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EVAN B. DONALDSON

adoptioninstitute

Beyond Culture Camp

Promoting Healthy Identity Formation in Adoption

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Cover photo: Children at the Catalyst Foundation's Annual Vietnamese Culture Camp in Minnesota

Executive Summary

I realized I never could change my ethnicity/race. I also developed a pride in being Korean and Asian. I reviewed things I liked about being Asian that European Americans did not have. I also grew comfortable with things I did not like about being Asian. As an adult I learned how to deal with racism/stereotypes in a way that makes me feel OK about being a "border person" and a minority (Study respondent).

Transracial adoption is a reality of contemporary American life. Since 1971, parents in this country have adopted nearly a half-million children from other countries, the vast majority of them from orphanages throughout Asia, South America and, most recently, Africa. Additional tens of thousands of multiracial families have been formed during this period with boys and girls adopted from foster care, with the rate of such adoptions from the domestic system growing from 10.8 percent in Fiscal Year 1995, when there were about 20,000 total adoptions, to 15 percent in 2001, when there were over 50,000. In the vast majority of these cases – domestic and international – children of color have been adopted by Caucasian parents.[1]

The consequences of this historic phenomenon have been profound, both for the tens of millions of Americans into whose families these children have been adopted, as well as for a society in which our understanding of what a family looks like is being altered every day. Yet we know very little about the impact of this change – most pointedly about its effects on the Asian, Hispanic and African American boys and girls at the core of it. How do they develop a sense of racial identity when raised by White parents, most often in predominately White communities? How do they incorporate an understanding of both being adopted and of having parents who are of a different race or ethnicity than themselves? How do they learn to cope with racism and stereotyping? What experiences are beneficial to them in developing a positive sense of self?

This ground-breaking study by the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute constitutes the broadest, most extensive examination to date of identity development in adopted adults. It does so not only by reviewing decades of research but also, most importantly, by asking the experts – adult adoptees – about the experiences and strategies that promote positive identity development. Too often, our understanding of identity, particularly of those adopted across race/ethnicity, has been formed through research involving children and youth. Similarly, conclusions about identity in transracial adoption too often have come from the perspective of parents, not adoptees themselves. The Institute's study focuses on adult adopted persons, gaining their understanding of how they have integrated "being adopted" and their race/ethnicity with other aspects of themselves that, together, form an identity.

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[1] TRANSRACIAL Adoption (TRA) is defined as the adoption of a child of one race by one or two parents of a different race (domestic or international). In this study, TRA adoption is limited to the adoption of a racial minority child by two Caucasian parents. TRANSCULTURAL (TRC) in this paper is defined as the adoption of a child (either domestically or internationally) who may be racially similar but ethnically different from the parents (i.e. an Ethiopian child adopted by African-American parents). INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION (ICA), INTERNATIONAL or TRANSNATIONAL ADOPTION (TRN) in this study is defined as the adoption of a child born abroad. An intercountry adoption may be transracial, in which case it is almost always also transcultural (a Chinese child adopted by Irish-Americans) or may only be transcultural (a Russian child adopted by European-Americans).

Although 468 adopted adults completed the online survey at the heart of this research (making it, to our knowledge, the largest study ever conducted of adopted adults in the U.S. to focus on identity), for the purposes of comparison, this paper concentrates on the 179 respondents born in South Korea and adopted by two White parents, and the 156 Caucasian respondents born in the U.S. and adopted by two White parents. For this analysis we chose these two groups, who constituted over 70 percent of our respondents, to make the cohorts as homogeneous as possible for comparison purposes. It is also noteworthy that South Koreans comprise the largest group of internationally adopted persons in the U.S., and adoption from South Korea into this country has a longer history than from any other nation; indeed, 1 in 10 of all Korean American citizens came to the United States through adoption.

It is important to add that, while one cohort of transracial adoptees is at the core of this study, an extensive review by the Adoption Institute of decades of relevant literature (Appendix I), as well as the Institute's examination of transracial adoption in comparable areas (see "Finding Families for African American Children: the Role of Race and Law in Adoption from Foster Care" at http://adoptioninstitute.org/research/2008_05_mepa.php) make clear that many of the key observations and conclusions in this paper also may be applicable to other domestic and internationally adopted persons and families.

Through this study we sought to learn about identity development in adopted persons generally, but also about the impact of racial/ethnic difference from one's parents. Respondents completed a range of standardized measures[2], questions about background, challenges in identity formation, and experiences or services that are most helpful in developing a positive adoption identity. Like many other studies of adoption, this one involves a self-selected sample of respondents, so we cannot know to what extent they are representative of all adoptees. We title this study *Beyond Culture Camp* because we recognize that parents adopting across race and culture, and the professionals who guide them, have developed strategies such as camps and festivals to introduce or strengthen children's connection to their cultures and countries of origin. Yet, as this study found, such activities – while important – are insufficient in helping children adopted across racial and national boundaries develop a healthy, positive sense of self.

The central findings of this study include:

- ***Adoption is an increasingly significant aspect of identity for adopted people as they age, and remains so even when they are adults.*** A primary contribution of this study is the understanding that adoption is an important factor in most adopted persons' lives, not just as children and adolescents, but throughout adulthood. Adoption grew in significance to respondents in this study from early childhood through adolescence, continued to increase during young adulthood, and remained important to the vast majority through adulthood. For example, 81 percent of Koreans and over 70 percent of Whites rated

[2] The Family of Origin Scale (FOS) to measure adult retrospective perceptions about global family functioning, the Multi-Group Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) to assess the strength of ethnic identification, a Cultural Socialization Scale, assessing the degree to which adoptive parents engaged in cultural socialization practices, the Adoptive Parent-Child Relationship Scale, and two measures of current psychological well-being -- the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and the Satisfaction with Life Scale.

their identity as an adopted person as important or very important during young adulthood. This new insight has profound implications for policy, law and practice relating to adoption.

- ***Race/ethnicity is an increasingly significant aspect of identity for those adopted across color and culture.*** Racial/ethnic identity was of central importance to the Korean respondents at all ages, and continued to increase in significance into young adulthood. Sixty percent indicated their racial/ethnic identity was important by middle school, and that number grew during high school (67%), college (76%) and young adulthood (81%). Based on their overall scores on the Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure, Korean adoptees had a stronger sense of ethnic identity than did White respondents, but with caveats. While being equal to Whites in agreeing they were happy about being a member of their ethnic group and feeling good about their ethnic background, they were less likely to have a strong sense of belonging to their ethnic group, despite identifying more strongly with it. They also were less likely than Whites to feel welcomed by others of their own race.

- ***Coping with discrimination is an important aspect of coming to terms with racial/ethnic identity for adoptees of color.*** The Korean respondents in our research were less likely than Whites to face discrimination based on adoption status, but more commonly confronted racial discrimination. Eighty percent reported such discrimination from strangers and 75 percent from classmates. Nearly half (48%) reported negative experiences due to their race in interaction with childhood friends. A notable finding was that 39 percent of Korean respondents reported race-based discrimination from teachers. It is clear that adoption professionals, parents and others – including schools – need more effective ways of addressing these realities.

- ***Discrimination based on adoption is a reality, but more so for White adoptees – who also report being somewhat less comfortable with their adoptive identity as adults than do their Korean counterparts.*** Adopted people of all backgrounds reported that they experienced bias based on how they entered their families, in all settings of their lives – from classmates to employers to strangers. Most Americans probably do not perceive that adoption discrimination exists, per se, but this finding makes clear that stigmas and negative stereotypes linger in our culture and adversely affect adopted children and adults. When asked to identify the context of adoption-related bias, White respondents identified extended family as the most frequent source (for 40%). For Koreans, adoption-based discrimination was most common by strangers (31%) and classmates (25%).

- ***Most transracial adoptees considered themselves White or wanted to be White as children.*** Of those adopted from Korea, 78 percent reported that they considered themselves to be or wanted to be White as children – although the majority grew to identify themselves as Korean Americans as adults. Analysis of their responses to open-ended questions demonstrated that integrating race/ethnicity into identity can be a complex process. While the most common reason cited for the shift was simply maturity, access to a more diverse community and affiliation with people of Asian background also facilitated the shift. For others, negative experiences such as racism or teasing led to reconsidering their

identities and coming to terms with being Asian. A minority of respondents classified themselves as "unreconciled" – that is, even as adults, they still long to look like their parents or members of the majority culture.

- ***Positive racial/ethnic identity development is most effectively facilitated by "lived" experiences such as travel to native country, attending racially diverse schools, and having role models of their own race/ethnicity.*** Many Korean adoptees were active agents in resolving identity struggles related to race/ethnicity, with 80 percent reporting that they tried to learn more about their ethnic group. Most had visited Korea (61%) and participated in adoption-related organizations or Internet groups. Korean adoptees offered practical suggestions to adoption professionals about actions that would have helped their shift in identity from White to Korean American; travel to the country of their birth topped the list. They also noted the importance of attending racially diverse schools and having child care providers, teachers and other adult role models of their own race/ethnicity. One respondent poignantly described the loneliness of being in an all White community this way: "I *was* the diversity in my high school."

- ***Contact with birth relatives, according to the White respondents, is the most helpful factor in achieving a positive adoptive identity.*** When asked to name the experiences or services that are most helpful in achieving a positive identity as an adopted adult, White adoptees rated contact with birth relatives as the most important. The vast majority of respondents – 86 percent – had taken steps to find their birth families. An unexpected finding was that a high percentage (49%) of the Korean adoptees had searched as well, and 30 percent had experienced contact with birth relatives, despite the common assumption that those adopted from Korea have little access to information about their families of origin. For Whites, 45 percent reported having contact with birth relatives. Like the one in the preceding bullet point, this finding underscores the essential fact that adoptees, like their counterparts raised in their families of birth, want to know (as the cliché puts it) "who they are and where they come from." A deeper understanding of this reality has broad implications for adoption law, policy and practice.

- ***Different factors predict comfort with adoptive and racial/ethnic identity for Korean and White adoptees.*** This study sought to identify the factors that predict adopted adults' comfort with their adoptive identity, as well as with their racial/ethnic identity. The strongest predictor of comfort with one's adoption identity for White respondents was life satisfaction. For Korean adopted adults, three factors predicted comfort with adoption identity: gender (females were more comfortable with their adoption); satisfaction with life (higher satisfaction predicted greater comfort with adoption); and self-esteem (higher self-esteem predicted greater comfort with adoption).

While most Korean respondents reported achieving some level of comfort with their race/ethnicity as adults, a significant minority (34%) remained uncomfortable or only somewhat comfortable. Two factors were significant predictors of their comfort with racial/ethnic identity: self-esteem (those having higher self-esteem felt more comfortable with their race/ethnicity) and their scores on the MEIM (stronger ethnic identification predicted greater comfort with

their race/ethnicity). Also, experiencing less racial discrimination and having higher life satisfaction were associated with greater comfort with their racial/ethnic identity. For Koreans, experiences of racial teasing – which were prevalent – also were associated with lower life satisfaction and lower self-esteem.

Recommendations

Based on this study, as well as on the examination of theory and previous research that undergirds it (Appendix I), the Adoption Institute recommends a range of changes in adoption practice and policy to promote positive adoptive and transracial/cultural identity, including:

- ***Expand parental preparation and post-placement support for those adopting across race and culture.*** Such preparation should include educating parents about the salience of race across the developmental course, instruction about racial identity development and the tasks inherent in such development, and assistance in understanding racial discrimination and how best to arm their children to combat the prejudice and stereotypes they will face. Preparation also should include the understanding that seeking services and supports is a positive part of parenting – i.e., it is a sign of strength, not failure.

- ***Develop empirically based practices and resources to prepare transracially and transculturally adopted youth to cope with racial bias.*** This study, as well as previous research, indicates that perceived discrimination is linked with greater psychological distress, lower self-esteem, and more discomfort with one's race/ethnicity. Hence, it is essential to arm transracially adopted youth with ways to cope with bias and discrimination in a manner that does not negatively impact their identity.

- ***Promote laws, policies and practices that facilitate access to information for adopted individuals.*** For adopted individuals, gaining information about their origins is not just a matter of curiosity, but a matter of gaining the raw materials needed to fill in the missing pieces in their lives and derive an integrated sense of self. Both adoption professionals and the larger society need to recognize this basic human need and right, and to facilitate access to needed information for adopted individuals.

- ***Educate parents, teachers, practitioners, the media and others about the realities of adoption to erase stigmas and stereotypes, minimize adoption-related discrimination, and provide children with more opportunities for positive development.*** Generations of secrecy, shame and stereotypes about adoption (and those it affects) have taken a toll, as the respondents in this research make clear. Just as discrimination based on color, gender, sexual orientation and religion – all components of people's identity – are broadly considered to be socially unacceptable, adoption-related discrimination also should be unacceptable. Professionals and parents also need to be better informed about the importance of providing diversity and appropriate role models.

- ***Increase research on the risk and protective factors that shape the adjustment of adoptees, especially those adopted transracially/culturally in the U.S. or abroad.*** More longitudinal research that combines quantitative and qualitative methods is needed to better understand the process through which children, teens and young adults progress in confronting transracial adoption identity issues. Additional research is also needed on the identity journey experienced by in-race adoptees – and, pointedly, more of the studies of every kind need to include the perspective of adopted individuals themselves.

Conclusion

The findings of this study reflect the need to go "beyond culture camp" to provide children with ongoing experiences and relationships that promote positive racial (and adoptive) identity development. Our respondents valued cultural celebrations and other opportunities to learn about their origins, but such singular events appear insufficient. Instead, the research points to a need to move beyond strategies that promote cultural socialization to experiences that promote racial and cultural identification and comfort. Part of this work is to expand understanding of the importance of learning about one's origins, whether by traveling to birth country or by seeking out biological relatives in the U.S. Further, there seems no question about the need to provide transracially adopted children with opportunities to be in diverse settings and have diverse role models. Some of our respondents also noted that their parents did not know or understand the impact of being a person of color in a predominately White community or the importance of connecting children to adults of the same racial/ethnic background to serve as sources of information, support and role models. The same can be said for adoption itself; that is, adopted children benefit from interacting with other adopted children, and from having adult role models who themselves were adopted. Adoption professionals and parents, together, can facilitate a broader network of these types of supports and opportunities for adopted children and youth, especially those adopted transracially.

The field of adoption is evolving. Early adoption practice sought to match children with parents who looked like them and had the same temperament or intelligence, in large part to make adoption invisible. Adoption, with its association with illegitimacy and infertility, was seen as a less desirable way to form a family. "Good" adoptive families minimized the importance of adoption. As families formed across racial, ethnic and cultural lines became more common, adoption necessarily became more visible. But until fairly recently in adoption practice, the impact and meaning of transracial/cultural adoption were also minimized. Commitment and love of the adoptive parents, exposure to positive aspects of the child's culture, and perhaps connection with other families who had adopted from the same country were thought to be enough to support the development of positive identity. As this study demonstrates, the integration of "being adopted," of one's racial/ethnic identity and one's identity as a person adopted from another country is a complex and continually evolving process. This understanding needs to inform the actions of parents, professionals and adopted persons themselves – as well as the laws, policies and practices that impact their lives.

BEYOND CULTURE CAMP:
Promoting Healthy Identity Formation in Adoption

Introduction

Transracial adoption is a reality of contemporary American life. Since 1971, parents in this country have adopted nearly a half-million children from overseas; about two-thirds of these boys and girls were born in Asian countries, and the rest came from Latin America, Eastern Europe and, most recently, Africa (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2009). Additional tens of thousands of multiracial families have been formed during this period through adoptions from foster care, with the rate of transracial adoptions from the domestic system growing from 10.8 percent in Fiscal Y 1995, when there were about 20,000 total adoptions, to 15 percent in 2001, when there were over 50,000 (Hansen, 2005). In the vast majority of these cases – domestic and international – children of color have been adopted by Caucasian parents.[3]

Despite extensive research indicating that children adopted across racial/ethnic lines generally fare as well as their non-adopted counterparts, the same studies show that transracially adopted individuals can face challenges to the development of positive identity. These include the loss of connection to their original families and cultures, disconnection between their physical appearance and their sense of self derived from the adoptive family, limited access to others of their ethnic/racial heritage, and persistent prejudice and discrimination that White parents are often not prepared to address (McRoy, Zurcher, Lauderdale, & Anderson, 1984; Juffer, 2006; Feigelman, 2000; de Haymes & Simon, 2003; Cederblad, Hook, Irhammar, & Mercke, 1999).

Some parents may not understand the importance of these issues for their children. More commonly, they appreciate the value of developing healthy racial and adoptive identity and maintaining a connection to birth culture, but are uncertain how to accomplish these goals. For families who have adopted internationally, myriad programs and services have sprung up since the late 1980s, in part due to the maturation of the first generation of international adoptees (McGinnis, 2003). One major example is "culture camps," which were created by adoptive parents and practitioners to help children better understand their backgrounds and integrate them into their sense of themselves. The camps can last from a day to a week, and usually include exposure to elements of home culture such as language, cuisine, dance and art.

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While these camps offer one strategy for addressing the challenges of maintaining ethnic and racial identity, research and experience indicate that the process of helping children build a strong, positive self-image needs to be far more extensive and far-reaching. In short, society's practice of international and transracial adoption has advanced far more quickly than has the understanding of how to best promote identity development for these individuals and their families. Given the lifelong impact of the issues involved – an impact that can profoundly affect many millions of people when the adoptees, their parents, siblings and other relatives are included – research in this realm is therefore critically important. The study presented in this report significantly advances our knowledge about identity formation in adoptees. Further, it deepens our understanding of racial and ethnic identity development among Korean American adoptees, the largest group of internationally adopted persons in the U.S. and the cohort on which this study primarily focuses. It is also important to say that many of the lessons learned are applicable to other domestic and international transracial adoptees as well.

Development of International Adoptions

Although the international adoption of children by American families began in the aftermath of World War II, it was not until the late 1950s, in response to the displacement of Korean War orphans, that adoption agencies became significantly involved in transnational placements (Feigelman & Silverman, 1984; Jones & Else, 1979). According to official statistics from the Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare, a total of 160,247 South Korean children were placed into families in Western nations between 1953 and 2007, representing the largest number of children to be adopted overseas from a single country to date (Overseas Adopted Koreans, 2008). Of the total, 107,145 were adopted into the United States – and, today, they constitute 1 out of 10 Korean American citizens (Overseas Adopted Koreans, 2008; Yu, Choe, & Han, 2002); European families adopted 54,068 of these boys and girls, about half of whom are in families in Sweden, Norway and Denmark. These Korean-born adoptees were, in a sense, pioneers in the establishment of modern international adoption.

An estimated 30,000 to 40,000 children are adopted internationally from over 50 countries annually, with the United States receiving the largest number into new families (Masson, 2001; Lovelock, 2000; Bailey, 2009). From 1989 to 2004, according to U.S. State Department figures, the number of children adopted by Americans from abroad nearly tripled – from 8,102 in 1989 to a peak of 22,884 children in 2004; the number has declined over the last several years, totaling 17,438 in 2008, the last year for which statistics were available before publication of this report.[4] Over the same period, members of the first generation of intercountry adoptees have been entering young adulthood, some becoming parents and even grandparents. Their experiences offer a wealth of insights for the current and future generations of adopted people, their families and the future development of adoption practices and policies.

[4] There have been many factors contributing to the decline in the number of intercountry adoptions, including new restrictions as a result of the ratification of the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption, which entered into force in the United States on April 1, 2008. From 1995 to 2006, according to the U.S. State Department, the top four countries sending children for adoption to the U.S. accounted for almost 75 percent of all international adoption placements. These nations were: China, Russia, Guatemala and South Korea. In 2007, Ethiopia topped South Korea as one of the top four countries, the first time an African nation has ever done so.

Coming of Age of the First Generation of International Adoptees

The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute demonstrated the importance of learning from this first generation of intercountry adoptees when – in conjunction with Holt International Children's Services, the Korea Society and the adult intercountry adoptee organization Also-Known-As, Inc. – it sponsored the First Gathering of Korean Adoptees in Washington, D.C., in 1999. This Gathering brought together 400 adults who had been adopted from South Korea between 1955 and 1985; they ranged in age from 21 to 65 and represented over 30 U.S. states and several European countries. The event has since been repeated, organized by adult Korean adoptee groups in 2001 in Oslo, and in 2004 and 2007 in Seoul. The Adoption Institute conducted a survey of participants at the 1999 Gathering (with 160 respondents) that captured the collective experiences of this pioneering group of international adoptees and began to shed light on the development of identity from the perspective of adopted adults.

One finding from the 1999 Gathering survey was a distinct shift in the ethnic self-identification of respondents from childhood to adulthood. While slightly over one-third of the respondents (36%) considered themselves to be Caucasian as children and adolescents, as adults they were far more likely to identify as Korean American (64%) and less as Caucasian (11%). Others identified as American (10%) or as Asian/Korean (10%). During small-group discussions held at the Gathering, participants described experiences of racism pervading many aspects of their lives. They also reported complex feelings about being adopted, including themes of loss and abandonment, as well as feelings of gratitude for their adoptions. While most participants reported that they sought to "fit in" and identify with the majority culture growing up, some also articulated a desire to encompass all aspects of their being, rather than choosing to put themselves in one "box" (Freundlich & Lieberthal, 2000).

Although it is important to recognize that the group attending the Gathering (and other such events) may have had a special interest in or curiosity about these issues, and therefore may or may not have been representative of the larger population of young adults adopted from Korea, the findings from the 1999 Gathering pointed to important questions for further investigation: What contributed to this shift in ethnic self-identification from childhood to adulthood, and what experiences fostered this development? Did a feeling of connectedness to their ethnic/racial group contribute to their adjustment and well-being and, if so, in what ways? And how did their experience of being adopted shape their comfort with their ethnic/racial group?

This new study by the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, launched with funding by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, seeks to broaden our knowledge of key aspects of adoptive identity formation both through a thorough examination of the research on this subject and, most pointedly, through the experience and knowledge of those who understand the process best: adopted adults. Specifically, the project sought to identify those factors that contribute to the formation of healthy identities for people who were adopted internationally by parents of a different race, and to develop knowledge about the dynamics of identity formation. Based on a review of the emerging literature on adoptive identity, racial/ethnic identity, and transracial adoptive identity and the relevance of identity issues for all adopted persons, the Adoption Institute conducted a national web-based survey of adults adopted both transculturally and

transracially and those adopted domestically. Specifically, this paper compares adults adopted from South Korea and adopted White, U.S. born adults on many measures.

Further, the study sought to derive lessons from the experiences of participants to inform current practices and services to promote healthy identity, and to provide the basis for best-practice recommendations. This ground-breaking study is, to our knowledge, the largest to date to focus on identity issues of adopted adults in the U.S., a topic relevant to the estimated 6 to 8 million Americans who have been adopted into their families, irrespective of whether they are of the same race/ethnicity as their parents. This report examines two separate but related issues – the factors that contribute to adopted people's formation of adoptive identity and those that shape racial/ethnic identity for persons adopted across race/ethnicity.

Why Identity is Important

In all of us there is a hunger, marrow deep, to know our heritage, to know who we are, and where we have come from. Without this enriching knowledge, there is a hollow yearning, no matter what our attainments in life, there is the most disquieting loneliness.

– Alex Haley (Roots, 1976)

All human beings, as they develop, seek to understand who they are and what their place is in the world. Adopted individuals have the additional overlay of discerning why they are not with the parents who created them and what relevance this has for their own identities. Those adopted across race and culture also face the reality of integrating racial/ethnic identity without input from a family with this lived experience.

Identity formation for adopted individuals can be more complex because of a number of challenges, such as a lack of knowledge about their pasts, an inability to obtain information, and social attitudes that stigmatize adoption. The belief that adopted persons do not need or should not have basic information about their origins has been formalized in law and policy. Adoptees are the only individuals in the United States who, as a class, are not permitted to routinely obtain their original birth certificates in most states, and thus are prohibited from accessing basic personal information about their backgrounds and heritage, as well as medical and genealogical data – information that some posit are critical for developing an integrated and healthy self-concept (as well as for concrete, health-related reasons) (Freundlich, 2007). Despite these barriers, a growing number of adopted persons have made efforts to gain information about their roots, and adoption practices have reflected a shift in understanding of the importance of identity for adopted persons (Samuels, 2002; Carp, 2007).

To better understand the issues involved, provide a context for its own study and provide greater knowledge to the field, to parents and to adopted persons themselves, the Adoption Institute conducted an extensive review of the theoretical and research literature on adoptive identity development and racial/ethnic identity in international adoptions. A summary of the primary findings from this review are summarized below, and the full review is appended to this report.

The concept of identity has been used in various ways to refer to a personal "sense of self," developed through both internal representations and relationships with others; social identity, as defined by society in roles and statuses; and collective identity, for instance, self-awareness of national or ethnic groups (Grotevant, 1997b; 2009). Most scholarly writings on identity, however, have focused on the individual. Psychologists have posited theoretical models of identity formation, which are reviewed in Appendix I. Theories of identity development hold that adolescence is the time when individuals most actively engage in the "work" of identity formation. Erikson (1968) theorized that although identity begins to form in infancy, the major exploration of relevant issues occurs in adolescence. Other theorists have developed more in-depth stages of identity development, such as Marcia's (1966) four identity statuses, describing different levels of exploration and resolution.

Many scholars have studied the development of racial/ethnic identity. For example, Phinney (1989) defined stages through which individuals progress in exploring the meaning of their own race/ethnicity – moving from denial of differences to an integrated awareness of race/ethnicity that incorporates pride in one's own racial/ethnic identity, as well as the ability to function successfully in the larger society. Another racial identity theory, the ecological model proposed by Root (1999), holds that racial/ethnic identity is fluid and constantly changing over time in response to experiences and a range of influences. A lifespan perspective advanced by Cross, Strauss, & Fhagen-Smith (1999), integrates the previous two models and holds that race may have a high or low salience in the identity of individuals. In accordance with their perspective, the best outcome of racial identity formation is not necessarily shaping a racially focused identity with strong ethnic identification, but integrating race into one's identity in a manner that supports self worth.

Adoptive Identity Development

Adoption adds a layer of complexity to identity development, because the reality for all adopted people is that they have dual identities – one related to biology and the other to adoption. Kirk (1964) was one of the first scholars to recognize the importance of addressing adoption issues. He suggested that adoptive families move from "rejection of difference" to "acknowledgment of difference," an attitude that recognizes inherent distinctions between families formed through birth and adoption and that facilitates exploring adoption-related issues. Grotevant and colleagues define adoptive identity development as "how the individual constructs meaning about his/her adoption" (Grotevant, Dunbar, Kohler, & Esau, 2000, p. 381). By studying the narratives of adopted adolescents, Dunbar and Grotevant (2004) identified four adoptive identity statuses: unexamined, limited, unsettled and integrated identity.

Brodzinsky (1990) proposed a "stress and coping" life stage model related to adoptive identity. In this view, adopted individuals' awareness of adoption loss and a sense of difference results in stress, and how individuals make sense of and interpret the adoption experience and how they cope with the stress will influence their adjustment.

Racial/Ethnic Identity in Transracial & Transnational Adoption

Transracial adoption adds yet another layer of complexity to identity development. The identity formation process for children raised by parents of a different race/ethnicity than their own involves incorporating disparities between one's self and one's family, as well as between one's self and one's society. The issues vary to some extent across groups of transracially adopted individuals, according to the extent to which their race or ethnicity is represented in the overall population where they live, the level of prejudice toward their particular racial/ethnic group, whether they are adopted domestically or transnationally, and other factors.

Lee (2003, p. 711) defined identity work for transracial adoptees as reconciling the "transracial adoption paradox," that is, being a part of a minority group in society by virtue of their birth, but identifying with "members of the majority culture due to their adoption." One of the few models to address this unique aspect of transracial adoptive identity development was developed by Baden and Steward (2000). The Cultural-Racial Identity Model describes 16 possible identity statuses for transracial adoptees that reflect the degree to which they identify with their birth cultures and with people from their own racial groups, as well as the degree to which they identify with their adoptive parents' culture and racial group. In addition, Steinberg and Hall (2000) described four stages through which White parents and their children of color may progress in integrating race and culture into their identity. Much more research is needed on the components of transnational adoptive identity.

Overview of Adoption Identity Research Findings

Research on Adjustment of Adopted Individuals

Researchers have focused on the psychological and behavioral adjustment of adopted individuals and have sought to determine both the benefits and potential challenges of adoption. Studies have found adopted children function far better when compared to youth who remain in institutions or foster care, or are maltreated or raised by biological parents uninterested in childrearing (Bohman, 1970; Bohman & Sigvardsson, 1990; Hodges & Tizard, 1989; van IJzendoorn, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Juffer, 2007; van IJzendoorn & Juffer, 2005, 2006). On the other hand, some groups of adopted persons have been found to function at lower levels when compared to non-adopted individuals raised in their birth families (Bohman & Von Knorring, 1979; Holden, 1991; Brodzinsky, Radice, Huffman, & Merkler, 1987; Rogeness, Hoppe, Macedo, Fischer, & Harris, 1988; Sharma, McGue, & Benson, 1996a; Versluis-den Bieman & Verhulst, 1995; Verhulst, 2000; Tieman, van der Ende, & Verhulst, 2005; Tieman, van der Ende, & Verhulst, 2006; Simmel, Brooks, Barth, & Hinshaw, 2001; Simmel, Barth, & Brooks, 2007; Howard, Smith, & Ryan, 2004). Studies have identified age at adoption and, more specifically, adverse pre-adoption experiences as having a significant effect on children's later adjustment (Barth & Berry, 1988; McRoy, Grotevant, & Zurcher, 1988; Verhulst & Versluis-den Bieman, 1992; Sharma, McGue, & Benson, 1998; Verhulst, 2000; Cederblad, Höök, Irhammar, & Mercke, 1999; Levy-Shiff, 2001).

Some experts suggest that identity struggles, while not directly linked to psychopathology, may be a factor in behavioral problems observed in some adopted children and adolescents (Brodzinsky, Singer, & Braff, 1984; Brozinsky, Schechter, & Henig, 1992). In fact, empirical studies have established a link between negative feelings about being adopted and behavioral or emotional problems in some adoptees (Smith & Brodzinsky, 2002; Juffer, 2006).

In general, the methodological constraints of studies (sampling bias, inadequate use of control and comparison groups, and measurement limitations), as well as the heterogeneity of the adoptee population itself, have made it difficult to draw conclusions about the relationship between adoptive identity and adoptee adjustment. (See Appendix I for a more in-depth discussion of research findings and limitations.)

Research on Adoption & Identity

Research that has explored adoption's effects on identity has tended to focus on two aspects: its impact on normative identity development in childhood and adolescence, and racial identity formation of transracial adoptees. Overall, the literature suggests that adoptees experience psychological stresses related to adoption, including ones related to identity, that may impact their overall adjustment and well-being; however, the impact can vary significantly among individuals because of a range of personal, social and environmental factors (Freundlich, 2001).

Brodzinsky and colleagues have studied adopted children's cognitive understanding of adoption and developmental stages in coming to terms with the meaning of adoption. Their study of 200 infant-placed adoptees and non-adopted children, aged 4-13 years, found that while pre-school-aged children could label themselves as adopted, their comprehension of their family status and ability to differentiate between adoption and biology as means of entering a family did not develop until early school age, 5-7 years (Brodzinsky, Singer, & Braff, 1984). In addition, they found adopted children became less positive about adoption as they got older, whereas non-adopted children became more positive (Singer, Brodzinsky, & Braff, 1982). Similar results were found in their survey of 82 adoptees (age 6-17) placed as infants; adolescent respondents reported less-positive feelings and more ambivalence about their adoptive status, while younger ones reported more intrusive thoughts about adoption (Smith & Brodzinsky, 1994). Thus, the literature suggests that as awareness of the meaning and implications of adoption grows in middle childhood, children begin to look at their adoptive status more critically. Around ages 7-8 many children become aware of the loss aspects of adoption which may contribute to negative or ambivalent feelings about adoption. These findings are consistent with evidence indicating increases in problem behaviors and fantasies concerning birthparents during middle childhood (Brodzinksy, 1990; 1993; Brodzinsky, et al. 1984, 1986; LeVine & Sallee, 1990).

While most of the adoption literature assumes identity formation is more complex for adolescent adoptees (Brodzinsky, 1987; Goebels & Lott, 1986; Rosenberg, 1992; Grotevant, 1997; Grotevant, et al., 2000), the empirical literature has been slow to systematically and adequately address these assumptions.

A study by the Search Institute (Benson, Sharma, & Roehlkepartain, 1994), conducted with a community-based sample of 881 adolescents adopted as infants in confidential placements, has

been used to challenge the notion that adoption complicates identity formation of adopted adolescents. The researchers found no significant differences on questions related to overall identity and self-esteem between adoptees and their non-adopted siblings. Based on a lack of differences on questions such as "I have a good sense of who I am" and "I have a good idea about where I'm going in life," the researchers concluded that adoption has little impact on the identity formation process of most adopted adolescents (Benson, Sharma, & Roehlkepartain, 1994). At least two other studies measuring global identity also found few differences between adopted and nonadopted adolescents (Stein & Hoopes, 1985; Goebel & Lott, 1986). However, other adoption scholars have expressed concerns about reaching such a conclusion from these data (Grotevant, 1997; Baden & Wiley, 2007). In fact, the Search Institute study found that two-thirds of the adoptees reported that they would like to meet their birthparents, and 41 percent said they thought about adoption daily to at least two to three times per month, with girls more likely to report doing so. Baden and Wiley (2007) conclude that the adoption literature has not reached a consensus on adoption's impact on identity.

In a study examining the behavior of 50 adolescent adoptees regarding search for their birth families, Stein and Hoopes (1985) found perceived physical dissimilarity to adoptive parents to be greater among those who chose to search. In a survey of 100 adoptees regarding factors associated with searching, Kowal and Schilling (1985) found 71 percent wanted to know about personality characteristics and 68 percent desired to know what their birth parents looked like. One adoptee stated, "I need to justify who I am because I'm very different from my [adoptive] family and I never felt like I was OK for who I am" (p. 361).

Adoption-related stress may continue beyond childhood as adopted individuals age. Several researchers have observed that adulthood may be a time when questions arise regarding heritage, genetic history, thoughts of searching for biological kin, or differences in physical characteristics or relationship with adoptive family (Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Henig, 1992; Hajal & Rosenberg, 1991). Studies on searching for birth relatives by adopted adults have found that a key motivation is related to identity (Stein & Hoopes, 1985; Campbell, Silverman, & Patti, 1991; Sachdev, 1992; Kohler, Grotevant, & McRoy, 2002). In reviewing the literature on this subject, Baden and Wiley (2007) analyzed 13 studies and identified the most common reasons for searching; among them were wanting background information, wanting a cohesive identity, desiring a biological connection based on physical appearance, and being curious.

Drawing from statements by adopted adult searchers who described a need to "find out who I am, learn my true identity" and to find "the part of me that is missing," Schechter & Bertocci (1990, p. 80) wrote:

> *Identity does not have closure in adolescence or young adulthood but continues to evolve over the life span and through the search, adoptees are seeking a reconciliation and cohesion of many complex perceptions, cognitive systems, and self-object representations.*

Research on Racial/Ethnic Identity in International Adoption

Most of the empirical literature addressing racial/ethnic identity issues in adoption has examined the effects of transracial adoption on minority children's racial/ethnic identity, self-esteem and psychological adjustment. Early research in transracial adoption examined the overall adjustment of domestic transracial adoptees, primarily African American children placed with White families, although later research has included children adopted from other countries, who comprise the majority of all transracial adoptions in the U.S with estimates as high as 85 percent (Lee, 2003). In general, these studies have found that children adopted transracially had overall adjustment outcomes similar to children placed in same-race families, particularly when they were adopted early in life (Grow & Shapiro, 1974; Kim, 1977; McRoy, Zurcher, Lauderdale, & Anderson,1982, 1984; McRoy & Zurcher, 1983; Simon & Altstein, 1987; Feigelman & Silverman, 1983; Shireman & Johnson, 1986; Andujo, 1988).

Earlier studies of transracial adoptions focused primarily on broad outcomes of adoptee adjustment, however, rather than ethnic/racial identification, and the few examining ethnic identity formation tended to rely on parent reports and focus on school-aged children (Feigelman & Silverman, 1984; Trolley, Hansen & Wallin, 1995). Later studies focusing on adolescent and young adult transracial adoptees found that many did indeed experience challenges related to their ethnic/racial identity, a fact masked by earlier research since this aspect of identity becomes more important with age (e.g., Feigelman, 2000; Brooks & Barth, 1999, Wickes & Slate, 1996). Recent transracial adoption studies have utilized more rigorous research methods and refined the specific constructs that are measured (racial/ethnic identity, reference group orientation and aspects of cultural socialization). A few studies have begun to look at adult experiences and to explore how ethnic/racial identity intersects with adoptive identity for transracial adoptees and their families (Basow, et al., 2008; Mohanty, et al., 2006; Frasch & Brooks, 2003).

Several scholars have provided integrative reviews of the literature on transracial adoption of both children adopted domestically and from overseas (Tizard, 1991; Alexander & Curtis, 1996; Rushton & Minnis, 1997; Friedlander, 1999; Lee, 2003; Fensbo, 2004; Juffer & van IJzendoorn 2005; Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2007). Taken in total, this body of research suggests that approximately 70-80 percent of transracial adoptees had few serious behavioral or emotional problems – a rate similar to samples of same-race adoptees – and that they do not differ significantly in levels of self-esteem or social adjustment (see review by Lee, 2003).

Empirical studies on adolescent and young adult transracial adoptees have found that many struggled with various aspects of their racial and ethnic identity, including discomfort with their appearance and ethnic self-descriptors (Benson, et al., 1994; Brooks & Barth, 1999; Feigelman, 2000; Freundlich & Lieberthal, 2000; Westhues & Cohen, 1998; Kim, 1977). For example, in the Search Institute study noted earlier, 173 of the 881 adolescent adoptees were Korean and, of these, 22 percent agreed with the statement, "I wish I was a different race than I am." In the final wave of his longitudinal study of transracial adoptees, Feigelman (2000) found about half of the young adult transracial adoptees had expressed discomfort with their racial appearance. In addition, in the final wave of Simon & Altstein's (1992) longitudinal study (also conducted in 1971, 1979, 1983 and 1991) 55 percent of the young adult Korean adoptees reported adolescence

as the period in their lives when they found being a different race and culture from their parents to be "harder." As for racial/ethnic descriptors, two-thirds or more of transracial adoptees across several studies did not identify with their racial status (Andujo, 1988; Feigelman & Silverman, 1984; Kim, 1995).

Although research has not systematically examined experiences of discrimination, a significant portion of international adoptees of color report a range of negative experiences, from overt racism to teasing about their appearance. A number of studies of international adoptees in many countries report that such experiences occur for a majority of participants, ranging up to 80 percent (Westhues & Cohen, 1994; Simon & Altstein, 1992; Lee & Quintana, 2005; Freundlich & Lieberthal, 2000; Triseliotis, 1993). Several studies have found a significant relationship between experiencing racial discrimination or discomfort with physical difference and adjustment difficulties (Feigelman, 2000; Cederblad, et al., 1999; Juffer, 2006).

In his review of the literature on transracial adoption, Lee (2003) noted that most studies on ethnic/racial identity have examined adoptees' use of racial/ethnic self-descriptors or pride/comfort with their race/ethnicity, but have not tested the relationship between racial/ethnic experiences and psychological adjustment. More recent studies have documented that the self-esteem of transracial adoptees is positively related to adoptive parents' cultural competence and the extent to which adopted children are positively exposed to their culture of origin (Yoon, 2004; Lee & Quintana, 2005; Lee, et al., 2006; Mohanty, Keoske, & Sales, 2006). In addition, living in a diverse community and having sustained social relationships with people of color have been found to contribute to stronger ethnic/racial identifications (McRoy, 1994; McRoy & Zurcher, 1983; Feigelman, 2000; Hugh & Reid, 2000; Yoon, 2004).

Research in the field of cultural socialization outcome studies is beginning to provide empirical evidence of a relationship between ethnic/racial identity development, parental cultural socialization, and psychological adjustment for transracial adoptees (Lee, 2003). In one of the few studies to measure the relationship between ethnic/racial identity and psychological adjustment of transracial adoptees, Yoon (2004) found in his sample of 241 Korean adolescent adoptees that parental support of ethnic socialization was related to a positive sense of ethnic pride, and that ethnic pride was related to subjective well-being. He also found positive feelings about one's ethnic group were related to growing up in a racially diverse community. Another study found greater cultural socialization was associated with fewer aggressive and delinquent behaviors in Asian adoptees (Johnston, Swim, Saltsman, Deater-Deckard, & Petrill, 2007). In addition, a study of 82 adult transracial adoptees found parental engagement in cultural socialization correlated significantly with their children's positive self-esteem, greater sense of belonging in their adoptive families, and fewer feelings of marginality (Mohanty, et al., 2006).

A current longitudinal study suggests that connecting internationally adopted youth to their culture and race is a challenge many families have not mastered. Lee (2009) assessed 248 adopted Korean American adolescents and their parents related to parenting practices that convey messages about race, ethnicity and culture. He compared parent and adolescent responses on cultural socialization/pluralism (teaching about the history of Koreans and other minority groups, celebrating Korean culture, developing relationships with other Asian children); preparation for bias (educating children about discrimination, stereotypes and racism

against Koreans and other groups, discussing how the child's life might be affected by racism) and promotion of mistrust. Responses from both parents and youth indicated that behaviors related to cultural socialization and preparation for bias were engaged in only "rarely to sometimes," with parents rating their efforts in this regard more highly than did their children. Both parents and youth reported more efforts related to cultural socialization than to preparation for bias.

Lee, Yoo and Roberts (2004) conducted one of the few studies comparing adult Korean adoptees to non-adopted Korean American college students in order to examine the extent to which different aspects of ethnic identity contribute to psychological adjustment (life satisfaction and psychological distress). They found the adoptees had lower ethnic clarity and pride than non-adopted Korean Americans, and ethnic identity pride was related to higher life satisfaction.

Other studies have examined types of cultural activities Korean adoptees experienced and their impact on ethnic identity (Song & Lee, 2009; Shiao & Tuan, 2008). Among the seven categories of cultural socialization experiences identified by Song & Lee, living in diverse communities (*Diverse Milieu)*, developing an awareness of what it means to be a racial and ethnic minority and an adopted individual (*Racial Awareness)*, and visiting Korea and searching for one's birth/foster families were positively correlated with ethnic identity (*Birth Roots)*.

Finally, the adjustment and identity of adopted individuals are shaped by interactions across a wide range of contexts including:

- Family characteristics (parental attitudes toward difference, adoption and race; quality of parenting; sibling relationships, such as having an adopted sibling from the same country; family communication about adoption and race; cultural competence; and others) (LeVine & Sallee, 1990; Brooks & Barth, 1999; Stein & Hoopes, 1985; Benson, et al., 1994; Brodzinsky, 2006; Rueter & Koerner, 2008).
- Community (experiences with peers and neighbors; school environment; diversity and multicultural experiences) (Freundlich & Lieberthal, 2000; McRoy, et al., 1982; Feigelman, 2000; Huh & Reid, 2000).
- Society (social stigma related to adoption or race) (Wegar, 1997; Rosenberg & Horner, 1991; Waggenspack, 1998).

Goals of the Adoption Institute Study

The new study by the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute presented here is based on a large, web-based survey of adopted adults. Beyond contributing to the knowledge base on transracial adoption and adoptive identity, the explicit goal of this report is to improve policies and practices aimed at promoting and sustaining a positive self-identity for adopted individuals. Specifically, the Adoption Institute's research compares the psychological adjustment, adoptive identity, and ethnic/racial identity of adults adopted internationally and raised by parents of a different race (transracial) to those characteristics of adults adopted domestically by same-race

parents in the United States. Although 468 adopted adults completed our online survey (making it, to our knowledge, the largest study of adopted adults in the U.S. to focus on identity), for the purposes of comparison, this paper will concentrate primarily on respondents born in South Korea adopted by *two* White parents (*N*=179), and Caucasian respondents born in the U.S. adopted by *two* White parents (*N*=156) – the two groups that constituted over 70 percent of our respondents. We chose these groups in order to make them as homogeneous as possible for comparison purposes. Also, South Koreans comprise the largest group of internationally adopted persons in the U.S., and adoption from South Korea has a longer history than other types of transnational adoptions into the U.S. It is important to note, however, that many of the observations and conclusions in this research may be applicable to other domestic and internationally adopted persons and families.

The decision to focus on the experiences and retrospective reports of adopted adults was intended to address the paucity of literature on adoption and transracial identity from the perspective of adult adoptees. Prior research on identity often has relied primarily on parent reports, which cannot necessarily provide insight into the inter-psychic processes of identity formation nor, in the case of transracial adoptions, the racial experiences of minority children. In particular, the current body of literature has not sufficiently examined the role of adopted individuals as active agents in forming their own unique identities. In fact, recent findings suggest much of the "work" of adoption and racial/ethnic identity exploration may occur in adulthood, although the foundations for such exploration begin in childhood and adolescence. In addition, we sought to address some of the methodological limitations in previous transracial adoption research by grounding our work in theory and utilizing standardized scales to measure ethnic identity and psychological well-being. We also wanted to understand how overall adjustment measures such as self-esteem and life satisfaction were related to *both* racial/ethnic identity and adoptive identity.

The Institute's study addresses these research questions:

- How important are racial/ethnic identity and adoptive identity for adopted individuals over their lifespan (at different developmental stages)?
- How do adult Korean transracial adoptees and White same-race adoptees differ in their ethnic identification? What factors are associated with strong ethnic identification among Korean adoptees?
- How do adult, Korean-born transracial adoptees differ from White adopted adults in their perceived comfort with their racial/ethnic identity and adoptive identity? What factors are associated with greater comfort with these identities?
- What contributes to the shift in ethnic self-identification for Korean transracial adoptees as they age from childhood to adulthood?
- What experiences do adopted adults identify as being most helpful in achieving a healthy identity as transracially/transculturally adopted persons?

Methodology

Conceptual Framework

Conceptually, our study was guided by theories of normative identity development, a developmental model of ethnic/racial identity formation, and the stress and coping life stage model of adoptive identity development described earlier. These theories suggest that ethnic/racial and adoption identity develop over the life course, progressing from a relative lack of awareness or understanding of adoption or race/ethnicity in early childhood, to active engagement in the meaning of being adopted and racial/ethnic exploration peaking in adolescence, to a consolidation and refinement of adoption and racial/ethnic identity through adulthood. We therefore hypothesized that both transracial and same-race adopted adults would report that adoption and ethnic/racial identity became most important to them during adolescence, tapering off in importance by middle adulthood.

Past research has found that the formation of a strong ethnic/racial identity is associated with positive self-esteem for ethnic minorities, including for transracial adoptees whose parents engage in cultural socialization practices and live in diverse communities. Thus, we hypothesized that transracially adopted Koreans who grew up with opportunities for cultural socialization as children and lived in diverse communities would have stronger ethnic/racial identities as adults than those who said they did not have such experiences. We predicted being comfortable with one's racial/ethnic identity would be associated with adopted adults' reports of high self-esteem and life satisfaction. Finally, we predicted there would be differences in adoption and racial/ethnic identity between Korean and White adopted adults.

Sample & Procedures

We solicited the participation of adopted individuals 18 years of age or older to complete an extensive web-based survey. Potential participants were identified through adult international and domestic adoptee associations, online adoption groups, and email lists. Information was posted on the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute website, in media stories, and in advertisements placed in two relevant magazines (*Adoption Today* and *Korean Quarterly*). Information about the survey also was sent to international adoption agencies, with requests to forward the inquiry to their client families. In addition, information about the survey was distributed at several conferences.[5] Some participants were recruited through snowball sampling, that is, by asking respondents already taking the survey to forward information to other potentially interested adult adoptees.

The survey was posted on the Adoption Institute's website from mid-October 2006 until February 2007. It was designed to be anonymous, although we did permit individuals to provide their email addresses if they were willing to be contacted afterward. Adoption groups

[5] These include the annual meeting of the Joint Council for International Children's Services (an umbrella organization of intercountry adoption practitioners), the Holt International Children's Services 50th Anniversary event, the St. John's University "Adoption without Borders?" conference, and the inaugural meeting of the International Adoptee Congress.

(associations and agencies) were asked by email to post information to their members, with a link to the survey. We sought a participation rate of at least 200 intercountry adoptees, anticipating that most would have been adopted from Asia, and a similar rate for our comparison group of same-race domestic adoptees.

A total of 533 adopted adults (transnational and domestic) responded. We excluded surveys that were less than 60 percent complete, giving us a working total of 468 respondents. Of those, 43 percent were born in South Korea (*N*=200) and 44 percent were born in the U.S. (*N*=206); the remaining 13 percent were born in other countries, primarily Colombia, India, the Philippines, and China (*N=62*). As noted earlier, for the purpose of this report, we analyzed only those respondents born in South Korea or the United States who were White and had two White adoptive parents. Of those born in South Korea, 179 identified *both* adoptive parents as White; and of the White U.S. born respondents, 156 identified *both* adoptive parents as White.

Survey Instrument

We constructed a comprehensive survey designed to address two aspects of identity important to transracial adoptees: adoptive identity and racial/ethnic identity. We also focused on two specific time frames in the adoptees' lives: as children (past) and as adults (present)**.** We referred to race and ethnicity as one variable (racial/ethnic). This combining of terms allowed us to use the same survey to collect data on a comparison sample of same-race domestically adopted adults. We did not define race, ethnicity or adoptive identity in the survey, allowing the respondents to answer according to their own perceptions and definitions.

Demographic survey items. Questions included participants' demographic information as children and as adults; what they knew about their own pre-adoption histories; experiences growing up in their families; exploration of their adoptions as adults, including searching for birth families and association with other adopted adults; exposure to their birth heritage within their families; experiences of discrimination (racial and adoption-related) within their communities; and current life status and sense of control (locus of control).

Measures. We used standardized measures for several variables: the Family of Origin Scale (FOS), which is designed to measure adult retrospective perceptions about global functioning of one's family (the adoptive family); the Multi-Group Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) to measure the strength of ethnic identification; and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and Satisfaction with Life Scale to measure current psychological well-being. For a full description of all the standardized measures utilized in the study, see the Appendix.

Adoptive identity achievement and racial identity were measured by two questions: "Overall, how comfortable are you with your identity as an adopted person?" Respondents answered on a six-point scale, from extremely uncomfortable (1) to extremely comfortable (6). We also asked a similar question: "Overall, how comfortable are you with your racial/ethnic identity?" utilizing the same six-point scale to assess respondents' perceived comfort with this aspect of themselves.

Changes in ethnic self-identification from childhood to adulthood. In order to explore differences between childhood and adult experiences and identities, we asked transracially adopted respondents the following open-ended question: *If your adoptive parents*

were of a different race/ethnicity than yourself, was there ever a time growing up that you considered yourself to be/wished you were of their race/ethnicity? Those who responded "yes" were asked to identify any experiences that contributed to changing their perspective.

Supportive services and experiences. We also asked participants to rate various experiences and services – such as culture camps, mentorships and visits to birth countries – on a 4 point scale of assistance in forming their identities (from Not Very Helpful to Not Helpful to Mixed to Helpful); we also asked whether they had ever utilized such services (Yes/No).

Data Analysis

We used bivariate analyses to examine the differences between the two groups of adult adoptees (transracially adopted Koreans and domestically adopted Whites) and to explore the associations between variables that have been associated with ethnic identity and positive adjustment in transracially adopted individuals. Finally, we used multivariate analyses to determine what factors best predict adopted adults' comfort with their adoptive and racial identities. Open-ended responses were also analyzed. All written responses to open-ended questions were categorized by themes and sub-themes.

TABLE 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondent Groups

Characteristic	Korean Adoptees *N*=179	White Adoptees *N*=156
Current Gross Income **	$44,486	$57,558
Current age in years (Mean)***	31	44
Mean Years Married ***	4	12
Gender		
Male	18%	17%
Female	82%	83%
Educational Level *		
High-School/GED	24%	23%
Associates degree	8%	15%
Bachelors degree	44%	28%
Masters degree	20%	26%
Doctoral degree	4%	7%
Marital Status **		
Never Married	44%	12%
Married / Partnered	50%	72%
Separated/Divorced/Widowed	6%	16%
Children		
Have Children ***	26%	72%
At least one child is adopted	31%	30%
Siblings		
Grew up with siblings	88%	85%
At least one sibling also adopted	74%	76%

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ between Korean & White respondents

Descriptive Findings

Description of Study Groups

A comparison of the Korean and White adoptees revealed similarities on some dimensions and differences on others (see Table 1, below). They were similar in terms of gender, with the majority of respondents in both groups being women (about 82%). There were significant differences, however, in terms of current age, marital status, years married, children, income and status of adoptive parents. On average, the White respondents were 13 years older (mean age=44) than the Koreans (mean age=31; $p<.001$). More of the White adoptees were married or partnered (72% compared to 50%; $p<.001$), and far more of them had children (72% compared to 26%) than their Korean counterparts ($p<.001$). It is probable that age accounts for the differences in marital status and number of children, as the majority of

Korean adoptees were young adults and just starting to establish their own families. A majority in both groups grew up with siblings (about 84%), with most (about 75% in each group) indicating that at least one of their siblings also was adopted. It is noteworthy that a large minority of respondents -- about 30 percent of those with children from both groups – reported at least one of their own children had been adopted, a significantly larger proportion than in the U.S. population at large. (The U.S. Census (2003) indicates that 3.7 percent of U.S. households with children have at least one adopted child.)

The White adoptees also had incomes that were about $10,000 higher on average than those of Korean respondents, which also may be the consequence of the older age of the former group (p<.01). What could not be determined was the extent, if any, to which this difference in income may have been race-related. Certainly, in terms of schooling, both groups of adoptees were well educated. Over half (52%) of the Korean adoptees indicated they had completed an Associate's or Bachelor's degree, while 43 percent of White respondents indicated the same; more White (33%) than Korean respondents (24%) also completed some level of graduate education (p<.05).

TABLE 2. Adoption Characteristics

Characteristic	Korean Adoptees *N*=179	White Adoptees *N*=156
Mean age at adoption (months) ***	21	7
Mean age knew you were adopted (years)**	4	6
Know birth name *	80%	72%
Searched for birth family ***	49%	86%
Member of Adult Adoptee Organization *	62%	49%
Member of Adoptee Listserv/E-group	73%	65%
Attended Adoptee Conference ***	49%	21%
Majority of time prior to adoption ***		
Foster family	39%	33%
Orphanage	35%	13%
Birth family	13%	16%
Do not know	11%	10%
Other	2%	28%
Number of Visits to Birth Country [a] **		
None	39%	-
1 – 2 times	40%	-
3 + times	21%	-
Satisfied with Pre-Adoptive Information ***		
Strongly to slightly disagree	46%	60%
Neither agree nor disagree	11%	3%
Slightly to strongly agree	43%	37%

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001 between Korean & White respondents
[a] Non-parametric test for Korean respondents only

Adoption Characteristics & Pre-Adoption Backgrounds

There were significant differences between the two groups on adoption-related variables such as age at adoption, pre-adoption placements, birth family search, and satisfaction with pre-adoption information (Table 2, below). The White respondents' average age at adoption was 7 months, compared to 21 months for the Koreans (p<.001). While one-third of respondents from both groups indicated they spent most of their pre-adoption time with foster families, 35 percent of the Koreans said they had

lived in orphanages, compared to 13 percent of the White respondents ($p<.001$).[6] Of interest is the fact that a majority of adoptees from both groups knew their birth names (prior to adoption), with the Koreans reporting at a higher rate than White adoptees ($p<.05$). Korean adoptees also reported knowing they were adopted at a younger age (mean age=4 years) than White adoptees (mean age=6 years; $p<.01$).

The survey also explored the level of adoption-related activities and actions in which respondents had engaged as adults. Among them were:

- The majority of White adoptees (86%) reported that they had engaged in a search for birth family, compared to almost half (49%) of Korean respondents ($p<.001$).
- Sixty-one percent of Korean adoptees reported that they had visited their birth country, and many (21%) had been there three or more times ($p<.01$).
- The majority (62%) of Korean respondents were members of adult adoptee organizations, and nearly half had participated in a conference for adoptees. Fewer White respondents (49%) belonged to such an organization ($p<.05$), and only about 20 percent had attended a comparable conference ($p<.001$).

Asked their levels of satisfaction with the amount of information they had about their pre-adoptive histories, the majority of White respondents (60%) indicated they were not satisfied, whereas fewer Korean respondents (46%) felt the same way. Just over 40 percent of Korean and just under 40 percent of White respondents indicated they were satisfied with the amount of information they had ($p<.01$).

Community Characteristics & Relationships

Table 3 below depicts characteristics, including diversity, of the communities in which respondents resided as children and as adults. The largest percentage from both groups (42-48%) grew up in the suburbs; however, as adults, nearly half the Korean adoptees (49%) said they lived in large urban communities. In contrast, as adults, the largest proportion of Whites remained in the suburbs (40%; $p<.001$). In terms of racial diversity, most Korean adoptees grew up in communities that were less than 10 percent Asian, but almost half (47%) indicated there are larger numbers of Asians in their current communities. This shift also was reflected in the fact that 67 percent of the Koreans described the extent of diversity in their childhood communities as "not at all" to "not very much," whereas many (42%) indicated there is "very much" diversity in their communities as adults. This indicates a shift for most from living in settings where they were very much in the minority as a child to living in communities with greater racial diversity. This change may be reflective of overall shifts in the American population, as well as the choice of Korean adopted adults to live in more diverse communities.

White respondents grew up in communities in which they were members of the racial majority and continue to live as adults with a high percentage of same-race neighbors. The reality that

[6] While the U.S. generally does not care for infants in orphanages/institutions at the current time, many of these adults were adopted several decades ago, when orphanage care still existed in the U.S.

TABLE 3. Community Characteristics as Children & Adults

	Korean Adoptees *N*=179		White Adoptees *N*=156	
	CHILD	ADULT	CHILD	ADULT
Characteristic	%	%	%	%
Residence ***				
Large urban (500,000+)	15	49	17	21
Small urban (250-500,000)	15	16	14	17
Suburban (less than 250,000)	42	30	48	40
Rural	29	5	21	22
Percent community same race †††, ***				
0-10 Percent	86	53	5	5
11-30 Percent	12	33	4	9
31-50 Percent	2	8	9	12
51-70 Percent	0	5	17	19
71-100 Percent	0	2	66	55
Community diversity ††				
Not at all	39	6	27	5
Not very much	28	20	26	26
A little	23	32	26	33
Very much	10	42	21	36
# Closest Friends Same Race †††, ***				
0 closest friends	72	36	1	3
1 to 2 friends	24	41	7	12
3 to 4 friends	3	16	23	39
5 closet friends	1	8	70	46
# Closest Friends Adopted **				
0 closet friends	75	53	74	71
1 to 2 friends	24	40	23	25
3 to 4 friends	1	6	1	3
5 closest friends	0	1	1	1

† $p < .05$, †† $p < .01$, ††† $p < .001$ between Korean & White respondents as children
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ between Korean & White respondents as adults

Korean adoptees lived in even more homogeneous communities as children than did White adoptees ($p<.01$) did not afford these individuals optimal conditions for gaining comfort with their own race/ethnicity during childhood. The survey also explored the racial makeup of respondents' closest friends as children and as adults. Whereas the majority (72%) of Korean respondents had no close friends who were Asian as children, only about one-third did not have a close friend of the same race today.

Similarly, most (75%) did not have a close childhood friend who was adopted, but as adults 47 percent indicated having close friends who were adopted. In contrast, far fewer White respondents had close friends of a different race at both time periods ($p<.001$), and over 70 percent indicated none of their close friends were adopted, either as a child or as an adult ($p<.01$). The fact that more Korean respondents had adoptee friends as adults may reflect their greater involvement in organizations for adopted persons, which obviously provide greater opportunities to create such friendships.

The majority of Korean adoptees indicated that the people they dated in high school were White (55%), although the proportion dating Asians increased from 32 percent in high school to 47 percent as adults, suggesting a greater interest in and opportunity to date people of the same race after high school. Most of the Korean respondents in current married or partnered relationships reported that their partners (56%) were White. Not surprisingly, the majority of

White respondents dated people who were the same race both in (78%) and after (70%) high school, with 81 percent indicating their current spouse or partner was also White.

TABLE 4. Experience of Race/Ethnicity & Adoption Bias

Characteristic	Korean Adoptees *N*=179 (%)	White Adoptees *N*=156 (%)
Childhood Teasing due to Race/Ethnicity ***		
Never- Hardly ever	22	92
Sometimes/ Often/ All the time	78	8
Childhood Teasing due to Adoption *		
Never- Hardly ever	79	65
Sometimes/ Often/ All the time	21	35
Extent Dating Influenced by Race/Ethnicity ***		
Never-Hardly ever	31	62
Sometimes/ Often/All the time	69	39
Extent Dating Influenced by Adoption *		
Never-Hardly ever	54	62
Sometimes/ Often /All the time	46	39

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ between Korean & White respondents

Experiences of Discrimination

The survey also explored respondents' experiences with discrimination or bias caused by their adoption status and their race/ethnicity (see Table 4). As might be expected, Korean respondents reported more racial bias than did their White counterparts. Thus, the majority of Korean respondents (78%) indicated that as children they experienced teasing because of their racial status (sometimes/often/all the time), while only 22 percent indicated being teased as children because of being adopted. The majority (69%) also indicated that race influenced their dating, and nearly half (46%) indicated their adoption status also influenced their dating. It is possible that some of this adoption-related bias in dating came from dating Whites but also may have related to dating non-adopted Asians, for whom the importance of blood lineage and the stigma of being an orphan may be more prevalent.

Not surprisingly, the majority of White adoptees did not experience bias or teasing because of their race or adoption status ($p<.001$); however, more White adoptees (35%) than Korean (21%) indicated being teased as children because of being adopted ($p<.01$). Fewer White respondents (39%; $p<.001$) indicated their adoption status influenced their dating.

In order to understand the sources of adoption and racial/ethnic bias, the survey asked in what contexts these encounters occurred (see Table 5). Significant portions of adoptees indicated that they experienced discrimination either related to being adopted or due to their race/ethnicity.

For Korean respondents, prejudice related to race/ethnicity was more frequent than to adoption, with the vast majority reporting racial discrimination "sometimes/fairly often/very often" coming from strangers (80%) and classmates (75%), followed by childhood friends (48%) and teachers (39%); one-third also experienced discrimination in the workplace, from extended family and from their partners' parents; all differences were significant at the $p<.05$ level. As might be expected, White respondents rarely encountered racial discrimination of any sort

compared with Korean adoptees (p<.05 for all comparisons). More White than Korean respondents, however, indicated experiencing adoption-related discrimination from extended family (40% vs. 21%; p<.05) and childhood friends (28% vs. 15%; p<.05), whereas most Korean adoptees experienced such bias from strangers (31%) and classmates (25%).

These findings suggest that race trumps adoption for transracially adopted persons. That is, the visibility of one's color and prevalence of racial bias bring one aspect of their beings – race – to the fore more frequently than another – adoption. Since White adoptees are part of the racial majority, differences rooted in adoption became more salient. In addition, these findings suggest that Korean adoptees most frequently encountered race-based discrimination among strangers and classmates outside of their immediate family. In contrast, White adoptees had more frequent encounters with adoption-based discrimination within extended family and from childhood friends (p<.05 for both, compared with Korean adoptees). The older age of White adoptees may have contributed to the greater prevalence of adoption stigma in their environment during their childhoods.

TABLE 5. Sources of Discrimination based on Adoption versus Race/Ethnicity

	Korean Adoptees *N*=179		White Adoptees *N*=156	
	ADOPTION	**RACE/ETHNCITY**	**ADOPTION**	**RACE/ETHNCITY**
	Sometimes/ Fairly often/ Very often	Sometimes/ Fairly often/ Very often	Sometimes/ Fairly often/ Very often	Sometimes/ Fairly often/ Very often
Source	%	%	%	%
Childhood friends [a,b,c,d]	15	48	28	8
Friends' parents [a,b,c,d]	11	38	24	5
Classmates [b,c]	25	75	9	7
Teachers [b,c,d]	13	39	21	8
Partner(s) [b,c,d]	8	22	12	3
Parent of partner(s) [b,c]	16	30	19	6
Coworkers [b,c]	11	33	10	3
Employers [b,c]	7	33	8	5
Extended family [a,b,c,d]	21	33	40	6
Stranger [b,c,d]	31	80	24	10

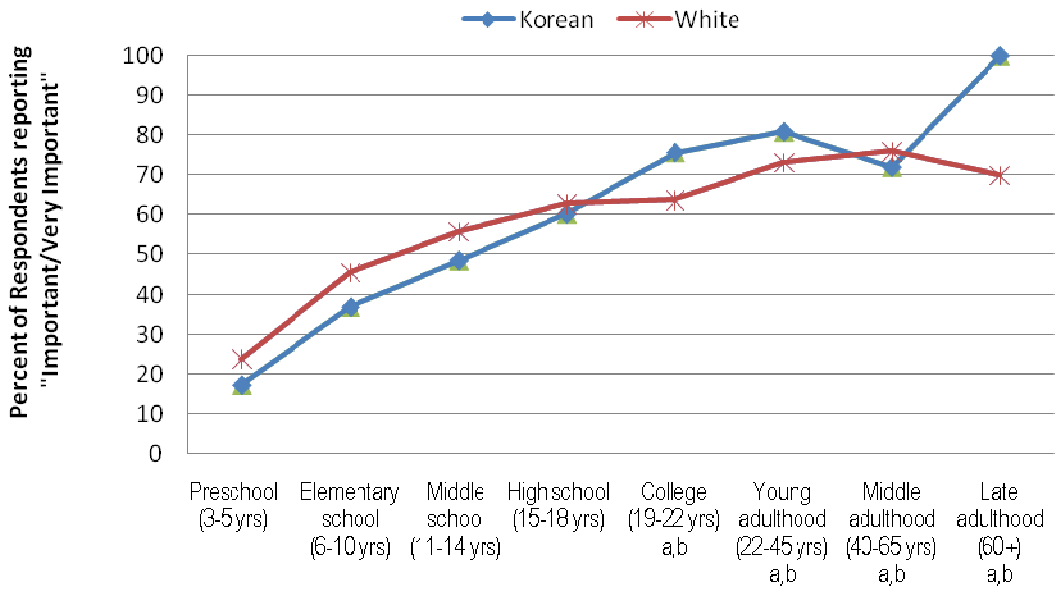
[a] *p <.05* for differences between Korean and White Adoptees in perceptions of discrimination based on adoption;
[b] *p <.05* for differences between Korean and White Adoptees in perceptions of discrimination based on race/ethnicity;
[c] *p <.05* for differences between discrimination based on adoption versus based on race, for Korean adoptees;
[d] *p <.05* for differences between discrimination based on adoption versus based on race, for White adoptees;

Importance of Racial/Ethnic & Adoptive Identity

Adoptive Identity over the Life Course

We asked survey participants how important their adoptive (Figure 1) and racial/ethnic (Figure 2) identities were to them at different developmental stages.[7] For the majority of respondents from both groups, adoptive identity and racial/ethnic identity were "very unimportant/ unimportant" during preschool and elementary school, although these factors clearly were important for some respondents, with slightly more Whites than Koreans indicating their adoptive identity was important to them at a young age. By middle school, many Korean (49%) and White (56%) respondents indicated their adoptive identity had become "important/very important" to them, and about 60 percent from both groups indicated their adoptive identity had become important by high school. The importance of adoptive identity increased for the Koreans (73%) in college and remained high into young adulthood and beyond. There was a similar pattern for White adoptees through high school, although they did not report the intensification of adoption issues in college that was reported by their Korean counterparts.

Fig. 1. Importance of Identity as an Adopted Person at Different Life Stages



a. Use of valid percents. Whites: College (*N*=154); Young adulthood (*N*=153); Middle adulthood (*N*=100); Late adulthood (*N*=10).

b. Use of valid percents. Koreans: College (*N*=173); Young adulthood (*N*=146); Middle adulthood (*N*=25); Late adulthood (*N*=1).

So our first hypothesis – that adopted adults would report adoption being most important to them in adolescence, with a tapering off in significance by middle adulthood – was not upheld. The importance of adoption did indeed increase during the adolescent years, but it continued to grow during young adulthood for both Korean and White respondents. (Conclusions related to

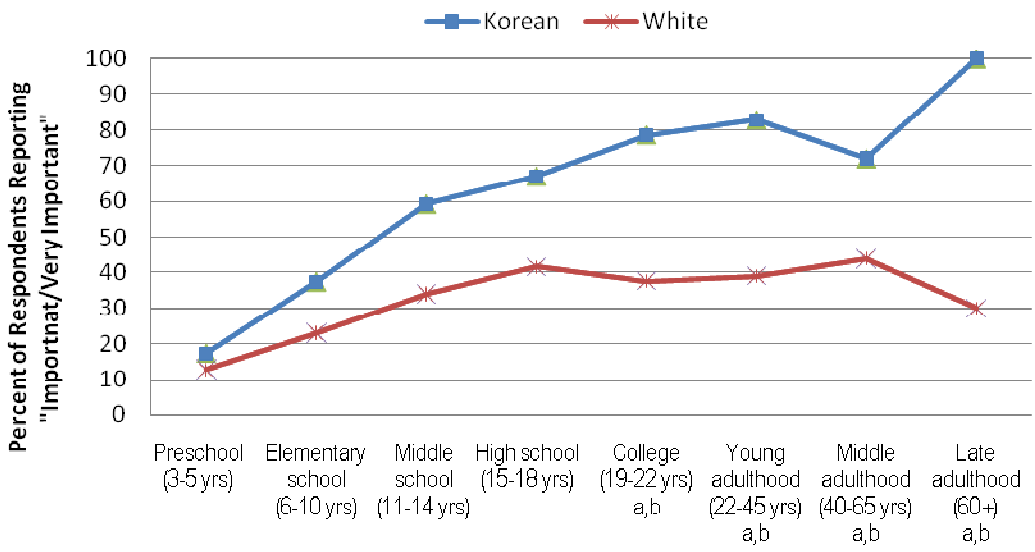
[7] Fewer respondents had reached middle or late adulthood, so valid percentages are used, based only on those responding.

later adulthood are limited by a low number of respondents at these ages, and Korean adoptions began in the late 1950s, so few of these individuals would fall in the older age categories). This may reflect the older cohort of adoptees, who grew up at a time when a "color-blind" approach to transracial adoption was the norm and secrecy in adoption more prevalent, factors that may have contributed to a delay in thinking about these issues. However, it also suggests the lifelong nature of identity work and the reality that adulthood is a crucial period in which adoptive and racial/ethnic identities continue to be salient for adopted persons.

Racial/Ethnic Identity over the Life Course

Although the majority of the Korean adoptees indicated their racial/ethnic identity was not important to them in elementary school, 37 percent said it was "important/very important" to them during that point in life, compared to only 23 percent of the White respondents. Sixty percent of the Korean respondents indicated their racial/ethnic identity was important to them by middle school, and it continued to increase during high school (67%), college (76%) and young adulthood (81%). Although racial/ethnic identity was more important to Korean than to White adoptees at all ages, 42 percent of the White respondents also indicated their racial/ethnic identity had become important to them by high school and remained at about the same level of importance into the middle adult years.

Fig. 2. Importance of Racial/Ethnic Identity at Different Life Stages



a. Use of valid percents. Whites: College (N=154); Young adulthood (N=153); Middle adulthood (N=100); Late adulthood (N=10).

b. Use of valid percents. Koreans: College (N =173); Young adulthood (N=146); Middle adulthood (N=25); Late adulthood (N=1).

Our hypothesis – that the importance of racial/ethnic identity would taper off after adolescence – was not upheld by the data. As with the importance of adoption identity, racial/ethnic identity continued to increase in importance beyond adolescence for Korean adopted adults, whereas it remained important to fewer than half of White respondents throughout the life course. The low salience of racial/ethnic identity among White adoptees is most likely reflective of the current

racial paradigm in the United States. For Whites, as noted earlier, ethnicity often describes family life and traditions, as well as being a way to affirm one's ancestry. Thus, for some White adoptees, a distinct ethnic identity may not have emerged because they simply embraced the traditions of their adoptive family's ethnic customs; while for others, who may be interested in their personal ancestry, the salience of ethnic identity may come to the fore as they recognize their own heritage to be distinct from that of their adoptive parents.

For both Korean and White respondents, the importance of race/ethnicity and adoptive identities closely mirror each other over the life course, further suggesting the interrelatedness of these aspects of identity for adopted persons. Adoptive identity was more important than racial/ethnic identity for Whites, however – and the reverse was true for the Koreans. Thus, while these two aspects of identity clearly influence each other, it is possible that adoption (i.e., desire for knowledge about one's biological heritage) may drive interest about ethnic/racial identity for Whites, whereas the importance of ethnic/racial identity may drive interest about one's adoption for Koreans, although the exact direction of influence cannot be determined by the data at present.

Comparison of Two Groups' Ethnic Identification

The Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure, or MEIM, was the tool used to gauge the strength of ethnic identity (see Table 6), with higher numbers indicating greater strength. The Korean adoptees had a mean of 2.72, compared to 2.55 for the White respondents (t=-2.74; $p \leq .01$). A larger percentage of Korean American adoptees agreed or strongly agreed with two-thirds (8 out of 12) of the individual items on the MEIM. This pattern comports with previous research, which has found that members of minority groups tend to have stronger racial/ethnic identity scores on the MEIM than do Whites (Phinney, 1992).

TABLE 6. MEIM Percent Agree or Strongly Agree

	Korean Adoptees *N*=179 %	White Adoptees *N*=156 %
Spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group ***	80.4	44.9
Active in org/ social groups of mostly my ethnicity **	48.6	35.2
Clear sense of ethnic group background	64.9	59.6
Think a lot about how life affected by ethnic group membership ***	46.3	21.2
Happy with being member of my ethnic group	85.5	86.5
Strong sense of belonging to ethnic group ***	52.4	62.1
Understand what ethnic group means to me	67.6	68.6
To learn more about my ethnic group, often talked to others of my group ***	63.7	33.4
Pride in my ethnic group	74.3	67.3
Participate in cultural practices – special food related to ethnic group	55.3	46.2
Strong attachment to my ethnic group	51.9	58.3
Feel good about cultural or ethnic background	83.8	80.8

** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ for differences in Korean and White adoptees

The Korean adoptees were more likely to say that they think a lot about how their lives were affected by their ethnicity (p<.001), and more likely to have talked to others to learn about their ethnic group (p<.001) or to have spent time finding out about it (p<.001). While about equal to Whites in agreeing they were happy being a member of their own ethnic group and feeling good about their ethnic background, Korean adoptees were less likely than their White counterparts to have a strong sense of belonging to their ethnic group (p<.001) and were somewhat less likely to agree they had a strong attachment to their ethnic group, although not to a statistically significant extent. Thus, while Korean adoptees had overall higher MEIM scores and had thought more about racial/ethnic group membership, fewer reported a strong sense of belonging to their ethnic group than did White respondents. Their scores on the MEIM were lower than scores found by Phinney (1992) among members of racial/ethnic minority groups in the U.S. This provides context to the finding in the subsequent section – the Korean adoptees were less comfortable with their ethnicity, despite identifying more strongly with it.

Comfort with Ethnic/Racial & Adoptive Identities

Perceived Comfort with Adoptive & Racial/Ethnic Identities

We asked respondents a subjective question about their current levels of comfort with their adoptive and racial/ethnic identities (Table 7). The majority in both groups indicated they were "extremely/somewhat" comfortable with both characteristics; more Whites (24%) than Koreans (14%) indicated they were uncomfortable with their adoptive identities (p<.05), but – notably – the Korean adoptees had significantly lower mean scores for comfort with their racial/ethnic identity, averaging 1.30 vs. White adoptees' 1.97 (t=3.91, p <.001). More ambivalent responses were in the middle of the scale for Korean adoptees, in that many of those indicating comfort (27%) rated this variable as "somewhat" as opposed to very or extremely comfortable. Also, the Korean adopted adults felt less welcomed by others in their own racial/ethnic group than did White adopted adults; 13 percent of the Koreans said they felt welcomed "very often," as compared to 72 percent of the White respondents (p<.001). The bottom line: White adoptees were more comfortable with their racial/ethnic identity, while Korean adoptees were more comfortable with their adoptive identity, confirming our hypothesis that there would be differences in adoption and racial/ethnic identity between these two sets of adults.

TABLE 7. Overall Perceived Comfort with Adoptive and Racial/Ethnic Identity

Characteristic	Korean Adoptees *N*=179 (%)	White Adoptees *N*=156 (%)
Overall comfort with identity as adopted person *		
Extremely-Somewhat uncomfortable	**14**	**24**
Extremely-Somewhat comfortable	86	76
Overall comfort with racial/ethnic identity		
Extremely-Somewhat uncomfortable	17	11
Extremely-Somewhat comfortable	**83**	**89**
Feel welcome by own racial group ***		
Never/ almost never	17	3
Sometimes/ fairly often	70	25
Very often	13	72

* p <.05; *** p <.001 for differences in Korean and White adoptees

Factors Associated with Comfort with Racial and Adoptive Identities

Transracially adopted Korean adults. There were some significant associations between age and other variables for Korean adopted adults, but not for Whites. Older Korean adoptees had less positive scores on the Parent-Child Relationship Scale (r=.287, p<.001) and the Family of Origin Scale (-.328, p<.001); experienced more racial teasing (r=-.265, p<.001); and lower rates of cultural socialization (r=-.444, p<.001); but they had somewhat higher self-esteem (r=.183, p<.01) than younger Korean adopted adults. There were no associations between gender and any of these variables for Korean adoptees.

Table 8 below shows the inter-correlations between most variables examined in the regression equations (age and gender are omitted) for Korean adoptees. Comfort with racial identity and comfort with adoption identity are highly associated with each other (r=.636, p<.001); however, some of the other variables are associated with one of these and not the other. For example, for Koreans, scores on the Parent-Child Relationship Scale (lower scores are more positive) and the Family of Origin Scale are significantly associated with their comfort with their adoption identity, but not with their comfort with their racial identity. Also, high life satisfaction and positive self-esteem have stronger associations with comfort with adoption than other variables examined (with the exception of comfort with race); and less teasing related to adoption or race is associated with greater comfort with their adoption.

Table 8. Inter-correlations for Selected Variables (for Koreans)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Culture	__										
2. Diversity	**.389**	__									
3. PCRS	**-.511**	-.108	__								
4. FOS	**.635**	.140	**.850**	__							
5. MEIM	.075	.103	.001	-.003	__						
6. Life satisfaction	**.254**	-.005	**-.344**	**.312**	.029	__					
7. Self-esteem	**.146**	.096	**-.317**	**.282**	**.182**	**.572**	__				
8. Race Tease	**.438**	**.285**	**-.460**	**.444**	.037	**.311**	**.235**	__			
9. Adopt Tease	**.237**	.057	**-.453**	**.360**	-.015	**.306**	**.189**	**.513**	__		
10. Comfort Race	.078	.143	-.023	.006	**.272**	**.203**	**.401**	**.182**	.085		
11. Comfort Adopt	.084	.006	**-.231**	**.175**	.124	**.377**	**.365**	**.205**	**.227**	**.636**	__

Note: Correlations noted in bold indicate significant relationships between the variables at the .05 significance level or greater.

Similarly, positive self-esteem has the strongest association with comfort with racial identity for Koreans, followed by a stronger ethnic identification (MEIM), higher life satisfaction, and less racial teasing. Also, it is interesting to note that more positive scores on the Parent-Child Relationship Scale and the Family of Origin Scale are strongly associated with less racial teasing. Racial teasing also was lower for children growing up in more diverse communities, and those experiencing less racial teasing reported higher life satisfaction and more positive self-esteem. In other words, those transracially adopted individuals who reported less racial teasing came from more diverse communities and more functional families, and they also as adults had more positive adjustment outcomes (higher life satisfaction and self-esteem).

The same dynamic held true for teasing about adoption as these respondents were growing up; that is, Korean adults who reported a more positive parent-child relationship and higher scores

on the Family of Origin Scale said they were teased less about adoption in their younger years. Less teasing about adoption also was associated with higher life satisfaction, less racial teasing, and higher self-esteem.

In addition, the associations between the Cultural Socialization Scale and other variables were interesting in that while this scale was highly associated with many other variables for Korean adoptees, it was not associated with comfort with racial or adoption identities or the MEIM. For these reasons, the Cultural Socialization Scale was not included in the multivariate analyses described below. Overall, Korean adopted adults who scored higher on the Cultural Socialization Scale reported living in more diverse communities as children; having more positive parent-child relationships and family functioning; experiencing less teasing related to their race or adoption; and having higher life satisfaction and self-esteem, indicating that parents' efforts to provide socialization to the child's racial/ethnic group are linked with other positive outcomes.

White adopted adults. There were no associations between age and gender and other variables for this group, with the exception of somewhat higher comfort with their adoption identity for males (r=-.182, $p<.05$). Table 9 shows the inter-correlations between most variables examined in the regression equations (age and gender are omitted) for White adopted adults.

Table 9. Inter-correlations for Selected Variables (for Whites)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Culture	__										
2. Diversity	.084	__									
3. PCRS	**-.512**	-.048	__								
4. FOS	**.574**	.102	**-.843**	__							
5. MEIM	**.291**	.140	**-.181**	**.171**	__						
6. Life satisfaction	**.239**	.004	**-.430**	**.381**	**.207**	__					
7. Self-esteem	**.204**	-.017	**-.377**	**.383**	**.323**	**.732**	__				
8. Race Tease	.045	**-.199**	**-**.154	.148	**.216**	**.262**	**.308**	__			
9. Adopt Tease	**.274**	-.081	**-.315**	**.371**	.040	**.316**	**.283**	**.268**	__		
10. Comfort Race	**.178**	-.144	**-.241**	**.202**	**.229**	.146	**.180**	**.193**	.063	__	
11. Comfort Adopt	**.342**	-.148	**-.364**	**.368**	**.167**	**.398**	**.322**	.126	**.317**	**.545**	__

Note: Correlations noted in bold indicate significant relationships between the variables at the .05 significance level or greater.

Almost all the variables (except diversity and racial teasing) had an association with comfort with adoption identity for White respondents, in the same direction as described above for Koreans. Racial teasing was associated with comfort with adoption for Koreans, however, but it was not a significant factor for Whites. In other words, the less the Korean adoptees were teased about race, the more comfortable they are today with adoption identity. Since race was not a source of teasing for most Whites, this is not a factor in shaping their feelings about adoption.

As with Korean adopted adults, more positive parent-child relationships and family functioning were associated with higher life satisfaction, higher self-esteem, less teasing about adoption or race/ethnicity, and greater comfort with their racial/ethnic and adoption identities.

Whites' scores on the MEIM showed stronger associations with other variables than was the case for Korean adopted adults, particularly for life satisfaction and self-esteem. Also, the

Cultural Socialization Scale was significantly associated with higher scores on the MEIM for the White adoptees, but not for their Korean counterparts.

Multivariate Findings

Hierarchical regression equations using a forced entry method were calculated to examine the factors that best predict comfort with adoption identity and with racial/ethnic identity for transracially adopted Korean adults and for White adopted adults. As shown in Tables 10 and 11, the regression models were significant, with the amount of variance explained ranging from 19-23 percent, except for the regression on Whites' comfort with racial/ethnic identity, which was less meaningful. Through this statistical process, we can identify the specific factors that are most important in determining variation in comfort with adoptive or racial/ethnic identity and the amount of the variation that these factors predict.

Comfort with adoption identity. For the Korean adopted adults, three factors predicted 19 percent of the variance in comfort with adoption identity (F=5.67, df=178, p<.000). These included gender (females were more comfortable with their adoption); satisfaction with life (higher satisfaction predicted greater comfort with adoption); and self-esteem (higher self-esteem predicted greater comfort with adoption).

Table 10. Comfort with Adoption Identity Regression Outcomes

Independent variable	Korean	White
	B (SE)	*B* (SE)
Constant	-.126 (.80)*	1.07 (.99)
Primary respondent gender (male=0)	.628 (.31)*	-.525 (.40)
Diversity of community growing up	-.035 (.08)	-.244 (.10)*
Extent of teasing about adoption growing up	.190 (.13)	-.117 (.21)
Parent-Child Relationship Scale (lower=better)	-.324 (.27)	-.068 (.31)
Family of Origin Scale	-.120 (.23)	-.474 (.25)
Current Age	.027 (.02)	.015 (.01)
MEIM	.184 (.13)	.258 (.19)
Satisfaction with Life Scale	.237 (.12)*	.395 (.14)**
Self-Esteem Scale	.453 (.22)*	-.131 (.28)
Adjusted R^2	.191**	.228**

Note: *$p \leq .05$; **$p \leq .01$

For the White respondents, only two factors entered the equation to explain 23 percent of the variance in comfort with adoption identity (F=6.09, df=155, p<.000). Higher satisfaction with life predicted greater comfort with their adoption. The extent of diversity in their communities while growing up (rated from 1=not at all to 4=very much) also was significant, with greater diversity predicting *less* comfort with adoption identity.

Comfort with racial identity. For transracially adopted Korean adults, two factors were significant predictors of comfort with racial/ethnic identity, together accounting for 20 percent of the variance on this variable (F=5.95, df=178, p<.000). The most significant of these was self-esteem, with those having higher self-esteem feeling more comfortable with their race (see Table 11). In addition, the MEIM was a significant predictor (stronger levels of ethnic identity predicted greater comfort with their race/ethnicity). Also, teasing about race approached

significance (p=.058) in that less race-related teasing while growing up was associated with greater comfort with their racial identity as adults.

Table 11. Comfort with Racial Identity Regression Outcomes

Independent variable	Korean	White
	B (SE)	*B* (SE)
Constant	.243 (.71)*	2.45 (.84)**
Primary respondent gender (male=0)	-.123 (29)	- .228 (.34)
Diversity of community growing up	.077 (.08)	-.154 (.08)
Extent of teasing about race/ethnicity growing up	.238 (.13)	.185 (.18)
Parent-Child Relationship Scale	.165 (.25)	-.317 (.26)
Family of Origin Scale	-.161 (.22)	.020 (.21)
Current Age	.003 (.01)	-.002 (.01)
MEIM	.335 (.12)**	.362 (.16)*
Satisfaction with Life Scale	.003 (.11)	-.028 (.11)
Self-Esteem Scale	.845 (.21)**	.064 (.23)
Adjusted R^2	.200**	.084**

Note: *$p \leq .05$; **$p \leq .01$

For White adopted adults, the MEIM was the only variable that was a significant predictor, explaining only 8 percent of the variance (F=2.58, df=155, p<.01). Whites scoring higher on the MEIM were more comfortable with their racial/ethnic identity. The basis for this association is unclear since higher scores on the MEIM may have reflected Whites identification with their adoptive family's race/ethnicity or with their own biological/birth ancestry.

Transracial Adoptees' Ethnic Self-Identification

Survey results from the First Gathering of Korean Adoptees ("Gathering") indicated that members of this group experienced a distinct shift in ethnic self-identification from childhood to adulthood – from identifying with the majority (i.e. White) culture to identifying as Korean Americans. Results of our current study bolstered those findings in that race/ethnicity became more important to Korean adoptees from adolescence into young adulthood. In addition, qualitative analyses of open-ended responses explained processes in the evolution of racial identity for some respondents.

We asked adoptees who grew up with parents who were racially/ethnically different from themselves whether, as children, they had ever considered themselves to be of their parents' race/ethnicity, or had wished they were. Among the Korean adoptees, 78 percent reported that, as children, they had considered themselves or wanted to be White.

We asked those who reported a shift in self-perception of their race/ethnicity from childhood to adulthood to describe what happened to facilitate the change. Of those responding to this question, 170 were Asian transracial adoptees (including persons from Asian countries other than Korea), and we analyzed their responses to explore their inner experiences related to racial identity (Table 12). Our analysis of the qualitative data suggests three major themes in adoptees' efforts to integrate their racial/ethnic identities. These themes, described further below, are:

- Neutral or positive factors that facilitate a shift to racial self-identification
- Negative experiences and feelings that reinforce one's racial difference (and thus can contribute to racial identity crisis and reconciliation)
- Unreconciled identity – struggle with racial identity is ongoing

The several related ideas in each larger category point to personal factors as well as experiences within the family, community and society that contributed to the formation of racial identity. A significant majority of the transracial adoptees in our study described a progression from thinking of themselves as White or wanting to be White, to discomfort with race/ethnicity, to a level of acceptance of themselves as Asian-Americans raised by parents of a different race. Many provided descriptions of transformation and recognition of internal as well as external factors that aided in the shift. Such descriptions included relationships within their families, with their peers, and through other close associations (such as with spouses, other adoptees, or people of their own race), school and community (both positive and negative), as well as the larger context

Table 12. Factors Contributing to a Shift in Racial/ethnic Identity for Asian Respondents

Theme	Sub-Themes	Number-Total for theme
Factors facilitating shift to racial identification as Asian	Maturity, "growing up"	30
	Access to more diverse community	22
	Affiliation with people of Asian background	19
	Gaining knowledge about/taking pride in culture and country of origin	16
	Just happened (natural/became resigned/unsure)	13
	Accept that situation not changeable (race/transcultural adoption)	13
	Pleasure from being different/unique	12
	Travel beyond own country/region of residence	10
	Active work to accept racial/ethnic self	10
	Bearing child, raising children	2
		(147)
Heightened racial awareness due to negative experience	Teasing, staring, "stupid" comments	11
	Dissatisfaction with Asian appearance	7
	White racism/prejudice (Society/family)	7
	Longing to "fit in" and not	5
		(30)
Unreconciled	Ongoing desire to look like others (family, majority culture)	7
	Still struggling with cultural identity	4
	Race doesn't matter	3
	Feel White despite appearance ("banana")	3
		(17)

of society. Significantly, a minority made comments suggesting that they were far from having resolved the identity challenges posed by transracial and transnational adoption.

While the majority of Asian respondents described positive and/or neutral factors that contributed to their racial identity development, a minority continued to desire to identify with their adoptive parents' race/ethnicity. Several also described negative experiences that heightened their awareness of their racial difference. In most responses, more than one theme and often several subthemes came through. For example, one survey participant wrote:

I realized I never could change my ethnicity/race. I also developed a pride in being Korean and Asian. I reviewed things I liked about being Asian that European Americans did not have. I also grew comfortable with things I did not like about being Asian. As an adult I learned how to deal with racism/stereotypes in a way that makes me feel OK about being a "border person" and a minority.

Such responses reveal many aspects of the move toward acceptance of one's Asian-American identity – from the realization that race is immutable, to deriving pride and pleasure from one's race, to the role of introspection and active consideration of self, to skill in coping with racism.

Factors Facilitating a Shift to Racial Identification as Asian

Maturity. The most common response to what led respondents to claim and accept their racial/ethnic identity was simply "growing up." Most felt that time and normal age-related development led to such acceptance. As one respondent stated,

[It was] growing up and maturing. Radical acceptance of how things are – as I got older – into my 20s. I could embrace and accept the multiple identities and know I didn't have to fit into a box.

Access to more diverse community. Many respondents explicitly referred or alluded to growing up isolated from other Asian people or even other minorities. Moving, often for college or for employment, brought them exposure to a more diverse community – not just of their own ethnic/racial group but also of a wide range of non-White people. This often "opened their eyes" to a range of cultures, beliefs and ideas.

Affiliation with people of Asian background. Many respondents noted the positive impact of Asian friends and role models, contact with other Asian adopted people, connection with Asian adoptee organizations or marrying an Asian spouse. These factors were key to feeling less of an outsider, to getting in touch with their "Asian-ness" and to developing a sense of community. One woman said contact with others like her enabled her to "see and appreciate the beauty of Asian people."

Gaining knowledge about/taking pride in culture and country of origin. Becoming familiar with aspects of Asian culture and history, often coincident with moving to communities with varied populations, also helped to shape positive racial/ethnic identity. In addition to affiliating with Asians, some respondents actively worked to learn about their country of origin.

Travel beyond own country/region of residence. Travel outside of one's adoptive country or region, like moving to a more diverse community, helped respondents re-evaluate the meaning of culture, race and identity. While visits to one's homeland were particularly powerful, journeys to anyplace where one was no longer in the minority – or simply being out of an environment where one was always the minority – somehow helped. The experience of visiting Korea was seen as very valuable by the vast majority, although positive reactions were not universal. Indeed, for one respondent a homeland trip increased her anger at the White world in which she was a minority:

Going to Korea changed my perception. I finally realized that I belonged somewhere. I remember feeling a deep sense of pride in knowing that there is a beautiful country filled with beautiful people who looked like me and that it was okay to be me, even if I lived in White America. When I returned home, I loathed White people. I grieved the loss of being with others who looked like me and I took it out on the White people around me.

Another noted:

It wasn't until I actually returned [to the homeland] that I gained a deep sense of pride that continues to grow to this day.

A group of children and parents on a tour to Korea led by Spence-Chapin

Active work to accept racial/ethnic self. While many respondents felt acceptance of their racial identity grew as they matured, and some benefited from access to diverse communities, others reported that the process required active, purposeful effort. Respondents wrote about consciously working to stop internalizing racism, to seek out others to discuss identity-related issues, and to spend time in introspection, appraisal and consideration of their lives.

Just happened (natural/became resigned/unsure). On the other hand, a minority of respondents denied that any effort was required. They were unsure about how a shift in identity occurred, described it as no "big deal" or just a routine part of life, or otherwise saw it as a shift that happened without their direct participatory action.

Acceptance that the situation (race/transcultural adoption) is not changeable. Thirteen respondents said their acceptance of the fact that their race and adoption could not be changed was a turning point in achieving positive racial/ethnic identity. Seeing race and adoption as realities beyond control helped them to find satisfaction with who they had become.

Pleasure from being different/unique. Another common subtheme among those who felt they had come to terms with their identities as Asian adoptees was that they took pleasure in being "different" or "special." Several made statements similar to:

> *As I grew older I began to appreciate who I was and where I came from, and I do not mind being unique.*

Bearing and raising children. Two respondents noted an increase in acceptance of themselves as Asian upon bearing children who looked Asian, or raising children who looked Asian in a predominately White culture.

Heightened Racial Awareness

Racial identity also was linked to negative experiences, including external events (taunting about race) and internal struggles (awareness that one's physical features were different from Whites and not esteemed by the majority).

Negative reactions of others. Teasing, insults and being stared at were common. One respondent reported not realizing she wasn't White until another child in pre-school called her "a little Chinese shit." Daily teasing also highlighted differences between the child's life and that of other family members. "No one (else) in my family endured this since they all 'looked like everyone else,' " explained one respondent. For some, the constant reminders of difference – such as being complimented on their English or being expected to be an expert on all things Asian – extended into adulthood.

Dissatisfaction with Asian appearance. Especially in the teen years, looking Asian was a source of discomfort and even shame for some, particularly when there were few or no people who looked like the adoptee in the community. Some described feeling that Asian eyes or skin color were "not natural" and not perceived as attractive by others. One respondent noted there were no Asian faces in the media when she was growing up.

White racism. Heightened racial awareness also stemmed from experiences with racism. Some respondents noted that their parents often were insensitive, lacked awareness of prejudice or, at worst, evidenced racism themselves. This reality led some to contemplate their own racial identity and also spurred them to be different from their parents – i.e., more tolerant. Several respondents said their parents were unable to understand their struggles with prejudice, while others described the sense of isolation stemming from being "the only Asian" and the only non-

White in their families, neighborhoods, schools or communities. One stated, "Sticking a child in a place where no one else looked like them in a dinky town is in my opinion child abuse." Increased understanding of the advantages of being White (and Asian "privilege" from being "nearly White") also heightened some respondents' sense of racial identity, as did experiences of discrimination in the larger society.

Longing to fit in. Several respondents put their teen identity struggles in the context of normal development; that is, they described feelings of dissatisfaction but explained them by noting that wanting to be like others, not liking one's appearance, and feeling separate and different were normal parts of adolescence or "just human nature."

Unreconciled Status

Some respondents (17) indicated that they were far from having resolved the identity challenges posed by transracial and transnational adoption. Many of them described their struggles as children in being different from their parents and from the majority culture. Some noted they had experienced a strong desire to be White in childhood and adolescence. One reported she wished to become White every time she blew out her birthday candles and another prayed nightly to "be blonde." One respondent recalled:

> *I can't count the number of days/times that I would wish and pray and beg to wake up with blonde hair and blue eyes, stand 5'8", and be sleek and slender. … I <u>was</u> the diversity in my high school. I denied my ethnicity and did everything in my power to assimilate, to emulate how White and non-Asian I was.*

A few respondents indicated that, as children, they thought they were White until someone outside the family informed them they were not – suggesting that their race and racial difference from parents was not part of early family discussion. For example, one noted that she was surprised to learn she wasn't White when this was pointed out by classmates. Another received no information about her ethnicity until she was 18.

Ongoing desire to look like others. For a small number of respondents, the desire to be White remains. Some described their desire to be of a different race as a function of wanting to be more like their parents, rather than about rejecting their genetic racial identities. For example, one respondent wrote:

> *I don't think I really considered myself to be White (although I joked often that I was Scottish) but I did wish that I were my parents' biological daughter. I wanted to know what I would look like if I was born to my parents.*

Still struggling with cultural identity. Four respondents describe making some progress in coming to terms with their racial/cultural identities, but continuing to struggle.

> [While developing sense of pride in culture]… *sometimes I still wish I had blonde hair and blue eyes. My insides don't match my outsides.*

> *This is a continual struggle for me. As I have grown older, I appreciate being different … but I still struggle with my cultural identity. It is a strange perception since, despite*

my appearance, I am completely American though other people don't see me as American.

Race doesn't matter. A few respondents resisted racial/cultural classification. They described not thinking of themselves in racial terms, stating that "people are people," or even that being upset about race or adoption is an excuse for failure or dissatisfaction with life. They did not claim an Asian or Asian-American identity.

Feel White despite appearance. A few respondents described an ongoing disconnection between cognitive understanding of their race and their sense of self, as described below:

I felt like a banana most of my life. In other words, racially [Asian] due to my skin. But in terms of my inner values and cultural identity, I felt very much Caucasian due to my upbringing within my adoptive family. I still feel this way.

The average age of survey participants was 36, reflecting a cohort of adopted adults who for the most part grew up without the resources and services available to adopted children today. However, the intercountry adoptees in our survey are able to access many of these services as adults and, indeed, sometimes are the creators and/or suppliers of them. The fact that the majority of respondents indicated they felt comfortable with their adoptive and racial/ethnic identities is a testament to their individual efforts and resilience, as well as to the strength of the parents who often raised their children with little guidance and few resources.

Experiences & Services that Foster Healthy Identity

The survey explored respondents' perceptions of the helpfulness of a range of experiences and services to individuals in forming a healthy identity as a transracially or transculturally adopted person. They were asked about the availability of these experiences or services to them, whether they utilized each, and the extent to which they felt each experience or service would have helped them in forming positive identity had it been available to them. Their responses are depicted in Table 13 below. It is important to note that their responses include experiences from their college and adult years, as well as during childhood.

Given the salience of race in the lives of most Korean respondents, the experiences and services that most (70% or more) indicated would be "helpful to very helpful" were overwhelmingly related to experiential diversity and were significantly higher than for White respondents. These included travel to Korea, attending racially diverse schools, having Korean or Asian role models, family travel to culturally significant places, living in diverse neighborhoods, and obtaining information from the Internet ($p<.05$ for all comparisons). In contrast, 72 percent of White adoptees thought having contact with birth relatives was or would be "helpful to very helpful" in achieving a healthy identity (as opposed to 47% of Korean adoptees who thought so; $p<.05$), followed by having siblings (68%) and reading books or articles about adoption (66%).

While the listing of experiences/services in the survey did not specify "adopted" siblings, almost all of the respondents with brothers or sisters reported having adopted siblings, so we can likely

assume that having a sibling who also was adopted was the context of this support. Previous research has found that for transracially adopted young adults, having only a sibling born to their adoptive parents was associated with maladjustment (Brooks & Barth, 1999). Also, Korean adoptees participating in the "Gathering" reported that having a sibling from Korea was a source of comfort and support (Freundlich & Lieberthal, 2000).

Overall, the majority of Korean adoptees (61%) identified opportunities to engage in culture camps as helpful, but most helpful were opportunities to build ongoing relationships with adopted adults and other minorities and to learn about Korea and its culture firsthand. External aspects of culture – such as having a Korean doll/traditional object, or studying traditional dance or martial arts – were considered by a minority of these respondents as being helpful in fostering positive identity.

TABLE 13. Experiences & Services Utilized and Perceived as Helpful to Very Helpful in Forming Identity

	Korean Adoptees *N*=179		White Adoptees *N*=156	
Source	% Utilized	% Helpful	% Utilized	% Helpful
Travel to birth country [b]	62	74	57	45
Attend racially diverse schools [a,b]	65	73	51	42
Having child care providers, teachers, adult role models same race/ethnicity [a,b]	41	73	65	58
Family travel to culturally significant places [b]	53	72	53	54
Read information from Internet [b]	79	71	75	62
Live in racially diverse neighborhood [a,b]	65	70	44	53
Books/Articles on adoption [b]	73	68	75	66
Cook food or dine at restaurants [b]	84	68	77	54
Regular contact with people of same race/ethnicity [b]	74	67	75	51
Exposure to multi-cultural entertainment	68	64	70	55
Take classes learn history/culture of birth country [b]	49	64	46	30
Having siblings [a]	80	63	70	68
Events by adult adoptees/adult adoptee organizations [a,b]	62	63	42	47
Support group for adoptees [b]	51	62	46	50
Involve ethnically diverse religious, social groups/activities [b]	59	62	54	40
Culture camp [a,b]	48	61	12	15
Study birth language [a,b]	56	59	44	43
Events sponsored by own ethnic group [a,b]	62	55	31	28
Have traditional objects (dolls etc.) from birth country [a,b]	72	49	55	37
Having contact with birth relatives [a,b]	30	47	45	72
Study martial art, traditional dance etc.	41	38	51	31

[a] $p < .05$ for differences between Korean and White Adoptees in % Experiences and Services Utliized
[b] $p < .05$ for differences between Korean and White Adoptees in % Perceived Helpfulness

Discussion

Who we are and how we understand ourselves as individuals includes components – such as occupation, religion, politics and personal beliefs – over which we have varying degrees of choice; but it also includes elements about which we have no say whatsoever. In this study, the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute examined the importance of two such elements or "ascribed statuses," adoption and racial/ethnic identity, to adopted individuals both during their childhoods and as adults. The first generation of internationally adopted children, who came to the U.S. predominately from South Korea from the mid-50s through the 1970s, are now adults and make up the largest portion of our study's respondents.

This project turned out to be far richer and more multilayered than we had anticipated. Because such a large number of people completed the extensive survey that is the heart of the research, this project represents a genuinely unprecedented exploration of identity in adoption. It examines a large, community-based sample of adopted adults, rather than a clinical sample, and provides deep insights into the needs and experiences of transracially, transnationally adopted people, as well as of those adopted domestically. We believe that its findings have implications for other adopted persons, regardless of their race/ethnicity or from where they were adopted.

A primary contribution of this study is the recognition that adoption is an important factor in most adopted persons' lives, not just as children and adolescents but throughout adulthood. Our prediction that adolescence is the culmination of adoption identity work was not supported. Adoption issues did not peak in adolescence and then decline in importance for most of the adopted adults in our study, as we had hypothesized. Rather, adoption issues intensify in adolescence, continue to increase in significance and remain integral aspects of identity in college and early adulthood. In fact, it is clear from our research that adoption remains important to most adopted adults throughout their lives.

Our prediction that the importance of racial/ethnic identity would also peak in adolescence was contradicted as well. In our respondents' recollections, interest in racial/ethnic identity did indeed increase during adolescence but, for the transracially adopted people in this research (in this case, from Korea), interest in this aspect of their identities continued and grew in importance well beyond adolescence.

White respondents reported more discrimination related to adoption as they were growing up and were somewhat less comfortable with their adoptive identities as adults than were their Korean counterparts. **The most common sources of adoption-related teasing or discrimination reported by Whites were extended family and childhood friends; this new insight highlights the need for adoptive parents to educate their relatives about adoption issues and for schools to create adoption-sensitive environments.** It is also significant that more positive outcomes on measures related to parent-child relationships and family functioning were linked to increased life satisfaction, which was the strongest predictor of White adoptees' comfort with their adoption identity.

Many of the adults who responded to our survey (average age=36) grew up in an era when fewer formal post-adoption services were available. However, many of them, particularly Korean

adoptees, had accessed a range of informal or formal supports either as children and/or as adults, such as travel to Korea or reading about adoption. The resources that White adoptees perceived as most helpful in building healthy identities were having contact with birth relatives, having siblings (most had brothers or sisters who were also adopted), and reading books or articles on adoption. **The importance these adoptees placed on contact with biological relatives provides insights for parents and professionals about adopted children's needs/desires growing up, and also suggests that adoption laws and policies – if they are to primarily serve the interests of children – should facilitate more access to information about and communications with birth families.**

Promoting Healthy Racial/Ethnic Identities for Transracially Adopted Adults

The racial/ethnic identification of transracially and transnationally adopted persons has only recently become the focus of research, with previous transracial adoption studies looking more at domestically adopted individuals and global adjustment outcomes, such as self-esteem or the level of behavioral/emotional problems. The question about whether a strong racial/ethnic identity is the most desired outcome for promoting positive adjustment in these adoptees has previously been asked, but not sufficiently answered. **Our findings indicate that a strong racial/ethnic identity (as reflected by scores on the MEIM) is an important predictor of comfort with that identity, which in turn is intricately interwoven with comfort with adoption.**

The Korean American adults in our study encountered many layers of complexity in developing an integrated, positive sense of self; those included the meaning of being adopted; being members of a racial minority; growing up in families with parents who were of a different race and in communities with few if any people of their race/ethnicity; and being separated from their birth country and culture. Theoretical writings on identity often describe a highly evolved individual as one who has spent considerable effort working through the meaning of various aspects of self, as well as the dissonance and stress arising from conflicting or confusing statuses. This individual has an "integrated identity" and is able to embrace multiple cultural and racial perspectives. One obvious reality described by Korean respondents is that the identity formation process requires information and exposure to meaningful opportunities in order to explore and consolidate various components of themselves. Many of them had to orchestrate a series of learning experiences in order to gain comfort with their own race/ethnicity.

Race/ethnicity was certainly examined by the Korean American respondents to our survey. Coming to terms with this aspect of themselves was a challenge for most, and, as young adults, 83 percent perceived their race/ethnicity as important to them. **At some time during their childhoods, over three-fourths of these adoptees viewed themselves as White or wished to be.** While most who had this experience later shifted toward identifying themselves as Korean American, their open-ended responses described struggles in this process.

The most prevalent one was that most grew up in communities with very little diversity, and only 28 percent had a close friend of their own race during childhood. Some reported feeling isolated from other Asian people, or even from other minorities. Korean adoptees also commonly experienced teasing or bias because of their race/ethnicity, with over three-fourths

reporting racial discrimination of moderate to heavy frequency as children. **While many prior studies have found that up to 80 percent of international adoptees of color reported experiencing such bias, this study is the first to systematically examine their specific experiences.** The most common sources of this discrimination were strangers or classmates; however, 39 percent reported it came from teachers, and one-third said it came from extended family and in the workplace. Racial teasing was less common for those growing up in more diverse communities. Also, those Korean adoptees reporting more positive parent-child relationships, as well as higher family functioning, reported less racial teasing. We do not know if this is because their parents helped them to cope with discrimination in a more positive way or whether they actually experienced less of it. Whatever the case, these experiences highlight the importance of educating parents who have adopted transracially to prepare their children to cope with discriminatory experiences.

Experiencing racial teasing can be detrimental to the overall adjustment of adopted children; this study found it to be associated with lower life satisfaction and lower self-esteem. This finding reinforces the work of Cederblad and colleagues in their 1999 study, which concluded that being teased for their "foreign looks" was associated with lower self-esteem and more problems in mental health for international adoptees in Sweden.

In addition to the discrimination they reported by people outside their racial/ethnic group, many Korean adoptees in our study also experienced bias from others within it. While many sought out relationships and experiences related to being Korean as adults, only 13 percent reported feeling "very often" welcomed by other Koreans. The linkage of transracial adoptive families to the American ethnic groups from which their children come would facilitate greater comfort in their children in interacting with others of their racial/ethnic group.

Finally, most Korean adoptees reported achieving a high level of comfort (56% responded "very" or "extremely") with their race/ethnicity as adults, but 44 percent were either "uncomfortable" (17%) or only "somewhat comfortable" (27%) with this aspect of themselves. Along with a strong racial/ethnic identification, positive self esteem is critical for feeling comfortable with one's racial/ethnic identity. This study helps us to understand the complexity of multiple factors influencing identity development. For example, self-esteem and a stronger racial/ethnic identity are significantly associated. However, their relationship with each other is much weaker than each of their individual associations with comfort with race/ethnicity. Other variables that were significantly associated with greater comfort with their race/ethnicity for Korean adoptees were experiencing less racial discrimination and having higher life satisfaction.

Many of the Korean respondents were active agents in seeking to resolve identity struggles related to race/ethnicity, in that they consciously sought out experiences or engaged in processes intended to increase their claiming of their Korean heritage. Eighty percent reported that they spent time trying to find out more about their ethnic group. As adults, most reported having a close friend of their race and also had visited Korea. The majority also participated in some adoption-related organization or internet group. Their responses to an open-ended question on factors that helped them to resolve issues related to racial/ethnic identity illustrated the multilayered, complex nature of transracial adoption identity. Many reported that access to people from diverse backgrounds, affiliation with other Asians, gaining knowledge or pride in

their racial/ethnic group and other such experiences had facilitated a shift from feeling or wanting to be White to an appreciation of their own race/ethnicity.

The perceptions of 179 Korean transracially adopted adults about the services and experiences that are most helpful in fostering a healthy identity have practical implications for adoption professionals, adoptive parents and for adopted people themselves. The top supports recommended include travel to birth country, attending racially diverse schools, and having child care providers, teachers and other adult role models of their own race/ethnicity. Providing these pieces of the puzzle generally requires conscious planning and a deep commitment to the importance of cultural socialization experiences that go beyond superficial exposure.

Limitations of Our Study

This study provides a valuable contribution to learning about adoptive and racial identity from adopted adults themselves, but it has several limitations, and its findings must be understood accordingly. First, the sample was non-random and self-selected. The degree to which respondents are demographically similar to all adoptees as a group is not known, nor do we know the extent to which their responses are representative of adoptees who did not hear about or chose not to participate in the study. In addition, the survey was lengthy (taking over an hour to complete) and required access to the Internet, which may have decreased participation by some adopted adults. The retrospective nature of questions related to childhood poses another limitation, since we do not know the extent to which the respondents' memories were complete and accurate. Also, while this is the largest sample of adopted adults responding to an in-depth survey on identity, the vast majority (over 80%) were women, so we do not know if the overall nature or content of replies would have changed had more men filled out the survey.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute offers the following recommendations in order to address the needs of adopted persons and their families:

Expand pre- and post-placement preparation and support for parents adopting across race and/or culture. A continuum of information and resources should be available and should extend beyond the adolescence of adopted persons; these should include:

1. Educating parents about the salience of race across the developmental course. The meaning and implications of race/ethnicity to people of color, and of being part of a minority group in society, are often outside the experience of White parents. It is fair to speculate that many of the survey respondents' parents would be dismayed to learn that their children had longed to be White, were embarrassed or ashamed to look Asian, or were frequently reminded of their "differentness" in ways that hurt or confused them.

   We recommend that parental preparation include instruction about racial identity development and the special tasks inherent in such development for those of racial

minority groups. Recently developed requirements[8] relating to the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption offer a beginning opportunity for this work. Section 96.48, *Preparation and Training of Prospective Adoptive Parents,* requires the inclusion of "information on the long-term implications for a family that has become multicultural through inter-country adoption." Preparation should stress that seeking services and supports is a positive part of parenting – i.e., it is a sign of strength, not failure.

2. Moving "beyond culture camp" to a range of experiences and relationships that promote positive racial identity development. Our respondents valued cultural celebrations and other opportunities to learn about their countries and cultures of origin. Such exposure clearly matters, but appears insufficient. We must move beyond strategies that promote cultural socialization to experiences that promote racial and cultural identification and comfort. Part of this work is to help parents understand the importance of homeland trips, which many respondents reported as profound and valuable experiences. Further, parents must be supported in providing their children opportunities to be in racially diverse settings. One respondent poignantly described the loneliness of being in an all White community this way: "I *was* the diversity in my high school." Some of our respondents noted that their parents did not know or understand the impact of being Asian in predominately White communities or the importance of connecting their children to adults of their own racial/ethnic background to serve as sources of information, support and as role models. Adoption professionals and adoptive parents need to work together to facilitate a broader network of these types of supports.

   More agency-facilitated, formal services beyond adoption finalization are clearly needed. However, there are also many experiences and supports beyond those provided by agencies that benefit adopted children and their families. For example, parents who adopted children from other countries have instituted a host of Internet-based resources to share information. We suggest that such sites grow beyond issues around placement and early adjustment to include the sharing of information, experiences and opportunities to enhance family awareness of race and identity issues, as well as special information and supports for children and youth. In addition, we recommend the expansion of resources such as currently available (but too limited) play groups and social events – usually organized by adoptive parents – that offer opportunities for them and their children to get together and thereby interact with more people like themselves.

[8] International adoptions into the U.S. are governed by an international treaty, the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption, and the U.S. legislation to implement the Hague Convention, the Intercountry Adoption Act of 2000. The State Department issued implementing regulations that address children's racial and ethnic needs, requiring that prospective parents receive training related to transracial adoption, as well as counseling related to the child's cultural, racial, religious, ethnic, and linguistic background. The Convention took effect in the U.S. in April 2008.

3. The best-practice mantra in the field of adoption is to act in the "best interests of the child," yet most professionals' work is not informed by the adults those children become. The expertise of adults adopted transracially is critical to developing practice informed by those whose best interests adoption is meant to serve. Those who have been adopted transracially/transculturally can offer the wisdom of lived experience related to managing life as an adopted person of color in a predominantly White society. We urge collaboration between those organizations that facilitate transcultural adoption and the adults who are coming forward to examine and share their experiences.

   In addition, we recommend that the growing number of organizations formed by internationally adopted persons include information for adolescents and young adults, particularly in relation to the challenges of being a racial minority and of being a transracial/transcultural adoptee. Such groups have grown in number and size in recent years. We suggest that they reach out to adolescents and their families, including them in conferences, providing them with resources on websites, and perhaps even serving as mentors for adolescents and young adults.

Develop empirically based practices and resources to prepare transracially and transculturally adopted youth to cope with racial bias. Most of the Korean respondents in this study experienced racial teasing or discrimination from a broad range of sources. This study, as well as previous research, indicates that perceived discrimination is linked with greater psychological distress, lower self-esteem, and more discomfort with one's race/ethnicity. Hence, it is essential to arm transracially adopted youth with ways to cope with discrimination in a manner that does not negatively impact their identity.

Much of the work related to parenting transracially adopted children has focused on cultural socialization experiences for these children. However, we must recognize that fostering cultural awareness or ethnic pride does not teach a child how to deal with episodes of racial bias. So it is critical to effectively prepare White adoptive parents to understand the impact of racism and prejudice, and to provide them with strategies that assist their children in coping effectively. Past studies have found that many White adoptive parents minimize the importance of race and racism, so sensitizing them to these issues and teaching them to communicate effectively with their children on racial subjects are foundational to this preparation.

In addition to programs for parents focusing on pre- and post-adoption issues related to transracial adoptive parenting, interventions and resources for working directly with youth are needed. Children's support groups and regular recreational programming for transracially adopted youth would provide them with the opportunity for interacting with each other, as well as for preventive and therapeutic experiences to address adoption and race issues. A curriculum to assist children in coping with discrimination related to race (akin to the WISE-UP Powerbook developed by the Center for Adoption Support and Education to empower adopted children to answer questions related to adoption) would be another useful resource.

Promote laws, policies and practices that facilitate access to information for adopted individuals. The White adults in our study reported that contact with their birth relatives was the most important support for achieving a healthy adoptive identity. For adopted

individuals, gaining information about their origins is not just a matter of curiosity, but a matter of gaining the raw materials needed to fill in the missing pieces in their lives and to derive an integrated sense of self. For many, contact with their birth family provides the kind of information they need to understand the circumstances of their adoption, their genealogical and medical background, and other important issues. Both adoption professionals and the larger society need to recognize this basic human need and right, and to facilitate adequate responses to it. The "how to" of accomplishing this reality includes but goes beyond changing laws that limit adult adoptees' access to their original birth certificates; it includes educating adoption professionals, whether social workers or attorneys, about the importance of this information for adopted individuals and shaping their practices in ways that promote access to it. For intercountry adoptees, this process is more complex, although significant inroads have been made in other countries; for instance, 30 percent of the Korean respondents to our study had met birth relatives, though they did not rate this experience as being as helpful to them as did their White counterparts.

Educate parents, teachers, practitioners, the media and others about the realities of adoption to erase stigmas and stereotypes, minimize adoption-related discrimination, and provide children with more opportunities for positive development. Generations of secrecy, shame and stereotypes about adoption (and those it affects) have taken a toll, as the respondents in this research make clear. Just as discrimination based on color, gender, sexual orientation and religion – all components of people's identity – are broadly considered to be socially unacceptable, adoption-related discrimination also should be unacceptable. Professionals and parents also need to be better informed about the importance of providing diversity and appropriate role models.

Increase research on the risk and protective factors that shape the adjustment of transracially adopted individuals, both for those born in other countries and in the U.S. More longitudinal research that combines quantitative and qualitative methods in order to understand the process through which children, teens and young adults progress in confronting transracial adoption identity issues is needed in order to identify both the risk and protective factors influencing their adjustments. It is vital to hear from the adopted individuals directly, rather than depending solely on parental reports of children's feelings and experiences. Also, studies need to be able to identify and examine sub-groups of transracially adopted individuals, because they may have very different experiences. Most studies of African American transracial adoptees are over 20 years old, and have focused only on children. A follow-up study on adults who were adopted transracially from the foster care system would be a valuable addition to our understanding of transracial adoptive identity.

Conclusion

The findings of this study reflect the need to go "beyond culture camp" to provide children with ongoing experiences and relationships that promote positive racial (and adoptive) identity development. Our respondents valued cultural celebrations and other opportunities to learn about their origins, but such singular events appear insufficient. Instead, the research points to a need to move beyond strategies that promote cultural socialization to experiences that promote racial and cultural identification and comfort. Part of this work is to expand understanding of the importance of learning about one's origins, whether by traveling to their birth country or by seeking out biological relatives in the U.S. Further, there seems no question about the need to provide transracially adopted children with opportunities to be in diverse settings and have diverse role models. Some of our respondents also noted that their parents did not know or understand the impact of being a person of color in a predominately White community or the importance of connecting children to adults of the same racial/ethnic background to serve as sources of information, support and role models. The same can be said for adoption itself; that is, adopted children benefit from interacting with other adopted children, and from having adult role models who themselves were adopted. Adoption professionals and parents, together, can facilitate a broader network of these types of supports and opportunities for adopted children and youth, especially those adopted transracially.

The field of adoption is evolving. Early adoption practice sought to match children with parents who looked like them and had the same temperament or intelligence, in large part to make adoption invisible. Adoption, with its association with illegitimacy and infertility, was seen as a less desirable way to form a family. "Good" adoptive families minimized the importance of adoption. As families formed across racial, ethnic and cultural lines became more common, adoption necessarily became more visible. But until fairly recently in adoption practice, the impact and meaning of transracial/cultural adoption were also minimized. Commitment and love of the adoptive parents, exposure to positive aspects of the child's culture, and perhaps connection with other families who had adopted from the same country were thought to be enough to support the development of positive identity. As this study demonstrates, the integration of "being adopted," of one's racial/ethnic identity and one's identity as a person adopted from another country is a complex and continually evolving process. This understanding needs to inform the actions of parents, professionals and adopted persons themselves – as well as the laws, policies and practices that impact their lives.

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Appendix I: Review of Theoretial & Reseach Literature On Adoptive Identity

Adoption and Identity: Brief Historical Context

All adopted people face the challenge of balancing dual identities – one related to biology and the other to adoption. Kirk (1964) in his seminal book, *Shared Fate,* wrote of the need for adoptive families to move from "rejection of difference" to an "acknowledgment of difference," an attitude that recognizes the inherent distinctions between families formed through birth and adoption and that facilitates exploring adoption-related issues. Later scholars labeled the polar opposite "insistence of difference" and recognized this stance as maladaptive (Brodzinsky, 1987; Kaye, 1990). During the early history of adoption, "rejection of difference" pervaded policy and practice. Since the 1970s, the pendulum has swung toward an "acknowledgement of difference" as a result of changing adoption practices and attitudes, with commensurate efforts to maintain the balance reflected in the current discourse and debate around adoption.

Although adoptions have occurred throughout human history, the practice of formal, legalized, non-relative adoption initially developed in the mid-19th Century in Western nations (beginning in the U.S.) because urbanization and industrialization had disrupted extended families and informal networks of child care. Non-relative adoption did not become popular until the early part of the 20th Century, when the availability of infant formula made it possible to raise adopted infants (Downs, Moore, McFadden, & Costin, 2000); most non-relative adoptions then, as now, were by infertile White couples. The practice of secrecy and the sealing of adoption-related records did not begin until the 1930s and 1940s and was originally intended to keep information – in particular, the adopted child's "illegitimacy" – from public scrutiny (Carp, 2007).

The practice of secrecy developed to the point that a child's adoption often was not even disclosed within the family and was perpetuated by practitioners who tried to "match" children with prospective parents. The adoption of children of a different race was often prohibited by law and reflected the anti-miscegenation sentiment and law that pervaded much of American society through the mid 20th Century.[9] The first significant numbers of adoptions across racial/ethnic lines were of children born outside of the United States and rescued from war-torn European nations, Japan and Greece, after the Second World War (Pertman, 2000; McGinnis, 2006). The first domestic transracial adoptions involving African American and biracial children into White adoptive families occurred between 1951 and 1963; and the intentional placement of Native American children into White adoptive parents intensified between 1958 and 1967 with the Indian Adoption Project (Simon, 1977; Fanshel, 1972; Lee, 2003).

[9] As of 1971 South Carolina's adoption law prohibited Black parents from adopting White children, but permitted White parents to adopt Black children, and Louisiana law prohibited the adoption of biracial children until a federal court ruled it was unconstitutional in 1972. By 1985 transracial adoption was formally legalized as a form of child placement in every state (Simon & Altstein, 1987).

Revolutionary social changes in the 1960s and 1970s set the stage for major shifts in adoption policy and practice. The sexual revolution and women's movement contributed to the legalization of abortion, access to contraception and acceptance of single parenting. These factors resulted in a decline in the number of healthy Caucasian infants being relinquished by single White mothers for adoption (Pertman, 2000). At the same time, as a result of mandatory child abuse reporting laws passed in the 1960s and 1970s, teen pregnancy, intensified substance abuse and poverty, the number of children entering the social welfare system dramatically increased and outpaced the ability of public agencies to handle caseloads; as a result, children languished in the foster care system without any plan for permanent placements (Downs, et al., 2000). Consequently, as fertility rates declined and White couples continued to seek to adopt, interest in adopting "special needs," multiracial and children of color grew.

The civil rights movement simultaneously altered society's view of race relations – and relationships – in profound ways; at the same time, altruistic and humanitarian reasons for adopting grew. An growing number of socially progressive middle-class couples began to see adoption as a way of expanding their families without contributing to population growth; further, some perceived that adopting across racial lines was a way of demonstrating and furthering social tolerance, as well as a way to meet the needs of children who might otherwise not find permanent families (Benet, 1976). Whereas racial matching had been the predominant practice, this also began to change. The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) revised its adoption standards in 1968 to recognize that there are families who have the capacity to adopt a child of a different racial background, and that these families should be encouraged to consider transracial adoptions (CWLA, 1968).

In these early transracial placements, adoptive parents were instructed to raise their children as if they gave birth to them (Pertman, 2000) – i.e., effectively rejecting differences and downplaying unique racial and ethnic experiences. In practice, this often amounted to the cultural assimilation or acculturation of children into the majority culture, i.e. White, middle class America (Lee, 2003). So, for many children in the first generation of transracial adoptees and their families, a "color-blind" approach was the norm.

At the same time, the 1970s saw a surge in racial and ethnic pride, especially within minority communities. As a result, even as transracial adoption was becoming more accepted, it also was being contested. The National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) issued a statement in 1972 opposing such adoptions on the grounds that they were a form of cultural "genocide," and voiced concern that a Black child raised in a White home would not develop a positive racial identity, learn the "survival skills" necessary in a society in which there was racism, nor develop the cultural and linguistic attributes crucial to functioning effectively in the Black community (NABSW, 1972; Jones & Else, 1979).[10] In addition, Black leaders voiced concern about the cultural competency of White caseworkers in assessing the stability of Black families (Sullivan, 1994). Similarly, Native American opposition to the Indian Adoption Project led to its dissolution and enactment of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) of 1978 (Fanshel, 1972; Simon & Alstein, 2000). As a result of this opposition, the number of domestic transracial

[10] NABSW's statement was modified in 1994, continuing to emphasize adoption within race as optimal for African American children but acknowledging that, in some cases, transracial adoption would provide needed families for Black children.

adoption placements fell sharply, and public as well as private agencies modified their practices and policies to emphasize same-race adoption and recruitment of minority families.

As the opportunity to transracially adopt children of color slowed within the U.S., many of the predominantly Caucasian, middle- and upper-class prospective parents saw a new option in international adoption (Lovelock, 2000; Vonk, Simms, & Nackerud, 1999). However, as this interest grew in Western nations throughout the late 1970s and 1980s, some officials in developing countries labeled the practice as a form of colonialism involving "wealthy Westerners robbing poor countries of their children," and causing adopted children to lose access to their own culture and roots, resulting in a possible "confused identity" (Tizard, 1991, p. 746). Critics of both domestic and international practices argued that transracial adoptions would result in uncertain and/or conflicted ethnic identities that would cause more adjustment difficulties and problems for transracial adoptees than for their same-race adopted peers (Feigelman, 2000).

The international recognition of the right of a child to "identity" was first articulated in the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which has been ratified by every U.N. member nation except for the United States and Somalia (Smith, McRoy, Freundlich, & Kroll, 2008). Article 20 specifically articulates the obligation of governments to protect a child's identity and to take into consideration "continuity in the child's upbringing and to the child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background" in placing children in substitute care. A second treaty, the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption, was drafted in 1993 to protect the rights of children, birthparents and adoptive parents involved in intercountry adoptions; it has been ratified by 75 countries to date, including the United States. It also recognizes the importance of a child's identity. Article 16 states that a child's country of origin must "give due consideration to the child's upbringing and to his or her ethnic, religious and cultural background" and "determine, on the basis in particular of the reports relating to the child and the prospective adoptive parents, whether the envisaged placement is in the best interests of the child" (Smith, et al., 2008).

Even as major changes were occurring in the world of intercountry adoption, significant reforms also were being pursued domestically. Among the most noteworthy was a movement – led primarily by White adults who had been adopted as infants into same-race families – to restore their right to access their original birth certificates and to put an end to the secrecy that hindered their access to information about their origins. Furthermore, women placing their children for adoption began to demonstrate that they did not fit the stereotypes created about them; that is, in growing numbers, they asked for – and sometimes demanded – expanded roles and more ongoing information if they were to go through with the placement process. At the same time, adoption practitioners were increasingly coming to the belief that greater openness and honesty were better for all involved parties, and began moving away from practices that involved secrecy (Kirk, 1985; Melina & Roszia, 1993; Grotevant & McRoy, 1998). Today, open adoptions are commonplace in domestic infant placements, in part because one of their benefits to adoptees is greater access to information about their birth relatives and about their medical/health histories (Grotevant, Dunbar, Kohler, & Esau, 2007).

In addition, new laws were passed that reopened the debate about transracial placements for children in foster care. In response to news accounts about children of color languishing in the

public system without permanent families of any race, two laws were passed in the 1990s – the Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) of 1994 and its amendment, the Interethnic Adoption Provisions (IEP) of 1996, prohibiting the delay or denial of a child's foster or adoptive placement on the basis of race, color or national origin.

Ultimately, the ethnic-identity revivals of the 1970s and the identity politics that ensued have altered America's image of itself as a "melting pot" in which new immigrants assimilate into a Eurocentric "American" prototype.[11] Instead, many minority and majority groups have moved toward multiracial, multicultural and often-hyphenated identities that embrace both one's ethnicity and American group status (i.e., European-Americans, African-Americans, Asian-Americans, etc.). Changes in national immigration policy in the 1960s opened the doors to increasing numbers of non-European immigrants, particularly from Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, forcing practitioners in social work generally, and adoption specifically, to address the need to build more culturally competent services (Proctor & Davis, 1994).

Within international adoption, practitioners began to develop services such as culture camps in the late 1980s for parents, prior to and after placement, with the goal of helping children born in other nations develop cultural awareness and/or racial identity. Today, evidence suggests that a growing number of White parents of transracially adopted children acknowledge differences within the family and try to teach their children about their birth cultures and heritages (Carstens & Julia, 2000; Friedlander, Larney, Skau, Hotaling, Cutting, & Schwam, 2000; Johnson, Shireman, & Watson, 1987; Rojewski & Rojewski, 2001; Tessler, Gamache & Liu, 1999; Vonk & Angaran, 2001).

Theories about Identity

The concept of identity has been used in various ways to refer to a personal "sense of self" (developed through both internal representations and relationships with others), social identity (roles and statuses as defined by society), and collective identity (for instance, self-awareness of national or ethnic groups) (Grotevant, 1997b; 2009). Most models of identity focus on the individual; the following theories and models therefore seek to explain or measure components of personal identity that also may incorporate aspects of social and collective identities.

Normative Identity Development. Theories of identity development consistently posit that adolescence is the time when individuals most actively engage in the "work" of identity formation. Although Erikson (1968) acknowledged that identity begins to form in infancy, he was one of the first to theorize that it is the major task of adolescence, stating that identity achievement in adolescence (versus identity confusion) is a critical step toward becoming an emotionally healthy and productive adult. Erikson held that in complex societies, adolescents experience an "identity crisis" – described as a time-limited, confusing and distressing period – as they explore alternatives before "settling" on values and goals, the refinement of which continues over the lifespan.

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[11] Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan's publication *Beyond the Melting Pot* in 1963 was particularly controversial in challenging earlier assimilationist theory and heralded the change by which sociologists and scholars studied ethnic groups.

Some theorists (Matteson, 1977; Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004) have challenged the idea of "identity crisis" and, rather, see adolescence as a period of intense exploration. Thus, the cognitive capacity for deep consideration of the fundamental question "Who am I?" and the often-lengthy search for "what is true and real about the self" begin in adolescence (Berk, 2003, p. 356). This search is the driving force in exploration related to sexual orientation; vocation; community involvement; interpersonal relationships; ethnic group membership; and moral, political, religious and cultural beliefs.

Marcia (1966) sought to operationalize and test the outcome of Erikson's "identity crisis." He categorized the conscious stages of identity development as statuses on a continuum, while others see them as states that shift in response to an array of internal and external forces:

Identity Diffusion (ID): In ID, individuals lack a clear sense of direction and often float from value to value or goal to goal. They have never deeply explored alternatives or have turned away from such exploration because it feels overwhelming. However, they have not committed to the prescribed values and goals of those in Identity Foreclosure.

Identity Foreclosure (IF): In IF, individuals settle on values and goals without a period of personal exploration, psychological struggle, maturation or achievement. They accept aspects of identity provided by authority figures, often parents or cultural norms, gender roles and religious dictums.

Identity Moratorium (IM): Moratorium implies a stay or rest from active decision-making. IM individuals are still exploring – weighing alternatives, trying on roles or styles. They are doing the work that can lead to Identity Achievement.

Identity Achievement (IA): After exploration of alternatives, IA individuals commit to a clear course of action through self-chosen values and goals. They feel a sense of psychological well-being, sameness through time and sense of future direction.

In Marcia's work, identity statuses are tiered, with Identity Achievement seen as the apex of the identity formation process. Identity Achievement (IA) and Identity Moratorium (IM) are seen as adaptive steps to mature self-definition, and are associated with a higher sense of self-esteem. IA and IM individuals are more likely to be engaged in abstract and critical thinking, report better fits between their real and ideal selves and are more advanced in moral reasoning (Josselson, 1994; Marcia, 1993).

In the Marcia model, Identity Diffusion (ID) and Identity Foreclosure (IF) states are considered less evolved. IF individuals tend to be rigid, dogmatic and intolerant, and may regard differences of opinion as threatening; they are often afraid of rejection by those who they depend on for nurture, love and self-esteem. ID individuals typically view the world as without direction and see their lives as determined by fate or luck, are heavily influenced by peer judgment, have academic and employment difficulties, and are more likely to use drugs. Archer and Waterman (1994) held that this lack of direction stems from a sense of hopelessness about the future.

Originally presented as static states, these identity statuses are now more often viewed as cyclical rather than linear. Marcia (1993) noted that adolescents may move from moratorium to

achievement to moratorium, etc., with each return to moratorium occurring at a more complex and sophisticated level. States that were once seen as maladaptive or less evolved are now seen as functional in many circumstances. Further, identity is not concrete or fixed; rather, it is refined as the individual faces and incorporates new roles and challenges over the lifespan.

Racial/Ethnic Identity Development. The development of positive racial and ethnic identity is posited to be a fundamental part of developing a positive overall identity, one that is mature and well-integrated (Phinney, 1989). At the same time, the dual processes of general identity formation and racial/ethnic identity formation create more complexity for children of color (Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990).

Members of ethnic and racial minorities – adopted or not – have to challenge existing negative (or sometimes positive) and often simplistic stereotypical views of their racial/ethnic group as part of the process of self-definition. The discovery of inequality and devaluing of one's group in the larger society complicates efforts to develop a sense of personal worth and of cultural belonging. Thus, minority adolescents must not only come to understand themselves in terms of personal characteristics, but also in terms of their group membership as a racial minority. Minority teenagers often "dodge" the work of ethnic/racial identity development because it is painful or confusing; many would therefore be characterized as having ethnic/racial identities that are diffuse or foreclosed (Markstrom-Adams & Adams, 1995). However, those who manage to deal effectively with prejudice by affirming self-worth or by demonstrating that stereotypes are not applicable to them, generally feel strongly committed to their ethnic group (Phinney & Chavira, 1995). Further, adolescents who live in neighborhoods or attend schools where their ethnic group is well represented have fewer self-esteem problems (Gray-Little & Carels 1997).

Theories on racial/ethnic identity development vary, but all treat race as a sociopolitical construct rather than a biological reality; that is, it has been the utilization of racial classification, and not race itself, that has forced race-related adaptation of different groups (Helms, 1995). There are a number of "stage" models theorizing the process through which people of color develop their racial identity that involve resolution of a crisis or intense challenge that must be worked through and then integrated. These developmental models mimic Erikson's overall identity process, depicting a stage-like process that moves through crisis or challenge toward an ideal end stage (Phinney, 1989; Wilkinson, 1985; Helms 1995) that is theorized to be associated with positive self-concept and adjustment (Phinney, 1989; Cross, 1978). In achieving positive racial/ethnic identity, the individual moves in an orderly and predictable manner from (Phinney, 1989; Wilkinson, 1985; Helms 1995):

<u>Denial of differences/Conformity (Pre-Encounter):</u> Does not accept or actively resists knowledge of racial or cultural group, devalues own group and allegiance to White standards of merit, to

<u>Inner awakening/Dissonance:</u> Awareness of racial differences and similarities and belonging to a particular group, ambivalence and confusion concerning own socioracial group commitment and socioracial self-definition, to

<u>Acknowledgement/Immersion-Emersion</u>: Articulation of difference in positive ways, idealization of one's socioracial group and use of own-group external standards to self-define, to

Affiliation/Internalization**:** Seeking out and learning from others of the same group to interact with and incorporate values from them (with possible rejection of the majority group), positive commitment to one's own socioracial group, internally defined racial attributes, to

Balance/Integrative Awareness: Pride in racial/ethnic identity and ability to function successfully in the larger society following an exploration process that enables individuals to value and internalize their own ethnicity, capacity to value one's own collective identities as well as emphasize and collaborate with members of other oppressed groups

In Helms' (1995) racial identity theory, members of all socioracial groups, regardless of specific racial or ethnic group classification, are assumed to experience a racial identity process that progresses through various "statuses." In her model, however, these statuses differ among racial groups due to the power differences that have existed, and continue to exist, among socioracial groups in U.S. society (i.e. racism). Thus, for Whites, the process of racial identity development involves the recognition and abandonment of White privilege, whereas for people of color the task involves surmounting internalized racism in its various manifestations (Helms, 1995).

Another model type is the ecological model first proposed by Root (1999). This perspective allows for the interaction between race/ethnicity and other salient aspects of identity and does not privilege race or ethnicity as necessarily the most significant aspects of identity development. Identity is a complex construct composed of and influenced by inherited/genetic factors (e.g. sexual orientation, physical aspects), traits like temperament, and social interactions. Moreover, the "overlapping influences of gender, class, regional history of race relations, and the particular generation of individual and family" (Frasch & Brooks, 2003, p. 204), operate to shape identity as well. Rather than an endpoint at the end of a process, the ecological model holds that racial/ethnic identity is fluid, involving a shifting process that changes over time and depending on a host of experiences and influences.

The lifespan perspective, which has been chiefly used in examining African-American identity development, incorporates aspects of both the stage and ecological models (Cross, Strauss & Fhagan-Smith, Strauss & Fhagan-Smith, 1999). It suggests that racial/ethnic identity development begins early in life and receives particular attention and "work" in adolescence, but is refined across life stages. Like the ecological model, it recognizes the influence of many factors contributing to racial/ethnic identity development. Unlike other models, the lifespan perspective does not privilege a racially focused identity as the best outcome of identity formation. This view holds that the salience of race differs across individuals and across the life span, and that other aspects of self may be equally important or more critical to the individual's sense of self – that is, one can have a positive identity (having integrated one's own race into one's identity in a manner that supports self worth) whether race has a high or low salience.

Finally, Brooks (unpublished manuscript, described in Frasch & Brooks, 2003) incorporates aspects of all three models, and holds that identity achievement is best understood as the integration of multiple achieved identities, which he names "identity consolidation." He posits that the inability to achieve identity across a number of domains results in fragmentation.

Adoptive Identity Development . Most research on general identity development has focused on aspects of identity that can be chosen: vocation, values and relationships. There are

other components to identity that are ascribed, including gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and adoptive status. Grotevant and colleagues (2000) write that for adopted people, "most aspects of the adoption did not concern things that the person has chosen" (p. 382). In other words, adoptees played no role in their relinquishments or movement into new families, so their adoptive status (and perception of themselves related to being adopted) comes from external factors and is often shaped by societal attitudes and stereotypes. Similarly, race is a component of one's being that a person does not get to select and, often because of its visibility and stereotypes about it, is assigned solely because of personal appearance. Grotevant (1992) has argued for the need to understand the interaction of "assigned identities" and "chosen identities," suggesting that the former provide context for understanding the latter.

Adoption clearly adds a layer of complexity to identity development. For the individual involved, identity work may include exploration of the narrative about one's adoptive experience as well as understanding one's history before adoption. The expanding cognitive abilities of adolescents enable them to develop an increasingly multifaceted self-explanation and understanding. At the same time, the young person must come to terms with contradiction and ambiguity (Grotevant, 1997b). For example, identity development in adolescence occurs coincident with the process of separation and individuation. For the adopted adolescent/young adult, this psychological "moving away" involves two families, often one that is known and one that is unknown. Who is the original/birth family? To what extent is the person like/not like the birth or adoptive family? How is it that the person came to be separated from the birth family in the first place (i.e., what is the real, complicated story vs. the simple one often given in childhood)? The complexity of working through such questions is often compounded by the fact that important information may not be known by the adoptive parents or extended family; may be known but not shared; or may be known and shared, but not in ways that allow full consideration or discussion.

Grotevant and colleagues (2000) define adoptive identity development as "how the individual constructs meaning about his/her adoption" (p. 381). Drawing from Erikson, they identified three key aspects in the development of identity for adopted persons that incorporate: 1) self-definition (set of characteristics by which one identifies and that others recognize); 2) coherence of personality (how various aspects of one's identity fit together); and 3) sense of continuity over time (linking the past, present and future and various contexts and relationships). In this view, identity connects personality, subjective awareness, relations and external context and, at its essence, is about building "self-in-context." Three components of adoptive identity are identified in this model: intrapsychic, family relationships and social worlds beyond the family.

Dunbar and Grotevant (2004) studied narratives of adopted adolescents to empirically explore these theories and found four adoptive identity statuses:

Unexamined Identity: The young person thinks little about being adopted and perceives it as unimportant to who he/she is.

Limited Identity: The young person has engaged in some consideration and may have questions, or would like to know more, but does not feel a strong need to talk about or mull over his/her adoption and considers it rather matter-of-factly.

Unsettled Identity: The young person spends considerable time and effort in thinking about and "working through" the meaning of being adopted, often including both positive and negative views about adoption.

Integrated Identity: The young person has thought a great deal about being adopted and how adoption has influenced one's life, can integrate both positive and negative aspects of adoption into a current sense of self and future identity, and has worked through challenging feelings at an earlier time.

Brodzinsky (1990) proposed a "stress and coping" life stage model related to adoptive identity. In his view, adoption is necessarily connected to both loss and sense of difference – and an individual's awareness of both increases over the developmental course, peaking in adolescence and young adulthood. Awareness of loss and sense of difference results in stress, and how an individual makes sense of and interprets the adoption experience and how they cope with the stress will predict adjustment. Thus, this model attributes the variability seen in outcomes of adopted persons to individual differences in coping with adoption-related stress.

Brodzinsky (1987) and others (e.g. Hajal & Rosenberg, 1991) also consider the development of a person's adoptive identity to be intertwined with the family life cycle and Erikson's individual life stage model. This model considers the shifts that parents, their children and extended family members make as they come to integrate their adopted child into the family and develop an identity as a family formed through adoption. Children who are adopted consider, understand and incorporate "being adopted" differently at each stage of development. Most critically, in this model, each of the stages of adoption awareness and understanding is mirrored by parental stages, involvement and response (e.g. being open vs. closed about discussing adoption, or supporting an increasingly complex understanding of adoption vs. maintaining the simplistic story of early childhood), influence the child's ability to master each developmental stage.

Transracial Adoptive Identity Development . Transracial adoption adds yet another layer of complexity to identity development. The children involved usually must navigate the identity formation process, including the development of racial and cultural identity, without the physical/social touchstones and the lessons of lived experience (e.g. coping with prejudice) of families who come from the same race and culture. The transracially placed child also typically operates without a surrounding cultural community. Thus, the identity formation process for transracially adopted persons involves incorporating racial/ethnic differences between one's self and one's family, as well as between one's self and one's society. The issues vary to some extent across groups of transracially adopted individuals according to the extent to which their race or ethnicity is represented in the overall population where they live, the level of prejudice toward their particular racial/ethnic group, whether they are adopted domestically or transnationally, and other factors.

Lee (2003) defined the identity work for transracial adoptees as reconciling the "transracial adoption paradox," that is, being a part of a minority group in society because of their birth, but identifying with "members of the majority culture (i.e., racially White and ethnically European) due to their adoption" (p. 711). In fact, most studies examining issues of identity in transracial

adoption have focused on adoptees' choice between their adoptive and birth identities, rather than the degree to which transracial adoptees embrace a mixed cultural identity (Tizard, 1991).

Baden and Steward (2000) developed one of the few models to address the unique identity of transracial adoptees. Their Cultural-Racial Identity Model offers 16 possible identity statuses for transracial adoptees that reflect the degree to which they identify with their birth cultures (e.g., Korean, Chinese, Latin American or African American) and with people from their own racial groups, as well as the degree to which they identify with their adoptive parents' culture and with people from their adoptive parents' racial group (e.g. White Americans).

This model suggests that racial and cultural identification is not necessarily a dichotomous process for transracial adoptees; rather, they may embrace "multiple cultural and racial perspectives, which are influenced by various factors such as exposure to multiple racial and cultural groups as well as the psychological valence (i.e., societal and personal judgments that impact the degree of positive or negative attitudes) attributed to each racial group and cultural group with which the adoptees identify" (Baden & Wiley, 2007, p. 877).

Steinberg and Hall (2000) focus on transracial adoptive identity development as a family and individual process grounded in the theoretical work of Kirk (1964) and Cross (1971, 1978). They describe stages through which White parents and their children of color progress:

Preconscious stage: There is a lack of awareness of the meaning of adoption to the child and a parental belief that neither adoption nor race "matter" significantly in the family.

Contact Stage: Both adopted children and their parents begin to realize ways in which transracial adoptive families are seen and treated differently from other families (including in-race adoptive families), and that these differences are sometimes negative. Adopted individuals may move into "disintegration," where they affiliate with similar others; adoptive parents may seek to change aspects of their communities.

Internalization Stage: Adopted people come to believe transracial adoptive families are different, but not better nor worse. They may make fewer efforts to stand out. Their parents may come to accept their ability to create change in the community is limited.

Immersion/Emerging Stage: Transracially adopted persons accept and incorporate being adopted, being a member of a minority group, and being in a family that is racially or ethnically diverse; parents fold their children's culture into the culture of the family, while accepting the limitations of their ability to combat "racism" and "adoptism."

Other researchers have focused on strategies through which adoptive parents can help their children reconcile the "transracial adoption paradox." Lee (2003) describes cultural socialization strategies for adoptive families that include: cultural assimilation, enculturation, racial inculcation and child choice. In addition, Vonk (2001) presents a three-part definition of cultural competence for transracial adoptive parents focusing on their need to gain awareness, skills and knowledge in racial awareness, and survival skills and multicultural planning.

Far fewer researchers have explored aspects of transnational adoptive identity, despite the fact that adoption practitioners have raised the importance of national origin as an aspect of identity for transnational adoptees (Freundlich, 2000); thus, factors associated with one's nationality may be considered a unique category in itself and may be particularly salient for international adoptees raised in same-race adoptive families (e.g., Russian-born child adopted by Irish-Americans), but may also play a critical role for transracial adoptees born overseas (e.g., Ethiopian child) compared to those who were born in the U.S. (e.g., African-American child).

Overview of Adoption Identity Research Findings

"We adopted people were *taken*, and *moved*, and *transplanted,* and given *new* names and *new* identities."

– Joyce Maguire Pavao (1998, p. 89)

Limitations of Current Research

Most of the research on adopted persons has focused on their well-being and adjustment, which are intertwined with their ability to develop a full sense of personal identity. Research that has explored adoption's effects on identity has tended to focus on two aspects: its impact on normative identity development in childhood and adolescence, and racial identity formation of transracial adoptees. Only a few studies have examined the interplay of adoption and racial/ethnic identity for transracial and transnational adoptees (Basow, Lilley, Bookwala, & McGillicuddy-DeLisi, 2008; Mohanty, Keoske, & Sales, 2006). In addition, despite the general consensus that adoption is a life-long process (Brodzinsky, Schecter, & Henig, 1992), empirical studies examining many areas of adopted adult experiences are limited (Baden & Wiley, 2007). In fact, research on adopted adults has tended to focus on young adults rather than those in middle adulthood – a period that may be very rich for examination of identity – or narrowly on adult adoptee experiences of searching for biological kin (Borders, Penny, & Portnoy, 2000).

Furthermore, while most of the adoption literature assumes identity formation to be more complex for adoptees (Frisk, 1964; Brodzinsky, 1987; Goebels & Lott, 1986; Rosenberg, 1992; Grotevant, 1997; Grotevant, et al., 2000; Hoopes, 1990; LeVine & Sallee, 1990), the empirical literature has been slow to systematically and adequately address these assumptions. Additionally, the methodological constraints of studies (sampling bias, inappropriate control and comparison groups, and measurement limitations), as well as the heterogeneity of the adoptee population itself, have made it difficult to draw conclusions about the relationship between adoptive identity and adoptee adjustment.

In particular, research is complicated by variations that may account for differences in the salience of adoptive identity for adoptees, including: age at adoption; pre-adoption histories; type of adoption (domestic infant, public child welfare, international, "open" or "closed"); and composition of the adoptive family (racial or cultural similarities or differences, presence or absence of other adopted or biological children). Moreover, given the changes in adoption practice over the past 30 years and subsequent shifts in the characteristics of adoptees, adoptive

parents and birthparents, comparisons among various cohorts may be undermined (Freundlich, 2001). Hence, despite decades of growing interest in adoption's impact on identity, relevant theories and supportive research are still emerging.

One outcome of this limited empirical data on the impact of adoption on identity is that the issue remains controversial. At the core of the debate surrounding adopted adults' access to their original birth certificates is the question of whether they need information about their origins to achieve optimal well-being and sense of identity. Many opponents of access maintain that information about – or contact with – birth family is not critical to adoptees' sense of personal identity, often rejecting clinical theory and studies that suggest otherwise. Proponents for access argue that obtaining such information can be vital for reasons of medical necessity, civil rights and development of a complete sense of identity. They cite theories of human development that suggest knowledge of background, genealogy and personal history abets the process of feeling whole and complete (Freundlich, 2001 & 2007). While a full discussion of these arguments is beyond the scope of this paper, a thorough analysis of this debate was conducted by the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute in its 2007 report "For the Records: Restoring the Legal Rights for Adult Adoptees" (Freundlich, et al., 2007).

Despite these limitations, a significant number of clinical studies, memoirs and reflections by adopted adults, as well as growing empirical evidence, are beginning to provide support for some of the theoretical predictions of adoption's impact on identity. Overall, the research suggests that adoptees experience psychological stresses related to adoption, including ones related to identity, that may impact their overall adjustment and well-being; however, the impact may vary significantly among individuals because of a range of personal, social and environmental factors (Freundlich, 2001). The following section briefly reviews current literature on adoption's impact on adjustment, mostly on children and adolescents adopted as infants, as well as its impact on normative identity formation over the lifespan, including experiences of adopted adolescents in open adoption arrangements and adopted adults who have searched for birth relatives.

Adjustment of Adopted Children, Adolescents and Adults

The psychological and behavioral adjustment of adopted children and adolescents has been the focus of significant investigation as researchers have attempted to determine both the benefits and potential risks of adoption. Depending on the comparison group, different cohorts of adoptees have been found to have no significant differences compared to their non-adopted counterparts, to manifest significantly higher rates of maladjustment or, on certain emotional and behavioral measures, to function higher than non-adopted individuals (see review Wierzbicki, 1993; Wilson, 2004). For instance, studies have found adopted children function far better when compared to youth who remain in institutions, foster care, or are maltreated or raised by birth parents uninterested in childrearing (Bohman, 1970; Bohman & Sigvardsson, 1990; Hodges & Tizard, 1989; van IJzendoorn, Bakermans–Kranenburg, & Juffer, 2007; van IJzendoorn & Juffer, 2005, 2006). Such research findings have lent support to the positive impact of having a permanent family and the continuation of adoption as a highly effective and preferable intervention for children who cannot be raised within their biological families.

On the other hand, some groups of adopted persons have been found to function at lower levels when compared to non-adopted individuals raised in intact families (Bohman & Von Knorring, 1979; Holden, 1991; Brodzinsky, Radice, Huffman, & Merkler, 1987; Rogeness, Hoppe, Macedo, Fischer, & Harris, 1988; Sharma, McGue, & Benson, 1996a; Versluis-den Bieman & Verhulst, 1995; Verhulst, 2000; Tieman, van der Ende, & Verhulst, 2005; Tieman, van der Ende, & Verhulst, 2006; Simmel, Brooks, Barth, & Hinshaw, 2001; Simmel, Barth, & Brooks, 2007 ; Howard, Smith, & Ryan, 2004). In particular, studies that found adoptees were overrepresented in mental health settings and showed more externalizing disorders stimulated a significant body of research identifying the unique psychosocial risks, as well as the moderating factors, characterizing the adjustment of some adopted children and adolescents (See Wilson, 2004; Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2005 for reviews). Studies of adoptees in clinical settings have found them to have higher levels of academic problems, acting out behaviors and hyperactivity, negative self-esteem, externalizing behaviors and social disorders (Deutsch, Swanson, Bruell, Cantwell, Weinberg, & Baren, 1982; Weiss, 1985; Fullerton, Goodrich, & Berman, 1986; Kotsopoulos, Walker, Copping, Cote, & Stavrakaki, 1988, 1993; Rogeness, Hoppe, Macedo, Fischer, & Harris, 1988).

Findings about adoptees in clinical settings contrast with research on adoptees conducted in nonclinical settings. These studies have found that while there were differences between adoptees and non-adopted peers in intact families, the differences were far less dramatic in nonclinical settings (Sharma, McGue, & Benson, 1998). For example, Sharma and associates (1996a) conducted a study in a public school and found lower levels of adjustment among adoptees, but it was fairly small when compared to non-adoptees. Overall, the body of research indicates that the majority of adopted individuals are on par with non-adopted peers, but that there is a subset of adoptees for whom adjustment may be more problematic (Wilson, 2004).

Studies focused on understanding the variance in adjustment among adopted persons have identified age at adoption – and, more specifically, pre-adoption experiences such as time in an orphanage, multiple placements or abuse – as having a significant effect on children's later adjustment (Barth & Berry, 1988; McRoy, Grotevant, & Zurcher, 1988; Verhulst & Versluis-den Bieman, 1992; Sharma, et al., 1998; Verhulst, 2000; Cederblad, et al., 1999; Levy-Shiff, 2001). For example, Sharma, McGue, and Benson (1996b) found in their multistate study of 4,682 adopted children that those placed with adoptive families after the age of 10 had more serious problems (including higher rates of substance abuse and antisocial behavior) than children adopted as infants. And in a study of 472 U.K. adopted adults, age at adoption affected adoptees feeling of belonging to their adoptive family, with the majority (54%) of those adopted before the age of 1 feeling that they belonged in their adoptive families, and only 19 percent of those adopted after the age of 2 feeling the same way (Howe, et al., 2001).

Other protective factors have been identified that may also contribute to adoptees' adjustment, including the socioeconomic status of adoptive parents (Smyer, et al., 1998). For example, the overrepresentation of adoptees in clinical settings is linked with adoptive parents' readiness to seek mental health services for their children and does not entirely reflect the nature or frequency of adoptees' problems (Warren, 1992). However, even after controlling for referral bias, it was found that adopted children were still more likely to receive counseling than non-adopted adolescents (Miller, Fan, Christensen, Grotevant, & Van Dulmen, 2000b).

In addition, while studies indicate adopted children and adolescents show more behavioral and psychological problems, only a few researchers have examined whether these problems persist into adulthood. A recent study by Decker and Omari (2009) examining outcomes of adopted adults in their 30s and 40s , some of whom had been placed at older ages, found that behavioral problems predicted for this group in adolescence did not affect adult success in terms of socioeconomic status and psychological well-being, although age at time of adoption did have a significant influence on later educational attainments. Also, Feigelman (1997) compared adult adoptees and non-adoptees (but did not control for age at placement) and found no significant differences in terms of educational attainment, income and age at first marriage.

In fact, a study examining a subset of twin pairs from the Swedish Adoption/Twin Study of Aging found adult adoptees had higher socioeconomic status and attained significantly higher levels of education than children reared by biological parents (Smyer, et al, 1998). Finally, Baden and Wiley (2007), in their critical review of the literature published in the past 15 years on the psychological outcomes of adopted adults, found that the data overall suggested the mental health of adopted adults was generally on par with non-adopted peers; although adopted adults in a few studies had higher levels of depression and psychological distress, the scores were generally below the clinical range.

Identity Challenges: Adoption Losses & "Genealogical Bewilderment"

Some adoption experts have suggested that identity struggles, while not directly linked to psychopathology, may be connected to behavioral problems observed in some adopted children and adolescents (Brodzinsky, Singer, & Braff, 1984; Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Henig, 1992). In fact, empirical studies have established a link between negative feelings about adoption and behavioral or emotional problems in adoptees (Smith & Brodzinsky, 2002; Juffer, 2006). The primary assumption by researchers and clinicians is that loss – specifically of biological connections – is at the core of the adoption experience and is a key component in adoptees' understanding of adoption and formation of identity (Brodzinsky, et al, 1986). This sense of loss contributes to feelings of rejection and of being "different," emotions that may underlie some adoptees' problems with adjustment by undermining their sense of security and well-being.

For instance, Brodzinsky and associates (1998) wrote that adoptees' awareness that their birthparents had "given them away" as infants may lead to fears of abandonment and worries about permanency within their adoptive families. Feelings of personal rejection by birthparents may be associated with adoptees' hostile or aggressive acting out, negative self-esteem and emotional instability (Rohner, 1986); or acting out behavior may stem from a need to "test the permanency of the adoptive relationship" (Rosenberg, 1992, p. 76). Other scholars have suggested the loss of the biological family may compromise an adopted child's ability to accept the new family, especially for children placed at older ages, or may create loyalty conflicts that could exacerbate behavioral problems as the child attempts to cope with life changes resulting from the adoption (Borgman, 1981; Smith, Howard, & Monroe, 2000; Post, 2000).

In her interviews with adoptees, Modell (1994) found even the positive intentions underpinning the tack of telling adopted children that they were "chosen" by their parents can undermine a sense of belonging to their adoptive families. Not only did the "chosen" story add the fear of

being "unchosen" but augmented feelings of difference, since the assumption is that children belong to their families because they are born into them and not because they are "picked." So adoptees' feelings of loss and difference are reinforced by societal attitudes and assumptions about adoption and beliefs that families are defined by blood ties (Brodzinsky, et al., 1998).

Most of the literature in this field assumes identity formation to be more complex for adoptees in adolescence because they have to confront hurdles relating to adoption, in addition to normative adolescent issues (Brodzinsky, 1987; Goebels & Lott, 1986; Rosenberg, 1992; Grotevant, 1997; Grotevant, et al., 2000). Hence, some clinicians believe that adolescent identity struggles may be intensified by the fact of adoption itself, with early loss exerting significant effects on identity formation; while others identify specific aspects of adoption that may have a particular impact on identity, including lack of information about genetic histories and "genealogical bewilderment," fantasies about birthparents and physical dissimilarity to adoptive family members (Sants, 1964; Sorosky, Pannor, & Barron, 1975).

Indeed, many clinicians maintain it is not only the psychological stress of losing connections with biological parents, but also the lack of or limited information about their past that make the consolidation of identity more challenging for adopted individuals, especially those involved in confidential or "closed" adoptions (Schechter & Bertocci, 1990; Brodzinsky, et al., 1998; Hartmand & Laird, 1990; LaVine & Sallee, 1990;). The term *genealogical bewilderment* was coined by Sants (1964) to describe the ambivalence and unique difficulty adoptees can face in forming identity created by limited or unknown information about birth family and genealogical roots. Partridge (1991) described the desire by some adoptees to see someone who physically resembled them as "mirror hunger."

Other clinicians have suggested fantasies about birth family may play a particularly powerful role for adopted individuals during adolescence (Hajal & Rosenberg, 1991). For example, Modell (1994) described in her interviews with adoptees a pervasive sense of being "cut off from a past" and feelings of isolation and emptiness when information about biological backgrounds was not available to them. In their study of 292 families seeking mental health services with adopted children between the ages of 3 to 20, Smith and colleagues (2000, p. 553) found identity issues were a concern for 62 percent of participating adoptees. These issues were expressed in various ways, such as: "I want to know more about who I am," "I just want to know about my birth mother," "I'm sometimes afraid that if someone finds out that I'm adopted, they will make fun of me and treat me different from the others." These issues were most common at age 7 to 8 and resurfaced at age 11 and 12; and were most prevalent among children placed as infants (under 1).

A study by the Search Institute (Benson, Sharma, & Roehlkepartain, 1994) of a community sample of 881 adolescents adopted as infants in confidential placements has been used to challenge the notion that adoption undermines the identity formation of adopted adolescents. The researchers found no significant difference in questions related to global identity and self-esteem between adoptees and their non-adopted siblings; other studies measuring global identity have similarly found few differences between adopted and nonadopted adolescents (Stein & Hoopes, 1985; Goebel & Lott, 1986). However, in the Search Institute study, two-thirds of the adoptees reported that they would like to meet their birthparents and over one-quarter endorsed the statement: "adoption is a big part of how I think about myself." In addition, 41

percent said they thought about adoption daily to at least two to three times per month, with girls more frequently reporting that adoption informed their identity and thoughts.

In a study examining the behavior of 50 adolescent adoptees regarding search for their birth families, Stein and Hoopes (1985) found perceived physical dissimilarity to adoptive parents to be greater among those who chose to search. In a survey of 100 adoptees regarding factors associated with searching, Kowal and Schilling (1985) found 71 percent wanted to know about personality characteristics and 68 percent desired to know what their birthparents looked like. One adoptee stated, "I need to justify who I am because I'm very different from my [adoptive] family and I never felt like I was OK for who I am" (p. 361).

Search and Contact with Birth Family: A Process of Identity Consolidation

While there are no definitive data on how many adoptees actively search for birthparents, many empirical studies of adopted adults have found one of the key motivations for searching is related to identity (Stein & Hoopes, 1985; Campbell, Silverman, & Patti, 1991; Sachdev, 1992; Kohler, Grotevant, & McRoy, 2002). Wrobel and Dillon (2009) discuss the development of curiosity and information-seeking in adopted children and adolescents. They recognize that curiosity about the world is a typical part of human development, and that this leads adopted persons to consider the issue of information seeking. Some adopted individuals decide that they want more information leading them to search for birth relatives, while others do not. In addition, some of these decisions are based on barriers and facilitators they encounter. Wrobel and Dillon labeled this process the Adoption Curiosity Pathway model. Drawing from statements by adopted adult searchers who describe the need to "find out who I am, learn my true identity" and find "the part of me that is missing," Schechter & Bertocci (1990, p. 80) wrote:

Identity does not have closure in adolescence or young adulthood but continues to evolve over the life span and through the search, adoptees are seeking a reconciliation and cohesion of many complex perceptions, cognitive systems, and self-object representations.

In reviewing the literature on this subject, Baden and Wiley (2007) analyzed 13 quantitative studies and identified the most common reasons for searching: 1) wishing for background information; 2) experiencing life cycle transitions (e.g. marriage, pregnancy, birth, adoption, death); 3) wishing for a cohesive identity; 4) hoping for a relationship with birth parents; 5) desiring a biological connection based on physical appearance; 6) having medical problems; 7) experiencing the social stigma of adoption; 8) wanting to assure birthparents that the adoptee is well; and 9) being curious. Although research on adoptees who choose not to search is more limited, Baden and Wiley identified the following motivations for this group: 1) concern about upsetting birthparents' lives; 2) fears of failing in the search; 3) fears of being rejected; 4) concern about unpleasant information and the time and money needed to search; 5) fears of upsetting adoptive parents and being disloyal; and 6) not wanting to complicate their own lives.

Although early research had pathologized search as a reflection of adoptees' personal problems or dissatisfaction with adoptive parents, an alternative view links search with identity issues and is seen as a normal response to being separated from birthparents (Sorosky, et al., 1975). In fact, more-recent studies have found that most adoptees who search report positive

relationships with their adoptive parents or comparable levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with adoption (Wrobel, Grotevant, & McRoy, 2004). These findings have lent support to the view of search as a normative developmental task associated with being adopted (Howe & Feast, 2000; Baden & Wiley, 2007).

A longitudinal study in the Netherlands examined factors related to search interest and activity among 1,417 international adoptees ages 24-30, and classified them into four groups: uninterested non-searchers (36%), interested non-searchers (32%), searchers (18%) and reunited searchers (14%). Overall, those who searched in their 20s had expressed more curiosity about their origins as adolescents, but researchers also concluded searching was affected by external factors as well, such as the divorce of adoptive parents (Tieman, et al., 2008).

Clearly, not all adoptees embark on an active search for birthparents, reflecting the variety of needs and heterogeneity of this group; however, it has been suggested that "the need to know is not necessarily the same as the need to search" (Wegar, 1997, p. 66-67). Muller and Perry (2001) reported half of adoptees at some time in their lives seek information about their birth families and half of those will want to meet them. In Scotland, England and Wales, where adopted adults have access to their original birth information at age 17-18, 55 percent of adoptees have sought information from their records and/or established contact with birth relatives (Carp, 2007).

Moreover, Schechter and Bertocci (1990) assert that a search can take on many forms: from unconscious, to fantasy, to actual contact and reunion with birth relatives. Brodzinsky and colleagues (1998) declared that all adoptees engage in a search process (intrapsychic or literal) that often begins in the early school years with the growing awareness of adoption issues. Thus, while all adopted persons may not actively seek out birth relatives, many clinicians consider the very act of contemplating a search to be a normal attempt to synthesize their dual identities – one by birth and the other by adoption – and to gain continuity in their lives (Kohler, Grotevant, & McRoy, 2002; Stein & Hoopes, 1985; Wrobel & Dillon, 2009).

The benefits of having access to information about one's past are at the center of the growing practice of "open adoption," in which some level of contact is maintained between adoptive and birth families (sometimes referred to as the adoptive kinship network). Such "open" arrangements contrast with the "closed" or "confidential" practices that were commonplace in the past, in which indentifying information was not exchanged and contact between birth and adoptive families was limited, at best. Proponents of openness assert that it benefits all parties in many ways – including the children by meeting their identity needs; promoting self-esteem by providing a sense of continuity with their histories; lessening their feelings of powerlessness; allowing them to resolve questions about themselves; and assisting them in feeling more secure in their adoptive families (Kirk, 1985; Grotevant & McRoy, 1998; Melina & Roszia, 1993; Triseliotis, 1993; Ryburn, 1995; Silber & Dorner, 1989; Gritter, 1997).

In fact, a growing body of empirical evidence suggests that the practice can be beneficial for adopted children. Miall and March (2005) found that the most frequently cited advantage of open adoption arrangements is the ability to obtain updated medical, health or genetic information. Emerging findings from the longitudinal Minnesota/Texas Adoption Research Project (MTARP), launched in the mid-1980s to understand the character and consequences of

open arrangements, also find that the practice is beneficial for children adopted as infants. Openness was found to be especially beneficial during adolescence, when the teens themselves often began pushing for more information or contact. Youth in open adoption arrangements demonstrated a better understanding of adoption, communicated more with their parents about adoption, were more satisfied with their adoption arrangements, and had more positive feelings about their birthmothers than did those youth without contact (Wrobel, Kohler, Grotevant, & McRoy, 2003; Grotevant, Wrobel, VonKorff, Skinner, Newell, Friese, & McRoy, 2007).

The research indicates contact does not minimize adoptees' thoughts about birthparents, but alters their nature. For instance, in their initial interviews with adopted children on their experience with open arrangements, the researchers found the majority were curious about their birthparents and birth siblings. Those children who had less information about these relatives wondered about things such as what their birthparents looked like, while those with more information wondered what their birthparents had done since they last had contact and whether they would meet again (Grotevant & McRoy, 1998). Thus, Grotevant and colleagues (1999) suggest outcomes for children in open adoptions may vary as a function of differences in frequency and nature of contact (letters, mediated versus face-to-face contact) as well as a range of factors including parenting style and social skills of the adoptive parents, psychological stability of birthmothers, and the extent to which adoptive and birth families value engagement.

Development of Identity over the Lifespan

Researchers and clinicians suggest that sensitivity to adoption-related stigma and loss is linked to adopted children's cognitive understanding of adoption. Brodzinsky, Singer, & Braff (1984) interviewed 200 infant-placed adoptees and non-adopted children aged 4-13 years to assess their cognitive understanding of adoption. They found that while pre-school-aged children could label themselves as adopted, their comprehension of their family status and ability to differentiate between adoption and biology as alternative paths to entering a family did not develop until early school age (5-7 years). These findings were similar for non-adopted children's understanding of adoption as well.

More importantly, in their interviews with 160 adopted and non-adopted children aged 6-13, these researchers found adopted children grew less positive about adoption as they got older, whereas non-adopted children became more positive (Singer, Brodzinsky, & Braff, 1982). Their survey of 82 adoptees (age 6-17) placed as infants yielded similar results; adolescents reported less-positive feelings and greater ambivalence about their adoptive status, although younger respondents reported more intrusive thoughts about adoption (Smith & Brodzinsky, 1994).

Thus, the literature suggests that with the growing awareness of the meaning and implications of adoption, particularly in middle childhood (age 7-11), some children may begin to look at their adoptive status more critically and that may contribute to negative or ambivalent feelings about this aspect of themselves. Brodzinsky and colleagues (1998) suggest that when children realize the differences between entering a family through birth and adoption, adoptees may be confronted by the questions of loss and abandonment.

These findings are consistent with evidence indicating increases in problem behaviors and renewed fantasy concerning birthparents during middle childhood (Brodzinksy, 1990; 1993;

Brodzinsky, et al. 1984, 1986; LeVine & Sallee, 1990). Wilson (2004) has also noted the possibility that adoption-related problems during middle-childhood may be part of a normative developmental pattern for adoptees as they begin to assess and integrate adoption into their own sense of self and their particular life situations.

Adoption-related stress, particularly relating to questions of identity, may continue as adopted individuals age. Several researchers have observed that adulthood may be a time when questions arise regarding heritage, genetic history, thoughts of searching for biological kin, or differences in physical characteristics or relationship with adoptive family (Brodzinsky, et al., 1992; Hajal & Rosenberg, 1991). In particular, young and middle adulthood are periods in which there is further separation from adoptive families and when other milestones, such as marriage, births and deaths, may trigger thoughts about the meaning and significance of their adoptions.

In a recent study of 54 adopted adults exploring the extent to which they struggled with adoption-related uncertainty and ambiguous loss of birthparents, 36 percent experienced a moderate degree of uncertainty and loss that fluctuated with life circumstances; and 33 percent experienced high uncertainly and loss, a deep need for closure and unresolved grief (Powell & Afifi, 2005). While some adults in the study chose to search for birthparents to reduce their uncertainty and unresolved grief, others tolerated a high degree of uncertainty due to fear of upsetting their adoptive families. This suggests some adopted adults delay or are prevented from having the opportunity to resolve feelings of adoption-related loss and ambiguity until much later in life, or engage in a search without the knowledge or supports of the adoptive family.

Some scholars have argued that adoptees are the most disempowered members of the adoption triad, "having generally had no opportunity to participate in the decisions that have so powerfully shaped their lives and their identities" (Hartman & Laird, 1990, p. 228). Others have suggested this absence of power in early life may extend into adulthood (Lifton, 1994; Sorosky, Baran, & Pannor, 1984). In particular, adoptees' transition to adulthood may be complicated by societal views that perpetuate the view of them as adopted "children" (Rosenberg, 1992). Legal barriers and challenges posed by adoption practices, such as their inability to gain medical information or access their original birth certificates, can exacerbate feelings of disempowerment (Kirk, 1985). Clearly, further research is needed to empirically assess the impact of adoption into adulthood. Although there are memoirs by adult adoptees, to date, no empirical studies have examined the development of adoptive identity over the life course or systematically studied how adults create meaning about being adopted.

Racial/Ethnic Identity in International Adoption: Research Review

People tend to think you are really intelligent and a stereotypical nerd. I was discriminated against by Asians because I didn't speak my native tongue and discriminated against by Caucasians because of how I looked.

– Korean adult adoptee (Freundlich & Lieberthal, 2000, p.18)

Research on Racial/Ethnic Identity in Adoption: Overview and Limitations

Concern surrounding adoption's impact on racial and ethnic identity formation has almost exclusively focused on the experiences of minority children adopted by Caucasian parents, reflecting the prevalent demographics of individuals/couples who adopt across racial lines. In contrast, the literature has minimally addressed issues of ethnicity and racial identity affecting children who physically resemble their parents (i.e. White children adopted by White parents), even though the biological ancestry and ethnic identity may differ, particularly for those adopted from overseas (e.g., a Russian-born child adopted by Irish-American parents). Although there are a few studies that compare transracially adopted children to minority children adopted by minority parents (see McRoy, Zurcher, Lauderdale & Anderson, 1982; Vroegh, 1997; Burrow & Finley, 2004, of African-American children; and Andujo, 1988, of Mexican American children), there is almost no research that has compared Asian children adopted transracially with those adopted by Asian parents or that has looked at issues of ethnic identity for Caucasian children.

One reason for the dearth of research regarding identity in transnationally adopted White children may be the way psychologists, sociologists and social workers have conceptualized ethnic identity and the salience of race in society. Although there is ongoing debate on the definition of the terms, *ethnic identity* most often refers to "one's sense of belonging to an ethnic group and the part of one's thinking, perceptions, feelings, and behavior that is due to group membership" (Rotherman & Phinney, 1987, p. 13). Ethnic identity typically refers to differences based on national origin, language, religion, food and other cultural markers – and not just on one's outward appearance – whereas *racial identity* refers to physical characteristics, such as skin color, facial features and hair texture, that typify a group of people.[12]

Some scholars suggest the fact that it is solely among Whites that self-esteem does not correlate with ethnic identity development and it is mostly non-Whites who explore their ethnicity, as

[12] Most child welfare professionals utilize the term "culture" more often than "ethnicity" when referring to characteristic patterns of behavior and traditions of groups. In the adoption literature ethnic and racial identity are used interchangeably to reflect the frequent confluence of race with ethnic group identity (sometimes referred to as "ethnoracial" identity).*Race* as a category has been historically problematic because of a lack of agreement on what characteristics define a racial grouping and the fact that such groupings have little biological basis but have been historically and politically significant for communities of color. In the United States the federal government recognizes the following racial and ethnic group classifications: American Indian or Alaskan Native (indigenous persons from North and South America); Asian (Northeast and Southeast Asia); Black or African American (origin from any black racial group in Africa) Hispanic or Latino (Cuban, Mexican, South or Central America or other Spanish speaking culture of origin); Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (original peoples from Hawaii, Guam, Samoa or other Pacific Island); White (origins in Europe, Middle East or Northern Africa).

evidence of prevailing racial inequality (Phinney, 1992; Shiao & Tuan, 2008). In fact, some sociologists have suggested that because Caucasians may see themselves as the racial norm against which other groups are judged, they may avoid the issue of racial identity altogether (McIntosh, 1997). Also, because race is not as salient for Whites in terms of influencing life circumstances, they may have the freedom to choose whether they will claim a distinct ethnic group identity and the extent to which they will incorporate the cultural values of that group into their lives (Waters, 1990). In contrast, racial minorities are more likely to define and/or have their identities defined externally by race, thereby pushing them to explore their ethnic identity and group membership (Omi & Winant, 1994). For Whites, many of whom are third or fourth-generation descendents of European immigrants and of mixed ancestries, ethnic identity is less often about group membership and more about familial traditions and celebrations, with ethnicity used to describe special occasions, holidays and special foods as well as personal heritage and pride (Waters, 1990). [13]

Thus, most of the empirical literature addressing racial/ethnic identity issues in adoption has examined the effects of transracial adoption on minority children's racial/ethnic identity, self-esteem and psychological adjustment. Mostly in response to criticisms raised in the 1970s, early research in transracial adoption examined the overall adjustment of domestic transracial adoptees in comparison to those adopted into same-race families. Later research expanded to include children adopted from other countries. In general, these studies found children adopted transracially (domestically or from abroad), had overall adjustment outcomes similar to children placed in same-race families, particularly if they were adopted early in life (Grow & Shapiro, 1974; Kim, 1977; McRoy, Zurcher, Lauderdale, & Anderson, 1982, 1984; McRoy & Zurcher, 1983; Simon & Alstein, 1987; Feigelman & Silverman, 1983; Shireman & Johnson, 1986; Andujo, 1988). These findings have been used to support transracial adoptions as a viable option for children of color who may remain in foster care in the U.S. or in orphanages overseas.

Earlier studies of transracial adoptions focused primarily on broad outcomes of adoptee adjustment, however, rather than ethnic and racial identification. A few studies incorporated rudimentary measurements of racial and ethnic identity and interpreted the relative absence of behavioral and emotional problems as indicating the insignificance of race (Shiao & Tuan, 2008). Early research examining ethnic identity formation of transracial adoptees also tended to rely on parent reports and looked mostly at school-aged children (Feigelman & Silverman, 1984; Trolley, Hansen & Wallin, 1995; Feigelman, 2000; Huh & Reid, 2000; Carstens & Juliá, 2000). Later studies, focusing on adolescent and young adult transracial adoptees, found that many did indeed experience challenges related to their ethnic and racial identity, a fact masked by earlier research since racial identity becomes more important with age (e.g., Feigelman, 2000; Brooks & Barth, 1999; Wickes & Slate, 1996).

Additionally, research has tended to focus on *ethnic awareness*, defined as the "conscious valuing of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, language, institutions, history and other artifacts characteristic of the child's ethnoracial community of origin" (Zuniga, 1991, p.

[13] Herbert Gans was the first to propose in his 1979 paper, "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America," the persistence of ethnicity among White Americans was increasingly a matter of personal choice based on a "symbolic identification" – i.e. food, language and dress - and attachment with an individual's European ancestry.

21) and less on *ethnic self-identification*, defined as the "acquisition of the correct and consistent utilization of an ethnic label which is developed by the perception and conception of him/herself as belonging to an ethnic group" (Zuniga, 1991, p. 22). In other words, while ethnic awareness may be fostered through exposure to cultural activities and parental cultural competency, ethnic awareness does not necessitate identification (Trolley, et al., 1995). Most studies have explored those factors that lead to ethnic awareness (which can be observed by parental reports), but not on those factors that lead to ethnic self-identification, which is an intrapsychic process that can only be understood from transracial adoptee reports.

Research in transracial adoption has been further criticized for deficits in methodological rigor, lack of grounding in theory, large attrition rates in longitudinal studies, lack of generalizability due to small sample sizes, and "convenience" samples that are not necessarily representative of the population of transracial adopters or adoptees , all of which may contribute to inconsistent findings, particularly pertaining to racial identity development (Courtney, 1997; Brooks, et al., 1997; Rushton & Minnis, 1997; Alexander & Curtis, 1996). Also, studies on international adoptees have been difficult to generalize because of differences in sample populations, including age at placement, countries of origin, limited information regarding pre-adoption conditions, and reliance on comparisons to children within the adoptive country as opposed to children who remain in institutions or are adopted within the birth country (exceptions are Bagley & Young, 1979; Palacios & Sanchez, 1996). In fact, most studies conducted in the United States have categorized subgroups of transracial adoptees by race and not by adoption type, making it difficult to distinguish variances based on international versus domestic placements. Juffer and van IJzendoorn's (2005) meta-analysis of approximately 100 adoption studies seeks to address this concern by looking across studies quantitatively for patterns in their findings.

Recent transracial adoption studies have tried to address some of the limitations of earlier work, utilize more rigorous research methods and have begun to examine the contribution of various factors in child outcomes. These studies have refined specific constructs that are measured (such as racial/ethnic identity, reference group orientation, and aspects of cultural socialization), have developed theories and tested hypotheses about the relationships among these variables. As with the earlier studies, more recent ones examine these issues primarily for children adopted in infancy or at young ages (Smith, et al., 2008). A few studies have begun to look at adult experiences, particularly of adoptees from South Korea and, as noted earlier, scholarship is starting to explore how ethnic/racial identity intersects with adoptive identity for transracial adoptees and their families (Basow, et al., 2008; Mohanty, et al., 2006; Frasch & Brooks, 2003).

Although international adoptions account for the majority of all transracial adoptions in the U.S., estimated as high as 85 percent, discussion of the ethnic and racial heritage of foreign-born children has been relatively limited in comparison to African-American children adopted into White families; the latter was the primary focus of transracial adoption research over 20 years ago (Lee, 2003; Kim, 1995). Over the past decade, however, a growing body of literary anthologies and books, as well as scholarly studies looking at individuals adopted from South Korea (who constitute the largest number of foreign-born children adopted by Americans) are providing new insights into ethnic and racial identity formation of transracial adoptees, particularly into adulthood and over the life course. This research is reflective of the coming of age of these early international adoptees and the development of an active adult Korean adoptee

community that emerged in the 1990s (McGinnis, 2003; Hubinette, 2005). Adoption scholarship is therefore beginning to move from the simple question "Does adoption work?" to more complex ones regarding "How does adoption work best with these types of children and these types of families over a lifetime?" (Baden & Wiley, 2007, p. 893).

Despite the growing scholarship indicating that transracial adoption in itself does not produce psychological or social maladjustment problems in children, the lack of definitive data and conflicting findings on the extent to which transracial adoptees face challenges relating to their racial/ethnic identity formation have continued to fuel the debate on the value of such adoptions for children of color. Transracial adoption as a practice remains controversial, perhaps because it is not just a factor in personal identity but also in collective identity (Rushton & Minnis, 1997). Although a full discussion of this debate is beyond the scope of this paper, an analysis of the policy implications of transracial adoption in the U.S. child welfare system was addressed in the Adoption Institute report "Finding Families for African American Children: The Role of Race & Law in Adoption from Foster care" (Smith, et al., 2008).

The following section will therefore focus largely on research on the transracial adoption of children from other nations, highlighting findings from outcome studies, racial/ethnic identity studies, and cultural socialization studies – an emerging field that is beginning to shed light on the relationship between racial/ethnic experiences and psychological adjustment of adolescent and young adult transracial adoptees (Lee, 2003). Although there is a significant body of research that has examined the adjustment of children adopted internationally and raised in England, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Belgium and Canada, given the differences between the U.S. and those countries in terms of race relations and culture, this review will primarily report findings regarding children adopted from abroad into the United States.[14]

Outcomes for Transracial and Transnational Adoptees

Several scholars have provided integrative reviews of the literature on transracial adoption of both children adopted domestically and from overseas (Tizard, 1991; Alexander & Curtis, 1996; Rushton & Minnis, 1997; Friedlander, 1999; Lee, 2003; Fensbo, 2004; Juffer & van IJzendoorn 2005; Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2007). Taken in total, this body of research suggests that approximately 70-80 percent of transracial adoptees studied had few serious behavioral or emotional problems – a rate similar to samples of same-race adoptees – and that they do not differ significantly in levels of self-esteem or social adjustment (see review by Lee, 2003).

In a meta-analysis of 88 outcome studies published between 1970 and 2007 examining the effects of adoption on self-esteem (as measured by a sense of global self-worth), researchers found no differences among adoptees (international, domestic or transracial) and non-adoptees

[14] Annually the largest portion of children available for international adoption are placed within the United States although per capita Sweden has the largest portions of overseas adoptees. In Juffer & van IJzendoorn (2007) meta-analysis of studies looking at global self-esteem of adoptees, they found no differences among adoptees raised in different adoptive countries. However, their study did not look at ethnic identity, nor have there been studies that have empirically measured ethnic and racial identity of international adoptees raised in other Western nations. In their analysis of behavioral problems and mental health referrals of international adoptees, they found studies conducted in North America (U.S.A., Canada) reported more behavioral problems for international adoptees than studies outside of North America.

comparisons; nor did they find differences in self-esteem between transracial and same-race White or non-White adoptees (Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2007). In addition, they found higher levels of self-esteem among adoptees than children who remain institutionalized, although the number of studies comparing adoptees to institutionalized children was small (3), precluding generalizations based on these findings. Notably, this review did not examine levels of ethnic identity, nor did it examine other aspects of psychological well-being besides global self-esteem.

Despite these findings, a meta-analysis by these authors of studies on adoptee mental health and behavior problems found that while the majority of international adoptees were well-adjusted, both they and domestic adoptees showed slightly more behavior problems and significantly higher rates of mental health referrals than those in non-adopted comparison groups; international adoptees had far fewer total externalizing and internalizing behavior problems and better mental health outcomes than domestic ones (Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2005). In analyzing some of the potential risk factors, they found international adoptees with pre-adoption adversity showed more problems and externalizing behavior than those without evidence of extreme deprivation. These findings mirrored other studies that found pre-adoptive experiences (extreme deprivation, neglect, malnutrition or abuse within orphanages or birth families) posed significant risk for developmental delay and mental health problems among some international adoptees (Groza, 1999; Groza, Ryan, & Cash, 2003; Mohanty & Newhill, 2006; Gunnar, Bruce, & Grotevant, 2000; Verhulst, Althus & Versluis-den Bieman, 1990; Asbury, Cross & Waggenspack, 2003; Groze, 1996; Lihua, 2001; Paulson & Merighi, 2009).

Notably, six of the nine studies reviewed that looked at adverse pre-adoption conditions were of children adopted from Romanian or Russian orphanages, suggesting birth country may also be an indicator of increased (or decreased) risks of deprivation; however, the remarkable developmental catch-up within a year after placement of many of these children also is evidence of the significant benefits of adoption (van IJzendoorn, Juffer, Klein, 2005; van IJzendoorn, et al., 2007; Rutter, et al., 1998). Thus, as in outcome studies that have solely looked at domestic adoptees, variances in outcomes for international adoptees suggest that a subset may be at risk for serious and long-term behavioral or emotional problems, but that some of the risks may be mediated by characteristics of the adoptive families, genetic endowment, birth country context and other protective environmental factors.

A few studies in the U.S. have also compared the psychosocial adjustment of different subgroups of transracial adoptees. In particular, two longitudinal studies of transracial adoptees that were initiated in the 1970s comparing African-American, Korean and Colombian transracial adoptees (Feigelman & Silverman, 1983) and African-American and Korean transracial adoptees (Simon & Alstein, 1996) found their overall adjustment to be similar to same-race Caucasian adoptees as young children. The final follow-up to Feigelman and Silverman's study (based on national surveys conducted in 1975, 1981 and 1993) found same-race adopted Caucasian males appeared to have the most problematic adjustment, with almost two-thirds identified in parent reports as having problem or poor adjustment, compared with just under half of transracially adopted African American males and under one-third of Korean adoptees (Brooks & Barth, 1999).

In a more recent comparison of the adjustment of Black, Asian/Indian, interracial and White adoptees to non-adopted siblings, the majority of children in transracial adoptive families were

well-adjusted (Weinberg, Waldman, van Dulmen, & Scarr, 2004). However, for almost every indicator, the adoptees (regardless of race) were more likely to be perceived by parents as having poorer adjustment than birth offspring. The researchers also found that, on average, adoptees functioned worse in adolescence and young adulthood than did those born into these families.

Indeed, empirical studies on adolescent and young adult transracial adoptees have found that many struggled with various aspects of their racial and ethnic identity, including discomfort with their appearance and ethnic self-descriptors (Benson, et al., 1994; Brooks & Barth, 1999; Feigelman, 2000; Freundlich & Lieberthal, 2000; Westhues & Cohen, 1998; Kim, 1977). For example, in the Search Institute study noted earlier, 173 of the 881 adolescent adoptees were Korean and, of these, 22 percent agreed with the statement, "I wish I was a different race than I am." In the final wave of his longitudinal study of transracial adoptees, Feigelman (2000) found that about half of the young adult transracial adoptees had expressed discomfort with their racial appearance. In addition, in the final wave of Simon & Altstein's (1992) longitudinal study (also conducted in 1971, 1979, 1983 and 1991) 55 percent of the young adult Korean adoptees reported adolescence was the period in their lives when they found being a different race and culture from their parents to be "harder."

As for ethnic descriptors, two-thirds or more of transracial adoptees across several studies did not identify with their racial status (Andujo, 1988; Feigelman & Silverman, 1984; Kim, 1995). Also, as stated earlier, in the survey of 163 Korean adult adoptees who attended the first national conference for Korean adoptees (the Gathering), 36 percent described themselves as Caucasian while growing up (Freundlich & Lieberthal, 2000). These findings correspond to other studies indicating domestic and international transracial adoptees tend to be highly acculturated into the majority (White) culture (Westhues & Cohen, 1994; Bagely, 1993a, 1993b; Kim, 1977; Vroegh, 1997; Wickes & Slate, 1996).

Although research has not systematically examined experiences of discrimination, a significant portion of international adoptees of color report a range of negative experiences, from overt racism to teasing about their appearance. A number of studies of international adoptees in many countries report such experiences occur for a majority of participants, ranging up to 80 percent, (Westhues & Cohen, 1994; Simon & Altstein, 1992; Lee & Quintana, 2005; Freundlich & Lieberthal, 2000; Triseliotis, 1993). Some researchers have expressed concern that anti-immigration sentiment in the United States, as well as in other Western countries, may also increase discrimination against internationally adopted children (Friedlander, 1999).

Generally, the effects of discrimination on transracial adopted persons have not been systematically investigated. Early research that relied on adoptive parent reports tended to conclude transracial adoptees experienced limited levels of stress as a result of racial or ethnic hostility, (Kim, 1977; Feigelman & Silverman, 1983; Barth & Brooks, 1999; Versluis den-Bieman, & Verhulst, 1995). However, other research has shown that Caucasian families of transracial adoptees tend to minimize the effects of racial taunting, bringing into question the accuracy of family perceptions about the harmfulness of racism on their children (McRoy, et al., 1982, 1984; Andujo, 1988; Feigelman & Silverman, 1983).

Evidence of the negative impact of external-family forces such as societal racism on the adjustment of transracial adoptees, especially in adolescence and young adulthood, is emerging. For instance, in his analysis of the final wave of data from his longitudinal study of transracial and in-race adoptees, Feigelman (2000) found a significant relationship between adjustment and racial discrimination. In other words, adoptive parents who reported higher levels of adjustment difficulties also reported their young adult children encountered more discrimination, negative comments and discomfort with their appearance. In addition, he found significant variance in adjustment among transracial subgroups that correlated with the frequency of discrimination; i.e., parents of Black children (53%) reported the most frequent encounters with discrimination, followed parents of Asian transracial adoptees (32%) and parents of Latino transracial adoptees (11%). Transracially adopted persons living in racially homogeneous communities reported more discomfort with their physical appearance.

Similarly, a study in Sweden reported that uncertainty about one's ethnic identity and perceived discrimination were related to greater psychological distress and lower self-esteem among internationally adopted teens and young adults (Cederblad, et al. , 1999); this may explain the higher rates of psychiatric and social maladjustment they observed among transracial adoptees and immigrants (Hjern, Lindbald, & Vinnerljung, 2002). Discomfort with racial appearance is evident in adoptees when they are young as well as when they begin aging into adulthood, as reported in a recent study of 176 Dutch families, all with internationally adopted children (age 7) from Sri Lanka, Korea and Colombia. The study found children adopted from Sri Lanka and Colombia (who tended to be darker skin than those from Korea) who wished to be White or born into the family had more behavior problems, as reported by teachers and parents (Juffer, 2006).

What is less clear from the U.S. studies is whether differences among subgroups of transracial adoptees are because of the type of adoption (international versus domestic) or because of differences between racial groups (e.g., Asians being perceived differently than African Americans). Although Feigelman's (2000) study showed differences among transracial subgroups in terms of experiences of discrimination, another analysis of the same data found African-American females were significantly more likely than Asian females to express pride in their racial or ethnic birth group (Brooks & Barth, 1999). And a more recent study, which utilized data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health to compare outcomes of Black and Asian transracial adoptees to Black and White same-race adoptees, found Asian transracial adoptees had the highest academic achievement but more psychosomatic problems than did same-race adoptees (Burrow & Finley, 2004). Further research clearly is necessary to understand the true implications of race – including the role of racial group stereotypes as well as adoption type – on transnational and transracial adoptees' adjustment as children and adults.

Transracial Adoption: Struggles with Racial/Ethnic Identity Formation

Research to date has consistently shown positive results for transracial international adoptees on measures of global self-esteem and psychological adjustment, but it also has suggested that children and adolescents struggle with aspects of their racial identity, including discomfort with appearance, identification with ethnic descriptors and racial taunting. While some studies have indicated transracial adoptees are less likely to develop strong racial or cultural identity than are children raised in their own racial and ethnic communities (Hollingsworth, 1997; Andujo, 1988;

Kim, 1977; McRoy, et al., 1982, 1984; McRoy & Zurcher; Triseliotis, 1997), the empirical results are not conclusive since other research suggests transracial adoptees have strong racial and ethnic identifications, especially as young adults (Brooks & Barth, 1999; Simon & Alstein, 1996).

In his review of the literature on transracial adoption, Lee (2003) noted that most of the studies on ethnic/racial identity have examined the extent to which adoptees use racial/ethnic self-descriptors and are proud of or comfortable with their race and ethnicity – but have not tested the relationship between racial/ethnic experiences and psychological adjustment. Recent research on non-adopted youth of color, mostly involving older children, adolescents and adults, provides evidence of a link between ethnic identity and measures of subjective well-being, psychological adjustment and self-esteem (Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine, & Broadnax, 1994; Phinney & Alipuria, 1996; Yip & Fuligni, 2002; Blash & Unger, 1995; Lemon & Waehler, 1996; Goodstein & Ponterotto, 1997; Smith & Brookins, 1997). Empirical support is also emerging for ethnic identity as a protective factor against discrimination for minority youth (Cassidy, O'Connor, Howe & Warden, 2004; Noh, Beiser, Kaspar, Hou, & Rummens, 1999; Yoo & Lee, 2008). What has yet to be established is whether this relationship between ethnic/racial identity and self-esteem holds true specifically for international and/or domestic transracial adoptees.

In fact, self-esteem as a measure of psychological adjustment may be particularly important for adopted individuals. In general, self-esteem has been found to be an important component of healthy personality development (Harter, 1999), with low esteem associated with dysfunctional outcomes like depression, externalizing behavior problems and higher risk of psychopathology (Donnellan, Trzesniewski, Robins, Moffitt, & Caspi, 2005). It has also been found that self-esteem is related to secure attachment, with empirical evidence showing that attached children are rated higher on indices of self-esteem (e.g., Booth–Laforce, et al., 2006; Elicker, Englund, & Sroufe, 1992; Verschueren, Marcoen, & Schoefs, 1996). So attached children not only feel supported and protected by their parents, but also feel lovable and worthwhile themselves.

There is wide recognition by researchers, clinicians and practitioners of the unique challenges transracial adoptees face because of the complexity of integrating both adoptive and ethnic/racial identities (Grotevant, 2003; Lee, Grotevant, Hellerstedt, Gunnar, the Minnesota International Adoption Project Team, 2006). As noted in the previous section, all adopted children have the task of integrating being adopted into their sense of self; children of color must also integrate their racial and ethnic identity, and those who are adopted transracially must sort through the meaning of their own racial identity, which is different from their parents.

The awareness of racial/physical differences and adoptive status can begin in children as early as 4-5 years of age (Brodzinsky, Singer, & Braff, 1984; Huh & Reid, 2000). As transracial adoptees grow older, particularly in adolescence, they may experience feelings of loss associated with being adopted (birth culture and biological kin), while at the same time they are developing a growing awareness of racism and discrimination (Lee & Quintana, 2005). As young adults, international adoptees may also find they are considered "outsiders" when they visit their countries of birth and are rejected by those who have immigrated to the U.S. from those countries (Freundlich, 2000). Two additional layers of complexity may be involved in the identity-formation process: what some clinicians have called "double consciousness," the stressful experience in which an individual simultaneously identifies with two cultures but feels

detached from both (Stonequist, 1935); and the "transracial adoption paradox," stated previously, which recognizes the dissonance adoptees experience within their White families and societal perceptions based on their racial status (Lee, 2003).

Finally, the consolidation of personal identity for international adoptees may be complicated by a lack of availability of and access to background information. As a consequence, information about the "mother country" can play a significant role in providing internationally adopted persons a sense of personal history and identity (Freundlich, 2000). Search, then, may be more complicated and have different meanings for international adoptees than for domestic adoptees. For the former, it may be as much an exploration of and interest in learning about native culture and history as a desire to find birth families (Freundlich, 2000; Tieman, et al., 2008).

A prevalent assumption has been that the development of accurate ethnic identification and racial identity is practically automatic when children are raised by parents of the same ethnic group, but will not occur as easily in transracial and transnational adoption (Hollingsworth, 1997). Indeed, emerging empirical evidence suggests differences between transracial adoptees and non-adopted minority youth in the development of racial identity. In their study of 50 Korean transracial adoptees (average age 12 years) and non-adopted Korean children, Lee and Quintana (2005) found similarities in the development of ethnic/racial identity between the two groups, but found non-adopted Korean children progressed through levels of understanding more rapidly than did transracial adoptees.

Non-adopted minority children have been found to progress from an understanding of ethnicity based on physical markers in preschool, to awareness of nonphysical features (such as heritage and cultural characteristics) in elementary school, a social perspective (in which racism and discrimination are particularly critical) in preadolescence, and a racial and ethnic group consciousness in adolescence (Quintana, 1994, 1998). Transracial adoptees reached these milestones at later ages (Lee & Quintana, 2005). Of significance was their finding that this difference was eliminated when levels of cultural exposure were taken into account. Thus, transracial adoptees who had more cultural exposure reached levels of ethnic/racial identity at ages similar to those of non-adopted youth.

A number of studies have documented that the self-esteem of transracial adoptees is positively related to adoptive parents' cultural competence and the extent to which adopted children are positively exposed to their culture of origin (Yoon, 2004; Lee & Quintana, 2005; Lee, et al., 2006; Mohanty, Keoske, & Sales, 2006). For example, Huh and Reid (2000) found that when adoptive parents were actively involved in Korean culture, Korean adoptees developed strong ethnic identities and identified themselves as Korean American (rather than Korean), suggesting an ability to integrate their birth (Korean) and adoptive (American) cultures. In addition, living in a diverse community and having sustained social relationships with people of color have been found to contribute to stronger ethnic/racial identifications for transracial adoptees (McRoy, 1994; McRoy & Zurcher, 1983; Feigelman, 2000; Huh & Reid, 2000; Yoon, 2004). The mere exposure to diverse ethnic groups, regardless of whether they match the racial/ethnic group of the adoptee, has also been suggested to be beneficial by fostering the development of a non-White or minority group identity (Barrow, et al., 2008).

In fact, research in the field of cultural socialization outcome studies is beginning to provide empirical evidence of a relationship between ethnic/racial identity development, parental cultural socialization, and psychological adjustment for transracial adoptees (Lee, 2003). *Cultural socialization* specifically refers to the ways in which parents negotiate the racial, ethnic and cultural experiences within the family, and seek to promote or hinder racial and ethnic identity development in the child (Lee, et al., 2006). In one of the few studies to measure the relationship between ethnic/racial identity and psychological adjustment of transracial adoptees, Yoon (2004) found in his sample of 241 Korean adolescent adoptees that parental support of ethnic socialization was related to a positive sense of ethnic pride, and that ethnic pride was related to subjective well-being. He also found positive feelings about one's ethnic group were related to growing up in a racially diverse community. In a longitudinal study of 145 mothers who had adopted a child from China or Korea, greater cultural socialization (emphasis on ethnic pride, heritage and diversity) was associated with fewer aggressive and delinquent behaviors in their children, who were mostly in their preteens (Johnston, Swim, Saltsman, Deater-Deckard, & Petrill, 2007).

A current longitudinal study suggests that many families have not mastered the challenge of connecting internationally adopted youth to their culture and race. Lee (2009) assessed 248 Korean adolescents and their adoptive parents related to parenting practices that convey messages about race, ethnicity and culture. He compared parent and adolescent responses on cultural socialization/pluralism (teaching about the history of Koreans and other minority groups, celebrating Korean culture, developing relationships with other Asian or Korean children); preparation for bias (educating children about discrimination, stereotypes and racism against Koreans and other groups, discussing how the child's life might be affected by racism) and promotion of mistrust (teaching a child to avoid others who might take advantage of the child due to race). Responses from both parents and youth indicated that behaviors related to cultural socialization and preparation for bias were only rarely to sometimes engaged in, with parents rating their efforts more highly than did their children. Both parents and youth reported more efforts related to cultural socialization than to preparation for bias.

A more recent web-based study of 82 adult transracial adoptees (60 percent from Korea) found that parental engagement in cultural socialization correlated significantly with their children's positive self-esteem, a greater sense of belonging in their adoptive families, and fewer feelings of marginality (Mohanty, et al., 2006). Although they also found ethnic identity to be related to positive self-esteem, their findings suggest that parental support for cultural socialization may not be significant for fostering ethnic identification but, rather, may relate to strengthening attachment to adoptive families. Hence, adopted adults who received support for cultural socialization perceived their parents to be more warm and affectionate, which promoted positive feelings (self-esteem) about themselves. Conversely, these findings indicate that the absence of cultural socialization may contribute to feeling less attached to adoptive families, more confused about who they are and where they belong (marginal), which may lead to low self-esteem and psychological vulnerability. While scholars have expressed concern about how parents can balance acknowledgement of their transracially adopted child's roots while experiencing a sense of belonging and acceptance within their adoptive family and culture, these findings suggest

cultural socialization may be a way to achieve that balance. What is less clear is what is and is not helpful in fostering those connections to a child's birth heritage.

Another internet-based survey of 83 Korean-born adopted adults similarly found that higher cultural socialization to Korean culture predicted stronger ethnic identity, as well as personal growth, and that both higher levels of ethnic identity and adoptive identity (measured by adjustment to adoption) were associated with greater psychological well-being (Basow, Lilley, Bookwala, & McGillicuddy-DeLisi, 2008). This study is one of the few that has looked at both ethnic identity and adoption, and its findings support that self-esteem for transracial adoptees is based on the dual aspects of adoption and race.

Finally, while these studies suggest racial/ethnic identity and cultural socialization can effect adjustment, others suggest that additional factors may influence the psychological adjustment of transracially adopted persons even more, such as parental/family relationships, peer relationships, ego strength or trauma (Baden, 2002). In fact, some scholars caution against purporting a "best" or "better" identity for transracial adoptees, one that does not recognize their unique experiences or acknowledge them as active agents in creating their own identities (Baden, 2002; Lee, 2003). Yet others suggest that the "transracial adoption paradox" is not necessarily a problem for all adoptees and is not something that needs to be resolved or that creates psychological distress (Lee, Yoo & Roberts, 2004).

Developing Racial/Ethnic Identity within Contexts: Young Adulthood

As stated earlier, minimal scholarship to date has examined the development of identity in adopted adults. Recent studies that have looked at young adult adoptees from Korea raised in the United States, however, are offering insights into the salience of race and ethnicity beyond childhood and adolescence; they also are providing a better understanding of the experiences that facilitate exploration of ethnic and racial identity, as well as adoptive identity, outside of the context of adoptive families. These studies suggest that young adulthood may be a crucial life stage in the work of racial and ethnic identity development for transracially adopted individuals (Baden, 2002; Song & Lee, 2009; Shiao & Tuan, 2008; Meier, 1999). Specifically, even more than adolescence, this life stage involves the legal, social and geographic separation from family, and greater personal independence and opportunity for experimentation (Rosenfeld & Kim, 2005). For transracial adoptees, this period may also lead to greater visibility as a racial minority, as well as greater freedom to engage in ethnic activities (Shiao & Tuan, 2008).

Lee, Yoo and Roberts (2004) conducted one of the few studies that have compared adult Korean adoptees to non-adopted Korean American college students in order to examine the extent to which different aspects of ethnic identity contribute to psychological adjustment, as measured by life satisfaction and psychological distress. They utilized a multi-dimensional measure of ethnic identity based on the work of Phinney (1990) that included three aspects: cognitive clarity (clear sense of one's ethnicity), affective pride (pride toward ethnicity) and behavioral engagement (active in ethnic organizations). The researchers found that adopted Koreans had lower ethnic clarity and pride than non-adopted Korean Americans, which was most likely associated with fewer opportunities for cultural socialization. However, they found no difference in terms of ethnic engagement between the two groups, indicating that adult Korean adoptees

are engaged at similar levels in ethnic exploration as non-adopted peers. The study also found ethnic identity engagement correlated strongly with ethnic clarity and pride, demonstrating their interrelated nature. Of particular consequence was the finding that various aspects of ethnic identity contributed to differences in life satisfaction. Ethnic engagement was related to lower life satisfaction, whereas ethnic identity pride was related to higher life satisfaction.

In a second study utilizing the same sample of 67 adult Korean adoptees, Song & Lee (2009) sought to identify the types of cultural activities adopted Koreans reported experiencing – as compared to other literature that has focused predominantly on parental cultural socialization practices – at different developmental ages (childhood, teen, young adult, adult) and whether these cultural experiences were related to ethnic identity development. They identified seven categories of cultural socialization activities:

1) Interpersonal Korean associations (interactions with adopted and non-adopted Asians/Koreans);
2) Organized Korean events (attend Korean adoptee conferences, culture camp);
3) Birth roots (visiting Korea, activities related to interest in and search for birth culture and family);
4) Diverse milieu (exposure and experience to diverse/heterogeneous communities, travel abroad, diverse neighborhood);
5) Support (general forms of emotional support from family, friends, therapy);
6) Cultural encounter (exposure to Korean culture via food, toys, martial arts etc.); and
7) Racial awareness (experiences that shaped awareness and understanding of racial minority status).

Interpersonal Korean associations was the category most frequently cited as being utilized across all development periods, but particularly by young adults and in adulthood. Organized Korean events were the second most frequently cited activity, used mostly in childhood and adulthood. Birth roots was the third most-frequently cited activity, mostly used during adulthood. Although not statistically significant, two patterns in cultural socialization activity over time were of note. The first was an increase in cultural activities related to the categories Birth Roots and Interpersonal Korean Associations as adoptees got older, and the second was a decline in Cultural Encounter. This finding suggests the types of cultural experiences provided by adoptive parents to their young children are primarily related to a literal perspective of ethnicity, such as eating Korean food or practicing Korean martial arts. As adopted individuals develop autonomy and independence during adolescence and adulthood, the opportunities to engage in more self-initiated, deeper-level cultural experiences, such as traveling abroad to South Korea and searching for one's birth family, increase (Song & Lee, 2009).

Song and Lee (2009) also found that ethnic identity development was significantly related to cultural socialization activities experienced during young adulthood. Thus, cultural socialization experienced during the ages of 18 to 21 appears to be most directly related to the development of a positive ethnic identity. Different types of cultural activities were found to have varying levels of impact on ethnic identity. Among the seven different categories of cultural socialization experiences that were identified, living in diverse, heterogeneous communities (*Diverse Milieu*), developing an awareness of what it means to be a racial and ethnic minority and an adopted

individual (*Racial Awareness*), and visiting Korea and searching for one's birth/foster families (*Birth Roots*) were positively correlated with ethnic identity. The negative association between ethnic identity and Cultural Encounter activities suggests that, despite being a developmentally appropriate way of exposing a child to certain aspects of ethnic culture, it may not provide a sense of pride that leads to a positive ethnic identity and sense of self. The connection between Birth Roots and ethnic identity is particularly important and provides support that engagement in search activities (birth culture or family) impacts both ethnic and adoptive identity formation.

Shiao and Tuan's (2008) descriptive study of 58 young adult Korean adoptees (mean age 35) provides further support for the importance of different social environments experienced in young adulthood for facilitating ethnic identity exploration. Of particular significance was their finding that different cohorts of adoptees reported different levels of ethnic exploration. Among older adoptees (born in the 1970s) not exploring ethnic identity was the norm, and the minority who pursued exploration primarily engaged in social exposure activities (joined Asian American organizations, make Asian acquaintances and friendships; engaged in Asian networks). In contrast, ethnic exploration was the norm with the younger adoptees (born in the 1980s), with investigations of cultural heritage (knowledge of foreign "origins" and familiarity with culture/history of Asia) becoming the most prominent way of exploring ethnic identity. Most of the adoptees born in the 1990s were substantially engaged in ethnic exploration and were equally engaged in social exposure and cultural heritage activities.

Across cohorts, Shiao and Tuan (2008) found higher education (college) was the most fertile institutional context for ethnic exploration – that is, being primarily in school rather than in non-school contexts (e.g. working) multiplied the odds of adoptees exploring their ethnicity due to greater availability of opportunities for such activity. Opportunities for ethnic exploration outside of school varied depending on cohort group. For the 1970s and 1980s cohorts, the most frequent non-school context for ethnic exploration was military service in Asia. Employment in an Asian business was absent during the 1970s but, by the 1990s, it had replaced military service as the main non-school source of opportunity. Finally, the type of ethnic exposure – social or cultural heritage – was related to the salience of race or adoption. Thus, when race was salient, adoptees tended to engage in social activities to explore ethnic identity, whereas when adoption was more salient, they tended to engage in cultural heritage exploration.

What We Know About Forming Healthy Identities

Much of the adoption literature has examined individual differences rather than environmental variation in explaining the heterogeneity observed among adopted individuals. For instance, in a number of studies of both domestic and international adoptees, gender (with boys at greater risk for problem behavior), age at placement (older children at increased risk) and developmental age (with more risks in adolescence) have been identified as factors that may increase the chance of poor adjustment (Alstein & Simon, 1991; Benson, et al., 1994; Bimmel, Juffer, van IJzendoorn & Bajersman-Kraenburg, 2003; Cederblad, et al., 1999; Lindblad, et al., 2003; Sharma, McGue, & Benson, 1996a; Verhulst, et al., 1990; Hjern, et al., 2001; Cermak & Daunhauer, 1997; Fisher, Ames, Chisholm, & Savoie, 1997). Not all studies have found these

factors to hold true, however. For instance, in the meta-analysis of adoptees' mental health and behavior problems mentioned earlier, the researchers did not find any significant differences resulting from age at placement or gender, and found fewer total behavior problems in adolescence compared to early and middle childhood (Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2005).

Identity issues have been recognized as affecting outcomes for adopted persons. It is well known that identity development is influenced not only by individual personality, but also by peer and other close associations, school and community, and the larger cultural context and historic period. Encounters in different contexts, particularly when there are mismatches between one's personal sense of self and the environment, have been shown to give rise to conflicted feelings that can provoke identity exploration (Bosma & Kunnen, 2001; Kunnen, 2006; Lichtwarck-Aschoff, van Geert, Bosma, & Kunnen, 2008). Motivation to explore one's ethnic identity is especially known to be influenced by conflicts between societal attitudes or crisis events that overwhelm personal beliefs about social belonging (Phinney, 1989; Cross, 1978; Tatum, 1992). These conflicts in identity (and their resolution) subsequently affect individuals' feelings about themselves, especially self-worth and self-esteem.

Since adoption and race are both "assigned" identities, in the sense that the individual cannot get to choose them like other aspects of identity (such as occupation), adoptees of any race must also navigate the ways society imposes these identities in often-negative, stereotypical ways, sometimes including racism and biases toward families formed biologically. The adjustment of adopted persons, as a result, is associated with two factors: 1) the interactive relationships among biological, environmental and personal variables, and 2) the nature and strength of the adoptees' ability to cope with and cognitively adapt to the realities of their adoption and race (Freundlich, 2001). The following section will briefly review literature that has looked at the influence of various environmental contexts – namely family, community and society – on the adjustment and development of identity in adopted individuals.

Role of Families

Erikson (1959) posits that family is the most significant social and cultural environment influencing a child's psychosocial development and adjustment. In addition, family is the first context in which identity development begins, and it sets the stage for adolescent identity formation. Two-thirds of adult Korean adoptee respondents to the 1999 Gathering survey indicated their parents and families (more broadly) played an important role as a source of comfort in helping them shape their identities while growing up. Thus, like all parents, adoptive mothers and fathers play a crucial role in helping their children develop a coherent sense of self and well-being. A number of studies have looked at different aspects of family dynamics and their influence on adoptees' adjustment and identity, including family characteristics, parental and familial relationships, parental attitudes, family communication and cultural competencies.

Parental Characteristics, Family Structure & Family Function. A review of the literature on adoptee adjustment found a greater likelihood of adjustment difficulties if adoptive parents were older at the time of adoption, if the adoptee was the only child in the family, if parents or extended family did not support the adoption, and if conflicts in general existed within the family (LeVine & Sallee, 1990). The increased likelihood of maladjustment also was

found for adult transracial adoptees who only had siblings who were born to their adoptive parents (Brooks & Barth, 1999). In the 1999 Gathering survey, adopted Korean adults also said having a sibling from Korea was a source of comfort and support. Finally, as mentioned earlier, socioeconomic status of the adoptive family also has been suggested to help mediate adoption stress, provide the financial means to obtain needed services, and send children to college. In their study of young adult Korean adoptee ethnic exploration, Shiao and Tuan (2008) underscored the importance of opportunities for ethnic exploration offered by attending college, as well as the critical nature of healthy (as opposed to dysfunctional) family functioning in providing sufficient personal freedom to explore ethnic identity.

Familial Relationships and Quality of Parenting. The quality of parenting and familial relationships have also been determined to be important factors in the overall psychosocial adjustment of adoptees. For example, Kim (1977) reported a significant link between a supportive family environment (including open, honest and warm communication) and self-esteem among adopted Korean children. Similarly, in a study of international adoptees in Sweden, family function as characterized by emotional support predicted adoptees' positive sense of self (Cederblad, et al., 1999). The quality of parenting, as is the case in all parent-child relationships, has been found to be particularly significant in adopted adolescents' identity formation (McWhinnie, 1969; Rickarby & Egan, 1980; Sabilis & Burch, 1980). Another study found adoptees scored higher on ego identity measures when they had positive relationships with their parents and siblings (Stein & Hoopes, 1985).

Parental Attitudes Toward Difference, Adoption and Race. Parents' attitudes – particularly denial or acceptance of differences – clearly relate to their children's mental health. For example, Benson and colleagues (1994) found that parental acceptance of differences, as perceived by same-race and transracial adoptees, correlated positively with adoptee mental health, while denial or over-insistence of differences correlated negatively with mental health. Unfortunately, the researchers did not define the source of these differences between parents and children (e.g. adoption or race). However, other scholars have proposed that some of the adoption-related psychological issues found in clinical settings may be related to the degree to which adoptees and their families engage in denial about the effects of adoption (Winkler, Brown, van Keppel, & Blanchard, 1988). In addition, the literature suggests that parents' attitudes about adoption, as well as any feelings of inadequacy they may have as parents, also may play a role in their adolescents' identity formation (Blum, 1976; Brodzinsky, et al., 1998).

The ability of adoptive parents to acknowledge differences between themselves and their children appears to be especially critical when considering race. A number of early studies on domestic and international transracial adoption found that most adoptive parents engaged in parenting behaviors that rejected or downplayed racial and ethnic differences (Andjujo, 1988; DeBerry, Scarr, & Weinberg, 1996; McRoy & Zurcher, 1983; Kim, 1978; Trolley, 1995). Many recent studies indicate that a growing number of transracial adoptive parents acknowledge differences and try to promote pride in their children's birth culture and heritage (Carstens & Julia, 2000; Friedlander, Larney, Skau, Hotaling, Cutting, & Schwam, 2000; Rojewski & Rojewski, 2001; Tessler, Gamache, & Liu, 1999; Vonk & Angaran, 2001). Cultural socialization studies examining strategies that transracial adoptive parents use to encourage their children's racial and ethnic identity development indicate that how transracial/transnational families

communicate about racial, ethnic and cultural experiences depends on parental attitudes and beliefs about race and ethnicity (Song & Lee, 2009). In fact, many professionals believe that acknowledgment of a child's racial, cultural and national heritage should be as forthright as acknowledgement of adoption itself. Although many questions remain about the specific ways in which adoptive families may support their children's connections with birth heritage, experts in international adoption appear to agree on the importance of the family's respect for and appreciation of diversity in general, and of their child's birth culture in particular, irrespective of the child's current level of interest in cultural heritage (Freundlich, 2000). There is limited empirical research, however, on the extent to which transracial adoptive parents engage in racial inculcation – or the teaching of coping skills to help children deal effectively with racism and discrimination; thus, parents engaging in the enculturation of their child's birth culture does not predict whether they will talk to the child about racism and discrimination (Lee, 2003).

Family Communication About Adoption. Studies of both birth and adoptive families demonstrate that open communication patterns between parents and youth positively influence child adjustment (Brodzinsky, 2006; Rueter & Koerner, 2008.) In addition, how parents communicate and discuss adoption and race has been found to be particularly significant to the formation of adoptees' adoptive and racial/ethnic identity. The literature indicates that with few exceptions, adopted adolescents tend to be more secure and have a stronger sense of identity when their adoptive families have encouraged open discussion of adoption (Blum, 1976; Schoenberg, 1974; Sorosky, et al., 1984; Stein & Hoopes, 1985). Although some clinicians point out the risks of excessive discussion of adoption, which may not take into account the adoptees' individual feelings and needs (McWinnie, 1969), the greater weight of clinical authority supports the benefits of open communication in relation to adolescents' identity issues (Freundlich, 2001). Two studies also have found that open and honest family communication about adoption was associated with positive outcomes for adopted adults (Kelly, et al., 1998; Levy-Shiff, 2001). Indeed, parents are critical in the initial construction of their children's adoption story, especially when they are young, but also play an important role in addressing more existential questions about the adoption as the child matures (Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004).

In particular, adolescents have been found to struggle with identity issues when their adoptive parents actively criticize their birthparents (Hoopes, 1990). Adoptive parents' negative views of birthparents may communicate a sense of "genetic inferiority" that may contribute to adoptees forming a negative self-image (Rickarby & Egan, 1980). Also, adoptive parents' ability to acknowledge, rather than deny, similarities to birth family appear to facilitate identity development in adoptees (Auth & Zaret, 1986; Hodges, et al., 1984). In fact, adoptive parents' facilitation of contact with birthparents during children's early years and adolescence was associated with higher levels of conversational sharing, adoptee emotional expression, and adoptive identity formation during adolescence and emerging adulthood (Von Korff, 2008). It is noteworthy that adult adoptees often withhold information from their adoptive parents about searching for their birthparents for fear that the former may feel threatened (Gonyo & Watson, 1988; March, 1997; Pacheco & Eme, 1993; Sachdev, 1992).

Family Communication About Race and Cultural Competency. No known empirical studies to date have solely focused on the impact on identity of adoptive parents' communication about their children's racial and ethnic groups – that is, how the narratives

these parents construct about their children's birth cultures and ethnicities influence transracial adoptees' perceptions about those aspects of themselves. But, as mentioned earlier, cultural socialization studies (focused on transracial adoptive parents' behavior) provide evidence that efforts to teach children about their birth cultures (i.e., enculturation) through educational, social and cultural opportunities – instilling ethnic awareness, providing knowledge, pride, and positive ethnic and racial identity – also appear to strengthen feelings of attachment to the adoptive family. In contrast, although less empirically studied, some scholars argue that transracial adoptees exposed to parenting behaviors that reject differences, or intentionally downplay the unique racial and ethnic experiences of their children, are more likely to internalize their parents' cultural worldview ("colorblind" orientation) and identify less strongly with their ethnic cultures (McRoy & Zurcher, 1983; Lee, 2003).

Transracial adoptive families play a significant role in helping their children deal with racism and discrimination, but research suggests White parents are not always certain about how to provide the necessary coping skills. For example, in a longitudinal study of 88 African American transracial adoptees, nearly half of all adoptive parents encouraged biculturalism during childhood but were more likely to deny or de-emphasize race as a factor; they also had ambivalent feelings about cultural socialization when their children reached adolescence, even though that was a time in which the salience of race, particularly awareness of discrimination, was most likely increasing (DeBerry, et al., 1996). These changes in culture-specific parenting corresponded with a decrease in the adoptees' identification with African American culture between childhood and adolescence, but interrelationship between changes in identification and changes in parenting was not known (Lee, 2003).

Early studies suggest that transracial adoptive parents utilize a variety of strategies to deal with racial issues, including downplaying racist comments, making derogatory comments about racists and, in some cases, taking an active role in the community to promote social justice (Lee, 2003). These strategies have been found to differ from those employed by parents of color. For example, a study comparing Mexican-American children who were transracially adopted with a group who were growing up in birth families found that Mexican American parents were more likely to live in Latino communities and to teach their children specific skills for responding to racism; the White parents generally used an educational approach (e.g. books) rather than an experiential, immersion approach (e.g. living in a Latino community) and tended to minimize the significance of racial incidents (Andujo, 1988). A more recent study of adoptive parents of 590 Korean-born children also found parental belief in enculturation did not predict whether they talked to their children about racism and discrimination in school (Lee, 2003).

In other words, belief in the importance of fostering ethnic awareness and pride did not translate into an acknowledgement of the salience of race, thereby obfuscating the need for skills to deal directly with racist or discriminatory incidents. In fact, in the summary of the small group discussions conducted during the 1999 Gathering, many adult Korean adoptees said they wished their parents had viewed the family as multicultural; while others, who reported their families had understood their multicultural nature, said they did not grow up feeling different (Freundlich & Lieberthal, 2000).

Role of Community

Experiences outside of the family – specifically with peers and neighbors, and at schools and work – provide ever-widening contexts for encounters that may stimulate identity exploration. For instance, respondents to the 1999 Gathering survey noted the following sources of comfort in helping to shape their identities: friends (26%); religious, spiritual or church resources (13%); and living in an open-minded and/or supportive community (6%) (Freundlich & Lieberthal, 2000). For adopted children, experiences at school may stimulate thoughts about adoption and adoption-related loss as they become aware of the different ways families are formed. For transracial adoptees, encounters within the community (both positive and negative) may also bring race and ethnic identity to the fore. Thus, research indicates that growing up with access to a diverse community and experiences in school and other contexts outside of the family also impact how adopted individuals think of themselves and, in turn, their sense of well-being.

Diverse Communities. As noted in the previous section, the literature overwhelmingly documents that growing up in a diverse, multicultural environment is beneficial for the development of a positive racial identity for both domestic and international transracial adoptees. For instance, Feigelman's (2000) study found that transracial adoptive parents who lived in predominately White communities tended to have children who experienced more discomfort about their appearance than those who lived in more integrated settings; conversely, transracially adopted children who lived in diverse communities and attended schools with diverse populations were found to have a more positive sense of racial identity (McRoy et al., 1982). Studies also indicate when transracial adoptive parents have Asian friends or colleagues, they are more likely to emphasize ethnic pride, heritage and diversity in their Asian-born children (Huh & Reid, 2000; Johnston, et al., 2007). Transracial adoptees themselves often report the benefits of living in integrated settings in helping shape their ethnic identity.

Far less understood or examined is the effect of growing up with access to diverse family constructs. The composition of the "traditional" American family has drastically changed over the last half century, with the term "family" no longer strictly defined as a married, ethnically similar heterosexual couple raising biological offspring (Wilson, 2004). It can be reasonably speculated that acknowledgement of the diversity within family formations is helping to normalize the experience of entering a family through adoption.

School Environments. The school environment is a major contributor to how all children and adolescents feel about their families, their circumstances and themselves. Often, it is only when they enter school that children become aware of their differences – whether they are coming to terms with being part of an adoptive family, a step family or any other "nontraditional" family (Smith, 2006).[15] For adopted children, issues in school range from dealing with questions related to ethnicity, birthparents, nationality, genealogical background and traditional lesson plans such as drawing "family trees." Furthermore, their interactions with teachers and classmates help to shape their understanding of cultural attitudes about adoption,

[15] School issues affecting adopted children are explored further in an earlier Institute report, "Adoption in the Schools: A Lot to Learn.," available at:: http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/policy/2006_09_adoption_in_the_schools.php

and therefore about themselves. School, particularly in preadolescence and adolescence, is also where social messages about a person's race and ethnicity often come to the fore, especially through negative encounters and teasing. As described above, the majority of transracial adoptees reported experiencing race-based taunting and, although far less frequent, adult Korean adoptees have reported teasing because of their adoption status when they were young (Freundlich & Lieberthal, 2000). Perhaps most importantly, higher education provides the richest environment for ethnic exploration by providing numerous opportunities for social exposure and immersion (Shiao & Tuan, 2008; Meier, 1999). What is far less understood is how experiences in college may also stimulate or coincide with exploration about adoption.

Other Contexts. Shiao and Tuan's (2008) study also indicates that other contexts outside of the family can provide rich environments for the exploration of ethnic identity for transracial adoptees. Of particular note were experiences in the work environment, particularly those that enabled increased interactions with other racial minorities, as well as travel overseas. Indeed, trips to one's birth country and other activities related to biological roots were found to be positively related to ethnic identity among adult Korean adoptees (Song & Lee, 2009). What has not been studied systematically is the effects of "motherland tours," which provide adoptive families the opportunity to return to their children's country of birth and which have proliferated in the past decade. There also have been no empirical studies to date examining the influence of the growing community of adult international adoptees and opportunities for mentorship between adopted adults and adopted youth (McGinnis, 2003; Hubinette, 2005).

Role of Society

Neither adoptive nor racial identity formation can be understood without placing them in the context of societal attitudes toward kinship and social constructions of race. Historically, Western societies have based kinship ties primarily, if not exclusively, on blood relations (Wegar, 1997). For adoptees, the emphasis on a biological basis for family relationships (i.e., biologicalism) automatically creates problems, since their familial ties are grounded in social rather than biological relations (Leon, 2002). As a result, all adoptees must deal with being "different" within their families. This difference, derived from not having genetic links to their parents, is often manifest in physical dissimilarities between the children and their parents, which are most conspicuous in transracial placements but also exist in same-race placements.

There is no known systematic research into the impact of stigmatizing attitudes on adoptees' sense of self (Wegar, 1997), but the few studies that have addressed the issue suggest that young adoptees are particularly vulnerable to feelings of "differentness" or low self-worth because of negative comments about adoption from peers (Rosenberg & Horner, 1991). General societal perceptions about the importance of biology gave rise to the myth of the "bad seed," an enduring characterization of adoptees that surfaces in a variety of contexts, including entertainment programming and criminal psychology (Hartman & Laird, 1990; Waggenspack, 1998).

As discussed earlier, transracial adoptees' experiences of discrimination buttress the suggestion that racial stereotypes and societal racism are continual factors in the lives of individuals of color. In the summary of the small group discussions at the 1999 Gathering, adult Korean adoptees reported that discrimination pervaded all aspects of their lives – from family, to

dating, to school experiences, to self-identity. Additionally, adult Korean adoptees have reported experiences of discrimination and rejection from Koreans in the U.S. and in South Korea. Some adoptees perceived this treatment as due to their not being able to speak the language, while others felt Korean people had difficulty relating to them because they were adopted (Freundlich & Lieberthal, 2000; Meier, 1999). Research on experiences of discrimination therefore must look not only at experiences within the larger society, but also within ethnic communities.

Appendix II: Research Instruments

Adoptive Family Functioning

Family of Origin Scale. The Family-of-Origin Scale (Hovestadt, et al., 1985) is a 40-item instrument designed to assess adults' retrospective perceptions of the "health" (global functioning) of one's family of origin; we utilized a shortened 20-item FOS scale. The FOS is described as reflecting Bowen's (1978) and Framo's (1976) view of psychological health as stemming from family environments that are nurturant and supportive, while simultaneously promoting individual autonomy. This balance of autonomy and intimacy appears to be particularly critical for healthy adolescent functioning (Erickson, 1968). Havestadt, et al. (1985) generated five dimensions of family functioning seen as important for individual adjustment: power structure, family individuation, acceptance of separation and loss, and perception of reality and affect. Sample statements include, "In my family, it was normal to show both positive and negative feelings" and "Differences of opinion in my family were discouraged." The FOS uses a 5-point Likert format and has a range of scores from 40 to 200, with higher scores indicating perceptions of better family health.

Adoptive Parent-Child Relationship Scale. The Adoptive Parent-Child Relationship Scale (Groze, 1996; Groza and Ryan, 2002) is a validated instrument used in several other adoption studies to gauge overall level of parent-child relationship satisfaction, with lower scores representing greater relationship satisfaction. The seven questions in the measure are scaled on a 4-point Likert scale. The first question (get along) ranged from 1 for very well to 4 for very poorly. The second question (time together) was rated from 1 for every day to 4 for once per month/not at all. The third question (communication) was ranked from 1 for excellent to 4 for poor. The fourth question (impact) was rated from 1 for very positive, to 4 for very negative. The remaining three questions all ranged from 1 for yes, very much so, to 4 for no, not at all. It was determined by factor analysis that the seven questions loaded on one factor, explaining 64.65 percent of the variance and all of the questions loading with a minimum factor load of .7 (range .71–.87). The scale has an alpha =.90, and ranged from .74 to 4.00 (μ=1:31, SD =49).

Racial/Ethnic Status & Identity

Multi-Group Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM). The MEIM is a 12-item self-report measure of ethnic identity. The MEIM provides a means of examining the degree of identification with one's ethnic group and is useful with samples that are ethnically diverse or of unknown ethnicity. The measure also permits comparison of correlates of ethnic identity across different samples, such as the relationship of ethnic identity to any number of psychological variables. The MEIM allows the exploration of commonalities across groups, as well as the differences among groups in the development of ethnic identity. The current version of the MEIM comprises two factors: ethnic identity search (items 1, 2, 4, 8 and 10), and affirmation, belonging and commitment (items 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11 and 12). The first factor is conceptualized as a developmental and cognitive component and the second factor is an affective component. The MEIM is scored by summing all items for each subscale and the total scale and deriving the mean by dividing by the number of items on each subscale and the total number of items.

Higher scores indicate stronger ethnic identity. The MEIM has good internal consistency with alphas for subscales above .80 across a wide range of groups and ages.

Cultural Socialization Scale. The Cultural Socialization Scale (Mohanty, Keoske & Sales, 2006) is a 15-item scale utilized to measure the degree to which adoptive parents engaged in cultural socialization practices as identified by adoptees. The measure utilizes a 4-step metric for responses varying from 1 (not at all true) to 4 (very much true). The responses are summed across all 15 items to form a composite score ranging from 14 to 56 and averaged with higher scores indicating high cultural socialization of adoptees. Sample items are: "My parents provided opportunities for me to learn values and traditions of my birth culture" and "My parents provided opportunities for me to feel pride in my racial heritage." Vonk (2004) reported an internal reliability of .91 for this scale. In this study, Cronbach's alpha was .90.

Current Life Status

Satisfaction with Life Scale. The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985), a measure of global life satisfaction, consists of five statements concerning the quality of life (e.g., "In most ways my life is close to my ideal."). Respondents use a 7-point scale (*strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*) to indicate their level of agreement with each item. Ratings are summed to yield an overall life satisfaction score, ranging from 5 to 35; higher scores indicate higher satisfaction. Diener et al. (1985) reported a coefficient alpha of .87 and a two-month test-retest correlation of .82, as well as moderately strong correlations with well-being measures. Cronback's alpha for our sample was .92.

Emotional/Psychological Well-Being

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1979) is a general measure of self-esteem. Using a 4-point scale (*strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*), respondents indicate their level of agreement with 10 statements (e.g. *On the whole, I am satisfied with myself; At times I think I am no good at all*). Total scores can range from 10 to 40, with higher scores indicating higher self-esteem. Rosenberg summarized a number of supportive psychometric studies, reporting test-retest reliability coefficients of .85 and .88, expected relationships with measures of depression, anxiety and peer-group reputation, as well as other measures of self-esteem. Cronbach's alpha for our sample was .90.