International and Transracial Adoptees

Experiences of Racism and Racial Discrimination and Personal Coping Styles

by

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ABSTRACT

International adoption in the U.S. remains a viable option for families who wish to build or expand their families; however, it has not been without controversy. Past research has sought to understand the initial and long-term psychological adjustment and racial/ethnic identity development of international and transracial adoptees. Research shows that pre-adoption adversity may be linked to the development of behavior and emotional problems, and opponents assert that international adoption strips children of their culture. Emerging research has focused on cultural socialization practices and how international and transracial adoptive families acknowledge or reject ethnic and racial differences within the family. An area less understood is how international and transracial adoptees cope with racism, prejudice, racial discrimination, and stereotyping. This study explores, using qualitative methods, the ways in which international and transracial adoptees experience and cope with racism, prejudice, racial discrimination and/or stereotyping. The personal stories of ten adult Korean adoptees are highlighted with particular attention to how interactions with adoptive family members and peers influence adoptees' identity development, how adoptees resolve conflicts in terms of "fitting in," and how parental/familial influence mitigates the effects of racism and racial discrimination. The study concludes with a discussion on implications for social work practice.

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INTRODUCTION

International adoption has become the subject of increasing interest and discussion. The term, international adoption, is used interchangeably with the terms, inter-country adoption and transnational adoption and is described as the process by which a family or individual adopts a child from one nation to another nation through permanent legal means (U.S. Department of State, 2014; Bartholet, 2005). It was and still is seen as a solution to an ever-present social problem globally. In the U.S., international adoption began as an altruistic response to the aftermath of the world wars. During and following World War II thousands of children primarily of European and Japanese descent were left orphaned and adopted by U.S., as well as European families, notably military families (Herman, 2007). The Korean and Vietnam wars similarly left more orphaned and abandoned children at the forefront of adoption during the 1950s-1970s. "Operation Babylift," a mass evacuation to the U.S. by the American military in 1975 rescued many Vietnamese children preceding the invasion of the North Vietnamese Army (Wilkinson, 1995). In successive years, poverty, socio-political and economic crises have led to an increase in international adoptions from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Central and South Africa (Chen, 2011). Additionally, China's problem with overpopulation combined with its one-child policy resulted in the abandonment of thousands of baby girls and has been largely responsible for the great number of international adoptions from China (Bartholet, 2005).

Overall, from 1999-2013, there have been 249,694 international adoptions worldwide with China, Ethiopia, Russia, South Korea, the Ukraine, and Guatemala topping the list as the most adopting countries (U.S. Department of State, 2013).

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Although international adoptions remain popular in the U.S., they have declined steadily in recent years. This has been linked to stricter international adoption policies and regulations affecting some of the top adopting countries (Chen, 2011). According to the U.S. Department of State (2014), inter-country adoptions to the U.S. peaked in 2004 at 22,991. In fiscal year 2013, there were 7,094 inter-country adoptions to the U.S. Ninety-four of those adoptions were to Arizona families (U.S. Department of State, 2014).

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

International adoption is a viable option for those who wish to build or expand their families. Additionally, it provides children who have been institutionalized and experienced early life adversity with an opportunity to thrive (Lee & the Minnesota International Adoption Project, 2010). International adoption differs from domestic adoption in that adoptive parents and their children meet across lines of difference involving not only biology, but socio-economic class, race, ethnic and cultural heritage, as well as nationality (Bartholet, 2005). Typically the adoptive parents are relatively privileged Caucasian, or White families from wealthier countries (Bartholet, 2005). In a U.S. population-based study in which 1,834 international adoption adoptive parents participated, 97% of them were White (Hellerstedt, Madsen, Gunnar, Grotevant, Lee, & Johnson, 2008). A 556-item survey was mailed to 2,977 parents who finalized an international adoption in Minnesota between January 1990 and December 1998. The study yielded a rate of 62% parent participation.

Adoptive parents come to the decision to adopt internationally for a variety of reasons. Some adopt because of infertility, and adoption is an alternative way for them to grow their family. Others adopt to add to their family, to help a specific child, or for

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reasons of social justice (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2010). However, this type

of adoption has not been without controversy, and international adoptive families face a

multitude of post-adoption challenges that can affect the development and well-being of

children. It is commonly argued that international adoption puts adoptees at greater risk

for problems in social, emotional and psychological development (Chen, 2011; Hjern,

Lindblad, & Vinnerljung, 2002; Wilkinson, 1995). Consequently, the adjustment of

internationally and transracially adopted children and their families has been an important

area of academic study, particularly in the fields of psychology and social work.

Much of the criticism surrounding international adoption originates from theories

regarding culture, familial structure, and identity formation (Yoon, 2008). International

adoption involves the migration of a child from his or her country of birth to a foreign

one and from one culture to another. Detractors assert that such adoptions strip children

of a connection to their community and culture and cause adoptees to develop a profound

sense of personal isolation, identity confusion, and poor self-esteem (Feigelman &

Silverman, 1984, Mohanty, Keokse, & Sales, 2006; Monhanty & Newhill, 2006).

Opponents also charge that difficulties in handling bias and racial discrimination may

potentially jeopardize the mental health of international and transracial adoptees

(Cederblad, Höök, & Mercke, 1999; Hübinette & Tigervall, 2009; Huh & Reid, 2000;

Mohanty & Newhill, 2006; Rivas-Drake & Hughes, 2008; Wilkinson, S.H., 1995; Yoon,

2004).

Research on international and transracial adoption has explored three predominant

areas. A number of studies have focused on the initial and long-term psychological

outcomes or consequences of growing up in a transracial adoptive family. Outcome

studies focus specifically on the psychological problems and adjustment of transracial adoptees without particular regard to racial and ethnic experiences (Lee, 2003). Another line of inquiry has examined racial and ethnic identity development among adoptees. Racial and ethnic identity studies focus primarily on the relationship between the racial and ethnic experiences of transracial adoptees and the formation of identity (Lee, 2003). Emerging research has focused on the parents' or families' efforts to socialize adoptees to their culture of origin by introducing adoptees to issues of race/ethnicity and discrimination (Kim, Reichwald, & Lee, 2013; Lee et al., 2010). Such studies examine parent's and children's efforts to overcome racial/ethnic differences and how this impacts the adoptee's psychological adjustment.

Psychological or Mental Health Outcomes

Research on initial and long-term adjustment suggests that international adoptees are at risk for maladjustment due to several pre-adoption issues including, pre- and perinatal factors, such as maternal stress during pregnancy and inadequate medical care, as well as factors after birth such as malnutrition, maternal separation, and maltreatment in early life (van der Vegt, van der Ende, Ferdinand, Verhulst, & Tiemeier, 2009). These factors along with physical and emotional changes caused by adoption are thought to make internationally adopted children more susceptible to core psychological symptoms including loss, grief, rejection, guilt and shame, identity confusion, and problems with relationships and intimacy (Brodzinsky, Smith & Brodzinsky, 1998; Chen, 2011). Studies of early adjustment indicate that international adoptees adapt well during their preschool and early school years following the months of initial adjustment in their adoptive families (Cederblad, Höök, Irhammar, & Mercke, 1999). However, adolescence,

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a critical period for identity development, may be a particularly difficult time for international and transracial adoptees as physical differences from one's peers, family, and society in general become more salient and exposure to racism and/or discrimination occur.

Overall, research in the U.S. on international and transracial adoption has generally shown positive outcomes; however, findings from other Western countries are more mixed (Mohanty & Newhill, 2006). For example, Hjern, Lindblad, and Vinnerljung (2002) conducted a cross-sectional epidemiological study in Sweden comparing international adoptees with non-adopted subjects for rates of suicide, psychiatric illness, and social maladjustment. A representative sample of 11,320 international adoptees was selected (male and female; adopted between 0-6 years of age) with an average age range of 16-25 years at the time of the initial study. The adoptees were primarily from Korea, India, and Colombia. In addition, 2,343 non-adopted siblings, 4,006 non-adopted European immigrants, and a general population of 853,419 of Swedish-born residents were selected for the study. After adjustment for major sociodemographic confounders, the results showed that international adoptees were three to four times more likely than Swedish-born children to die from suicide, attempt suicide, and be admitted for a psychiatric disorder, five times more likely to abuse drugs or alcohol, and two to three times more likely to commit a crime.

Velhulst, Althaus, and Versluis-Den Bieman (1990b) compared the adaptive functioning of 2,148 international and transracial adoptees aged 10 to 15 years with a same-aged sample of 933 Dutch children from the general population. Approximately fifty percent of the adopted children were 0-24 months at the time of placement. The

study found that parents reported more problem behaviors, especially externalizing behaviors such as delinquent behavior and hyperactivity, with the adopted children compared to non-adopted children. The study also indicated that the older the child at placement, the greater the probability that the child will develop behavioral or emotional problems and/or will perform less well in school.

Westhues and Cohen (1997) assessed social adjustment of international and transracial adoptees by examining the quality of the child's family integration, self-esteem, peer relations, comfort with racial background, comfort with ethnic background, and school performance. The study included a sample of 126 families from three provinces in Canada: British Columbia, Ontario, and the Secrétariat à l'adoption international in Quebec. Most adopted children were two years of age or younger at the time of adoption. At the time of the study, the mean age of the adoptees was 17.3 years (86 adoptees were aged 12-17 years and 48 were aged 18-25 years). The study found that international and transracial adoptees fared well on measures of social adjustment, but there were differences in adjustment between the adoptees and their native-born siblings, with siblings, on average, showing more positive adjustment on measures of self-esteem, family integration, peer relations, and comfort with racial and ethnic background than the international and transracial adoptees.

Juffer and Ijzendoorn (2005) in their meta-analysis compared behavioral problems and mental health referrals of international adoptees with non-adopted controls and domestic adoptees. A total of 34 articles on mental health and 64 articles on behavior problems were selected for the meta-analysis based on the criteria that sufficient data to compute differences between adoptees (in all age ranges) and non-adopted controls were

available. International adoptees across the studies were primarily from Romania, Russia, Korea, India, Columbia, Thailand, Indonesia, China, Sri Lanka, Greece, and South America. The meta-analysis reported that compared to non-adopted controls, international adoptees showed more total behavior problems and more internalizing and externalizing problems. International adoptees were also found to be overrepresented in mental health referrals. Consistently, more severe forms of early adversities were associated with greater levels of psychopathology.

Evidence suggests that adversity during the pre-adoption period may increase risk for psychological problems. For example, van der Vegt and associates (2009) examined the trajectory of psychiatric problems exhibited by international adoptees with known early childhood adversity. This panel study (1986, 1989-1990, and 1999-2002 respectively) included a sample of 1,984 Korean, Colombian, Indian, Indonesian and Bangladeshi male and female adoptees between the ages of 10-15 years at the time of the initial study (adopted at the mean age of 29 months). The original sample of adopted children was selected from the central adoption register of the Dutch ministry of Justice in the Netherlands. Two scales, the Anxious/Depressed, Somatic Complaints and Withdrawn scale and the Aggressive Behavior and Delinquent Behavior scale, were employed to assess both internalized and externalized problems. The results were consistent with similar studies (Cederblad, Höök, Irhammar, & Mercke, 1999; Verhulst, Althaus, & Versluis-den Bieman, 1990a, 1990b, 1990c) reporting that early adversities, such as abuse, neglect and numerous placements prior to adoption, contribute to a trajectory of psychiatric problems from childhood into adulthood. Furthermore, the researchers found that across a span of 20 years, the impact of early adversities on

psychiatric problems did not decrease in strength. These findings suggest that a vulnerability to psychological problems due to early childhood adversity persists in the lives of international adoptees despite removal from problematic environments into better circumstances.

Racial/Ethnic Identity Studies

Ethnic identity is described as a sense of connection with both one's cultural past and one's present adoptive heritage (Huh & Reid, 2000). Spencer and Markstrom-Adams (1990) define ethnic identity as "a process in which the ethnic person is constantly assessing the 'fit' between the self and the different social systems in the environment." In broader terms it refers to how individuals identify themselves with others through the shared experiences of traditions and customs, values, beliefs, and behaviors. According to Yoon (2004), "ethnic identity is conceptually and functionally separate from one's personal identity as an individual, even though the two may reciprocally influence each other." For international and transracial adoptees in the U.S., identity development may be complicated by how they perceive themselves within the context of a pre-dominantly White society, and at the same time, how they believe others perceive them. Research suggests that racial minority adoptees construct their ethnic identity, in part, by retaining connection to their own racial backgrounds while simultaneously assimilating aspects of the dominant culture (Tan & Nakkula, 2004). The formation and meaning of adoptees' identities likely result from a dynamic process involving adoptees' racial and cultural background, their adoptive family and community, and the dominant society (Tan, et al., 2004). The dominant culture plays a critical role in the identity formation of international and transracial adoptees. However, parents also share a key role in identity formation

through imparting their own attitudes, expectations, and value systems (Huh & Reid, 2000; Massati, Vonk, & Gregoire, 2004; Vonk, 2001; Yoon, 2001; 2004).

Much of the research exploring the life experiences of internationally and transracially adopted persons has sought to understand how racial and ethnic identity is formed and how adoptees come to terms with their racial and ethnic backgrounds. Though past research in the U.S. generally shows positive outcomes in terms of children's social adjustment, studies also report that many international, transracial adoptees are confused about their race and ethnicity and lose identification with their culture of origin and racial group (Feigelman & Silverman, 1984; Mohanty et al., 2006). Children adopted abroad do not typically share the cultural heritage of their adoptive families, and in societies where racial and ethnic discrimination are persistent, the feeling of "otherness," even within one's own home, may result in psychological distress and other health and developmental concerns (Hellerstedt, Madsen, Gunnar, Grotevant, Lee, & Johnson, 2008). Opponents of international adoption assert that adoptees are socialized to assimilate to the dominant American culture and lose their sense of cultural or ethnic identity. Westhues et al. (1997), found that ten percent of the 86 international adoptees they interviewed thought of themselves as White (adoptees were from South Korea, Bangladesh, Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Bolivia, Chile, Mexico, Jamaica, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Cambodia, China, and Zambia and ranged in age from 12-25 years).

One way that international and transracial adoptees find salience and meaning of ethnicity and race in their lives is through ethnic exploration. Tessler and Gamache (2012) describe ethnic exploration as "the action component in ethnic identity which

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draws a person to ethnic discovery, as a potentially transformative experience (p. 265)."

Some studies report that international adoptees have little ethnic identity or interest in exploring their own cultural heritage and identity themselves more with the ethnic group of their adoptive parents' (Huh & Reid, 2000; Juffer, Stams, & van Ijzendoorn, 2004; Lydens, 1988). In one study, adoptive parents described their children as being apathetic, embarrassed, or confused about their racial background and heritage (Chartrand, 1978). This may be caused in part by the way that internationally and transracially adopted children are socialized into the dominant American culture of their White adoptive parents. In a socially racialized society, stigma and perceived racism could also present barriers to ethnic exploration and reasons for avoiding it altogether (Alvarez, Juang, & Liang, 2006).

Cultural Socialization Studies

Cultural socialization is a lifelong developmental process by which individuals learn about the salience and meaning of race and ethnicity in their lives (Kim, Reichwald, & Lee, 2013). This area of research examines the manner and extent to which international and transracial adoptive families acknowledge or reject ethnic and racial differences within the family (Kim et al., 2013). For racial/ethnic minorities, cultural socialization involves the transmission of cultural values, beliefs, customs, and behaviors from parents, family, friends, and community that fosters racial/ethnic identity development. Family cultural socialization may also include practices that equip racial/ethnic minorities with coping strategies to manage racism and discrimination while encouraging pro-social behavior and appropriate participation in society (Lee, 2003). An

underlying assumption in this type of research is that parents and others play an active and integral role in the psychological development and cultural competence of children.

Kim, Reichwald, and Lee (2013) have identified two specific types of cultural socialization experiences: ethnic socialization and racial socialization. These socialization experiences are reflected within international and transracial adoptive families when acknowledgement of ethnic and racial differences occurs. Ethnic socialization refers to the acquisition of knowledge, values, and beliefs about one's ethnic heritage through activities, customs, and practices, which nurtures the development of group pride and belonging. Ethnic socialization may involve extrinsic family activities outside the home and emphasizes cultural knowledge rather than strongly held cultural values and beliefs. Racial socialization, also referred to as preparation for bias, is described as the awareness of race and oppression in society, the preparation for racism and discrimination through open family discussions, opportunities to experience racial diversity, and acquisition of appropriate behaviors for different racial situations (Kim et al., 2013). Parents surveyed with internationally and transracially adopted children report that the majority of parents are prepared to talk with their children about racism and discrimination; however, little is known about the quality of these conversations or the extent to which families engage in cultural socialization activities (Lee et al., 2006; Rojewski, 2005).

In a qualitative study of 59 adopted Korean American adults, half of the participants grew up in families that rejected ethnic and racial differences and the other half were raised in families that acknowledged such differences (Shiao & Tuan, 2008). The study reported that parents in the latter group were more willing to address the

significance of race and racism in America and were also more willing to comfort their children and advocate on their behalf.

In another study of international adoptive parents with Korean-born children, it was reported that parents tended to reference their engagement in more extrinsic types of ethnic socialization, i.e., culture camp or visiting a Korean restaurant, but did not mention engagement in conversations about discrimination or racial and ethnic identity (Kim et al., 2013). The study showed that adopted individuals may not always perceive these types of cultural socialization experiences as engaging their racial or ethnic identity and desire familial conversation related to discrimination or racial/ethnic identity. Furthermore, a discrepancy of views regarding conversations related to racial identity, racism, and discrimination was also found between the adoptive parents and their children in this study, specifically a variance in the frequency, type, and quality of incidents of racial socialization. This may be the result of less fluency and discomfort felt by some international, transracial adoptive family members, including adopted children, in discussing matters of racial socialization (Kim et al., 2013).

How adoptive parents handle racial issues and practice racial socialization is an important issue and one that is not well understood. Andujo (1988) found that among transracially adopted Hispanic adolescents, prejudicial and stereotyped ethnic assumptions from society at large prevailed as a point of contention between the adoptees and their adoptive parents. Many of the parents ignored racial incidents because they believed such incidents to be insignificant and others attempted to help their children deal with racism by stressing the concept of a "human identity." Other studies show that adoptive parents are aware of prejudice and discrimination directed toward the family and

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specifically their children (Lee, et al., 2010), but the link between perceived parental

discrimination and its association to child development is not well understood (Feigelman,

2000). In a qualitative study of eight families who had adopted children from South

Korea and Latin America, derogatory racial comments toward their children was reported

as a common experience (Friedlander, Larney, Skau, Hotaling, Cutting, & Schwarm,

2000). Another study highlighted the difficulty young adult transracial adoptees had in

discussing race with their families reporting, "race was one of the most conscious aspects

of the Korean adoptees' everyday experience, because they were constantly reminded of

their physical dissimilarity to their family" (Galvin, 2003; Fujimoto, 2001).

Research indicates that perceived discrimination is positively related to behavioral

problems, emotional distress, and lower self esteem in the lives of transracially adopted

individuals (Green, Way, & Pahl, 2006; Lee, 2003; Cederblad, Höök, Irhammar, &

Mercke, 1999; Hübinette & Tigervall, 2009). For ethnic minorities, including

international and transracial adoptees, racial and ethnic discrimination is seen as a salient

feature in their experiences (Greene et al., 2006; Meier, 1999; Lee, 2003; Westhues et al.,

1997). Adopted children whose race and culture differ from the dominant culture become

aware of the meaning behind acts of discrimination by late childhood or early

adolescence (Huh et al., 2000). These perceptions of discrimination are believed to

increase during adolescence at the peak of identity formation and persist well into

adulthood (Feigelman, 2000).

Cederblad et al. (1999) found that negative racial and ethnic experiences among

211 international and transracial adoptees in Sweden, as measured by perceived

discrimination and ambivalence in one's ethnic identity, were positively related to

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behavioral problems, emotional distress, and lower self-esteem regardless of the effects of family functioning, family structure, and peer support. A substantial number of the adolescent and young adult adoptees had been teased because of their foreign looks and/or felt ill at ease because of it, and two thirds had experienced being regarded as foreign. In a qualitative study of 20 adult international adoptees and eight adoptive parents in Sweden, Hübinette and Tigervall (2009) reported that the "non-normative" appearance of adoptees is made significant in their everyday lives in interactions with the white Swedish majority population (adoptees interviewed were between the ages of 21-48 years and adopted from Korea, Ethiopia, Sri Lanka, Iran, Bangladesh, Colombia, Chile, Morocco and the Dominican Republic). Adoptees also reported feeling uncomfortable within the intimate sphere of their own families where appearance was highlighted by family members or significant others.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is guided by Erikson's (1950, 1968) developmental theory and Stryker's identity theory. Erikson's (1950) framework of psychosocial development assumes that a major developmental task in adolescence is the establishment of identity and that the process of human growth and development continues across one's lifespan. For international and transracial adoptees, the theory suggests that ethnic identity, as part of ego identity, evolves from a lack of awareness or understanding of one's ethnicity to a more clear and committed sense of ethnicity (Mohanty, Keoske, & Sales, 2006). Friedlander et al. (2000) explored the process of bicultural identity development in international and transracial adoptees and found that the children's understanding of ethnicity in relation to adoption goes through a developmental progression that is

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reflective of change in a growing child's cognitions, values, and sense of personal identity.

Eriksonian theory (1950) links the family as a context for identity development. The theory suggests that adoptive parents can help facilitate the integration of adoptees' overall sense of self (Mohanty et al., 2006). Thus, the role of adoptive parents in social culturalization is instrumental in helping international and transracial adoptees feel comfortable with their ethnic identity across the stages of development. These supports may furthermore help children avoid the social marginality associated with minority status (Mohanty et al., 2006; Tessler et al., 1999) and the adverse psychological effects that follow.

Identity theory explains social behavior in terms of the reciprocal relationship between self and society and suggests that society affects social behavior through its influence on self (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). Identity theorists propose that the self is a multi-faceted social construct that emerges from one's roles in society, or role identities. Role identities, i.e., adoptee, daughter, student, mother, parent, are dynamically constructed and reconstructed through interpersonal interaction and acquire self-meaning. They are self-conceptions or self-definitions that people apply to themselves as a result of the structural role positions they occupy and through a process of identifying oneself as a member of a particular social category (Hogg et al., 1995).

Role identities are organized hierarchically within the self-concept. Those considered to have more self-relevance than others are more likely to be positioned near the top of the hierarchy and are, therefore, more self-defining than those near the bottom (Stryker, 1968). Others respond to a person in terms of his or her role identities, and these

responses form the basis for developing a sense of self-meaning and self-definition. If one is enacting a role satisfactorily, feelings of self-esteem are typically generated. In contrast, perceptions of poor role performance may engender doubts about one's self-worth and may even produce symptoms of psychological distress (Thoits, 1991). For international and transracial adoptees, what self-identity he or she holds may differ from what others believe they are.

Identity theorists consider the salience of identities within one's self-concept to be relatively stable and that this salience of a person's identity determines his or her behavioral responses (Hogg, et al., 1995). The salience of a particular identity will be determined by the person's commitment to that role. The development of role identities in international and transracial adoptees is often more complex and may be affected by a number of factors related to race and culture within the wider social structure. How do societal factors such as racism, prejudice, race-based discrimination, and/or social marginalization affect international and transracial adoptees' development of identity and self-concept? Is the salience of ethnic identity compromised by these factors? The maintenance of identity and acculturation may result in conflict between minority group status and dominant culture. The decision to either accept or reject racial differences within the family and society at large influences how international and transracial adoptees integrate a sense of ethnic identity within a greater concept of self. The salience attached to each component of an adoptee's identity will influence how much effort is put into each role and how well each role is performed. This process, in turn, has psychological as well as behavioral outcomes.

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AIMS OF PRESENT STUDY

Research on international and transracial adoption has explored two predominant areas – initial and long-term psychological outcomes and racial and ethnic identity with an emerging body of research focusing on cultural socialization. An area less studied in the literature is how international and transracial adoptees personally cope with racism, prejudice, ethnic or racial discrimination, and stereotyping. Marsiglia and Kulis (2009) define racism as "the subordination of any person or group because of some physically distinctive characteristic" (p. 10) and prejudice as "an irrational and unsubstantiated negative feeling toward members of different cultural groups, such as racial and ethnic groups…that generates stereotypes about those groups." (p. 41). Ethnic or racial discrimination is defined as "unfair, differential treatment on the basis of race or ethnicity" (Green et al., 2006, p. 218). Stereotyping refers to overgeneralizations about the characteristics of all members of a particular group based upon beliefs an individual holds about members of that group (Marsiglia et al., 2009).

Past research consistently reports that discrimination is prevalent against minorities in the U.S., including transracial adoptees, and affects their daily functioning and psychological well-being (Greene & Pahl, 2006; Lee, 2003; Lee and the Minnesota International Adoption Project, 2010; Tessler & Gamache, 2012). Managing racism and/or discrimination can be particularly complex for international, transracial adoptees whose adoptive parents do not share their racial characteristics and have no personal experience with the challenges of racism, prejudice, racial discrimination or stereotyping. Since White families raise the majority of international and transracial adoptees, these children are inoculated by mainstream American culture and its prevailing ideology.

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They are often identified as "other" by the larger society and heightened to their own sense of "difference." Anxiety or distress associated with a consciousness of difference can be triggered in response to perceived racism, prejudice, racial discrimination and/or stereotyping. The purpose of this study is to explore, using qualitative methods, the ways in which international and transracial adoptees experience racism, prejudice, racial discrimination and/or stereotyping and to identify patterns of coping. The study will be guided by the following questions:

a. How do interactions with international and transracial adoptees' family and peers influence identity development?

b. How do international and transracial adoptees resolve conflicts in terms of "fitting in?"

c. How has parental or familial influence mitigated the effects of racism, prejudice, racial discrimination, and stereotyping?

METHODS

This qualitative study is informed by semi-structured in-depth interviews and participant diagraming completed with international and transracial adoptees. Qualitative methods were used to capture the complexity and 'lived experience' of international and transracial adoptees in terms of exposure to racism, prejudice, racial discrimination, and stereotyping and personal coping styles when faced with such adversity. Adoptive parents have identified perceived discrimination as a post-adoption risk factor for individuals who are racial minorities in their adoptive countries, and these findings are correlated to problem behaviors for adopted children from Eastern Europe (Cederblad, et al., 1999; Hübinette et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2010). The ways in which international and transracial

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adoptees personally cope with racism, prejudice, racial discrimination, and stereotyping, however, is not very well understood.

Participant Recruitment and Demographics

Following human subjects approval, multiple methods were used to recruit participants. A flier/letter was posted on a social networking website for adult Koreans. Participants were asked to refer other international and transracial adoptees (i.e., snowball sampling). Additionally, announcements about the study and criteria for adoptee participation were sent to ten different adoption agencies in Arizona, California, and Oregon, and follow up calls were made to each agency. Inclusion criteria included 1) participants must be at least 18 years of age at the time of the study 2) participants must be internationally and transracially adopted to the U.S. by Caucasian parents. All recruiting materials are included in the appendices.

Ten participants, five female and five male, of Korean heritage were included in the present study. All ten participants were born in Korea and adopted to the U.S. by Caucasian parents. Six participants self-identified as Korean or Korean American; three participants self-identified as Asian American, "just Asian," and Amerasian, and one adoptee stated that she associated "more with Caucasian people" and did not see herself as being Korean. Six of the participants grew up in Arizona, although one left Arizona to attend college in Indiana, and the other four participants grew up out of state and moved to Arizona with their families or to pursue higher education. Nine of the participants stated that they grew up in predominantly White communities and that the schools they attended were likewise predominantly White. One participant, however, stated that he grew up in a more heterogeneous community and that the high school he attended was of

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a diverse population. The median age of participants was 31.0 (18-56) years. Nine of the

participants were single and the remaining participant was married. Nine participants

earned a bachelor's degree or higher, and one is currently a college student. Six of the

participants had one or more adopted siblings (See Table 1 for additional demographics

information).

Table 1.

Participant Demographics ($N = 10$)

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Age at time of Adoption	States/Countries where participants were raised
Suzy	Female	27	8 months	AZ
Grace	Female	56	2 years	CA, OR
Kelli	Female	38	8 months	AZ
Leslie	Female	24	5 months	MN
David	Male	18	4 months	AZ
Sonny	Male	31	5 or 6 years	AZ
Jason	Male	25	5 months	AZ, IN
Elizabeth	Female	27	6 months	AZ
Ethan	Male	31	3 or 4 months	ROK, CA, UT, ID
Hope	Female	33	2 years	IA

Interview Guide and Visual Aid

A semi-structured interview guide was used to facilitate the interview with

participants. Questions inquired about demographics, relationships and experiences with

family and peers, communities in which participants grew up, and specific life events

related to racism, prejudice, racial discrimination, and/or stereotyping. Sample questions

included: How did you feel growing up in a family of a different race? Did you ever

feel/think that you were physically or racially/ethnically different from your parents?

How was race discussed in your family? Can you recall the first time you experienced racism, prejudice, racial discrimination, or stereotyping? How did you resolve any conflicts resulting from specific incidents of racism or racial discrimination? Participants were asked to share concrete examples and probing questions were used as necessary. In addition to the interviews, participatory diagramming, a visual-based research method, was utilized to inform this study. Participants were asked during the interview to create a visual timeline of significant experiences related to racism, prejudice, racial discrimination, and/or stereotyping over time.

Visual methodologies are becoming more evident in social research and encompass media such as film, video, still photography, electronic visual media, and material artifacts (Guillemin, 2004). Image-based social research examines the phenomena of human behavior through visual or graphic elicitations. It expounds on language as the primary medium in which to assess and represent multiple levels of experience that are not easily expressed by words. (Bagnoli, 2009). For example, a study by Bentley (2010) used color drawings in addition to interviews to explore the meaning and impact of psychiatric medications on persons with severe mental illness. Jackson (2012) used participatory diagramming, another form of image-based social research, to examine the racial identity development of ten multiracial individuals. Diagrams are drawings, sketches, or outlines that demonstrate or explain a social phenomenon, and common diagramming techniques include timelines, flowcharts, network maps, and matrixes (Jackson, 2012). Participants were asked to create a timeline of significant events impacting their identity development over time, thus creating a visual representation of their multiracial identity.

In the present study, participatory diagramming was used to facilitate dialogue with international and transracial adoptees' past and current attitudes and behaviors towards racism, prejudice, racial discrimination, and stereotyping, as well as to help identify socio-environmental factors that have influenced such attitudes and behaviors. The ten participants were supplied with blank paper, colored markers and pencils, and offered minimal directives by this investigator. Partcipants were given further directives if needed and reassured that drawing and/or grammatical skills were not the focus of the activity. Interviews took place in private study rooms located in local public libraries, and participants were left alone in the study room to complete their timelines. On average, participants spent approximately 30 minutes completing this task, after which, the interview continued. Upon completion of the timeline, the remainder of the interview focused primarily on exploring participants' timelines in conjunction with the interview guide. All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim.

Analysis

The analysis involved a constant comparison approach between and within transcripts while completing initial, focused, and axial coding (Charmaz, 2006). During the initial coding phase, line by line coding was completed where segments of data were labeled. Initial coding involved breaking up data to facilitate comparing data to data. Themes identified in initial coding were then used to complete focused coding, which involved analyzing and categorizing the data further (Charmaz, 2006). Themes were redefined as needed throughout this process. Next, axial coding was used to determine links between categories and subcategories and to examine how they were related (Charmaz, 2006). The following steps were taken to enhance the trustworthiness of the

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study. In order to reduce researcher bias, I met with the thesis committee chair regularly to discuss data coding and themes. Whenever disagreement in interpretation emerged we always referred back to the participants' narratives to reflect on our interpretation. In addition, substantial quotes are used throughout the findings to support the credibility of the findings (Charmaz, 2006).

FINDINGS

The findings are presented in four main sections. The first section addresses how international and transracial adoptees recognize that they are different. There are four major themes in the first section, recognizing racial differences: 1) Physical differences are apparent/observable, 2) Interactions with peers and school environment, and 3) Interactions with family members. The second main section addresses ongoing experiences of racism, prejudice, racial discrimination, and stereotyping that participants encountered and also describes ways in which they felt "othered." In this section, there are six major themes: 1) Frequency of racism/discrimination, 2) Racism with family, 3) Stereotyping, 4) Horizontal discrimination, 5) Ignorance, and 6) Impact of racism/discrimination on adoptee. The third main section addresses the challenges participants' experienced in navigating two cultures. There are three major themes in this section: 1) Choosing between two different cultures, 2) Identifying with the predominant culture, and 3) Coping with racism, discrimination, stereotyping, and prejudice. In the fourth and final section, adoptee recommendations are discussed based upon participants' knowledge and experiences, including parental limitations and needed supports.

Recognizing racial differences

Adoptees became aware of racial differences in different ways. As participants interacted with family members and others, the racial differences in the composition of their family became apparent or were suggested by others. Parental involvement in this process varied by participant. Four major themes were present. For some participants physical differences were obvious when they looked at themselves next to their parents, others learned through their interactions with family members while others learned through their interactions with schoolmates. Other participants did not place a weight on racial differences.

Differences in physical traits

Participants described that racial differences were obvious through differences in physical traits between adoptee and parents. In the following excerpt, one participant described his earliest memory of noticing these differences, which he identified as occurring around the time he first began to talk.

> *Jason (adopted at age 5 months): ...when I was a baby, they said that I would look in the mirror and then look back at them, and look in the mirror, then look back at them and have this perplexed look on my face. And then later down the road as I got older, I knew deep down that I was different, but I wanted to believe that I wasn't. And I wanted to believe that, this sounds foolish, but I wanted to believe that the mirror was just playing tricks on me, and I was actually White, that the mirrors were just perceiving me as Asian...I mean I knew that I was Asian, but I wanted to believe something different.*

Although he was not able to verbalize the recognition of these physical differences, the participant remembered being perplexed by them and later conflicted. Another participant who was adopted around the age of two years recalled the immediacy and surprise with which she recognized the physical differences between her and her new adoptive family:

Grace (adopted at age 2 years): ...Everyone asks me when did I realize (physical differences), well I knew right away. Both my parents are blond, blue-eyed. I knew I didn't look like them. In fact, I'd never seen blondes before. My cousins came over to visit and they were all blonde, blue-eyed, and I was like, they thought I was amazing looking, and I thought they were amazing looking.

Interactions with peers: Entering the school environment

Elementary school is a crucial period for adoptees in terms of identity development. Greater awareness of racial differences when compared to their peers becomes increasingly salient as adoptees recognize that their peers resemble the physical features of their parents. The following participant recalled a specific event in school that brought these differences to light:

Hope (adopted at age 2 years): When I was a kid, I actually thought we (parents) were the same race...Yea, so I ate the same food, wore the same clothes, you know, we did the same activities, we all spoke English, so it wasn't until I started, probably about first or second grade, where I became aware that, you know, that the kids in my class actually resembled the other members of my family. I think what really did it was in 3rd grade we had to do a family tree project. And I guess even as a kid, I totally stressed out about it...I always felt like these are my real parents, so but then the family tree was all about lineage and bloodlines, and so (laughing)...I think I got to the point where my parents had to ask the teacher if I could skip the project.

In most cases, racism and discrimination was directed at participants' appearance. For example, one participant shared, *"I can remember in elementary school being teased because of my eyes and the shape of my eyes...kids would pull back their eyes and make fun of me, and also they would make a sound, it's um, sort of a ying yong ying yay..."* Another participant had a similar experience:

Elizabeth (adopted at age 6 months): Well basically in elementary school the, again just like we talked about a little earlier, why do I look different? Just basically like that. And then again I never really had much of a problem with that one. I just explained it and most kids were good with that. That's when I got one or two of the squinty eye jokes, and like you know, when they pull their eyes to the side like, yea, I'm Asian. And then it was like, you know, in true kid fashion, I was like, 'well I'm not you.'

During the elementary school years, participants also received multiple inquiries from peers related to not only physical differences, but differences in the way their families were formed in comparison. Most participants had difficulty managing such questions due to their young age. The following participant illustrated on her timeline some of the questions she was most frequently asked by her peers, and later, by others whom she encountered:

Figure 1. Suzy's Timeline
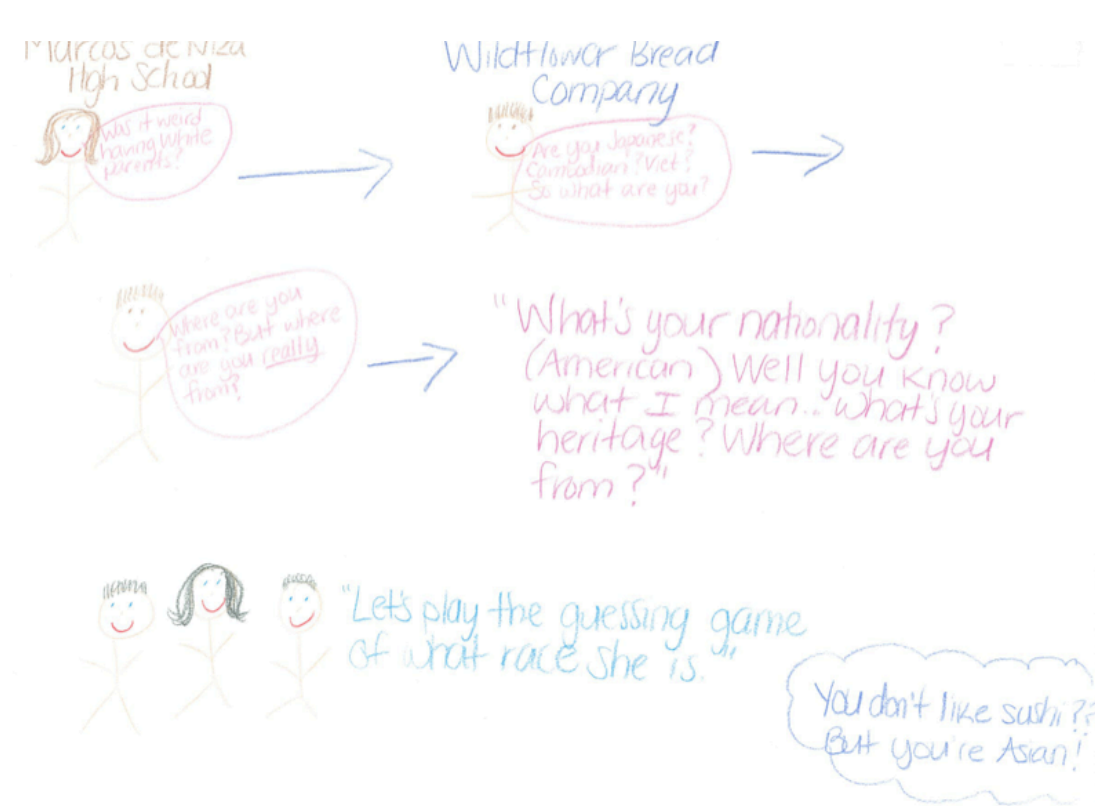
Figure 1. Suzy's timeline provides an illustration of some of the stereotypical questions and remarks she received beginning in high school. She noted being particularly perturbed when others tried to guess her racial background, which she called "the guessing game."

Many participants experienced incessant querying by their peers who were often curious and unaware that their curiosity made the adoptee feel uncomfortable. For example, one participant shared the following:

David (adopted at age 4 months): When I was younger, I thought that kids were just being kids just like me. There are things I was curious about too, and I would ask, why, why, why. And kids are very in tune to anything different, and so that kind of paints a bull's eye on my head the instant my mom or dad walks into a classroom. At the time it wasn't so much why are you asking this, it was like, okay, I gave you an answer, why are you not satisfied? ...More, more, more. That's what I didn't understand at the time. So I was like, why do you keep asking me, I guess was the operative word, keep the repetitive asking that bothered me more than the initial curiosity...

Another participant shared that he found such questioning tiresome:

Jason (adopted at age 5 months): Repetitive. Repetition because that's what I feel with anything, and I make a joke with my friends that I should just have a brochure and carry it with me. It is tiring to give the whole spiel because – I am getting off topic, but for instance, you've probably had this, 'well, where were you born?' or 'where do you come from?' Well I just can't say, Korea, and they say, 'oh.' So, I have to say I was born in Korea then I was adopted at five months, and this and this and this and this. I mean, it's just – I've thought about saying, in Arizona.

Interactions with family members

Adoptees learned about racial differences through their interactions with family members. Some adoptive parents engaged in proactive measures to prepare children for the differences they would observe, while other parents engaged children in conversation in response to an incident with discrimination. Through interactions with her adoptive mother, the following participant learned that she was different. When she first arrived to the U.S., she spoke only Korean, which was discouraged by her mother:

Grace: (adopted at age 2 years): No...No, my mother didn't ever really talk to me. She um basically would tell me not to talk like that – that's how I knew there was something different. When I was talking she would say, 'don't talk like that.' So later on, I just quit talking.

This was the only example shared by participants where the adopted parents perpetuated comments and attitudes that were culturally insensitive to the adoptee.

Proactive strategies. In many cases, participants' parents proactively engaged them in extrinsic types of activities related to their culture of birth such as attending

cultural events, eating out at ethnic restaurants, cultural camp/school for Korean children,

or reading books about adoption. Several participants talked about their parents reading

books to them specific to adoption. For example, one participant shared:

> *Jason (adopted at age 5 months): My mom, being a mother, she found books about adoption, about why am I different. I think one of the books, it was like, Why Do I Have Slanted Eyes? Or something racially horrible (laughing). But it helped.*

Another participant said that his parents were eager to explain the concept of adoption to

him at an early age and used age appropriate books to engage him:

> *David (adopted at age 4 months): There are several books that we have, including one, I think the adoption agency gave it to us, it's called, When You Were Adopted from Korea, and so it kind of shadows a few baby stories, you know, from birth to coming to the States to kind of help adoptees relate.*

In other cases, parents acquired keepsakes related to the participant's birth culture.

For example, one participant's parents purchased a traditional Korean hanbok for her and

both of her two adopted Korean sisters.

Family conversations related to racial teasing. Participants reported that

conversations about racial issues resulted in response to negative events he or she

experienced at school due to racial teasing, microaggressions, or bullying. One

participant described a conversation he had as a young boy with his mother following a

negative incident at school in which he was teased by peers:

> *Sonny (adopted at age 2 or 3 years): ...And when I went to school, it wasn't a secret that I was adopted. Kids could be mean, you know, especially young kids...'Oh how come you don't look like your parents, or how come, blah, blah, blah? And I remember a couple times when I ran home crying. I said well they made fun of me 'cuz I have slanty eyes and I don't look like my parents...Or they'd say the traditional, you know, racial slurs...But I remember going home and my mom talking to me. She was like, oh let's talk about this, and I was very young, so I remember she said, well let's talk about this and do a couple of things, so and one of the books, I forgot the name, but it was like that duck book...It's an older book, but basically my mom read that to me and basically she said, well it's just saying if you act and do the things you're supposed to, you're going to be that. So she said, well you act like our family, you talk like our family, you do all*

these things, so you are part of our family. That helped make that connection for me…

Another participant similarly shared that conversations with her parents about race typically occurred after she or her adopted brother were teased at school. The context of these conversations centered on the significance and value of family relationships that were of a more enduring nature than those of her peers:

> *Kelli (adopted at age 8 months): …it would usually happen around if I had been teased at school, or my second brother had been teased because of our ethnicity. And so we would come home and be upset or crying and things, and so they would, they would teach us that just because we look differently, that that doesn't mean there's something bad or wrong with us, or that that's a bad thing. Um, and so trying to probably age appropriate um, you know, teach us that there's always gonna be people who might not like us or might not like our family because of that…but also the significance of valuing each other and caring for each other in these relationships that would probably be more lifelong kind of relationships.*

No weight placed on racial differences.

Other participants viewed racial differences between themselves and their adoptive parents as less significant or less distinguished. For example, one participant described his experience of growing up in a family of a different race and explained that he saw no distinction physically or racially between him and his adoptive parents.

> *David (adopted at age 4 months): I thought it was interesting (laughs). To be honest, because myself, I mean, I didn't see any major differences, you know. Anytime someone pointed out something, it'd be like, oh that's a very interesting point of view because to me there's no difference. My parents are my parents. No distinction I guess.*

Another participant similarly explained that growing up in a family of a different race was no different than growing up in any other family:

> *Researcher: …how did you feel about growing up in a family of a different race? What was that like for you?*
>
> *Elizabeth (adopted at age 6 months): I assume it was like everybody else growing up in their family. 'Cuz again, like I said, it never occurred to me that – it was one of those things where I was consciously aware that I looked nothing like my parents, especially my mom. I look absolutely nothing like her. But at the same*

time, the idea that I did look different didn't even really register as something worth noting, 'cuz again, it was one of those things where it's like, yes, I know she's Caucasian, but my mom's my mom and just that tie right there is enough for me to go on. I don't know any other way to think about it.

Family conversations focus on adoption rather than race

Conversations participants had with parents were focused on the adoption rather than race. As one participant shared, "*…other than the normal conversations we had about, you know, being adopted, we never really talked about the intricacies of race.*" Similarly, another participant stated that racial differences in the family were acknowledged, but not typically discussed. Rather, he and his adoptive mother celebrate the day he was adopted every year, which is often referred to by adoptive families as "gotcha day" or "arrival day."

> *Jason (adopted at age 5 months): …It was never kept a secret. My mom and I always celebrate arrival day. So on June 23rd of every year, or somewhere around there, we go out and we celebrate…But they always acknowledged, yes, you may be different, but we still love you…*

No family conversations on race

In other cases, participants had neither discussions related to race or their adoption with their parents. For example, one participant believed that her parents were waiting for her to initiate such conversations if and when needed:

> *Suzy (adopted at age 8 months): I think the subject was just never broached. Like they as far as I can remember, I don't remember them ever bringing it up. Um, I think it was just kind of assumed, and I know that with trying to find my birthparents, they were waiting for me to approach them about it. So I'm wondering if maybe it was the same thing about me talking about not looking like them. Like if I would have had those issues, they were waiting for me to bring it up. But I think for me, I kept so much in that, I don't know, I just got to the point where it was awkward if I would have brought something up.*

In cases where no conversations occurred on racial differences, adoptees were left to themselves to figure it out as explained by this participant, "*I never really brought it up or was curious about it (racial differences). I don't know, I think I just figured it out on*

my own and just went from there and never really sat down and had an intimate

conversation with them (parents).

Feeling othered: Ongoing experiences with racism and racial discrimination

"I've had to deal with this (racism) on a regular basis…" It was not uncommon

for participants to report that they encountered racism and/or racial discrimination

regularly. These interactions reinforced the notion of being different or perceived as

"other." One participant spoke of and then traced regular occurrences of such experiences

on his timeline:

> *Ethan (adopted at the age of 3-4 months): …I'm pretty sure I was the first Asian*
> *moving into that elementary school of that group of kids. They never saw it or*
> *were around it or anything, so like all kids, you pick on whatever is different.*
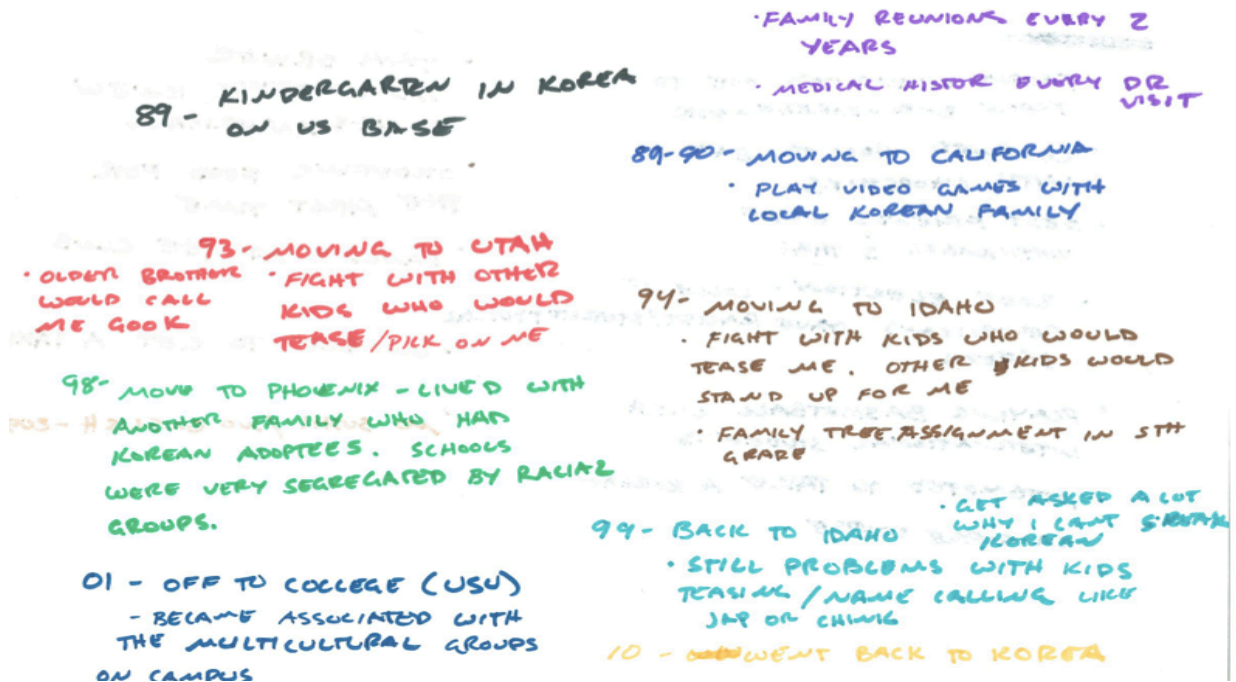
Figure 2. Ethan's Timeline

Figure 2. Ethan's timeline (page 1) gives reference to specific periods (moving
from left to right on the above figure) in which he experienced discrimination
and the contexts in which they occurred. Following his adoption, his family
stayed in Korea where they lived for one year, after which he and his family

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made several moves to different states, including Utah, Idaho, California, and Arizona.

The next example shows the extent to which adoptees often experience racial discrimination. The participant illustrates distinctive time periods across her lifetime:

Figure 3. Elizabeth's Timeline

P/k Elementary
- why do I look different from my parents
- squinty eyes jokes
- Tae Kwan Do

Junior High
- Smart Asian Stereotype
- "chink" comment

High School
- assume I spoke Chinese
- Asian guessing game
- Smart Asian stereotyping

College
- guys w/ Asian fetish
- "your people" comments
- assumed I was Buddhist
- assuming I spoke a foreign language
- "When did I immigrate to America?"
- Asian studying science stereotyping

After college
- guys w/ Asian fetishes
- assume I'm Chinese
- assume I speak another language
- Asian guessing game
- Oriental vs Asian
- small, petite, skinny Asian girl stereotype
- smart, organized, dedicated Asian stereotype
- "your people" comments
- random declarations about Asian foods a person likes
- assume I only eat Asian cuisine
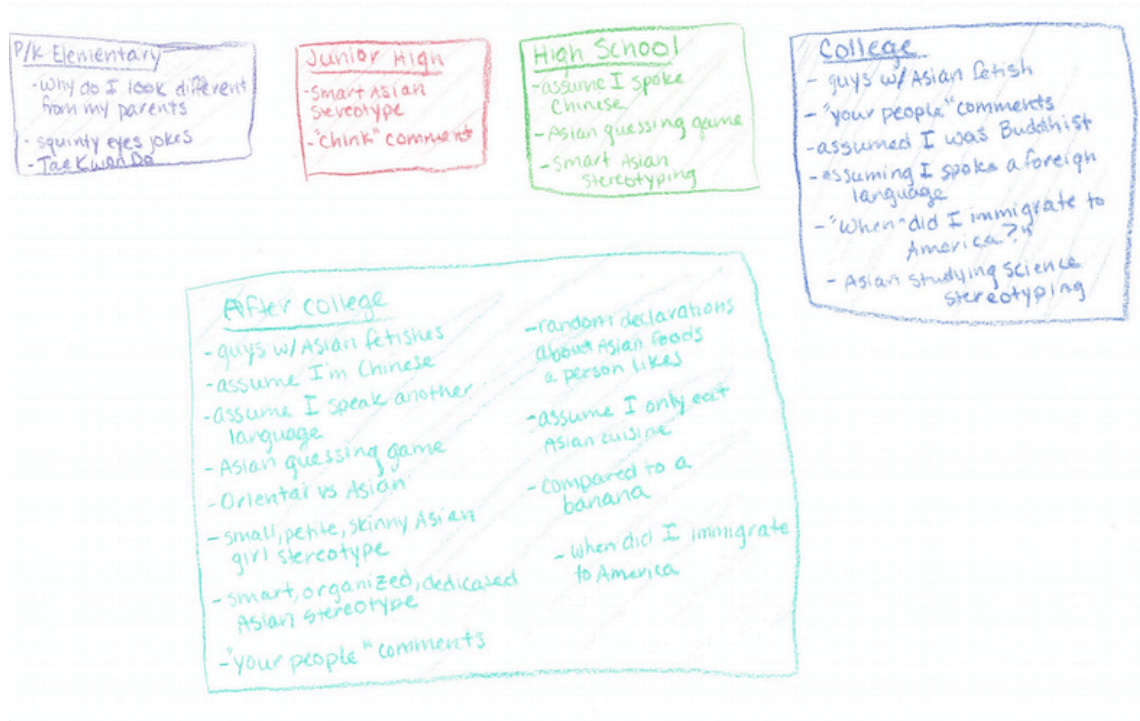- compared to a banana
- when did I immigrate to America

Figure 3. Elizabeth constructed her timeline in such a way as to highlight various stages of her life from elementary school to adulthood that describe negative stereotyping she has encountered.

Racism within the family

Participants experienced similar types of encounters with racism, prejudice, racial discrimination, and stereotyping within their family. Several participants were discriminated against by members within their own families, or by extended family members. One participant disclosed conflict he experienced with his native-born older brother, who called him derogatory names while they were growing up.

Ethan (adopted at age 3-4 months): ...Mostly looking back on it, it was mostly just the brother/sibling conflict more than anything. But because my brother was

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*an ignorant teenager, he used racial slurs and stuff like that at me in anger, but
probably well deserved…I remember my brother would call me a gook, which is
slang for Koreans, and I got really upset.*

Another participant remembered her mother telling her of incidents involving her

grandfather who, similarly, called her derogatory names when she was a child:

*Hope (adopted at age 2 years): My grandpa was in World War II, and then I
think he was in Vietnam, and he died three years after I joined the family. So my
mom would tell me that he would make racist comments to me…Yea, he would
call me things like chink. I guess I tried to shrug off a lot of that.*

In the next example, the participant described being ignored by her cousins, who attended

the same high school, after she attempted to greet them:

*Grace (adopted at age 2 years): We went to two different junior highs because
we lived up in the mountains. There was only one high school. So my cousins
were back. Oh my God, so I get to class and go hi, and they walk around me like
I had a disease, like trying to crawl clear across the hallway, walking around my
other cousin. It was horrible. And I tell my friends can you believe it? They're my
cousins! They're in my family.*

Another participant shared how disappointed and hurt she felt when her in-laws

disapproved of her marriage to her husband, who is Caucasian:

*Kelli (adopted at age 8 months): One of the challenging parts of our relationship
is his (spouse) family, his side of the family. Um, he grew up in Michigan and his
family is from that area. So his parents and I struggle. We don't really talk now.
We don't talk. But, when we were dating and getting more serious, his mom –
there's definitely some racism that exists. And his mom would say things like,
'well what are your kids going to be like?' meaning, are they going to be Asian
or look Asian? When we were first dating, but before we had met, he told his
mother that I was Asian and she got – all along she was real supportive. And
then after he told her that, she wasn't supportive anymore. So it's just different
things that we both had to encounter. He's worked really hard, and it's been a
big shock to him to realize that his family feels this way. It's very challenging.*

Stereotyping

Many participants spoke of being negatively stereotyped by others, including

close friends who unintentionally made comments that were hurtful or offensive. One

participant shared the following:

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Leslie (adopted at age 5 months): Um I mean like sometimes when you're having conversations with your friends or whatever, there's like obviously like racial comments or even slurs that aren't like meant to offend you, but sometimes, you know, that sort of things come up, and it's kind of awkward, and you don't know what to do....

Participants described being approached by strangers who stereotypically mocked Asian-like accents. One participant stated, *"One of the things that always perplexes me is we'll go out somewhere, even when I was younger like a kid, and random people would sometimes come up to me and go, 'ching, chong, chong, chong,' and be funny, and I'm like, 'I speak English!'"*

Other common stereotypes participants discussed include bad driving and being good in math, science, IT, or engineering. In the following example, the participant highlighted several incidents of stereotyping that have occurred in his life from past to present:

Jason (adopted at age 5 months): ...These are all more stereotypes that I've had to deal with from past to present and probably future. The first one is driving. I was a bad driver, or slow driver, or horrible at parking... If I hit a curb or something, they're like, 'oh it's your Asian instinct coming out.' I'm like, 'well, shut-up.'...So they always asked me, even in college, 'oh you're an Asian, you must be good at math.' You can help me with my homework. You can do my advanced math. I was, but I wasn't like a math genius. And later, when you have to take advanced math, I was like, I'm not good at this. I can do it; I'm not good at it. So, I don't know why – just because I'm Asian doesn't mean I am Asian.
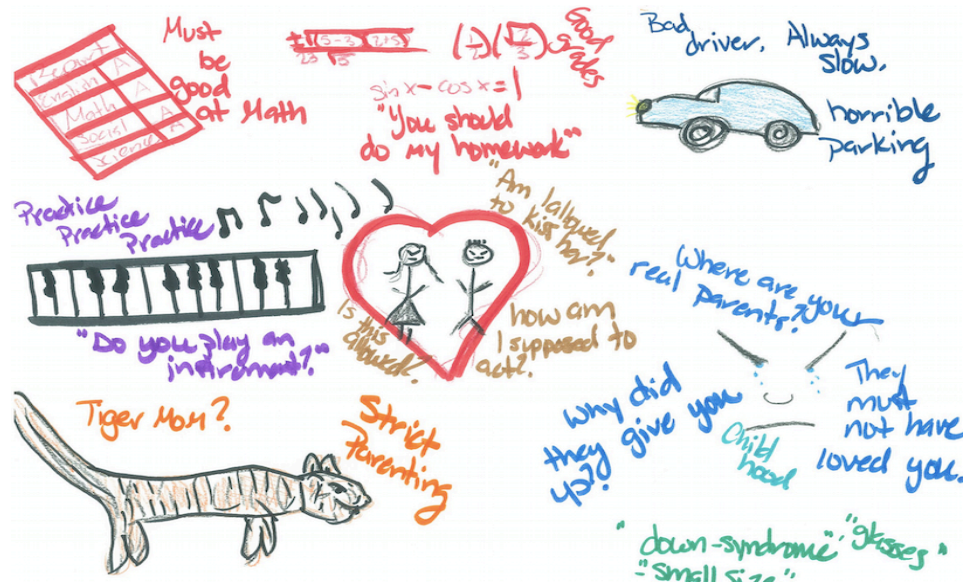
Figure 4. Jason's Timeline

Figure 4. Jason's depiction of negative stereotypes he has experienced. One stereotype that he frequently encountered was being the "smart" Asian. Other stereotypes included assumptions that he was musically gifted and received strict parenting, as illustrated by the reference to "tiger mom" on his timeline.

In other cases, participants discussed prejudicial and stereotypical ethnic assumptions others made of them because of their race and ethnicity. For example, the following participant explained that others often assume that all Asians use chopsticks well:

> *Elizabeth (adopted at age 6 months): It's one of those things you always have to be like, 'no, it's not because I'm Asian I can do this.' Somebody at that point also made a chopsticks comment because we were using chopsticks. And they were like, 'oh you're really good at that you know. Is it because you're Asian?' I was like, 'no, I had to learn how to use chopsticks like anybody else. It's not inherently sequenced into our DNA, coming out using chopsticks.*

Horizontal discrimination

Several participants experienced horizontal racism or inequalities. Horizontal racism may be described as racism or discrimination that occurs between members of the same racial group or between members of different, targeted racial groups (Adams, Bell,

& Griffin, 1997). When this occurred, participants described feeling discriminated by other Koreans. One participant shared, *"It wasn't until I met Asian people, and they would say like, 'was it weird growing up in a White family?' and things like that…"* Another participant described an event in college that discouraged his growing interest in exploring his Korean heritage:

> *Sonny (adopted at age 5-6 years): I remember my first experience with Korean culture was going up to a Korean organization there (in college). I remember going up to them and saying, 'Hey I'm Korean. I want to get some information about joining your club,' because at that time, I was joining every club I could that was associated with Asians. But I very distinctly remember them saying, 'Well do you speak Korean?' I said, no. 'Do you read Korean?' No. 'Are you from Korea?' No. 'Well then, I don't think this is a good club for you.' And it struck me at that moment that I said, regardless of whether or not I can speak it or read it, or if I have Korean parents or not, I'm showing interest in a culture. Regardless of whether or not I actually am that ethnicity doesn't matter. It's a person that has that passion for it, and they just totally shut it down.*

In the next example, the participant spoke of an event where he and his Caucasian girlfriend received disapproving looks from members of another racial group due to interracially dating:

> *David (adopted at age 4 months): Moving down (pointing to timeline), there's an elephant and some people watching the elephant. I was at the zoo with my girlfriend at the time, who was Caucasian. And there were some older ladies. They were Chinese. I could tell by looking at them, and they were giving us very unusual looks because um – especially I found that older Chinese and Japanese people tend to view interracial dating and mixed families in a much more negative way. It was unusual, you know. I was like maybe they're looking at the elephant, but then we moved and they kept watching us, so you know…and a similar incident happened in a restaurant as well.*

Ignorance

Participants attributed acts of racism, prejudice, racial discrimination, and stereotyping to ignorance. One participant defined ignorance in this way, *"Ignorance is a lack of knowledge. You can't fix stupidity, and racism is like that. It's stupidity, and there's no way to fix it. I don't even bother anymore…"* The following participant further

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explained, *"…But it's more like they're ignorant because they're not aware of the situation and they assume things and then when they've discovered the truth, then their personality or their tone changes…"* Another participant stated that she believes people are often curious and ask insensitive questions because they do not know any better. She explained:

> *Suzy (adopted at age 8 months): …But now I think I'm realizing that people are just ignorant and sometimes they just don't realize it. Like, I know some people are just curious, but they just don't know how to word it. Um, so I just kind of try not to let it get to me as much as it used to. Like before I'd get more angry about it, but I wouldn't really know what to do about it because it would have already happened. So it's not like I could, like, confront the person or anything…*

In the next example, the participant described an exchange between him and a schoolmate that occurred in high school. The incident took place after his class watched a news report on the political conflict between North and South Korea:

> *David (adopted at age 4 months): The one below that has a line (pointing to timeline). The line, I will call it ignorance. (It) happened this past year. I have on top the letters DPRK over SK, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, otherwise known as North Korea versus South Korea divided by the 38ᵗʰ parallel. I had someone come up, and I find this very humorous, I had someone come up to me this past year and say, and they've known me for awhile, and they've known I'm Korean, and they said, 'It's so good that you escaped the political hardship (laughing). Did you have to escape?' And I was like, no. Please explain. Then I realized they thought that I was from North Korea and they said, 'Oh, which one is the bad one?' You know, so that's just ignorance, but it's still, nonetheless, a type of stereotype…If they were more informed they would realize North Korea is a closed country in general and very closed to adoption even more so than it's compatriot in the south…I thought it was really funny, but it has serious undertones.*
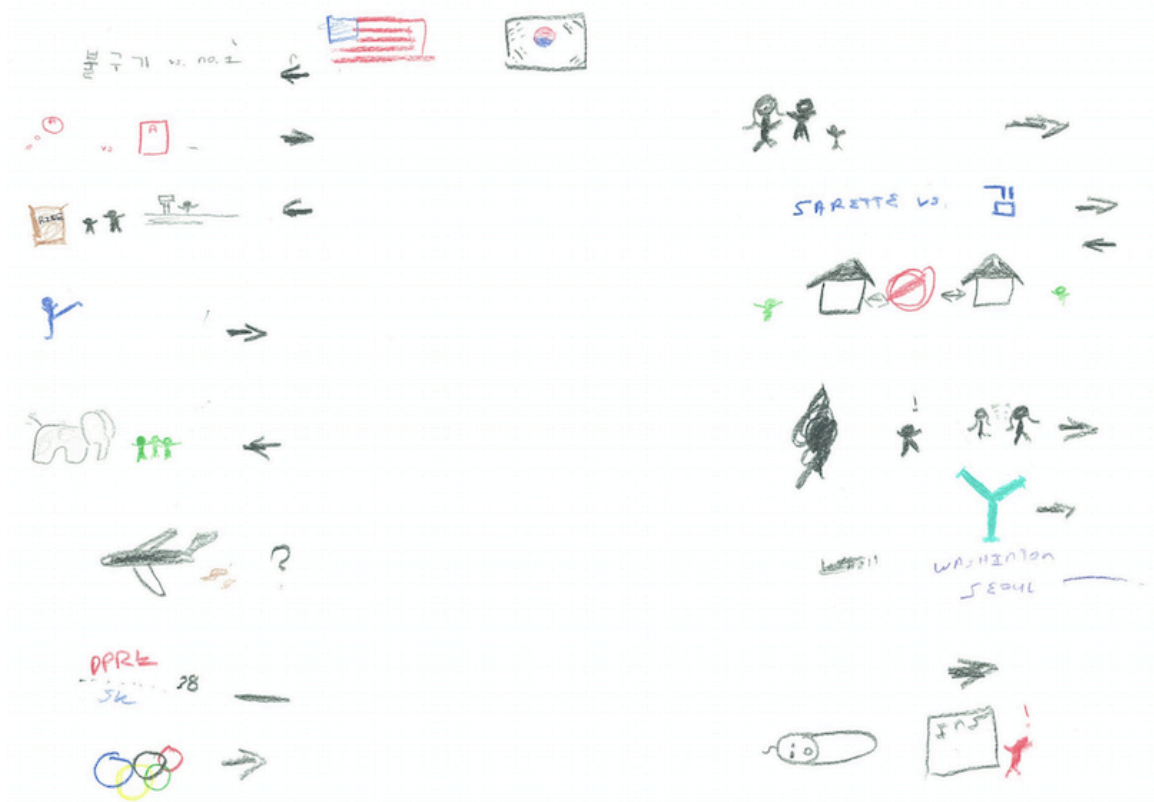
Figure 5. David's Timeline

Figure 5. David's timeline is organized by incidents that have occurred across time from the present to the past (from top right and down to top left and down). The arrows represent his belief that "prejudice, racism, etc., flows both ways." The incident described in the narrative above is represented on the bottom left side.

Impact on adoptees: Loss of self and ambivalence towards ethnicity

Experiences of racism and discrimination impact adoptees' sense of self, as well as sense of agency, and can induce feelings of isolation and not belonging. As one participant explained, *"I always felt like a loner. I didn't feel – I knew I didn't look like them (peers). I wished that I looked White."* Another participant shared, *"...sometimes I feel like I'm not Asian enough, and sometimes I feel like I don't belong around other White groups..."* Similarly the following participant explained, *"...I think it was probably at that elementary school...um, maybe the one before, where that was the*

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turning point to where I started to become more aware of it, like, oh I'm different and

that's not maybe always a good thing." She further stated, *"…I didn't want necessarily to*

be Korean if that meant I was going to be teased…"

Ambivalence towards one's ethnic and racial identity is an underlying theme that

emerged as participants shared their stories. One participant described the conflict he has

experienced in terms of identity and achieving a balanced sense of self in the following

quote:

> *Sonny (adopted at age 5-6 years): So it's this weird dualing thing between them and that's what I mean about like finding the balance between the two, not necessarily the balance, but the two sides are warring with each other and trying to find a mutual agreement between the two, and it doesn't seem to work too well most of the time. 'Cuz it's two different cultures…*

He illustrates these difficulties on his timeline through the use of symbols:

> *Sonny: And then right here is me now, so it's a split. I have to enjoy my Korean heritage and my American heritage both at the same time. I have to find balance between the two somehow or another, and it's a daily struggle sometimes. And a lot of people may not say that or voice it, but it can be. 'Cuz you have to, I don't know, it's hard to describe, but finding a balance between the two is the important thing I think…Some days I'm more American, some days I'm more Korean, and sometimes I'm neither. Sometimes it's just one of those in the middle things depending on the day.*
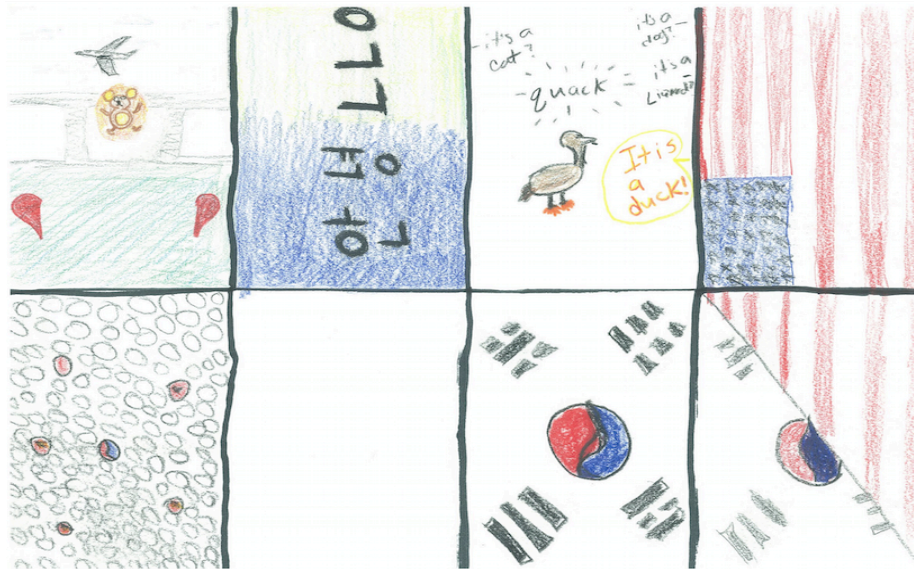
Figure 6. Sonny's Timeline

Figure 7. Sonny depicts his arrival to the U.S. in the top left square above. He stated that his adoptive parents gave him a teddy bear at the airport when they arrived to pick him up and take him to his new home. The American flag represents receiving U.S. citizenship, which was a significant event for Sonny. The Taeguk in bold (bottom row), a well-known symbol in Korean culture, represents a period in Sonny's life where he actively sought ways to connect with his Korean heritage. The last square on the bottom row (to the far right) represents the "split" he now feels between his American and Korean heritages.

Navigating two cultures: Efforts to fit in and cope

Participants spoke of the difficulties they experienced in terms of navigating two cultures. The ways in which participants managed this process varied. Three different themes were identified related to efforts participants made to "fit in" and cope and will be discussed: 1) Conflict over choosing one racial group over another, 2) Identifying with the predominant culture, and 3) Ways of coping with racism, prejudice, racial discrimination, and stereotyping.

Choosing one racial group over another

Racism and discrimination often caused inner conflict and, as a result, left many participants feeling uncomfortable and confused. These feelings often generated an even stronger desire to "fit in" with peers and to be accepted. Such experiences and the contexts in which they occurred had a great bearing on how adoptees responded to situations where they felt discriminated against. For example, one participant spoke of wrestling with the decision to end a friendship with another Asian girl because of how this association affected her social status:

> *Kelli (adopted at the age of 8 months): So then going on kind of junior high, high school, seeing that other people were, you know, dating or had crushes and things and feeling excluded 'cuz nobody had a crush on me. Um the blond hair, blue-eyed thing syndrome again. Also about my friend who was Asian, the only other Asian girl in the class, and I think the school, you know, being with her was kind of shameful…I was more accepted when I was not hanging out with her. But that was also kind of hard because I liked her.*

Kelli depicted this particular event visually through the use of symbols and color on her timeline.

> *Researcher: And I noticed you made a little red squiggly to kind of represent this event. Tell me a little more about that.*
>
> *Kelli: Right, right, the conflict. I wanted to be here, but I was more accepted here (points to figures on timeline), so just being torn and just feeling very divided and sort of like my loyalty was being tested of, 'do I like this friend?' Do I hang out with her and risk, you know, being made fun of, being called names or do I distance myself and make fun of her sometimes also just so it's off of me (laughing)? So it was just that kind of junior high, societal pressure and acceptance and wanting acceptance certainly.*

Figure 7. Kelli's Timeline

Figure 7. Kelli's timeline depicts her journey through adoption and some of the challenges she has experienced caused by racism and discrimination. Some of the words Kelli chose to put on her timeline, "invalidating," "shame," and "acceptance," speak to the conflict she spoke of in the above narrative. However, the words, "hope," "strength," and "proud" illustrate how she currently feels after coming to terms with her Korean and American heritages.

Identifying with predominant culture

Adoptees learn from parents, peers, and the community at large that they are different. In order to fit in, they adopt the culture of their adoptive parents. One participant explained it in this way:

> *Sonny (adopted at age 5-6 years): I tend to think I'm on the American side more than the Korean side, but it's a weird thing because I want to identify with Korean, but I don't really want to. I think that's because of the experiences that I've had, so I'm hesitant to be Korean, but I'm comfortable being American, but I am Korean.*

Another participant shared, "*I grew up in such like a White-based town and like what not, that I almost don't see myself as being like Korean or like – I almost associate more with Caucasian people...*" She further stated, *"We honestly wanted to be like, as close to like*

as our parents were, as White as possible…" In the next excerpt, the participant

described this phenomenon in the following way:

> *Kelli (adopted at age 8 months): Um I think part of it was, you know, I don't want to be teased. So it was hurtful just in that kind of sense…I can't just, you know, shed my skin and become Caucasian (laughing). But really sort of the fitting in um and not understanding why I was different, 'cuz like you said, the cultural kind of norms. I grew up thinking I was Daisy Duke (from 1980s television series, Dukes of Hazzard). I grew up kind of with a lot of the um White cultural America things, you know – what we did, what we didn't do, what we watched, what we ate…And so still not really understanding the difference between culturally being immersed in United States culture and not understanding why I couldn't picture myself as Daisy Duke just because I looked different. So I think that was a significant um piece to my identity of the contrast and the confusion of living in two worlds simultaneously.*

Another participant similarly described this process as "molding" into the culture of her

Caucasian parents:

> *Suzy (adopted at age 8 months): Um I think I can identify a little more with being Korea, um as opposed to when I was growing up. I think I molded myself well into my parent's culture. I don't know if it would be the American culture? Um but just kind of like, my parent's values and how they acted in everything whereas when I met Asian people, it was different. Like, they're very respectful of their elders, so some of my friends when they'd hear me call my aunt and uncle by their actual names, they thought that was kind of weird, just because it was a respect thing…*

While Kelli and Suzy describe feeling more connected with their Korean heritage as

adults, they tried to identify more with the dominant race when they were young.

The communities in which adoptees are raised also influence their sense of

identity. A majority of the participants stated that they grew up in predominantly White

communities. In the following example, the participant described the impact of growing

up in a predominantly White Minnesota neighborhood on her sense of identity:

> *Researcher: Do you feel like living in a mostly White community impacted your sense of identity at all?*

> *Leslie (adopted at age 5 months): Oh yea. I think it definitely made me less inclined to my ethnicity than, yea – (laughs) – definitely, definitely did.*

> *Researcher: Okay so how about your school? What was that like? Was it diverse,*

non-diverse? Same or like your neighborhood?

Leslie: It was a little diverse, but not by a lot. Maybe like 10%. Yea.

Researcher: So I'm just curious, growing up in that kind of environment, you said you relate more to like your parent's being White and all of that. How do you feel about that now? Is it the same or…?

Leslie: Yea, it's pretty much stayed the same. Um, moving here to AZ where the community culture is extremely more diverse here, obviously, it's changed a little, but like – I have a lot more like different friends from different ethnicities than I did in Minnesota.

Adoptees become so assimilated into western culture, that they often experience

discomfort around other Asians. One participant shared the following:

Jason (adopted at age 5 months): …I'm more comfortable when I'm around White people than I am with Asians 'cuz I don't know how to deal with Asians. And when I was little, I'd get anxious if there were more Asians in the room 'cuz I was like, oh my God, they're gonna find me because I'm Asian, but I'm not Asian 'cuz I was raised White.

Alternatively, one participant, the youngest of the participants, described

identifying strongly with both his Korean and American identities and of being exposed

to multiple cultures through the community in which he lives and grew up, which he

considers heterogeneous. This participant stated, *"…at every stage of my life, I've made*

friends with every ethnicity you could think of…" He also spoke of his own interest in

learning about the languages, customs, traditions, and foods of different cultures in the

following quote:

David (adopted at age 4 months): I identify as Korean, um specifically a Korean American, um, because I do take a lot of interest in the Korean culture. I can cook Korean food. I'm learning Korean, trying to…Culturally I suppose I'm a little bit of a mix of American culture, Korean. I also speak Spanish and Brazilian Portuguese, so there's a little bit of a few different continents there.

Ways of coping with racism

Participants shared numerous memorable accounts of racism and racial

discrimination that have occurred across their lifetimes. In many ways, participants were

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not only perplexed by some of the discriminatory encounters they experienced, but also

caught off guard, which rendered them uncertain in terms of how to respond to the

perpetrator in the moment. One participant stated:

> *Jason (adopted at age 5 months): People are curious, but sometimes they're not, what's the term? Compassionate when they ask you questions 'cuz they'll just blurt out whatever they want to ask you, and sometimes some of the things that come out of people's mouths, I'm just shocked. Like why are you asking me this? And some people are just stupid.*

In the next excerpt, the participant explained that she did not know what to say to people

when they made racial comments or slurs towards her and that she kept her feelings to

herself even if she felt bothered:

> *Leslie (adopted at age 5 months): I was really shy in high school, so I almost like most of the time, I don't even know what to say back to people when they say stuff like that and am very like quiet and kind of just keep it to myself even if it bothers me...*

Another participant described an event that occurred at work between her and another

staff member and recalled being caught off guard by his comments:

> *Elizabeth (adopted at age 6 months): And the weirdest one I ever got was I was compared to a banana, yellow on the outside, white on the inside. It just threw me. And again, this was one of those ones where – he was a volunteer and I had seen him before, but he was in there just making small talk while I was waiting for somebody else. And he went through the, oh you know, what kind of Asian are you? I said I was adopted, and he was like, oh okay, da di da. At first he started out fairly normal. He was like, 'oh yea, I have an Asian friend.' Great! Good for you. I don't know your Asian friend by the way just so you know, because there's that assumption that we clearly must know all other Asians around. And then he's like, 'yea so you're probably like a banana then.' And I'm like, a what? He was like, 'you know, yellow on the outside, white on the inside.' I don't know you! If it was my one friend, yes, you could make that comment, because we've both made comments to each other about that. But I don't know you. Why did you make that comment? In the smallest sense that was really bad because that was like really awkward, and I'm not sure how to break out of that one, especially because it caught me so off guard. If I was expecting something weird like that or I'd gotten the hint earlier, I probably would have had some comment ready and waiting, but it was so sudden, it was like, oh man...because I had no idea what to do.*

How adoptees managed these situations was highly individual and appeared to

change across time and with maturity. Some participants used physical aggression, verbal

quips, and disregard while others used humor or isolation. The following participants

acted out in anger, which led to physical altercations with their perpetrators:

> *Sonny (adopted at age 5-6 years): Well, when I was younger, I was very angry about it 'cuz it was like they're teenagers, I hate them. That lasted quite awhile. I have to admit, I wasn't the best kid when it came to that stuff, and I got into a lot of fights because of it. I did it because I took martial arts and to the point where I almost welcomed it because it reaffirmed – like whenever I beat somebody with Tae Kwon Do, it reaffirmed like you're racist, but I'm better than you… I don't get into fights anymore. When it comes to racist comments and things like that, those are handled more with little quips, or just ignore them all together. 'Cuz racism is born from hate, and hate is fueled by reaction, and if you don't have any reaction toward it, there's nothing to work off of. That's what they want is a reaction from you and as cliché as this sounds, the moment you give into it, they've won. And it's true in that sense 'cuz it's not like you're better than them, but their comments, their mentality is beneath you at that point. They're not beneath you, but that aspect of them is beneath you at that point. What do you do in those cases? Just ignore it. Step over it.*

Another male participant similarly shared, *"I remember a couple of times, you know,*

having like push fights with some of the other kids if they got too belligerent."

Some participants responded to racism and discrimination by way of verbal

retaliation or verbal quips. For example, one participant stated, *"And I think now if it*

were to happen, I can come up with a kind of smart-alecky comment whereas before, I

would just answer the question. But I think now I can kind of retaliate a little more…" In

another example, a participant explained how he relies upon his own wit to deflect racism

or racial discrimination or simply ignores the perpetrator.

> *Jason (adopted at age 5 months): It gets to me because it's like ignorance and well, it depends on the situation. Sometimes I'll say something very witty that bites them, but most of the time, I just ignore them. Or if they're attacking me for something an Asian type person would do, then I would just say something worse about Asians 'cuz I've heard them all, so I can come up with some pretty horrible things about Asians because I've been told that.*

Other participants talked of using humor to normalize situations when they were

affronted by racism and racial discrimination. The following participant described an

incident that occurred in junior high in which she was approached by a peer who

commented on her eyes:

> *Elizabeth (adopted at age 6 months): ...I think it was actually in junior high. I got a funny question. It was the, 'how do you see? Is it like regular vision or wide screen?' (laughing). And I just remember just cracking up. I was like, oh my God, 'cuz I'd never heard that before. And then I stopped and thought about it, and I'm like, oh okay, I can actually see where they're coming from on this. It doesn't make any sense logically, but okay.*

Some participants made fun of themselves as a way to cope. In the next example,

the participant explained that joking about himself or telling a joke about Asians was a

way to get perpetrators to leave him alone.

> *Jason (adopted at age 5 months): ...because when you don't feel loved and when you're a kid, you believe things and what other people tell you. But as I got older, I just was like this is stupid, you know. And then normally I'll put it as a joke. I'll tell like an Asian joke, or I'll make fun of myself because a lot of people don't even expect that. A lot of people expect that if they make fun of you, you're going to whimper away, so I start making fun of myself, and I start beating them to the punch line, and they just leave me alone.*

The same participant also described wanting to prove himself or prove the perpetrator

wrong when faced with racial derogation. He described an exchange that occurred

between him and his optometrist:

> *Jason: ...when I first wanted to learn how to wear contacts, the lady at the optometrist said, 'I don't think you're going to put contacts in because of your eyes.' And I was like, what? 'Because your eyes are skinnier, or squintier.' I was like, whoa, what does that mean? So I proved her wrong.*
>
> *Researcher: So how did that make you feel?*
>
> *Jason: I was like taken aback. Excuse me, you don't need to say that. That's not your job.*
>
> *Researcher: So you felt kind of shocked. It came out of nowhere.*
>
> *Jason: Yeah, and then I was determined to prove her wrong.*
>
> *Researcher: With these incidents do you feel like they affected you emotionally or physically?*
>
> *Jason: Oh yeah. I mean I wouldn't be human if they hadn't affected me at all. It's*

made me try to prove myself, you know. Don't judge a book by its cover. Just because I look like something doesn't mean I am that. But I mean getting made fun of when I was younger for being different, it hurt, but I learned from it, and I built it up more and – It's just one of those things where the more it happens, you figure out how to cope with it and deal with it.

In certain situations, some participants took it upon themselves to learn about issues of race through bibliotherapy, or reading specific books related to race. This often led to a sense of empowerment and provided validation. The following participant shared the impact one particular autobiography had on her perspective and coping with racism and discrimination.

> *Hope (adopted at age 2 years): And then I guess what helped me was I read this autobiography by Dick Gregory who's a comedian from the 60s. And his book is called, Nigger, not in a cute abbreviation or anything. That really helped me. There's this one line that says that if someone was going to make fun of him, he was going to be the one to do it first. Um, and then it was the difference between they were laughing with him instead of at him. So I think that's where I got the idea and why I've changed my reaction as far as how I handle situations involving racism…*

Another participant shared:

> *Kelli (adopted at age 8 months): So you know, one of the things that helped me through that process and just kind of the continued journey of learning is a book that I read called Warrior Stories, and it's by a woman named, Phoebe Eng. And she writes about how Asian American women try to find their voice in culture. She talks a lot about just the cultural pressures. Now I didn't have some of this, but the cultural pressures she had as a Chinese woman and her mom and the Chinese mother's expectations, but then also living with a foot in U.S. culture. And so trying to really kind of have that balance. So that was a very empowering book to me to say, gosh, somebody else has had a similar type of struggle. And so that book and there was another one also that just hearing stories, I mean, kind of cliché, The Joy Luck Club type of thing. But just hearing other women, especially Asian women's stories, um, and how they kind of navigated living in the United States.*

In certain circumstances, participants chose to ignore the perpetrators or walk away from the situation. One participant described such a situation in the following way:

> *Elizabeth (adopted at age 6 months): I'm a very laid back person to begin with, very easy going, and it takes a lot to ruffle my feathers over anything 'cuz it's just one of those things where what's worth it, getting upset over this? Sometimes yes, maybe I should make more of a big deal or bring this up, but other times, I'm just*

like, it's not worth it, and I don't really care, and I'm not going to give them the joy of getting a rise out of me or anything like that.

However, despite walking away or ignoring racist comments, some participants internalized what occurred. For example, the following participant talked of distancing himself from others as a means to cope.

> *Ethan (adopted at age 3-4 months): ...then I moved back to Idaho. There were still problems with some kids teasing and name-calling. I remember one kid in particular. I don't know why or what the reason was, but he was very aggressive. Like he, you know, he liked to pick on me a lot. Funny thing is though that by senior year, we became friends. But before then he was really negative and um would call me Jap and chink all the time...It made me angry, you know, because I was more aware at that time of racial slurs and what not. I think my parents still tried to explain the ignorance thing...I do remember sometimes feeling down or bad, like why do I have to get picked on out of everybody, or why is it so aggressive or mean? I remember feeling that way a lot when I was younger and just kind of like it was unfair.*
>
> *Researcher: How did you cope with all of that?*
>
> *Ethan: Um probably not very well. Probably the same, I kept myself distant from everybody, alone.*

In other cases, participants found acceptance through other minority peers, which minimized some of the effects of racism and discrimination as they identified with these individuals. For example, one participant found connection with another minority college student whom he met at a fraternity party:

> *Ethan (adopted at age 3-4 months): ...And I remember this kid came up to me and he's like, 'hey what's your name?' He's Vietnamese. I didn't know, but he's like, 'come hang out with me' or 'come with me,' or something like that. So, I follow him and we start talking and what not, and we're still good friends today. But it was kind of surreal, I guess. One of the things that college showed me was how people try to associate with what's familiar to them no matter how crowded or dark it is.*

Learning from discrimination

With maturity and life experiences, adoptees' perspective on racism and discrimination   and their ways of coping change. One participant stated that he has learned general life skills as a result of such experiences, including how to handle

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adversity and uncomfortable situations. Another participant shared that she has learned

tolerance, patience, and forgiveness. Other participants described a more global

awareness and understanding of what racism is from the perspective of others and an

increased tolerance for those who perpetrate it. For example, one participant shared the

following:

> *Kelli (adopted at age 8 months) : You know, I think unfortunately it's (racism) always going to be there wherever we are. But just really understanding that, um, you know, that person's coming from a different perspective. It's not always my job to change their mind. It's not always my job to educate them, but to know that it's not always personal.   Sometimes it's that person's issues or things that they need to work on.*

The next participant described what her experiences have taught her in this way:

> *Elizabeth (adopted at age 6 months): ...I'm much more aware of it (racism) now. Because when I was younger and they described racism to you, you tend to think of the apartheid, civil rights, very obvious types of segregation sort of thing, whereas when you get older, you start realizing it's a lot of different shades of racism and discrimination, and that it's not always outright. Well, no, you can't do this because you're Asian. It's more you have to read between the lines a little bit more. You have to feel things out, and you realize again that ignorance is one of the bigger reasons behind racism, not necessarily because people are being mean. They just don't know any better. And then just realizing that a lot of people don't know any better 'cuz it's one of those things. I grew up in a mixed family, you know. My parents are interracially married and all that stuff. It never really occurred to me, so I just assumed everybody must think the same way. But then as I got older, I started acknowledging that no, not everybody had that. Not everybody was completely exposed to having a bunch of different, you know, races around them.*

Adoptee recommendations

Parental limitations

In some cases, participants reported their parents as a consistent source of support

and comfort when faced with racism and discrimination. One participant shared, *"...my*

parents were really supportive, so that helped a lot having, you know, that support to get

through. 'Cuz just growing up normally you have a lot of emotions and feelings, so

adding another layer just makes it more difficult." Another participant made the

following comments:

> *Jason (adopted at age 5 months): ...a lot of kids would ask me, 'where are your real parents? Why did they abandon you? Don't they love you? And that would always hurt because you have no answer 'cuz you don't know why they gave you up, you don't know if they love you. And so then I'd always get really upset. My mom would always comfort me, or my dad. So they'd always comfort me, but that was one of the main struggles...*

In a separate account, Jason talked of his mother proactively coming into his elementary school classroom every year to discuss adoption with his peers:

> *Jason: ...she knew I was struggling sometimes at school because people didn't really quite understand adoption, and kids don't understand. So she would come in every year at the beginning of the year and introduce herself, and we'd watch my arrival video...And then she would read one of the books about why am I different and talk about adoption so they had a better understanding of it...*

Despite the support and best efforts provided by their parents, however, many participants felt that their parents still had great difficulty helping them navigate through the psychological and emotional distress caused by racial discrimination or conflicts related to race, culture, and identity. One participant described it in this way, *"I mean they could never be fully prepared. I think I appreciated the effort they made..."* Another participant stated*, "...they made a very strong effort, which I appreciate, to make that connection, and they talked to lots of adoptive families and talked to the social workers who were assigned to me..."* In the following example, the participant described feeling the support of her parents, yet also recognized their limitations:

> *Kelli (adopted at age 8 months): Growing up with my parents, I mean, going to Chinese restaurants was probably the most cultural thing that we did (laughing). It wasn't that they weren't willing to do different things, um, they didn't know how to cook Korean food, you know. They certainly didn't know the language. Um, they were supportive, but they just kind of like were, well we just don't know what to do – felt very ill-equipped...They didn't stop me from questioning or talking about it, but they just didn't know what to do, didn't know how to help not only educate me, but also look at how I could approach situations in junior high, high school, at least from that cultural standpoint.*

Needed supports identified by adoptees

Participants identified several ways in which adoptive parents can help their adopted children better cope with racism, prejudice, racial discrimination, and stereotyping. These recommendations are divided into four primary categories: 1) Ask adoptees about their experiences 2) Expose adoptees to their culture of origin, 3) Parental education, and 4) Adoptee support groups.

Ask adoptees about their experiences

It was recommended that adoptive parents seek input from adoptees themselves. International and transracial adoptees share many unique characteristics and challenges, and their experiences can provide insight into what kinds of supports are most beneficial. One participant made the following comments:

> *Grace (adopted at age 2 years): They can't really know what it's like to be us. They need to ask us. How do you feel about the way you look?...Maybe they (adoptees) feel angry because they were forced to live in a country that is totally unlike where they came from…It was very frustrating not speaking English, not being able to tell people, I can't eat this food. I don't know what French fries and hot dogs are…I say, put yourself in our shoes, okay?...Everything's scary. Everything's new…*

Expose adoptees to their culture of origin

Most participants agreed that nurturing a sense of ethnic pride through extrinsic types of activities related to the adoptee's birth culture is one of the most tangible ways of building connection. One participant suggested the following:

> *Hope (adopted at age 2 years): Take the family to a Chinese New Year celebration. Allow the child to explore. If the child does not attend, bring them back and talk about what you found interesting and perhaps an interest will develop, and both the parent and child can enjoy together. Get a foreign movie to watch together, music of different cultures, types, or languages…*

Another participant shared:

> *Kelli (adopted at age 8 months): I think having the family support and nurture through the whole process is important…One of the things that I've reflected on*

with my sister-in-law and brother adopting a child is how can they continually expose their child to things that are native to his country? People, food, culture, those types of things…They might do everything that they can and it might not be enough. But hopefully there's that structure in place that he has people he can go to, that he has books that he can find that have people who had similar experiences. And to really shut down any types of experiences that are not supportive of him – situations that make him feel like he's less than the community he's a part of.

Some participants suggested that parents engage their children in other culturally based activities such as Tai Kwon Do to promote a sense of ethnic pride and to help build confidence.

Parental education

Participants recommended that adoptive parents receive as much training and education as possible to increase cultural competence and develop skills to navigate children through racism, prejudice, racial discrimination, and/or stereotyping. One participant made the following suggestion:

Sonny (adopted at age 5-6 years): I think having a lot of knowledge, so the parents need a lot of knowledge first so that can get filtered down to the kids…I think what helped with our family was the fact that my parents weren't 100% educated on it, but they did the best they could…I think seminars would really help or any information in that sense that gives them that perspective will help them understand that a little bit more, even if it's just like they go to a seminar and talk about early age emotional development of children. I think that helps just because obviously we've all been kids at one time, but you have to look at it backwards through their eyes…

Another participant felt that cultural training and education should include not only adoptive parents, but extended family members as well. She further suggested that cultural training impart not only interesting facts about the adoptees' country of origin, but the country's political history. She explained in the following quote:

Kellie (adopted at age 8 months): You know one of the things too about parental support is um cultural education, cultural training for parents, even for extended family, or if the parents have the support system, you know, doing some training like that about, not just, oh, this person's from Liberia and here's the country and here's what they make. Not just facts kind of stuff, but political history of that country, cultural issues with Africans, African Americans, um you know, so a

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greater awareness that the parents and the support system can have so that when the child asks questions or has a situation where they confront something that's negative, looking back in history, but also having some tools to say this is what happened. This is why White people don't like Black people or whatever.

In the next example, one participant recommended that teachers and other educators be better informed about issues related to international and transracial adoption:

> *Ethan (adopted at age 3-4 months): …I think it starts with the parents, but it's the whole environment because the parents aren't with them (adoptees) 24/7. So I think if an adoptee is having issues in school or in some extracurricular activity, even if the parent can't be there with whoever the supervisor or adult is, whether it's the coach or teacher, 'cuz sometimes the teacher isn't even aware of what's going on or the extent of the situation, and they're experiencing it for the first time, too…*

Adoptee support groups

Finally, participants recommended adoptee support groups. Many of the participants have found connection with other adoptees who share similar experiences through support groups and find such groups extremely beneficial. Support groups also provide a sense of community and positive group identity as explained by one participant in the following quote:

> *Jason (adopted at age 5 months): Some of them are later 20s, mid 30s, early 40s and 50s. And so it was nice. When I first met some of them, we went to the Cheesecake Factory, and it just blew my mind because we all have different stories, but yet we can all relate to one another. It was very calming and nice to finally relate to somebody who gets me.*

Another participant suggested having support groups for children beginning as early as middle school age:

> *Suzy (adopted at age 8 months): Maybe having a support group or just like um if something were to happen, just having things they could say to that person if it were to happen to them…So, I don't know if they really talk about those issues, but I think maybe like having that option. Or even having those people to vent to about things because for me, I don't really think I had anyone I felt comfortable enough with to tell these things to, especially when no one around me could really relate.*

Additionally, participants suggested extending post-adoption services provided by

adoption agencies beyond the typical scope of follow up visits following placement of the child. Such services would include thorough assessments of the adopted child's physical, psychological, and emotional health to determine length of services and to promote positive outcomes.

LIMITATIONS

The limitations of the present study include a small sample primarily drawn from one geographic area, and participants in the study were all of one race and ethnicity, only Korean. Despite these limitations the participants' narratives yield rich data advancing our understanding of the lived experiences of international and transracial adoptees in terms of coping with racism, prejudice, racial discrimination, and stereotyping, as well as how adoptees personally negotiate their identities and sense of place in society. Furthermore, the data provides considerations for improved parenting practices and extended support services suggested by internationally and transracially adopted persons.

DISCUSSION

The present study sought to understand how international and transracial adoptees personally cope with racism, prejudice, racial discrimination, and stereotyping, how interactions with family and peers influence international and transracial adoptees' identity development, how international and transracial adoptees resolve conflicts in terms of "fitting in," and how parental/familial influence mitigates the effects of racism, prejudice, racial discrimination, and stereotyping. Consistent with Stryker's identity theory, the reciprocal relationship between self and society are factors that significantly influence how international and transracial adoptees' construct their identities and assign meaning to their concept of self (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). A particularly

challenging task for international and transracial adoptees is that of integrating their American identity with that of their birth culture and racial group. Ethnic identity is a complex process in the lives of international and transracial adoptees and is continuously evolving. Adoptees assimilate into the predominant culture at the risk of losing identification with their culture of origin and racial group. One participant described this phenomenon as a split between his Korean and American heritages and that finding balance between the two is difficult to attain. Another participant stated that he is still learning his identity and continues to struggle with finding his place within his adoptive family.

Differences between adoptees and their adoptive family members, physically and in family composition, become apparent at a very young age and can be perplexing for young children. One participant described feelings of shock and surprise at the physical appearance of her blond-haired, blue-eyed adoptive family upon initially meeting them because she had only known other Korean children and caregivers prior to her adoption. In most cases, these differences were accepted in a positive manner, and many adoptive parents proactively sought ways to help adoptees understand the concept of adoption and racial differences indirectly through activities such as reading children's books on the subject.

Once participants entered elementary school, racial differences were negatively reinforced by peers as adoptees were repeatedly exposed to racial teasing and other microaggressions directed towards their physical appearance. Insensitive querying and remarks from schoolmates were reported to occur frequently during this period and included questions such as, "where are your real parents?" "Why did they give you up?"

and "They must not have loved you." These interchanges were confusing to participants, as they were not yet at an age developmentally to understand the implications behind such actions. One participant stated that she did not understand why she was perceived as different by her peers because she acted White and had grown up with similar "White cultural America things." Evidence suggests that adopted children whose race and culture differ from the dominant culture become increasingly aware of the meaning behind acts of discrimination by late childhood or early adolescence (Huh et al., 2000). This finding is consistent with what participants reported in the present study; however, despite their inability to process negative situations that occurred prior to reaching a later stage of development, these encounters nonetheless had a profound effect psychologically upon adoptees' burgeoning sense of identity and sense of agency. Participants described feelings of not fitting in and being "othered" as a result of the discrimination or bullying they experienced in school.

Participants made concerted efforts to minimize these differences by assimilating into the predominant culture in order to fit in and be accepted. One participant shared feeling deeply conflicted when she decided to end a friendship with the only other Asian girl in her school for social status and to avoid being discriminated against by her White peers. Another participant stated that she wished she were White like her peers in order to alleviate feelings of being "different." As past findings suggest, race is one of the most conscious aspects of international and transracial adoptees' everyday experience because they are constantly reminded of their physical dissimilarities to their family (Fujimoto, 2001; Galvin, 2003;) and, furthermore, to their peers and society at large.

Consistent with Erikson's developmental theory (1950), the adoptee's family is a context for identity development, and adoptive parents greatly influenced participants' sense of identity. Evidence further suggests that adoptive parents and others play an active and integral role in the psychological development and cultural competence of adopted children (Kim et al., 2013; Lee, 2013). A majority of the participants stated that they felt more comfortable among Caucasian people than with their own racial group and more strongly identified with the predominant culture. In some cases, parental support mediated some of the effects of racial discrimination participants experienced. Many adoptive parents were also reported to have proactively engaged participants in cultural socialization through extrinsic experiences such as attending cultural events, eating at ethnic restaurants, sending the adoptee to cultural camp or Korean school, or reading books about adoption in an effort to expose adoptees to their culture of birth. However, experiences of racial socialization, e.g., preparation for racism and discrimination through open discussions, were far less frequent in adoptive families and nonexistent in others.

Typically, conversations about racial issues were initiated by participants following specific incidents related to being teased or mocked by peers. The nature and quality of such conversations, as reported by participants, varied. Some parents read books to adoptees to explain racial differences. In other cases, parents used terms such as "special" or "unique" to explain differences in their family composition. When conversations between parents and adoptees occurred due to altercations outside of the home, participants reported feeling supported, comforted, and accepted by their parents. In other cases, conversations about race were never discussed, and participants felt like they were left to figure things out on their own.

In spite of their parents' best efforts to mitigate the effects of racism and discrimination, participants also reported that their parents did not fully understand what the adoptee was feeling or experiencing, or could not relate well and were ill-equipped to help them manage the emotional distress caused by such experiences. Furthermore, parents lacked the knowledge to impart specific skills to adoptees in confronting negative encounters such as racial teasing, name-calling, bullying, and racial microaggressions.

Despite some of the unique developmental challenges that international and transracial adoptees experience, research in the U.S. generally shows positive outcomes in terms of their social adjustment (Cederblad et al., 1999; Feigelman et al., 1984; Mohanty et al., 2006). The present study, however, indicates that positive social adjustment in the lives of international and transracial adoptees is challenged by ongoing experiences with racism, prejudice, racial discrimination, and stereotyping, especially during the early years of development. Consistent with other findings (Green et al., 2006; Meier, 1999; Lee, 2003; Westhues et al., 1997), participants reported racism and discrimination as a consistent reoccurrence across their lives to varying degrees. One participant stated that he has had to deal with racism on a daily basis, and another participant described the frequency of such encounters as tiresome.

Racism and discrimination also occur in the lives of international and transracial adoptees in multiple contexts. One significant finding in the present study is the number of discriminatory incidents reported by participants as perpetrated by members of their own family. Participants reported being called derogatory names by immediate family members such as "gook" and "chink." One participant described being shunned by her Caucasian in-laws because they disapproved of her husband marrying interracially. In

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other cases, participants felt discriminated against by members of their own racial group and talked of being snubbed by other Koreans because they did not observe traditional Korean customs such as dating only Koreans, could not speak the language proficiently, or were of a mixed race family. In such cases, participants felt rejected by members of their own racial group and, furthermore, discouraged from learning more about their culture of origin. Many participants also spoke of feeling uncomfortable around other Koreans because they do not know how to act or what to say.

Because racism and racial discrimination occur repeatedly in the lives of international and transracial adoptees, the findings of the present study have important implications. Evidence indicates that perceived discrimination makes international and transracial adoptees more susceptible to behavior problems, emotional and psychological distress, and lower self-esteem (Cederblad et al., 1999; Green et al., 2006; Hellerstadt et al., 2008; Hubinette et al., 2009; Lee, 2003). Findings from the present study indicate that adoptees struggle with identity confusion and "fitting in" as they become increasingly aware of the racial differences between them and their peers and family. Exposure to racism and discrimination during the early course of development puts adoptees at risk for emotional and psychological distress and lower self-esteem. In some cases, participants reported distancing themselves from others or keeping their feelings inside and felt strongly that they did not belong as a result of discrimination and being perceived as "other." One participant described feeling like a loner, and another participant shared that she did not want to be Korean if that meant she was going to be teased.

Participants also expressed that though their parents were a source of comfort and support, parents still did not know how to help them manage racism and/or racial

discrimination effectively. Consequently, participants coped with racism and discrimination in many different ways. Some male participants reported getting angry and becoming physically aggressive towards perpetrators. In other cases, participants ignored perpetrators or walked away. Some used humor to offset the offense, and other participants sought validation through reading books on racial issues. The internalization of such negative experiences across time, despite adoptees' attempts to forget about them or ignore them, may have a psychological impact with long-lasting effects.

Regardless of experiencing racism, prejudice, racial discrimination, and stereotyping at different points throughout their lives, the adoptees in the present study demonstrated that they are resilient. They have faced many different challenges over the course of their development and in multiple contexts, yet are successful. Many developed a more clear and committed sense of ethnicity reflective of maturity and their own personal experiences. One participant thought of herself as a survivor as a result of overcoming racial derogation perpetrated by her own family, peers, and co-workers for many years. As adoptees mature, they find other ways to cope with racism, prejudice, racial discrimination, and stereotyping. One particularly beneficial resource is through participation in adoptee support groups where adoptees can connect to others with similar backgrounds and experiences. Several participants spoke of the support and community they have found through adoptee support groups. Other participants found support and connection through friendships with other minority peers, and another participant spoke of finding meaning through mentoring other adopted children in the school where he works.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

The present study yields several implications for practitioners and future research. First, practitioners must understand the complex nature of international adoption. Because internationally adopted children do not share the same cultural/racial characteristics of their adoptive parents, adoptees face unique challenges developmentally in terms of psychological, emotional, and social adjustment, as well as in racial and ethnic identity development. Practitioners must understand the potential impact of racism and racial discrimination upon the psychological health and well-being of international and transracial adoptees and how these factors also shape identity. More research is needed to further examine how adoptees across multiple races/ethnicities and geographical regions cope with racism, prejudice, racial discrimination, and stereotyping, the long-term effects, and how both parents and practitioners can better support them and provide for their needs.

Findings from the present study also show that adoptive parents need a wide range of supports, and more significantly, a better understanding of the importance of racial socialization, including skills to prepare their adopted children for racism and racial discrimination. Considerations for parental training and education include helping adoptive parents examine and resolve their own biases, learning skills to navigate developmental/emotional/psychological challenges unique to international and transracial adoptees, age appropriate ways to discuss racial differences, racism and discrimination, when and how to begin such conversations, and providing resources to adoptive families that will support these endeavors. Further research in this area can be used to inform

interventions that address the developmental challenges encountered by international and transracial adoptees and their families.

Finally, the present study utilized participatory diagramming, specifically visual timelines, to facilitate dialogue with international and transracial adoptees' on past and current attitudes and behaviors towards racism, prejudice, racial discrimination, and stereotyping. The visual timelines provided reinforcement and support to participants' verbal narratives and illustrated significant events across time related to racism, prejudice, racial discrimination, and stereotyping. Future research, however, could utilize participatory diagramming techniques more exclusively to examine the dynamic experiences of international and transracial adoptees and their attitudes and behaviors towards racial discrimination and identity formation. Such research could provide a unique perspective on the multifaceted lives of international and transracial adoptees.

CONCLUSION

The present study sought to understand the ways in which international and transracial adoptees cope with racism, prejudice, racial discrimination, and stereotyping. Ten adult Korean adoptees shared personal stories highlighting the experiences they have had related to racial discrimination. Their narratives and visual timelines provided a more thorough understanding of the prevalence of racism and racial discrimination in the lives of international and transracial adoptees, the difficulties adoptees experience in terms of navigating two cultures, and the resiliency with which they withstand these challenges. Participants spoke ultimately of finding connection with other international and transracial adoptees who share common experiences and who provide a sense of community and acceptance. It is hoped that the present study will prompt further

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investigation on ways international and transracial adoptees manage racism and

discrimination and to inform effective interventions for adoptees and adoptive families.

Such research can also be used to effect changes in policy to ensure that international

adoptive families and adoptees receive adequate post-adoption services from adoption

agency professionals.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Appendix A

Interview Guide

<u>Section I: Demographics</u>

Age:

Participant country of origin:

Total number of family members:

How long have you lived in the U.S?

Gender:	☐ Female	☐ Male	**Marital Status**:	☐ Single	☐ Married
				☐ Divorced	Other
Annual Income:	☐ $9,900 – 0				
	☐ $10,000-$19,000				
	☐ $20,000-$29,000				
	☐ $30,000 to $39,000				
	☐ $40,000 to $49,000				
	☐ $50,000+				
Level of Education:	☐ High school student		Grade level:		
	☐ College student		Years Completed:		
	☐ Graduated high school				
	☐ AA/BA				
	☐ Masters or higher				
Work:	☐ Not employed				
	☐ Full-time				
	☐ Part-time				

<u>Section II: Adoptee Background</u>

1. At what age were you at the time of your adoption?

2. What do you remember about your initial transition?

3. Are there any other adoptees in the household?

4. How do you identify yourself ethnically?

5. Did you ever feel/think that you were physically or racially/ethnically different from your parents?

    a. Did your parents talk to you about these differences?

    b. How were these conversations initiated?

    c. What were some of the things you and your parents discussed in these conversations?

<u>Section III: Family/Interracial Issues</u>

6. How did you feel about growing up in a family of a different race?

7. Was race an issue for you and your family? If so, in what way?

8. Did you feel comfortable talking about race in your family?

9. Describe the community/neighborhood that you grew up in.

    a. How was the community diverse or non-diverse?

10. How did living in such a community impact your sense of identity?

11. Describe the diversity or lack of in the schools that you attended while growing up.

<u>Section IV: Issues of Race</u>

12. Has racism, prejudice, racial discrimination, and/or stereotyping in the past or present been an issue for you? If so, in what ways?

13. Can you recall the first time that you experienced racism, prejudice, discrimination, or stereotyping? (The next set of questions will be used to guide the participant through their timeline)

    a. How old were you when this incident occurred?

    b. Where did the incident occur?

    c. What happened in this particular incident?

    d. Who else was involved in the incident?

    e. How did you respond?

    f. Did you talk to your parents or confide in another person regarding the incident?

g. How did that impact you?

h. How did the incident affect you emotionally? Physically?

i. How did you resolve any conflicts (inner, with the perpetrator(s), etc.) resulting from this incident?

j. What are some ways that adoptees could be better supported when confronted with racism and/or discrimination?

k. How did your family support you in terms of coping with racism, prejudice, discrimination, or stereotyping?

14. What would you like adoptive parents to know about helping their children cope with racism, prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping?

15. How has your perspective on racism, prejudice, discrimination, or stereotyping changed as you have matured?

16. Have you learned something from these experiences?

17. Is there anything else that you would like to say?

APPENDIX B

STUDY ANNOUNCEMENT

Volunteers Needed for a Research Study

International and Transracial Adoptees: Experiences of Racism and Racial Discrimination: Personal Coping Styles

The purpose of this research study is to examine the ways in which international and transracial adoptees experience racism, prejudice, racial discrimination and/or stereotyping and to identify patterns of coping. To explore these issues, interviews with international adoptees will be conducted. Results from the study will highlight the unique experiences of internationally adopted persons and provide a deeper understanding of how adoptees cope with racial derogation and discrimination. In-person interviews with adoptees will be approximately 1.5-2 hours.

To participate in this study, individuals should:
- Be at least 18 years of age or older
- Be adopted from another country to the U.S. by parents of a different race/ethnicity
- Currently reside in Metro Phoenix, Arizona

All interviews will be conducted in a location that ensures privacy and confidentiality.

By participating in this study you will be contributing to the work of understanding how international and transracial adoptees manage racism and discrimination in their lives and how these issues impact the development of adoptees' identity. The study will help to inform social workers and other healthcare professionals what types of support services would most benefit international and transracial adoptees and their families.

To learn more about this research, please contact:
Marijane Nguyen
mcnguyen@asu.edu
480-516-7468

This research is conducted under the direction of
Cecilia Ayón, MSW, PhD
Associate Professor
School of Social Work
College of Public Programs
Arizona State University

APPENDIX C

RECRUITMENT LETTER

Appendix C

Attachment A: Letter soliciting support

ASU ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

Dear (Adoption Service Provider),

My name is Marijane Nguyen. I am a graduate student of Arizona State University in the School of Social Work working under the supervision of Dr. Cecilia Ayón. I am currently conducting a research study to investigate how international and transracial adoptees manage racism and racial discrimination in their lives and how such incidents impact the development of identity. The study will involve personal interviews with international and transracial adoptees. To participate in the study, adoptees should be at least 18 years of age or older and adopted from another country to the U.S. by parents of a different race/ethnicity.

I am seeking your help in distributing information about the study to adoptees and adoptive families. I have attached an announcement about the study that may be used for distribution to adoptees and adoptive families. It is hoped that the results of this study will contribute to the research and provide insight from the adoptees' perspective into how international, transracial adoptees personally cope with racism and discrimination. Furthermore, it is hoped that this research will produce data that will inform the development of preventive interventions for international, transracial adoptees and their families, as well as post-adoption support services, that will eradicate the effects of racism and discrimination and promote their well-being.

I will follow up with a phone call in a few days to answer any questions you may have about the study.

Sincerely,
Marijane Nguyen
mcnguyen@asu.edu
480-516-7468

APPENDIX D

LIST OF ADOPTION AGENCIES

Appendix D

List of Adoption Agencies:

Dillon Southwest
Catholic Community Services of Southern Arizona
International Child Foundation, Inc.
Arizona Adoption & Foster Care
Christian Family Care Agency
Holt International Children's Services (California and Oregon)
Oasis Adoption Services, Inc.
Southwest Adoption Services, LLC
Hand in Hand International Adoptions
Children's Hope International

APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Appendix E

Information Form for Participants
International and Transracial Adoptees: Experiences with Racism and Discrimination and
Personal Coping Styles

Date:

Dear community member,

My name is Marijane Nguyen and I am a graduate student in the School of Social Work at
Arizona State University working under the supervision of Dr. Cecilia Ayón. I am conducting a
research study to learn more about how international and transracial adoptees cope with racism
and discrimination. The information you provide will inform the development of post-adoption
support services for adoptees and adoptive families.

I am recruiting individuals to participate in an interview. During the interview you will be asked
questions about your relationships and experiences with family, peers, within your community,
and specific incidents related to racism and discrimination. You will also be asked to complete a
timeline to identify various points in your life when incidents of racism or discrimination
occurred. The timeline will be used as a visual prompt to guide our discussion. To complete the
timeline, you will be given a blank piece of paper and colored pencils/markers to create a visual
interpretation of significant events related to racism or discrimination. To protect your
confidentiality, please do not include your name or name of others on your visual timeline, or in
situations discussed. You will be given 30 minutes to complete the timeline in private and
additional time if needed. We will then discuss the events represented in your timeline together
during the interview process.

To participate in this study you must be 18 years or older, adopted from a country other than the
U.S. by parents of a different race/ethnicity, and reside in Metro Phoenix. The interview will be
scheduled for a date that works best for you. The interview will last between 1.5 to 2 hours, this
includes the time spent completing the visual timeline. The interview can be take place in your
home, the ASU downtown campus, or another location that will ensure privacy.

Your participation in the interview component is strictly **voluntary**. You can choose not to
participate or if you do want to participate but change your mind, you can stop at any time. Also,
whatever you share will be **confidential**. This means your name or any other potential identifying
information will *not* be used. All information will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and I will be
the only person to have access to the information you provide. It is possible that the information
you share will be used in reports, presentations, or publications, but the information will be
presented as a whole and will not be tied to any individual person.

What you say during the interview is very important and I would like to remember everything
you say. For that reason, the interview will be audio-taped. The audiotapes will also be stored in a
secure location and all information that is gathered will be destroyed after 5 years following the
completion of the study.

There are benefits to participating in this study. You may enjoy discussing the different topics.
In addition, it is our goal to share this information to develop support services for international
adoptees. The information you provide will assist us in this process.

By participating in the interview you are consenting to take part in this study.

If you think of any questions later, you may call me at (480) 516-7468. Thank you very much for your time. I am hoping that you will enjoy the discussion.

Sincerely,

Marijane Nguyen

If you have any questions about your rights as participants or if you think that you have been put at risk, please contact the office of Human Subjects at (480) 965-6788.