family through friendship, an encounter, or through family friends. Sarah and Fantine both shared about how they identified with other adoptees. Sarah had transracially adopted friends, who were able to relate over race-related identity issues.

*“One of my friends has had a lot of the same thoughts as I have. She’s darker like I am. I know a couple adopted Korean guys. Girls, I think that we relate to each other well on the guy front, how we’re treated at a club. I think we relate to each other in how we’re treated by others. I think there’s identification in that there is a lost identity there. I think a lot of adopted kids have identity issues. I don’t think it’s so much adoption as it is race. Like we look like we’re Asian but we’re not...like imitation crab. We look Korean but we’re not Korean. It’s a good metaphor for those who are adopted.”*

Fantine identified with other adoptees over their adopted status.

*“I’m very open about it. Other adoptees aren’t as open as me. We are all better now, have a better life now. That is the common ground we all had. Everyone had different stories.”*

Adoptees were asked if their friends, especially childhood friends, consisted mainly of their parents’ race or their own ethnicity. The majority of the adoptees primarily had White friends. They were asked if they were aware of their physical differences when with their White

friends, and most of them were aware of these differences because their friends would point them out or the adoptee would simply observe them. Leo said he joked with his friends about race. Fantine and Sarah were conscious about body types and features while they were with their White friends.

Fantine: *“Yeah with White friends. Just our bodies. With skin color, people would wish they could tan. Body wise, Latin people have curves, and I learned later that it was in my genetics that I am supposed to be like that. So I love my body now. But back then I hated it.”*

Sarah: *“I saw differences with white friends. I was really jealous of my one friend’s eyes. I really like blue or green eyes, I don’t like brown eyes. I have a beautiful blonde friend.”*

Adoptees were also asked about their awareness of similarities to friends of their ethnicity. Liz was especially enthusiastic in describing the physical similarities she found in her Filipino friends:

*“I remember when seeing Rebecca I remember noticing that she looked a little like me, she’s short...When I’m with [Mary and Rebecca], just having them at my level was crazy. I would be like, whoa, I don’t have to look up, they’re my height. I was like, wow, I found my people. I even told my mom that I found my people. Also the way they talk is with tiny mouse voices, and I was wondering why mine wasn’t like that. I do take notice of kind of being the same when I am with them. It was actually kind of exciting the first day. It never happened before.”*

Sarah on the other hand stated that she was more aware of her physical differences to other Asian girls, since as she shared earlier in her interview, she believed that she may be only half Asian.

*“I notice mainly the differences...how skinny they are, how small, what their faces look like. I make comparisons...my ideal is more of an Asian girl body. I prefer more of an Asian build.”*

Adoptees were asked if their friends ever stereotyped them due to their race. Seven of the adoptees said that they were met with stereotypes by their friends, but it was always in a joking manner to which they would laugh along. None of them felt negatively affected by this.

Sarah: *“I think we used them in jest. I play the Asian card. They would too. It was all in good fun with my friends. With those outside the circle, they would make stereotypes...like we can’t drive, we’re crazy, clingy. I observe these things. I notice it mainly with guys, they can be very stereotypical.”*

Gwen: *“Just everyone talks about Asians being bad drivers, not having good eyesight, having squinty eyes, being good in one area...some Chinese thing. Like math...I usually laugh along. It doesn’t affect me negatively.”*

Leah on the other hand, did not recall any occasions in which she was stereotyped.

*“I think I’ve noticed that White people don’t really want to offend people of other races so they won’t really say anything.”*

Most of the adoptees, namely the Asian adoptees, shared that there were instances in which they found that their White friends did not understand them due to differences in experiences and their racial minority and adopted status. In Leo’s case, his friends understood that they did not understand his perspective, while the other adoptees did not mention this of their friends.

Leo: *“Yeah. And that still happens now. Going to frats, they know that they don’t know how it feels like to go as an Asian. They try to accommodate that. They try to help put in situations where I won’t have to deal with it.”*

Marvis: *“Yeah sure. Definitely feel like I wasn’t really understood. Might have been typical teenage stuff.”*

Liz: *“Sometimes when I was trying to explain on my sad days about being adopted, they wouldn’t quite understand how I was feeling because they were not me, they didn’t know the dynamics of my family, so sometimes that was sad. I had sad days sometimes.”*

Sarah: *“I think yes, going with gut, because they don’t know what it’s like growing up in a foreign country, to always be a minority. The beauty ideal in this country is something you can’t do because your Asian, I feel like they don’t understand. I think there’s a disconnect.”*

There were three adoptees, Gwen, Fantine, and Leah, who did not recall experiences where their friends did not understand them due to race.

Adoptees were also asked if they ever felt split between the two worlds of their parents’ race and their own race. This question did not apply to most of the adoptees except Sarah and Liz. Sarah was most aware of this experience when she was in college:

*“In college definitely. when I got very involved in Asia, I hung out with a lot Japanese kids. With Japan, it was going into a different culture. I got frustrated with American culture, how loud and rude they can be. In Japan, that’s really where I felt it. Hanging out with Westerners, they just smash through the culture. I studied Japanese culture and knew what rules they were breaking. I felt like I*

*was between two worlds. I was with these Westerners, it was weird. With the Japanese I was absorbed into them and could speak Japanese.”*

Adoptees were lastly asked about which racial group they were most comfortable with while growing up. Seven of them replied that they were most comfortable with Caucasians. Two of them, Liz included, further explained that it was because Caucasians were always there as the majority.

*“My family and my adopted siblings are basically White and my friends were all White. I don’t really know anything about Asian culture at all. Unless they are Asian American, then I have something to bond over.”*

Marcy stated that she did not have a preference in regards to racial groups:

*“I don’t think I was uncomfortable with any one of them, they were just different. With my Asian friends we would joke more just to be funny. I don’t really have a preference.”*

#### *Racial/Cultural Background Interest*

Adoptees were asked if they were ever interested in learning more about their birth culture and the ways in which they attempted to learn more. All of the adoptees were to some degree interested in learning more about their birth culture. Curiosity about their native culture and a desire to learn the language were a few of the reasons for being interested. Fantine wanted to know more to “Diffuse the stereotypes,” and Liz wanted to know more about her culture in order to understand her biological family, whom she began to communicate with in college.

*“In the past five years I’ve been interested because of meeting other Filipinos and because I wanted to understand my biological family. The culture is so different. They expect me to give them money. I just want to understand why they were this way.”*

Adoptees varied in the extent to which they researched their culture or exposed themselves to it. They also varied in their attitudes towards learning more about their culture. Liz and Sarah both seemed the most purposeful in their investigations. Liz talked about joining Filipino Club and researching the Philippines on her own. Sarah said she had done an independent study on Korea as a freshman in college, which acquainted her with its history. She had also visited Japan, during which she also spent a week in Korea, and she continues to pay attention to what is happening there.

*“I watch the news to find out what’s going on there. I always keep an eye on Korea. I love that there’s a Korean song on American radio.”*

Gwen had also visited her native China with that visit being the extent of her immersion into her heritage. Fantine mentioned writing a papers on her native Columbia for school. Leo once attempted to trace his ancestry but did no further investigation into his culture, which he was unable to identify. Marcy said her family celebrated Chinese New Year for her every year, and she searched the internet for information when she was curious. Marcy, Marvis, Leo, and Gwen expressed mild interest in their cultural roots but did not seem to have investigated it much on their own.

Adoptees were asked if they had ever visited their native country. Sarah and Gwen were the only two who did. The six other adoptees were all interested in potentially visiting their native country. Leo did not know his country of origin, since he looks Asian but he was adopted from Russia. He seemed to have mixed feelings about visiting Russia.

*“I was always afraid of the things that were home to me. When my parents asked me about going to Russia, I was like, I don’t know. In truth, I did want to know, but because of the kid I was, I was like, fuck that.”*



Those adoptees who did visit their native country were asked about their experience. For Gwen, visiting China helped her to realize that she was given a better life having been adopted.

*“I noticed a lot of the city was poor. It wasn’t that well kept. It made me feel a lot more fortunate being where I am. If I were still there, I wouldn’t have the same opportunities as I do now.”*

For Sarah, visiting Korea was difficult due to language barriers.

*“I was living in Japan at the time. I mainly noticed the differences. I realized how much of an outsider I felt. There was also the language barrier. I know how to maneuver in Japanese culture. Not in Korean culture. Through that entire visit, the only way I could communicate with my friends was with Japanese. It was an odd visit.”*

The adoptees were asked if they were interested in finding their birth parents. Leah and Liz were the two adoptees who had met their biological family. Liz had not met her family in person due to the fact that they were in the Philippines but she was very interested in visiting them in the future. Leah had visited her family in California a few times. Among the adoptees who never knew their biological family, interest in finding their birth parents was varied. Marvis and Gwen were not interested in finding their birth parents. Both of them said that they were grateful for the parents they have now.

*Gwen: “My whole life I’ve known my mom, and she’s my mom. Meeting my birth parents would be like meeting a stranger and them saying I’m your birth parents. The mom I have now is my mom, she is the one who watched me grow up and has put me through everything I need to be through. So I’ve never had an urge to find them.”*

The other four adoptees who were interested in their birth parents were curious about their story. None of them knew the situations that led to their being put up for adoption. However, while Sarah and Marcy were positively interested in their birth parents, Leo and Fantine seemed conflicted. Both of them felt that their biological father was to blame for their mothers having to give them up.

Leo: *“As a kid, I didn’t put the father into the picture. I assumed as a kid that my dad left my mother, or it was her fault. I used to just think and not care for my mother at all. That was my childish anger, but there was always a part of me that wanted me to know. I didn’t know where to put my love in because I had another mother out there. Maybe she was forced to give me up. I just had no idea how to approach it. Just have conflicting thoughts and feelings.”*

Fantine: *“That’s hard. Dad no, I don’t care. My mom, I juggled the idea for a long time. You’re always going to wonder. Teen-pregnancy is always an issue, I don’t want to ruin her life. She could be married and stuff. I feel like it would ruin her if I showed up, so why not bury it. I’m not dying to know.”*

Liz and Leah were both asked if meeting their biological family affected how they saw themselves in regards to their ethnicity, and both said that the encounter did not really change much about how they saw themselves in general.

Leah: *“My dad had passed away before I could meet him. My mom has been through a lot, she has a lot of illnesses, she is overweight and doesn’t speak English. I think more to do with anything else, I didn’t want to end up like her, no a judgment on her. That was the biggest thing.”*

Liz: *“It’s hard to say because I have so many questions I want to ask them that can’t be answered because of the language barrier. I feel bad because before I*

*never really took an interest in learning more about the culture. I don't think it really changed in how I feel about myself except that it made me feel bad that I didn't really take an interest before."*

The adoptees who did not meet their birth parents were asked if contacting their birth parents would affect how they viewed themselves. The majority of them thought so because their parents' story would let them know their own story of how they came to be. Birth parents may answer a lot of unanswered questions they had.

*Sarah: "I think at a younger age it would have. I think now that I am older, it depends on how they react. Would they want to meet me? If they rejected me I'd have issues, if they accepted me, it would fill some holes."*

Leo was especially sure that contacting his birth parents would change how he saw himself in regards to ethnicity, since he did not know his ethnicity.

*"I would then probably look into my culture and get more out of that. I could be someone, and be part of something. It would make a difference. I think it would have made me stronger in the end. Personally I would like to know. I look White. and I have Asian features."*

Gwen was the one adoptee who did not think that meeting her birth parents would affect her view of herself. Marcy was not sure if her parents' story would affect her either.

*"...Hearing their story may affect what I think being with them would have been like, but I don't think it would change how I feel now."*

### *Current Identity*

When the adoptees were asked how they currently viewed themselves in regards to race and ethnicity, five of the six Asian adoptees expressed that they saw themselves as physically Asian, but to some degree White on the inside was well. They recognize that while they look

Asian, to others they also act and sound White, making them feel American as well. Liz and Marvis specifically mentioned being Asian American, while Gwen identified more as an American than an Asian.

Marvis: *“I would say that last year I lived with a guy who didn’t see me as Asian, he saw me as White because I was raised in a White culture. It was the stuff I liked. Obviously I’m Asian. I’m Asian American. Raised in a White culture. Its hard to make the claim that I am 100% Korean. I am, but I’m American. I’m Asian American.”*

Liz: *“I have White friends who say they are more Asian than I am. They know more than me. I feel Filipino American, basically White on the inside, but look Asian.”*

Marcy: *“I am Asian, I know that, but sometimes I don’t feel like it because I’m in a White family, and I don’t act Asian. I don’t think about it too much. I am who I am. I don’t think of myself as an average Asian girl.”*

Gwen: *“I know that I’m Chinese or Asian, but I would identify more as an American than Asian.”*

Sarah stated that she felt neither Asian or American or Asian American.

*“I feel kind of like a stranger in a strange land at all times. I don’t feel like I fit anywhere. I don’t feel Asian, or American or Asian American as others think. I think I’m just a major mix.”*

Fantine strongly identified herself as Latina. Leah identified most strongly with religion.

*“I feel like my ultimate identity is in Christ, it’s not in my race. I happen to be Middle Eastern, I happen to be in America. I love both. I feel like I have more*

*peace than before. The more I mature, I take more the positive from both worlds. I am definitely proud of where I come from.”*

Most of the adoptees’ current view of themselves in regards to race and ethnicity had not changed since they were younger. However, for adoptees like Sarah and Leah, experiences that accumulated over the years did influence self-perceptions.

*Sarah: “I feel more like an outsider than I did when I was younger. Pretty much the traveling did that. The more I studied Asian culture, the more... yeah.”*

*Leah: “When I was younger I viewed it as, ‘I am different and I want to be like everyone else.’ Now I am different and I can reach out to people who would not be understood otherwise. I feel like I have a bigger view of the world.”*

Most of the adoptees were also proud of their ethnic heritage in various degrees. Leo was proud of whom he was as a person, and Sarah was indifferent. For Liz, ethnic pride developed over time, especially after she met other Filipinos and her biological family.

*Liz: “It’s a new development. Before, I was like, I am not Filipino. I think it’s because I didn’t feel so different. No one really knew Filipinos. I was really resistant when I was younger. Now I’m like, yeah, I’m Filipino, I know Filipinos...”*

Marcy and Leah both described ethnic pride changing over time as well. Marcy learned to accept herself more as she grew older, whereas Leah was more proud when she was younger.

*Marcy: “Yeah I was. Middle school I was insecure because there were a lot of White pretty girls. As I got older I learned to love myself.”*

*Leah: “I think I was proud when I was younger. I think there was also a pull like I don’t want to be different. Now I don’t want to push it away.”*

Adoptees were asked about how they responded when other people asked them about their ethnicity. Liz, Sarah, and Marcy stated that they respond with their ethnicity – Filipino, Korean, and Chinese. Marvis, Gwen, Fantine, Leah mentioned their adoptive status as well in response to this question. Since Leo did not know his ethnicity, he answered to the best of his ability.

*“Yeah...I don’t know. I just say I think I’m Mongolian of the Caucus region because I have the White and the Asian.”*

#### *Concluding Questions: Personal Opinions on Transracial Adoption*

At the close of the interview, adoptees were asked about their opinions concerning transracial adoption and their overall experience. All of the adoptees expressed that growing up in a multiracial family had a positive effect on how they came to perceive themselves. Two of them mentioned that the experience made them stronger people and another two mentioned that it helped them to be more accepting of people.

Leah: *“I think that there were bumps along the road, especially in adolescence, you ask, ‘Who am I?’ I would definitely say that it made me a deeper stronger richer person. You don’t get there without bumps in the road.”*

Sarah: *“I think I’m more accepting of people because of [being adopted].”*

Gwen, Marvis, Leo, and Liz recognized that it shaped their lives and provided them the opportunities they have now.

Gwen: *“If I had grown up in a Chinese family, I would have followed their culture more than I do now.”*

Marvis: *“I would say adoption shaped my views...I see it as a gift. It has shaped who I am and my future I guess as well.”*

Liz: *“I am so proud of being a part of a multiracial family...I see things a lot more differently than my other friends because of it. I am proud of it – of being able to allow other different people into my life. Being adopted is one thing, being part of a family of ten is another thing, then having White and Filipino siblings. It’s something to talk about with people. It’s rare. It makes you feel special, being part of such a different family.”*

Most of the adoptees had very positive views towards transracial adoption, calling it wonderful, brave, awesome, and great. Most of them also saw it as a beneficial to the adopted child. They also mentioned that those who transracially adopt must be willing to learn and be understanding, since there is adversity that parents could face as well.

Fantine: *“From a parent perspective, it’s probably one of the bravest things you can do because society is so naïve and mean. I think for anyone who takes part in it, it takes a big heart. My grandpa wanted nothing to do with it. You need a big heart for it.”*

Along this theme, a few of the adoptees also stated that transracial adoption was not easy and parents had to be careful with it.

Leah: *“It can definitely be a wonderful thing. Parents have to go into it as learners. Understanding that, you have to be patient and understanding and show love to your child and not show them to be any different because kids pick up. You have to be sensitive and careful going into it. You need to educate the children and instill in them a sense of pride so they can function well in both cultures and not feel like outcasts. My spiritual beliefs play into that too.”*

Sarah: *“I think if you do [transracially adopt], you should do it when you don’t have biological kids. You need to be careful. They’re going to have identity*

*issues. Parents need to be fully committed and need to treat the kid like a birth child or the kid will always feel a disconnect. My parents never made me feel that way.”*

Seven of the eight adoptees said that they want to transracially adopt a child in the future. Sarah was the one adoptee who did not want to adopt, but she did not really want children in general. Those who wanted to adopt were asked if they would change anything their adopted parents did in raising them, and all of them were supportive of the way their parents raised them. Fantine and Gwen also both mentioned that it was good their parents told them about their adoption since they were young and did not keep anything from them.

*Gwen: “I wouldn’t change anything [my mom did]. I would do everything she did, even letting us know early on that we were adopted. When we were young she would tell us the story of how she got us from China. She would tell us at night. I feel like telling children later would create serious identity issues, but growing up with it, you get used to it.”*

*Liz: “Oh definitely. I think my parents were really great. We had issues sometimes, but I think it was me making it up. They did a good job raising us. We are really close and we aren’t dysfunctional at all. We are really close-knit. I have some friends who have small families and they’re all crazy with each other.”*

*Marvis: “I had a really great upbringing. I would hope that I would be able to raise my children the same way my parents raised me.”*

*Leo: “As a kid I was trying to be a father. I am going to be the best father no matter what...I am just a very different person from my parents in general. It’s not that they didn’t care for me; there are different ways for caring for people. I*



*came out of this situation, I know my experience. I know that the second time around, I would be able to help my son or daughter with that.”*

### **Individual Summaries**

#### *Marcy*

Marcy is adopted Chinese. She shared with me that her adoptive parents told her she was found in a cabbage patch. She has a good relationship with her adoptive parents; she never felt that her parents treated her differently from her non-adopted sister, except that they celebrated Chinese New Year for her and kept her Chinese name as her middle name. Besides celebrating Chinese New Year, her parents showed her videos of China and kept a chest of objects from her native country.

She stated that she was not really aware of her physical differences from her parents until she would notice others' confusion about who her parents were. Her school district was very diverse. She had Asian friends as well as White friends, and with her Asian friends, she noticed both their similarities and differences. Her Asian friends had Asian parents and they spoke their native tongue with their parents. Marcy was called White-washed by her Asian peers. They also pointed out her Asian-ness, as did her White friends. When Marcy was with her White friends she was not very aware of the fact that she was Asian until someone pointed it out by telling her she is Asian or commenting on her hair and intelligence. She expressed that she did not think she fit the Asian stereotypes or acted very Asian.

Marcy did not intentionally gravitate towards specific groups of people – she talked to everybody. Unlike adoptees such as Liz and Fantine, Marcy did not have any kind of preference regarding her Asian friends and White friends, she like both groups equally.

She was interested in her culture but did not research it on her own very much. In regards to her self-identification, she knows that she is Asian, but she does not feel or think that she acts Asian because she was raised by White parents. When she was younger, she felt insecure about her physical appearance as compared to “pretty White girls”, but she eventually learned to love herself. She said that even though she looked different from her family, they still loved her and so she felt all right with herself.

She thought it was good that her parents adopted her at 10 months instead of when she was older because in this way, her adoptive parents are like biological parents to her.

### *Gwen*

Gwen is also adopted Chinese. She was adopted by a White single mother and also has an adopted Chinese sister. Her mother told her and her sister the story of how they were adopted every night when they were young.

She visited China with her sister and mom at one point. During that visit, they saw the orphanages they were adopted from. That experience helped her realize how grateful she was that she was adopted, since the city was poor and she was adopted into more privileges and greater opportunities. Her mother did not discuss their native culture much with Gwen and her sister. Gwen admitted that she and her sister were not that into their culture to begin with, though she was interested in anything her mother shared with her.

Gwen also stated that she was never conscious of her physical appearance while out in the community where the majority of people were White. Even if she was looked at differently, she said she was used to it and it did not bother her. She also shared how others thought she did not seem very Chinese. Any questions or comments about her appearance did not bother her.

She had White friends and half-Asian friends and did not have Asian friends. They teased her with stereotypes, but like the other adoptees, stereotypes from friends were jokes that they laughed along with and did not take offense to.

Gwen identified herself as a White Chinese person. She knew she was Chinese, but she said she was White. She saw those who belonged to Asian families and followed Asian values and culture as “Chinese-Chinese” and did not identify with them, mainly because she just did not see that she was like them. She identified more as American than Asian. She always felt like a White-washed Chinese. She recognized that if she had been raised with her biological parents, she would have followed their culture and values.

She was not interested in finding her birth parents because she saw her adoptive mother as her mom for having raised her. Like Marcy, Gwen believed it was important that her mother adopted her at a very young age and also told her and her sister about their adoption since they were very young. She believes that this prevented her from having any identity issues.

*Liz*

In her adoptive family, Liz is one of six adopted Filipino children. Her adoptive parents also have four biological children. She has a very positive, close relationship with her adoptive parents and all of her siblings. She recalled that strangers and neighbors would always be curious about her family wherever they went. She, along with her parents and siblings, often repeated the story of how their family came to be and how the adoptive parents adopted the six children from the Philippines. Liz drew a sense of pride in her family, not just with their story but also with their strong, loving relationships with one another.

Liz spent her childhood in predominantly White neighborhoods with White friends. She had no interaction with Asians outside of her adopted siblings until college. She shared that there were times that she wanted to be White because she felt White. She also said that she

often forgot that she was Asian when she was with her friends, until she saw her reflection or someone reminded her. Before meeting other Filipinos, Liz was curious about her Filipino features – her small stature and young features such as her small nose and large eyes. She would wonder if other Filipino girls looked as young as she did.

Liz recalled that it was a conversation with one of her non-adopted siblings that made her realize her adopted status. That was when her adoptive mother explained to her the story of her adoption and how she was different from her non-adopted siblings. Her parents did tell her about the Philippines but overall did not talk about it to her much. Liz also stated that she did not really ask much about it either. She was not very interested in her Filipino heritage until she went to college and encountered other Filipinos and found Filipino Club. When she made a couple Filipino friends, she realized that they were small and young-looking like her. She found these physical similarities exciting and even told her mother that she found “her people.” Despite this discovery, for a while she was opposed to hanging out with Filipinos because she did not feel Filipino.

She especially became more interested in her culture when she was contacted by her biological family. After this discovery, she began to ask her adoptive mother questions about the Philippines in order to understand why her biological mother asked for money and said certain things. She joined Filipino Club to find people who could translate her biological family’s messages for her. This encounter also gave her a greater desire to visit her native Philippines to see what the culture is like and to understand her family more..

In terms of how she identifies herself ethnically, she knows she looks Filipino but she feels White on the inside. She is proud of her Filipino heritage and her adoptive family.

*Fantine*

Fantine was adopted from Columbia. Like the other adoptees, she had a strong relationship with her parents. She reported that her parents talked to her about her native Columbia when she and her brother asked them questions, which they would answer in full. She shared that her parents helped her to be strong about herself when she needed support. When people tried to tell her she was White and not Latina, a comment which would often annoy her, her parents told her that if she was not White, then she did not have to mind what they said.

Since she was young, Fantine was aware that she was darker than her parents. She shared with me that when she was little, she always chose the brown crayon to draw herself and the peach crayon for her parents, but she never realized that this differentiation was significant until someone pointed it out to her. Peers would also comment on her Latin features. She recalled that when she was younger and with her White friends, she was always more tan, and her friends would wish they could tan. She mentioned that large breasts and a big butt were all common to Latin women. Her curvaceous body was one she learned to love and feel comfortable with after she learned that she was genetically supposed to be that way.

She was interested in learning more about her native Columbia because she wanted to know if the stereotypes associated with it were true or false. She wanted to know what it was really like, and she often took the opportunity to research Columbia for school reports and papers. Through her research, she found that what her parents told her about her native country was correct.

In high school and college, she became friends with people she later learned to be Hispanic and with whom she shared interests in Spanish music and food. She said she feels

more in touch with herself when she is with her Hispanic friends than when she is with her White friends, and she identifies herself as Latina, not White.

### *Leah*

Leah is an adopted Afghani with White parents and two other adopted siblings – a brother who is half White and half Indian, and a sister who is Indian. She has a good relationship with her two adopted siblings. Unlike the other adoptees in this study, Leah was born in the United States. She has a strong and positive relationship with her parents, who she claims helped her gain a healthy self-image. She recalled once asking her adoptive dad if it bothered him that she and her siblings did not look like him. He told her that he forgot that his children did not look like him; this indicated to Leah the strength of her parents' love. Her parents are Christian. They helped her to see her adoption as a positive thing – God chose her for this family, and this made her feel special. They also exposed her to her culture as much as they could: they took her to cultural festivals; they made friends with an Indian family and went to their home for dinner occasionally; her mother cut out pictures of their native cultures and countries for both Leah and her sister.

She has always been fascinated with her birth culture. She mentioned how having a Disney princess from the Middle East (Jasmine) was important to her and made her proud when she was a little girl. When she reached college, she was exposed to other cultures and joined an international student association. Exploring her culture made her proud of where she was from. She thought her culture was beautiful, and she found that her people were oppressed but proud.

Like Liz, she had also been contacted by her biological mother and siblings, only she had met them in person as well. She stated that she did not really feel that she fit in with them, due to language barriers with her biological mother and differences in spirituality.

Her community and school was mainly White until she reached high school. One of her good friends in high school was Indian, and so was one of her good friends in college. Leah said that she thinks she gravitated towards minorities because she was able to relate to them in regards to appearance and experiences. She also felt that she fit in with White people because she grew up in White culture, and majority of her friends were White.

Unlike the other adoptees, she could not recall having encountered many comments or stereotypes. She thinks it was because people usually do not want to offend. She did mention, however, that during 9/11 she did not want people to know where she was from. Regardless, she did not feel very conscious about her appearance while in the community because she felt secure with her family.

She sees herself as Middle Eastern. She loves the culture and thinks it is beautiful. Ultimately, she told me that her identity was ultimately in Christ, and that her Middle Eastern ethnicity and adopted status were just parts of her story. When she was younger, she wanted to be like everyone else, but now she knows her differences has helped her to be able to reach out to people who are also different.

She believes that parents must be patient and understanding with children. They should also teach them how to function in both cultures, so that they don't feel like outcasts in any way.

### *Marvis*

Marvis is an adopted Korean who grew up in a small town in Pennsylvania. Like Leah, he has adopted siblings, all of them Korean, and White parents who instilled their Christian values in their children.

Similar to Gwen, he did not really wonder about his birth parents because he saw his adoptive parents as his parents who raised him. He described having a very solid and loving

relationship with his parents. They told him about his adoption and where he was from since he was young. He mentioned that they took him to Korean camp but never impressed his native culture on him. He believes that they helped influence how he viewed other Koreans. His parents did not talk about his culture much when he was still in elementary school because he was not really interested in his culture. He figured that they stopped because he was not very interested.

He has a close relationship with his siblings, especially his sisters who are closer to him in age. He said there was an understood bond between them because of their adopted Korean status.

The community in which he lived was all White with very few other Asians. Marvis knew that he was different from other kids and he was met with a lot of racism in middle school, which bothered him. In retrospect, it did not have a lasting impact on his self-esteem. He did not have anyone to identify with in school, but he did have his brother, who was ten years his senior. In spite of being teased, he had other positive activities he could focus on: he was good at sports and academics, and he had parents and people he could talk to. His parents encouraged him when he was down, and told him that God created him and it did not matter what other people said about him. All of his friends growing up were White. Stereotypes used among his group of friends were always used in jest, and he never took offense to them.

He had more opportunities to interact with other Asians after he left home. He had a Korean roommate in college who he was able to bond with over being Korean Americans. He had been to China before, and he shared that he identifies more with Asians in general than specifically with the Korean ethnic group.



Marvis shared that he is interested in visiting Korea and experiencing culture. He was not interested in finding his birth parents, but discovering their story would let him know his story. He was simply curious.

In regards to how he identifies himself, he knows that he is Asian, and he identifies as Asian American because he knows that he is not completely Korean. He recalled one occasion where he lived with a guy who thought he acted very White. When he was younger and teased, he did not want to really identify as Asian, but now he is also proud of his ethnicity.

He sees transracial adoption as a gift, and he hopes to raise his children the way his parents raised him.

### *Leo*

Out of all the adoptees, Leo was the most uncertain about his ethnic identity because he did not know his ethnicity. Like the majority of his adopted peers, he did not know his biological parents and what happened before he was adopted. However, with him, there was also a discrepancy between the fact that he was adopted from Russia and he looks Asian. He also mentioned a discrepancy between his adoptive parents' knowledge of his history. He told me that he had been living his life in defiance of his biological father. This view towards his father influenced his attitude towards Asians, whom he saw as timid, a characteristic he associated with his father and did not want to have. He also had conflicting feelings about his love for his adopted mother because of the fact that he had a biological mother somewhere. The subject of his biological parents and his past history was an object of his curiosity but also one which he was afraid of addressing. Because of this ambiguity as to his nationality, his parents could not really tell him much about it, and therefore they did not talk about it to him much.

He has a good relationship with his older non-adopted brother, but his brother also taught him how to deal with racial derogation, which he encountered through high school and

even into his first year of college. His brother often would give him the same treatment his peers gave him, throwing Leo into a rage. But Leo knew that it was all to make him stronger, and overall he was on good terms with his brother.

He did not like racial derogation, and mentioned that he did not like being treated like he was not a person. However, he liked to handle his issues on his own and also had support from his friends.

He learned to be proud of himself as a person, and he viewed himself as someone special, a view which was influenced by the fact that he was recognizably unlike his peers. He had the ability to befriend anybody and seemed sure of his ability to handle situations on his own. In regards to his ethnic identity, he did not know his ethnicity, and answered that he thought he was Mongolian of the Caucus region when people inquired about his race. He knew that he was physically Asian-looking, but at the same time he recognized himself as a White kid. He stated that contact with his birth parents and discovering his birth culture would let him know that he could be someone and be a part of something.

### *Sarah*

In regards to her sense of ethnic identity, Sarah also expressed that she did not feel like she was anything specific but a mix of things. She described it as feeling like a stranger in a strange land all the time. Ethnically, she is Korean. She is unique in that she has a great interest in Japanese culture and could speak Japanese and has an understanding of their culture and values, giving her a sense of identification with that culture. She had also spent some time living in Japan.

She is interested in Korean culture and has a desire to learn the language. She also has knowledge of its history and had visited Korea briefly during her visit to Japan. Her visit to Korea was also difficult because of the language barrier. It made her feel like an outsider and

also had her realize her differences from Koreans rather than the similarities. In spite of this, her interactions with Koreans have been positive ones, though she did not feel that she was like other Koreans. She is open to befriending Koreans to learn more about the culture.

Sometimes she wonders if she is only half Korean and the result of an affair. This view was influenced by comments she would receive that she did not entirely look Korean or she was too tall. When she saw other Asian girls, she would also often notice her physical differences rather than the similarities. She did not want to fit Asian stereotypes when she was younger because she hated stereotypes and did not want to be a target. So she avoided Asians at school. Sarah shared that in grade school, she also felt like she was an outsider with Asians.

How she is treated by Asians frustrates her more than how she is treated by Caucasians. In Japan, she noticed that the Japanese treated Westerners differently – they were fascinated with them – but she was not seen as a Westerner. It frustrated her that the Japanese did not recognize her as American.

When things troubled her about her ethnicity, her parents' support helped her when she was younger. She has a very open relationship with them, but even so, she feels that they kept some things from her. They did expose her to Korean culture but did not impress it upon her. Much of what she learned about Korea was on her own, and she continues to keep track of their current events.

Most of her friends are White, primarily because she grew up with a majority of White people. However, two of her best friends are adopted Koreans. She never intentionally looked for other adoptees, but they crossed paths and became friends. They related to one another with experiences in how they were treated by other people and how they identified themselves. She explained that they saw themselves as something like imitation crab meat – they looked Korean but they were not Korean.

## DISCUSSION

The overall purpose of this study was to examine how family, peers, and the community shaped transracially adopted young adults' ethnic identities. I was primarily interested in their personal narratives and how their combined experiences and personality led them to their current perception of self. The majority of the eight adoptees seemed comfortable with who they are as individuals. The variations in ethnic identity among them ranged from those who did not feel like they were anything or did not know, to one who identified more as White, to one who identified with her ethnic group, to a few who identified as an American version of their ethnic selves, such as Filipino American or Korean American.

The following discussion answers the following research questions:

- *What is the effect of socialization on ethnic identity?*
- *What factors were most influential in adoptees' development of ethnic identity?*
- *How influential are family relationships, peers, and community members on a transracial adoptee's ethnic identity?*
- *What factors protect against discrimination?*

Three factors appeared to be the most influential in the adoptees' identity construction: parents, peers, and personal interest in birth culture. Parental and peer influence helped them construct their ideas about themselves and their sense of self worth. Personal interests in birth culture affected to a degree the amount of exposure they had to their native culture. These factors varied the most between the adoptees and also seemed to have the greatest impact on their identities. They will be discussed in three categories: Parents, Friends and Peers, and Interest in Birth Culture.

### *Parents*

Parents contributed largely to the adoptees' socialization into American culture and exposure to their native culture. The majority of adoptees mentioned that they were American on the inside because of the culture in which they were raised. Adoptees also first realized their physical differences through their parents.

A number of the adoptees stated that they had always known they were different from their parents. A few of the exceptions reported that they became more aware of their ethnic difference and adoptive status when an outsider indicated that there was an apparent difference. Regardless of the physical differences, adoptees expressed that their parents were a primary source of support and approval. Adoptees developed their sense of worth from their parents' love and verbal encouragement. When they felt insecure about their differences, the majority of adoptees reported going to their parents for comfort. Most of those who went to their parents for support found reassurance in parental encouragement concerning their identity versus what others thought about them, and this support strengthened their sense of self. Many of the adoptees expressed that it was important that the parents treated them as if they were their own biological children. Those who felt this way shared that their parents were open with them about their adoption and answered any questions they had. This open relationship between the adoptive parents and their children has been found to be beneficial to the adoptees' self-esteem (Docan-Morgan, 2010).

What also seemed essential to these adoptees' sense of self-worth was the story their parents' shared of how they came to be their children. These "entrance" stories explain how a child entered the family and gives the child a sense of belonging and value (Galvin, 2009). How parents tell these stories to their adopted children can have long-term effects on their well-being (Friedlander, 1999). Gwen, who expressed a very close relationship with her adopted mother,

recalled that when she was younger her mother would tell her and her sister the story of their adoption every night before bed. She believed this to be a very necessary act that allowed her to accept her adopted status and avoid serious identity issues. Liz, one of six adoptees in a family that also includes four non-adopted siblings, also expressed a sense of pride in her family and the story of how her family came to be. Continued retelling of these stories seemed to reaffirm the adoptees that they are a valued part of the family.

For the adoptees, the story of their adoption explains how they entered their adoptive family, but it does not necessarily explain how they came to be. Most of the adoptees did not know their biological parents or the circumstances surrounding their birth and being placed for adoption. They received only bits and pieces of this history from what their parents knew and would share with them. This is one area where the adoptees' parents varied the most. Some parents were able to provide their children with more information than others. In Sarah's case, she felt that her parents kept some things from her. In Leo's case, his parents were unable to provide a lot of information because they simply did not know. However, most of these adoptees seemed satisfied with just their entrance story into their adoptive family, and the limited knowledge of their biological parents did not seem to bother the majority of them. Many of them were curious, but the mystery did not take away from their sense of worth; rather it became a part of their identity and part of the story they would use to explain who they are. In Leah and Marvis' cases, their parents told them that God placed them in their families, and the instillation of these spiritual beliefs added to these adoptees comfort and a more confirmed sense of belonging and security within the family. However, for an adoptee like Leo who did not even know his ethnicity, his adoptive fathers' inability to confirm the accuracy of the story his mother told just reinforced the mystery of his past, which seemed to haunt him.

From the adoptees' stories, their parents also varied in the extent to which they exposed their children to their birth culture. There were parents who actively exposed their children to cultural activities while others did not. This, however, also seemed to vary according to the children's own interests. Some parents' efforts fed and encouraged their adoptees' interests while some did not spark much interest. For the adoptees who were not very interested in their native culture, their parents seemed to do fine in not imposing native culture onto them. For example, Leah's parents took her to cultural events, but she was also fascinated with her culture and wanted to know about other cultures. This interest became especially prominent while she was in college. Her parents encouraged her exploration. In contrast, Marvis said his parents took him to Korean camp when he was young, but they did not talk to him much about Korea as he grew older because he was not very interested. Similarly, Liz was not very interested in her Filipino culture and did not ask her parents about it much. Fantine shared that while her parents did not explicitly expose her to her culture, she would ask her parents about Columbia, and they would answer her questions thoroughly.

### *Friends and Peers*

Based on the adoptees' accounts, peers acted as a mirror in which the adoptees' could see themselves and recognize their differences and similarities. Cooley's idea of the looking-glass self was demonstrated in these interactions (Henslin, 2013). Friends, peers, and strangers provided comments that often reminded adoptees that they did not look White. Comments included stereotypes, questions regarding ethnicity, comments regarding skin color or hair or facial features, and questions about their family. Non-verbal cues such as stares and general confusion over the differences between the adoptee and the adoptive parent also made the adoptees aware that they were different. These acted as frequent reminders to the adoptees that they were not like everyone else because of their ethnic minority and adopted status.

Regardless, adoptees like Gwen grew used to this and still identified herself as being more White than Chinese. Similarly, adoptees like Liz and Marcy reported that when they were with their White friends, they often forgot that they were a different ethnicity until someone made a comment. However, for these adoptees, especially Gwen, it seems that White friends and peers kept them from fully identifying as White, even though the adoptees shared the same culture and were raised by White parents.

Interactions with peers also reminded the adoptees that they were not entirely like the people of their ethnic group. Most of them received comments from both Whites and minorities that they did not act Asian. Marvis recalled that he had a friend who thought of him as a White person because his interests and mannerisms reflected the American culture he grew up with. Marcy mentioned that while her group of Asian friends frequently reminded her that she was Asian, they also pointed out ways in which she was unlike other Asians and was “White-washed.” The majority of the adoptees, who happen to be female, also compared and contrasted their bodies and features with the people of their ethnic group. Adoptees such as Marcy and Sarah thought that their body types were not the typical tiny Asian. They were also told they did not look Chinese or Korean. These two women mentioned that they sometimes think they may be of a mixed race.

From these interactions and observations, most of the adoptees’ recognized that while they share physical characteristics and some race-related experiences with same-race peers and American culture with White peers, they do not fully belong to either group, and therefore may be some kind of in-between or combination. Gwen expressed this when trying to explain that she is Chinese but she is not “Chinese-Chinese,” referring to those who follow Chinese culture, and that she identifies more as White, or as a “White-Chinese person.” Liz similarly expressed this as she explained that while she knew she was Filipino, she did not feel fully Filipino but



rather she was American on the inside. The majority of adoptees shared this view about themselves. Leo also viewed himself as both White and Asian, but there was an added dimension to his identity in that he did not know specifically what he is and where his biological parents came from. Sarah is also an exception to this majority view in that she identifies more with the Japanese rather than Koreans or Americans; she expressed that she often feels like she is neither Asian or American or Asian American. Her observations on how she is treated by different groups as well as her observations of how she is different from each of them seemed to have contributed to this view.

Friends not only contributed to the adoptees' awareness of their differences, but they also seemed to provide a group with which they could to some extent identify. This was most apparent with adoptees who had friends of their race. Fantine happened to make Hispanic friends in high school and college. They discovered shared interests in Hispanic food and music, and she reported that she felt more in touch with herself with them than with White friends. She identified herself more as Hispanic than White. Leah also had close Indian friends in high school and college with whom she could share cultural interests. She also said that when she was with her Indian friend, she knew her friend saw her as just another girl, and not as a brown girl, which is many peoples' first impression of her. Leah said that one reason she likes to reach out to minorities is because they can relate to one another over race. For these two adoptees, same-race friends seemed to reinforce already existing interests in ethnic culture; it seemed that having same-race friends did not cause them to identify more with their ethnic group. Other adoptees such as Marcy and Sarah who also had same-race friends did not mention having shared cultural interests with these friends. Neither of them identified strongly with their ethnic group.

A few of the adoptees seemed to relate closely with their White friends. Gwen and Liz both felt that they were more White throughout their childhood and had only White friends. “Feeling White” most likely referred to their familiarity with American culture and values. When they compared themselves with those who were Asian, they did not feel connected to that peer group because they felt more White inside and were more comfortable with White people. Gwen noted that she did not follow the values and traditions of Asians, and that is what set her apart from their group.

Friends also played a role in emotional support against derogation. Same-race friends, including adopted siblings, provided adoptees with someone to relate to and share experiences and complaints with, since they may have had similar experiences. White friends in Leo’s case also provided a lot of support, since he was often harassed for his Asian features. He stated that whenever his friends would go out with him, they would help him avoid the places or parties which they knew would give him trouble. They were also willing to support him whenever he needed help with dealing with people.

### *Interest in Birth Culture*

The adoptees’ interests in their own native culture also seemed to play a large role in how they came to identify themselves. All of the adoptees varied in the degree to which they expressed interest in their birth culture. Some of the adoptees were more interested in learning more about their native culture and past history than the others. Those who were more interested took opportunities to learn more about their culture. For example, Fantine did research papers on Columbia, Sarah did an independent study on the history of Korea, and Leah involved herself in activities that exposed her to different cultures when she was in college. They expressed that through these efforts they gained more knowledge about their country and culture, which in turn fostered, to some degree, a greater understanding of their native culture

and appreciation of their roots. While increased understanding of their motherland did not determine how they identified themselves ethnically, it seemed to encourage them to learn more, and for Leah and Fantine, it seemed to instill a greater sense of pride in their birth culture.

Those who were not as interested in their birth culture did have some exposure to it, expressed openness toward it, and may have done some research on their own. However they did not seem too concerned with autonomously learning more. Their lack of interest may have also affected their parents' efforts in exposing them to their native culture. For example, Marvis held positive views towards his native Korea and tried bits and pieces of the culture, but it was not something he actively pursued. He also shared that his mother talked to him about Korean culture more when he was younger, but stopped as he grew older. He assumed that it was because he was not very interested. Adoptees like Marvis may not have gained as much knowledge about their culture as those who were more interested, which may have contributed to a lesser sense of fascination and pride than those who learned more.

Though an interest in birth culture in a few cases may have influenced pride, a greater interest and accumulated knowledge of the culture did not necessarily influence pride in ethnic heritage in all cases. Neither did a lack of interest predict a lack of pride in all cases. Sarah, though she was interested in Korea and even visited, stated that she was somewhat indifferent to whether or not she prided herself in being Korean. Marvis still said he was proud of his Korean heritage, and Leo, who could not learn about his unknown native country, still prided himself in being himself, which he believed to be part White and part Asian.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the accounts of those interviewed, ethnic identity construction in transracial adoptees is a complex process that involves an interplay of both external and internal factors. External factors such as adoptive parents, friends, and peers primarily instilled within these adoptees the values, beliefs, and behaviors of American culture, which gave the majority of them the sense of being “White” or American. As they internalized American culture, the adoptees also gained a sense of belongingness within the family and other groups of people based on their interpretations of verbal cues such as encouragement and reassurance, comments about their appearance, and stereotypes; and non-verbal cues such as stares and perceived attitudes towards themselves. The variation of these cues and how the adoptees perceived and handled them seemed to largely affect their self-esteem. A high frequency of perceived positive cues such as encouragement, loving reassurance, and acceptance combined with a lower frequency of racial derogation and negative or awkward comments seemed to help the adoptees feel a stronger sense of belonging to their families, friends, and a racial group of people. However, regardless of the fact that they shared American culture, adoptees were continuously reminded that they were different from everyone else. The adoptees also found that they were unlike people of their ethnic group regardless of the fact that they shared physical features.

All of these adoptees were also exposed to some form of cultural socialization described by Galvin (2003) – conversations about their origins, participation in cultural events, interactions with people of the same ethnicity, and visits to the adoptee’s birth country – yet the adoptees varied in their interest in their native cultures, which may have influenced the amount of exposure they had to their native cultures throughout childhood and adolescence. Similarly, a lack of exposure or frequent cultural experiences may have influenced the adoptees’ interest in

their birth culture; these experiences or the lack thereof played a large role in the degree to which they identified with their ethnic culture.

In regards to ethnic identity, the adoptees all fell on different parts of the spectrum in which one end is American group and the other is their ethnic group. The majority of the adoptees identified themselves as someone in the middle, in which they do not fully fit in to either group but share characteristics of both. However, as their accounts suggested, ethnic identity is plastic. Continued interaction with other Americans or people of their ethnic group may solidify some aspects of their ethnic identity and expand other aspects of it. New experiences and increased exposure to native culture may continue to enhance their understanding of where they came from and who they are as transracially adopted individuals.

## APPENDIX A

### Interview questions

#### Background Questions

1. What is your race?
2. How old were you when you were adopted?
3. What is your adoptive parents' race?
4. Where did you primarily grow up?
5. Do you and your family have religious views? What are they?
6. How was your family's financial stability?
7. Do you have siblings? Are they adopted/non-adopted? If adopted, what race are they? (If adopted) How old were you when they were adopted?

(If none, skip question #14-17)

#### Birth Parents

8. Do you have any memories of your birth parents? Of your native country?
  - If so, how did such memories make you feel about yourself as you grew up?
9. Did you ever wonder about your birth parents? How did that make you feel? How did it influence how you viewed yourself?

#### Parent Relationship

10. What was your relationship like with your adopted parents growing up?
11. Did the race of your parents influence your ideas of your own race?
  - If so, how and to what extent?
  - If not, please explain.

12. Did your parents ever expose you to your birth culture and talk to you about it?

(Travel to birth country, churches, other organizations, books, classes, etc.)

- How did you feel about them (not) talking to you about it?
- (If they did): Were you interested in what they told you? Why/why not?
- To what extent did they talk to you about it?
- How did they talk to you about it/when would they bring it up?

13. Did your parents keep in contact or make contact with your birth parents at all?

What did you think of that? How did that affect your relationship with your adoptive parents? How did this affect how you viewed yourself in regards to your race and ethnicity?

### **Sibling Relationship**

14. What was your relationship like with your adopted sibling(s) growing up?

15. Were you and your sibling(s) able to identify with one another in regards to how you felt about your ethnic identities/attitudes towards your community? How? In what situations? What did you both do in response?

*non-adopted siblings*

16. Did you feel like they treated you differently from other siblings/peers? How did that make you feel about yourself and about your place in the family and why did you feel that way?

17. Do you feel that your parents treated you differently from your non-adopted siblings?

### **Community**

18. What was the overall racial make-up of the communit(ies) you grew up in?

19. Were you ever conscious of your physical appearance while with your family out in the community?

- Why/Why not?
- (If so): How did the situation make you feel? Did you ever do anything in response to such feelings?

23. Growing up in that community, did you feel that your neighbors/peers treated you/looked at you differently?

- What did you think of it back then?
- What do you think of it now?

24. Did family, friends, or strangers ever make comments or remarks about your appearance/skin color/features? What would they say? How did it make you feel? Why?

- How did you cope with it?
- Did you ever talk to your parents about it? Why/why not? If so, how did they respond? Did that help you? How?
- Did you ever talk to your friends or siblings about it? Why/why not? If so, how did they respond? Did it help you? How?

### **School**

25. What was the overall racial make-up of your school district?

26. In school, did you ever seek out people who were of your race or were a racial minority? Why/why not?

27. Did you ever try to fit into a certain peer group in school?

- Why/why not?



- If so, what did you do? What happened? How did it make you feel? Were you satisfied with the results?

28. If you decided to no longer conform, what made you decide that? How did you feel about it? How did you perceive yourself then?

### **Race Awareness**

29. Do you have a memory when you first realized you were not the same race as your parents? How old were you? What situation led to that realization? If you remember, what was that experience like for you/how did it make you feel/think about yourself?

30. Were there any other people of your race in the community? If so, what was your attitude towards them/what did you think of them? Why?

- Would you have tried to be friends with them?

31. Did you ever interact with people of your race/ethnicity?

- How frequently/to what extent? Where and in what situations? What did you think of these interactions/relationships?
- Did you ever try to fit into your racial group? If so, why and what measures did you take? If not, why not?
- What did you think about people of your race? (How did you feel about them?)
- Did you identify at all with people of your race? To what extent?
- Did these interactions ever affect how you perceived your own race? How? And to what extent?
- Did you ever seek out other adoptees of your race? Why/why not?

- If so, in what ways did you identify with them? What experiences did you share?  
In what ways do you think spending time with them influenced the way you saw yourself in regards to race/ethnicity?
32. Did you primarily have friends who were of your race or of your parents' race?
- Were you ever aware of your physical differences/similarities when you were with your friends?
33. Within your friend group, were you ever met with stereotypes because of your appearance/race?
- What was your reaction to them back then?
  - Why was this your reaction to them?
34. Do you feel that you were close friends because you shared similar experiences due to your race? Do you feel that you did not quite understand each other because you did not have similar experiences due to race?
35. Did you ever find yourself going back and forth between two groups: one being your race and the other being your parents' race? If so, can you describe the experience? How did you feel about yourself when you did that?
36. Which racial group of people were you most comfortable with while growing up?  
Why?

### **Racial/Cultural Background Interest**

35. Were you ever interested in learning more about your birth culture?
- Why/Why not?
  - If so, how did you investigate it and to what extent?
  - What did you discover? How did you feel about what you learned?
  - How did knowledge of your birth culture affect how you felt about yourself?

- Have you ever visited the country of your origin?
- What was that experience like/how did it make you feel?

36. Were you ever interested in finding your birth parents? Why/why not?

- If so, did you ever visit them and get to know them?
- How did learning more about them and getting to know them affect how you saw yourself?
- (If never met birth parents) Do you think contacting your birth parents would have affected how you viewed yourself in regards to race/ethnicity?

### **Current Identity**

37. How do you view yourself in regards to race and ethnicity now?

- How do you think it has changed since when you were younger?

35. Are you currently proud of your ethnic heritage?

36. Were you ever proud of your ethnic heritage? Why/why not?

37. Do people ever ask you about your ethnicity?

- What do you tell them? Why?

### **Concluding Questions**

38. Overall, do you think growing up in a multiracial family had any effect on how you perceive yourself?

39. What is your personal opinion of transracial adoption?

40. Would you ever adopt a child of another race? If so, would you do anything differently from what your adopted parents did? Why/why not?

## REFERENCES

- Andersen, M. L. and Taylor, H. F. (2008). *Sociology: Understanding a Diverse Society*, Fourth Edition. Belmont CA: Thomson Learning, Inc. Retrieved from <http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=UILcQZS6Bi4C&oi=fnd&pg=PR5&dq=HF+Taylor++Race+and+ethnicity+in+society:+The+changing+landscape,+2006&ots=i-7dBN1G-1&sig=RUX5I-Wss61FWMZCdAW7TXIq928#v=onepage&q&f=false>
- Andujo, E. (1988). Ethnic Identity of Transracially Adopted Hispanic Adolescents. *Social Work*, 33(6), 531-535.
- Briggs, L. (2003). Mother, Child, Race, Nation: The Visual Iconography of Rescue and the Politics of Transnational and Transracial Adoption. *Gender and History*, 15(2), 179-200. Retrieved from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/doi/10.1111/14680424.00298/pdf>
- Bureau of Consular Affairs. (2011). [Adoptions by Year tab: Line graph of the number of international adoptions by year and table of top five adopting countries by year]. *Intercountry Adoption Statistics*. Retrieved from [http://adoption.state.gov/about\\_us/statistics.php](http://adoption.state.gov/about_us/statistics.php)
- Cederblad, M., Hook, B., Irhammar, M., & Mercke, A. (1999). Mental health in international adoptees as teenagers and young adults: An epidemiological study. *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry & Allied Disciplines*, 40, 1239–1248.
- Deacon, S. A. (1997). Intercountry adoption and the family life cycle. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 25, 245–260. Retrieved from <http://web.ebscohost.com.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=6ac188fc-389d-4bfd-b2c8-2eb61c53816c%40sessionmgr10&vid=2&hid=9>
- DeBerry, K. M., Scarr, S., Weinberg, R. (1996). Family racial socialization and ecological competence: Longitudinal assessments of African-American transracial adoptees. *Child Development*, 67, 2375–2399. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/stable/1131629>

- Docan-Morgan, S. (2010). They don't know what it's like to be in my shoes: Topic avoidance about race in transracially adopted families. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 28(3), 336-355. Retrieved from [www.uwlax.edu/commstudies/.../Docan-Morgan-Sara-JSPR.pdf](http://www.uwlax.edu/commstudies/.../Docan-Morgan-Sara-JSPR.pdf)
- Elkin, F. & Handel, G. (1989). *The Child and Society: The Process of Socialization 5th Edition*. New York: Random House, Inc.
- Fanshel, D. (1972). *Far From the Reservation: The Transracial Adoption of American Indian Children*. The Scarecrow Press, Inc., Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, Inc.
- Feigelman, W. (2000). Adjustments of Transracially and Inracially Adopted Young Adults. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 17(3), 165-183. Retrieved from <http://link.springer.com.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/article/10.1023%2FA%3A1007531829378>
- Freundlich, M. and Lieberthal, J. K. (1999). The Gathering of the First Generation of Adult Korean Adoptees. The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute. <http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/proed/korfindings.html>
- Galvin, K. (2009). International and Transracial Adoption: A Communication Research Agenda. *Journal of Family and Communication*, 3(3), 237-253. Retrieved from [http://www.tandfonline.com.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/doi/abs/10.1207/S15327698JFC0304\\_5](http://www.tandfonline.com.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/doi/abs/10.1207/S15327698JFC0304_5)
- Henslin, J. (2013). *Essentials of Sociology: A Down-to-Earth Approach*. Boston: Pearson.
- Herman, E. (2012a). Adoption Statistics. *The Adoption History Project*. Retrieved from <http://pages.uoregon.edu/adoption/topics/adoptionstatistics.htm>
- Herman, E. (2012b). Matching. *The Adoption History Project*. Retrieved from <http://pages.uoregon.edu/adoption/topics/matching.html>
- Hochschild, J.L. (2009). Conducting Intensive Interviews and Elite Interviews. *Workshop on Interdisciplinary Standards for Systematic Qualitative Research* [Internet].

- Huh, N.S. & Reid, W.K. (2000). Intercountry, transracial adoption and ethnic identity: A Korean Example. *International Social Work*, 43(1), 75-87. Retrieved from [www.rci.rutgers.edu/.../intercultural%20transracial%20adoption.pdf](http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/.../intercultural%20transracial%20adoption.pdf)
- Lee, R. M. (2003). The Transracial Adoption Paradox: History, Research, and Counseling Implications of Cultural Socialization. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 31, 711-744. Retrieved from <http://tcp.sagepub.com.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/content/31/6/711.full.pdf+html>
- Lee, R. M., Grotevant, H. D., Hellerstedt, W. L., Gunnar, M. R., & Minnesota International Adoption Project Team. (2006). Cultural socialization in families with internationally adopted children. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 20(4), 571-580. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/docview/614462281/fulltext?accountid=13158>
- Liptak, A. (2012, December 24). Case Pits Adoptive Parents Against Tribal Rights. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/25/us/american-indian-adoption-case-comes-to-supreme-court.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/25/us/american-indian-adoption-case-comes-to-supreme-court.html?_r=0)
- Phinney, J. (2003). Ethnic identity and acculturation. In K. Chun, P. B. Organista, & G. Marin (Eds.), *Acculturation: Advances in theory, measurement, and applied research* (pp.63- 81).
- Quintana, S. M. & Lee, D. C. (2005). Benefits of Cultural Exposure and Development of Korean Perspective-Taking Ability for Transracially Adopted Korean Children. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 11(2), 130-143. Retrieved from: <http://psycnet.apa.org.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/journals/cdp/11/2/130>
- Simon, R. J., Alstein, H., & Melli, M.S. (1994). *The Case for Transracial Adoption*. Washington D.C.: The American University Press.
- Song, S. L. & Lee, R. M. (2009). The Past and Present Cultural Experiences of Adopted Korean American Adults. *Adoption Quarterly*, 12(1), 19-36.
- The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute. (2002). International Adoption Facts.

<http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/FactOverview/international.html>

Trolley, B. C., Walin, J., & Hansen, J. (1995). International Adoption: Issues of Acknowledgement of Adoption and Birth Culture. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 12(6), 465-479.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2012, April). Household and Families: 2010. *2010 Census Briefs*. Retrieved from [www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-14.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-14.pdf)

Vandivere, S., Malm, K. & Radcliff, L. (2007). Adoption USA: A Chartbook Based on the 2007 National Survey of Adoptive Parents. Retrieved from <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/09/NSAP/chartbook/index.cfm>  
<http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/09/NSAP/chartbook/glossary.cfm>

## ACADEMIC VITA

Josephine Seung-Ah Lee

[jsl5189@psu.edu](mailto:jsl5189@psu.edu)

---

---

### Education

B.A. Sociology; B.A. Visual Arts, Fall 2013, Penn State, University Park, Pennsylvania

### Honors and Awards

- Dean's List, Penn State University, Fall 2009 – Fall 2012
- President's Freshman Award, Penn State University, Spring 2010
- Hartnett Cwenar Trustee Scholarship, Penn State University, Fall 2012
- Buck Roy C. Liberal Arts Scholarship, Penn State University, Fall 2012
- Class of 1934 Reunion Fund, Penn State University, Fall 2012
- Evan Pugh Junior Award, Penn State University, Spring 2013

### Activities

- Harvest Global Missions Church
- Asian American Christian Fellowship

### Experience

- Coding Research Assistant for the Immigration and Climate Project, Penn State University, Fall 2011-Spring 2012
- Residential Program Worker/Intern, The Arc of Centre Country, Summer 2012

### Research Interests

I have interests in sociology and social psychology. I am particularly interested in socialization and identity construction. I am curious about how personal experiences and personality influence current decision-making and behavior. I



am also interested in how societal factors influence issues such as poverty and crime.