

Chris's Group Overview

The issue of race within the adoptee community is a very important issue. However, in many ways it is unconventional to the standard way of thinking about race that the majority of Americans understand. Multiraciality is an issue that most adoptees do not even think about, let alone understand and comprehend. From our interviews, it seemed that the monoracial adoptees didn't even know about multiracial people within the adoptee community. Even some of the multiracial adoptees spoke of how their experiences as transracial adoptees were much more significant than their experiences as multiracial persons. It seems that the issue of race within the adoptee community is constructed around the issue of transracial versus non-transracial adoptee experiences. Whereas the issue of race within the larger American society is constructed around one's phenotype and ignorant, misconstrued links to biologically based culture, for adoptees the issue of race revolves around if you are of a different race than your parents (presumably white parents) and how the process of white socialization affects one's sense of identity.

Tashiro's concept of ascribed racial identity is a critical element for transracial adoptees. The outside world views them according to what box they fit into based on how they look. They are assumed to be Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, etc., yet they culturally are not. Based on their family experiences and socialization process, they are in many ways "white." In the words of my multiracial adoptee interviewee, "I was white during the week and Japanese on the weekends." It seems that rather than drawing boundaries using criteria based on racial purity, cultural knowledge, or historical awareness, adoptees seem to base "in-group" status based on one's experiences with ascribed racial identity, experiences in a transracial family setting, and the experience of adoption in general.

The one issue that may supercede all the others is identity, specifically how to define one's identity, how to reconcile one's conflicting identities, how to decide what is a healthy identity. Within the adoptee community, this is a crucial issue for both monoracial and multiracial adoptees. As Barbara Ballis Lal asserts in "Learning to Do Ethnic Identity," many people want to determine identity based solely on a supposed biologically linked ethnic culture, and that transracial adoption adversely affects children based on this supposition. From the interviews, it seems that many adoptees adhere to this "identity essentialism" theory. The reason why they have psychological difficulties is that they cannot reconcile the ethnic heritage of their birth and the current "white" identity they have developed because of their upbringing. Indeed, the adoptee who was most comfortable with his identity and had very little identity issues happened to be a Korean adoptee who was adopted by a Korean American mother. Based

on our small sample size, it appears that adoptees who have a direct link to the culture of their ethnic heritage via a parent are the most well off in terms of identity issues.

On the other hand, the multiracial experience confounds this process. The multiracial Japanese/Caucasian American woman whose adoptive parents were both Japanese Americans still had the same issues with identity that the majority of transracial adoptees face. This was despite the fact that, in her words, she was “3/4 Japanese.” Although she had a direct link with her ethnic heritage through her entire family, she was still only “half” Japanese. It is, however, very interesting to note that this woman viewed herself as very Asian but was not accepted into the Asian community because of her looks, and not because of her cultural knowledge and attachment. For most of the other adoptees in our study, rejection from their “non-white” racial/ethnic communities was based not on their looks, but on the lack of cultural knowledge.

The power of multiracialness within the adoptee community can be clearly seen in the case of the black/white multiracial transracial adoptee who was able to be adopted because of his biracial phenotype. Based on his lighter skin tone, he was seen as more desirable for potential adoptive families. It is important, however, to note that this is not a positive thing. The systemic nature of racism and colorism in this case illuminates the racial dynamics of the larger society. Within the adoptee community, it appears that being multiracial confounds the already difficult issues of transracial adoption. Although most adoptees would say that multiracialness is less important than the experience of transracial adoption, it is quite evident that being multiracial in the adoptee community presents its own unique challenges and issues.