

“WHO CAN I BE THE BEST PARENT TO?”
AN ANALYSIS OF US RACE RELATIONS THROUGH THE LENS
OF INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION

by
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ABSTRACT

This research is a contemporary study of race relations in the United States (U.S.). The presence of international interracial adoptions reveals white Americans openness to crossing racial boundaries when forming their families through adoption. Since the inception of international adoption, prospective parents have primarily adopted from the regions of Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America. However, the international adoption market is changing. As prominent programs slowly shutdown (such as China and Korea since the mid-2000s) or newly emerge (such as Ethiopia during the mid-2000s), it is important to examine the myriad of issues that confront white American parents wishing to adopt children from a multi-racial, international pool of adoptees. Given that this process potentially involves confronting racial-ethnic differences, the realities of immigration, the assimilation process, and the challenges of upward mobility, this study situated the parents' process within discussions of each of these issues. Intensive interviews and participant observations were conducted among 25 participants, 4 adoption agency staff members and 21 married adoptive parent couples who resided in the Mid-Atlantic Region. The study reveals that the adoptive parents' adoption plans and the adopted children's upbringing are influenced by the originization process. "Originization" is the process in which parents socially characterize an adopted child based on the child's country of origin and foster the child's acquisition of the cultural traits of the origin country. The originization process leads to the racial stratification of international adoptees, thus highlighting the transformation of the U.S. racial hierarchy from a binary white/nonwhite hierarchy to the white/honorary white/collective black three-tier system.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This research is a contemporary study of race relations in the United States. Specifically, it examines the myriad of issues that confront white American parents wishing to adopt children from a multi-racial, international pool of adoptees. Given that this process potentially involves confronting racial-ethnic differences, the realities of immigration, the assimilation process, and the challenges of upward mobility, this study must situate the parents' process within discussions of each of these issues. Further, these adoption processes may reveal much about how American society may be experiencing a transformation of its racial hierarchy.

In this study, race is defined as a social construct that categorizes groups of people based upon what are perceived to be unique phenotypical characteristics. Racial hierarchy refers to the systemic classification and ranking of groups of people based upon their racial backgrounds. Ethnicity is defined as the sharing of cultural traits (e.g. language, religion, and political ideology) and history among a group of people. As this study sheds light on race relations and the transformation of the U.S. racial hierarchy, it is important to note the racial and ethnic distinctions addressed throughout the research. The term black refers to all persons of the African descent including native-born and foreign-born persons. However, the term African American, speaks to the experiences of blacks born in the U.S. who share the collective history of being descendants of slaves. The term, white, refers to all persons of European descent who

now reside in the United States, includes native-born and foreign persons. ¹Asian is referred to as a heterogeneous group of people whose ancestry can be traced back to the continent of Asia and the Southeast Asian region, includes native-born and foreign-born persons. The term, Latino, is identified by the U.S. Census Bureau as an ethnicity; however, for the purpose of this research Latino refers to the respondents' laymen usage of the term as a racial group and includes the regions of Central and South America. Therefore, when addressing co-ethnic experiences this research refers to a group of people who share a similar ethnic (albeit often national) background.

Overview of Social Significance – International Adoption

Adoption is one of many modern-day modes of family formation. Unlike alternative forms of family formation, such as remarriage (step-parenthood), in vitro fertilization, surrogacy, or donor insemination, adoption is the only form of “surrogate parenthood” in which there exists an absence of a biological connection between parents and children (Michael & Heather Humphrey 1988). Further, no longer is family defined as “traditional nuclear,” where kinship is based solely upon a biological connection between parent and child (Michael & Heather Humphrey 1988) and on shared national and ethnic origins. International adoption is multidimensional, in that it proceeds from the preferences of the prospective parents, the approval of the domestic adoption agents and regulatory agencies, and the policies of the foreign nations.

¹ The study consists of European and Canadian immigrants who have gained U.S. citizenship.

The preferences that parents hold for which child they wish to adopt are shaped, among other things, by current racial norms (positive or negative) that govern social relations. The most common group of parents to consider such adoptions are racially white, and this has been true since formal adoptions were institutionalized during the early 20th century. Further, from the 1930's to the 1960's adoptions were governed largely by the rule of racial matching (Melosh 2002, p. 54). However, for white Americans interested in the domestic adoption of healthy white infants, such an option has been decreasing since the 1970's. As a result, white Americans are demonstrating a relaxation in the crossing of racial boundaries to become parents. Adoption now encompasses the international market with its roots stretching back to the 1940's; however, *interracial* international adoptions began to gain popularity during the 1950's as an aftermath of the Korean War (Weil 1984; Selman 2009).

International adoption is now viewed as a viable option for Americans wishing to start or complete their family, prospective parents are exposed to an array of race and ethnic backgrounds from which to adopt. Historically the racial composition of prospective adoptees has been predominantly non-black as children of Eastern European and Asian descent dominated the international adoption arena. For instance, Eastern European and Asian countries have dominated the ranking of the top 20 sending countries to the United States for approximately the last two decades (Quiroz 2007; Selman 2009; Selman 2006; U.S. Department of State 2015^{2b}). Among Eastern

² Information retrieved from the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs is based on the government fiscal year. The fiscal year starts on October 1 and ends on September 30.

European countries, Russia accounted for a third of the adoptions; and among Asian countries, China and Korea accounted for two-thirds of the adoptions between the years of 1990 to 2005 (Quiroz 2008). In addition, Latin American countries have also contributed a significant number of adoptees. The 2004 peak in international adoptions yielded a total of 22,991 children. Those receiving orphan visas to the U.S. were primarily from the countries of China, Russia, and Guatemala (Selman 2009). The DMOZ, a directory of adoption agencies located in the U.S., revealed that of the top 20 international adoption programs offered in the U.S., from 1990-2005 China and Guatemala represented the most popular programs, followed by Russia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan (Quiroz 2008). Until recently, the presence of children of African descent in the international adoption market was very limited. Prior to 1995 international African adoptions were non-existent; in 1995 the Department of Justice Immigration and Naturalization Service recorded only 89 African adoptions (Davis 2011, p. 793). However, for the first time in the history of international adoptions within the United States, three of the top five sending countries were representative of African and Caribbean nations for 2013 (U.S. Department of State 2014)!³ What does such data suggest in reference to the couples being open to the adoption of nonwhite children, more specifically black children?

Americans who take part in international interracial adoptions are no doubt aware of a number of important changes that have occurred over time in regards to

³ For Fiscal Year 2013 the top five sending countries to the United States were China, Ethiopia, Ukraine, Haiti, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (respectively).

how society judges children from certain countries, such as their ability to become productive American citizens, and whether white Americans are capable of parenting such children and leading them to productive citizenship. Children of African descent have been at the center of such concerns. The immigrant populations of African and Caribbean blacks are both new and small. For instance, African immigrants began arriving in the U.S. around the 1980's and their percentages continue to remain low (Migration Policy Institute 2015a). Due to their less noticeable presence, Americans rarely make ethnic distinctions regarding blacks residing in America. In those regions of the country where Caribbean or African blacks have a strong presence, these immigrants go through great lengths to distinguish themselves from African Americans and other Americans have grown to acknowledge those differences. For instance, Waters (1999) finds that among immigrants from the West Indies and Haiti, ethnic distinctions are upheld in order for the West Indians and Haitians to benefit from the positive stereotypes associated with non-African American blacks, such as they are hard workers versus the negative stereotypes associated with their "lazy" African American counterparts. Otherwise, in regions of the country where black immigrant populations are small or non-existent, the negative racial connotations attached to African Americans encompass all blacks. Therefore, the same racial attitudes that pertain to blacks in America ultimately impact Americans' attitudes towards foreign blacks and thereby society's judgment of white Americans' ability to successfully parent African or Caribbean children.

Roby and Shaw (2006) reveal that the adoption of African children was remaining low due to potential concerns raised and shared by persons from the sending and receiving countries. The international adoption of African children was found problematic for some advocates from the African adoption community because they feared that the lingering effects of American slavery will ultimately affect the experience of African children; in particular they were concerned with the state of race relations between blacks and whites in America (Roby & Shaw 2006). There were also concerns of Americans abusing the system and adopting the children only to disguise the presence of modern-day slavery or child trafficking (Roby & Shaw 2006). While Americans, were concerned with African children's overall well-being and healthy identity development if raised by a white family (Roby & Shaw 2006); we can also assume that similar concerns exist in regards to predominately black nations of the Caribbean.

Although these concerns probably continue to exist to a certain extent both among Americans interested in adoption and among Africans curious of international adoptions, the number of African children sent to the United States has slowly but steadily increased since 1995 (Davis 2011). Ethiopia, the most popular sending country among the African nations, experienced an increase in the number of children adopted by Americans between 2003 and 2010 (Selman 2012). In 2003, 135 Ethiopian children were sent to live with their new families in the United States; by 2010, the number had increased to 2513 (Selman 2012). Since 2010 the number of children adopted from Ethiopia has declined. In 2011, Ethiopia attended to their administrative needs and

significantly decreased the number of adoption referrals in order to make their workloads more manageable, yet in 2013, 993 children were adopted by Americans (Selman 2012; U.S. Department of State 2014). When taking into consideration trends of international adoption in reference to Africa in its entirety, the number of African countries present in the market has also increased, this change can be traced back as far as 1999 (U.S. Department of State 2015b). In 1999 international adoptions only took place in 15 African nations, African adoptions accounted for approximately 0.9⁴ percent of international adoptions occurring in the U.S. (U.S. Department of State 2015b). In 2011, international adoptions took place in 33 African countries, African children accounted for approximately 27.4 percent of the international adoptions occurring in the U.S. (U.S. Department of State 2015b). In 2013, international adoptions continued to take place in 23 African countries and African children accounted for 29.6 percent of international adoptions occurring in the U.S. (U.S. Department of State 2014). The percent change of 28.7 between 1999 and 2013 suggests an optimistic future regarding the adoption of black children by Americans. Including the percentage of international adoptions occurring between the U.S. and different Caribbean nations, leads to the adoption of black children representing 36.7 % of all international adoptions occurring in 2013 (U.S. Department of State 2014).

Based on the historical trends of international adoption, I argue that white Americans are more comfortable with the adoption of lighter complexion children

⁴ All figures referring to the percentage of African and Caribbean international adoptions were calculated based upon data made available through the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs. The percentages account for international adoptions that occurred during the U.S. government fiscal year.

whose countries of origin usually include Eastern European, Asian, or Latin American countries. But the current trends reveal a metamorphosis of the international adoption market's racial composition. As it becomes more difficult to adopt children from the more popular regions – as evidenced by the decline in international adoptions from Asian countries since 2005 and Latin American and Eastern European countries since 2004 (Davis 2011) – it is important to understand how white Americans come to terms with who they can successfully parent especially as the market for black foreign adoptions continues to grow and become more accessible than the market for foreign Asian, Eastern European or Latin American adoptions.

Research Objective

The main objective of this research is to examine whether white Americans' interpretation of the U.S. racial hierarchy and thereby U.S. race relations influences their adoption plan. Such interpretations of U.S. race relations take into consideration the parents' ability to rear a non-white immigrant child in the United States' racially-charged social atmosphere. The research first asks: As parents enter into the international interracial adoption process, how successful did they expect to be as parents in socializing, assimilating, and making upwardly mobile the child they adopted, particularly if a child was nonwhite? How did their perceived ability to successfully parent a child adopted from abroad originally influence their adoption plans? Does the answer differ in accordance to a child's racial-ethnic background? Because the United States is a nation of immigrants, it is imperative to evaluate the transformation of U.S.

race relations by also taking into consideration the role of immigration towards influencing a transformation. More specifically, how the success or failure of an immigrant group's assimilation into mainstream society came to influence society's overall cultural and racial judgment of an immigrant group and thus influence adoptive families' expectations of their abilities to be successful adoptive parents to non-white children. The research then asks: What shaped the parents' expectations? How influential was the past experience of immigrant success into mainstream society? How influential was historical thinking about racial types (e.g. intellectual ability, attitudinal and behavioral stereotypes)?

To achieve this objective, this study reveals white adoptive parents' understanding of U.S. race relations and how this understanding influenced their plans for adoption. It also reveals how parents implemented such plans and handled the problems that interracial families encounter specifically as a result of the international adoption of non-white children.

Answering the above questions was the task of this dissertation. Doing so involved the collection and synthesis of primary data and the integration of the existing race theories. Theoretical concepts were borrowed from three bodies of literature: racial hierarchy theory, contemporary assimilation theory, and ethnic socialization theory.

Chapter Outline

This dissertation includes three chapters that examine how race relations influence the parents' plans for adoption and how their interpretation of race relations influences how they raise their adopted children. The overall research focuses on the experiences of white adoptive parents whose children are of Asian descent. However, when insightful this research also shares the experiences of the sole couple whose children are from Russia. My analyses of the parents' adoption plans and rearing practices (the incorporation or rejection of ethnic and/or racial socialization) may reflect a change in the United States racial hierarchy thus shedding new light on the growing body of sociological literature pertaining to adoption. The dissertation chapters are outlined below.

- I. Chapter 1: Introduction
- II. Chapter 2: Theory and Methods
- III. Chapter 3: Coming to Terms with an International Interracial Adoption
- IV. Chapter 4: Originization and the Creation of the Adoption Plan
- V. Chapter 5: Embracing the Immigrant Experience vs. Camouflaging the Immigrant Experience – The relevance of ethnic and racial socialization
- VI. Chapter 6: Conclusion – International Adoption, Implication for Change in U.S. Racial Hierarchy

In chapter two, I introduce the theories and methods used to guide the research. I present how the applications of three bodies of literatures – racial hierarchy theories, assimilation theories, and ethnic/racial socialization theories – together better form an understanding regarding the parents' perception of race relations and the U.S. racial hierarchy. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the research design.

Chapter three explores the process from which the parents released the desire of “having” a child, more specifically the act of birthing a child, to placing their attention on the desire of “parenting” a child. It reveals why the couples turned to international adoption as a way to form their families rather than domestic adoption; in particular, it reveals the parents’ perceived shortfalls of the U.S. domestic adoption system and the strengths of international adoption system.

Chapter four explores how elements of the originization process informed the adoption plans of the different families. The reputation of the adoption programs, race of the prospective child, ethnicity of the prospective child, and the origin country’s culture all exist as factors that helped the couples determined who they believed they were best equipped to parent and thus adopt. In addition, the assimilation experiences of an international adoptee’s co-ethnic immigrant group further influences the couples’ plans for adoption. This chapter provides profound insight regarding why the parents felt capable of raising a foreign-born Asian adoptee but less capable of raising a foreign-born black adoptee. More specifically, the parents’ evaluation of the aforementioned elements reveals that children of Asian descent are allotted a status of honorary white.

Chapter five discusses the role of the originization process towards influencing a child’s upbringing. In particular, it looks at the significance that parents placed on the need for ethnic socialization and/or racial socialization being incorporated as part of an Asian adopted child’s upbringing. The chapter reveals that the extent to which adoptive parents incorporate ethnic and/or racial socialization into an Asian adoptee’s upbringing

varies based upon the adoptive parents' perceptions of the importance of the child having an ethnic identity (persistent with their origin culture) and the importance of a child having the skills to combat racism (due to their nonwhite racial background).

In the concluding chapter I readdress how the United States progressions towards a three-tier racial hierarchy impacts the parents' perceptions of who they feel they can successfully parent and how they choose to parent. Moreover, this chapter addresses how the underlying ramification of cultural racism influences the creation of the couples' adoption plans and thus the racial stratification of international adoptees. Although the adoptive parents are unaware of the racial practices that take place when adopting, many (though not all) of the these families still have hope that over time international adoption will help transform the state of race relations in the U.S. by blurring the concept of race and eradicating racial stereotypes. This chapter ends with a discussion of implications for future research.

CHAPTER 2: THEORY, APPLICATION OF THEORIES, AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Discussion - American Racial Hierarchies and Race Relations

White/Non-white Divide. The United States is a nation whose foundation is built upon the labor of immigrants (whether they came to this country voluntarily or involuntarily) with the exception of Native Americans. Scholars of race theory have been highly contemplative of the ever-changing nature of society's racial order, which is predominantly influenced by the influx of immigrants. Racial hierarchy theory has sought to predict how the incorporation of immigrant groups into the majority or minority groups (dominant or subordinate groups) of U.S. society reflects a change in U.S. race relations.

In the United States, white Americans occupy a position of dominance. Cornell and Hartmann acknowledge that "...in much of the world's recent history, Whites have been more likely than others to have the power to make racial assignments, to organize social life in racial terms, and to define and value the categories as they see fit" (1998, p. 29). The hierarchal ranking of the racial categories and thus a group's designation in the ranking order influences how race relations occur (Martinot 2003). Historically, racial boundaries between white and nonwhite racial groups have been sustained through conquest of land, enslavement, and legal subjection to oppression. Currently these boundaries are sustained through covert discrimination. Although the U.S. racial order is one that maintains racial boundaries between whites and nonwhites the legacy of slavery has led to the U.S. racial order being "fundamentally anchored on the black-

white experiences” (Bonilla-Silva 2004, p. 931). Therefore, an analysis of the U.S. racial hierarchy, in reference to the experiences of immigrant groups, often evaluates how the definition of whiteness has been adapted for the inclusion or exclusion of immigrant groups, thus positioning an immigrant group with the majority or minority group. The definition of whiteness, i.e. who is accepted as white, is contingent upon the use of blacks as a comparison group in which the concept of whiteness is measured (Warren & Twine 1997, p. 207).

Historically, the experiences of Europeans and non-European immigrants differ. Distinctions were once drawn between white Americans of Northern or Western European descent and those migrating from Eastern or Southern Europe based upon phenotypical, cultural, and religious differences (Yancey 2003). Such immigrants were once treated as racial minorities obtaining a status almost equivalent to that of black Americans. As the majority group came to recognize the threat of becoming a numerical minority, they welcomed the inclusion of these European immigrants within their domain. Simultaneously, European immigrant groups recognized the privileges that were gained by being incorporated into the majority group, such as the elimination of racism and discrimination that was associated with racial minorities, in particular blacks (Yancey 2003). Overtime the marital, structural, and cultural assimilation of Eastern and Southern European immigrants deemphasized their phenotypical and ethnic differences from native white Americans and members of the dominant group racially identified these European immigrants as white with minimal distinctions being drawn between Eastern and Southern European immigrants and white American natives

(Yancey 2003). Their assimilation into the dominant culture was supported by their willingness to isolate themselves from blacks, as blacks were and continue to be designated as the “other”, thereby providing a model in which non-blacks learn to condemn (Warren & Twine 1997; Yancey 2003). On the contrary, non-European immigrants (e.g. Mexican, Chinese, and Japanese immigrants) whose presence in the U.S. can be traced to the late 19th century/ early 20th century, found themselves experiencing social realities similar to blacks that were much more difficult to escape. It was not legally or socially acceptable for Asians or Latinos to define themselves as white and throughout U.S. history they have been exposed to racism and discrimination (Lee & Bean 2007).

However, the success of European immigrant groups suggests that overtime other immigrant groups could also lose their status as a minority and be incorporated into the dominant group. A transformation of the U.S. racial hierarchy will involve the definition of whiteness compromising for the phenotypical and cultural differences displayed by contemporary immigrants who are primarily composed of Asian or Latino descent and such groups’ willingness to emulate the status quo which, for instance, will be achieved through interracial marriages, residential integration, and the adoption of white racial attitudes. Such a transformation would support white prospective adoptive parents’ belief that the adoption of a non-white child should not be problematic because the racial norms created to police the formation of families would become more relaxed in regards to whites successfully rearing non-white children who are not of black descent.

As we proceed through the 21st century, there are growing debates that the U.S. racial hierarchy will change as America anticipates a shift in the numerical majority (a group whose power is maintained by its large number of members) that will soon be composed of non-whites. A change in the racial hierarchy will occur as the dominant group addresses the issue of becoming a numerical minority by incorporating non-black immigrants into the majority group. This will allow white Americans to maintain the social privileges associated with the majority group as they build an alliance with non-black immigrants and remain in a position of social dominance. Depending on which non-black groups are incorporated into the majority group, the racial hierarchy will either remain binary representing a black/non-black divide or a new hierarchy will emerge as a three-tier system consisting of whites/honorary whites/collective blacks. Though different hierarchies have been predicted, the scholars agree that blacks will continue to occupy the lowest tier regardless of how the emerging 21st century racial hierarchy is structured (Gans 1999; Alba & Nee 2003; Yancey 2003; Bonilla-Silva 2004; Lee & Bean 2007). The following paragraphs address theories regarding the emergence of a tri-racial hierarchy and the alternate black/non-black hierarchy.

Three-Tier System. Bonilla-Silva posits that a system of stratification will pursue in which whites continue to occupy the highest tier, a selective group of high status racial minorities will come to occupy an intermediary tier labeled “honorary whites,” and blacks along with other poorer status non-white racial minorities will occupy the lowest tier referred to as the collective black. The emergence of an intermediary tier is supported by the transformation of the United States’ sociopolitical atmosphere

following the Civil Rights Movements, which includes the influx of non-white immigrants settling in the United States. These changes have led to members of the dominant group coping with the reality of losing their position of power to a newfound numerical majority that will consist of non-white Americans; the shift in numerical majority is projected to occur by the year 2050 (Bonilla-Silva 2002). The white majority will support the development of an intermediary tier that consists of high status racial minorities because “honorary whites” will serve as the buffer for racial conflict, particularly between whites and members of the collective blacks (Bonilla-Silva 2004).

The intermediary tier will consist of primarily Asians and Latinos who are phenotypical distinct and often culturally different from white Americans but have acquired high social status based on their higher educational attainment and occupational prestige. The white majority will more socially accept honorary whites than members of the collective black. The third tier will consist of blacks (all persons of African descent, including multiracial persons with African descent). In addition, the collective black will consist of Asians and Latinos who, according to U.S. racial standards, were originally considered racially distinct from blacks but their darker complexion (in comparison to others in their *traditional* racial group) and low economic standing will lead to their allocation into the collective black. For example, in the United States both Chinese and Cambodian Americans are categorized as Asian however, the greater economic success that Chinese Americans have will lead to them being classified as honorary whites while Cambodian Americans will be classified with the collective blacks.

Since Bonilla-Silva first posed the tri-racial hierarchy theory in the early 2000s, scholars interested in international adoption have presented research supporting the emergence of a three-tier system. For instance, Quiroz (2008) finds that children who would be classified as white or honorary white (as defined by Bonilla-Silva's typology) are featured among the most popular international adoption programs available in the U.S. and the most popular sending countries, even if one takes into consideration the restrictiveness of the foreign nations' policies. For example, the eligibility requirements for the 'popular' programs are equivocal to, if not more restricted than, the policies governing the less popular international adoption programs that often represent collective black countries (Quiroz 2008). Shiao, Tuan, and Rienzi (2004) find that the adoptive parents of Korean children who embraced a colorblind ideology rather than acknowledge parent-child racial differences create honorary positions for Korean adoptees by holding their children accountable to social standards, that they, the adoptive parents, also follow (Shiao et al. 2004). For example, a Korean woman revealed her mother's disapproval of "interracial dating;" it was only acceptable for her to date white men; romantic relationships with Asian men were also deemed unacceptable (Shiao et al. 2004, p.9). Shiao et al. (2004) address how the white adoptive parents' embracement of a colorblind ideology and thus the practice of imposing what they deem as appropriate social standards onto their adopted children leads to the restructuring of their children's racial positions as honorary whites:

In practice though, the colorblind approach did not eliminate race as much as it re-cast their Asian children as honorary Whites. By normalizing Whiteness,

parents essentially socialized their children to be White and to see the world from a White, rather than colorblind, perspective. Parents saw themselves as raising their children to be “normal,” with little awareness that their definition of normal was White centered. Thus, far from being colorblind, many White parents, consciously or not, worked to include their own children in the White category (p. 9).

Although these studies offer insight regarding changes of the U.S. racial order, it is very difficult to discern if these changes are indeed reflective of a three-tier system or a reformed two-tier system. These scholars do not address the difficulty of determining the extent to which adoptive parents’ preferences for international adoption address differences in regards to ethnicity and race of a child, which are important distinctions to be made if one wishes to present empirical evidence that further supports the emergence of a three-tier system. Theorizing about the formation of a tri-racial order presents challenges for an analysis of international interracial adoptions. However, this challenge presents the opportunity to advance the discussion through empirical research.

Black/Non-black Divide. Theories addressing the emergence of a black/nonblack divide suggest that as the United States becomes composed of more Asian and Latino immigrants, racial boundaries between whites, Asians, and Latinos will collapse and the new racial hierarchy will consist of a dominant group that will encompass Asians and Latinos in addition to whites (Gans 1999; Yancey 2003). The white majority will seek the

incorporation of Asians and Latinos in order to find new allies and maintain political power by preventing the formation of a numerical non-white majority (Gans 1999). In particular, white Americans will seek the incorporation of Asians and Latinos into the dominant group because of the continuing significance of the definition of whiteness that explicitly excludes blacks from being incorporated into the dominant group. In order for Asians and Latinos to gain entrance into the dominant group, they must adopt the attitudes of white Americans, acculturate and assimilate into mainstream American society; and, for Asians it is particularly important that the phenotypical distinctions between themselves and white Americans diminish.

According to Yancey, Latinos will be recognized as majority members and acquire a white racial identity much sooner than Asians; the transformation will occur over the next few decades possibly by the year 2050 (2003, p.129). First, Latinos are at an advantage versus Asians because of the racial resemblance many hold with white Americans due to their European ancestry. Second, although Latinos currently represent the largest minority group in the United States, the U.S. is experiencing a decline in the percentage of foreign-born Latinos (Yancey 2003). The growing percentage of second generation or later Latino immigrants will lead to more Latinos assimilating and acculturating to mainstream society as they lose exposure to cultural attributes particular to their native societies in comparison to first generation immigrants who have a profound recollection of such attributes (Yancey 2003). As the number of native-born Latinos increases, white Americans will be much more likely to interact with assimilated and acculturated Latinos who have adopted attitudes similar to

whites. Therefore, white Americans will be more socially accepting of Latinos and more willing to incorporate them into the dominant group (Yancey 2003). However, this will not hold true for Latinos who display strong indigenous or African physical features.

On the contrary, the economic success that Asians have experienced will sustain their high degree of social acceptance by white Americans. White Americans will view Asians as adhering to the values, norms, and practices representative of the dominant culture as suggested by the model minority stereotype popular in the U.S.; yet the physical differences between Asians and white Americans will continue to pose a challenge for their incorporation into the dominant group. Yancey (2003) proposes that as we witness an increase in interracial relationships between Asians and white Americans, a decrease in physical distinctiveness will occur from the offspring of such unions and thus overtime Asians will be seen as physically white and eventually incorporated into the dominant group. Unlike Latinos, acceptance into the dominant group will be a slower process. It will take possibly two to three generations before Asians are recognized as members of the dominant group. However, the challenges faced by Asians and Latinos assert that the incorporation of these racial groups into the dominant group will not be immediate, but can occur which is similar to the experiences of European immigrants of the late 19th and 20th century.

Kubo (2010) finds that family formation via international adoption among white adoptive parents is a reflection of the United States' shift towards a black/nonblack racial order, white adoptive parents who support and have confidence in existing as

multiracial families through interracial adoptions, are more comfortable with the adoption of Asian children and are uncomfortable with the adoption of black children. Their decisions are influenced by existing racial stereotypes upheld by the U.S. racial hierarchy. As stated by Kubo:

They often acknowledge the racial hierarchy through internalizing existing racial stereotypes of different minority groups – reinforcing the model minority of Asian Americans and expressing condescension toward poor blacks. It became evident that white parents feel Asian children are more assimilable to mainstream white culture than black children, and the choice becomes more about whether to adopt black versus nonblacks (2010, p. 267).

The shift towards a black/nonblack racial hierarchy is further supported by the current patterns of international adoption which reveal that “despite recent high profile adoptions by pop culture luminaries like Madonna, adoptees from Africa aren’t viewed in the same light as light-skin Asians or Latinos” (Tessler, Tuan & Shiao 2011, p.38).

The black/nonblack and the three-tier racial hierarchy theories are built upon the foundation of white/nonwhite racial hierarchy theory. Therefore, intellectual critiques regarding the new perspectives for the racial hierarchy theory focus on the “newness” and “uniqueness” of the black/nonblack racial hierarchy and the three-tier racial hierarchy arguments. Bennett (2011) critiques racial hierarchy theories derived from the “whiteness literature” and finds an absence of clear distinctions being drawn between the two-tier versus three-tier arguments. In particular, Bennett (2011) raises

the question as to whether the three-tier perspective is actually a modification of the black/nonblack perspective, since the racialization process that will lead non-whites to be classified as “honorary whites” could continue until these groups eventually acquire a white identity. Warren and Twine (1997) undermine the binary perspective by arguing that the black/non-black perspective is itself a modification of the black-white racial perspective. Arguments for the black/non-black racial order continue to focus on a racial comparison drawn between blacks and whites in order to maintain a definition of whiteness that ultimately sustains the exclusion of blacks from the ability of acquiring the full social advantages associated with being “white.” Warren and Twine conclude that, “... the ‘old racial nature’ is the contemporary racial nature of the nation” (1997, p.215).

This research holds that adoption programs expose that there are non-white children at a disadvantage in the international adoption market; more specifically black children are at a disadvantage in the adoption market. Presently, we see an influx of children in the U.S. whose lighter-skin (which often correlates with their more privileged racial and ethnic backgrounds) creates a preference for such children in comparison to those who are of a darker hue. Quiroz explains that:

racialized structures and subjective constructions of children articulate with intercountry adoption as racial/ethnic status generates *racialized* symbolic capital affecting the life chances of those possessing it (e.g. lighter skin) – in this case, desirability for adoption (2007, p. 25).

I argue that race relations between whites and blacks have experienced limited changes as they pertain to the family formation process. Society continues to deem white/black adoptions as unacceptable because white adoptive parents will have a difficult time successfully parenting black children, regardless as to whether these children are native or foreign blacks. On the contrary, the popularity of Asian and Latino adoptions by white Americans suggest that race relations between whites and Asians and whites and Latinos appear to be changing and Asians and Latinos are possibly in the process of the losing their “minority” status within the U.S. racial hierarchy. An in-depth qualitative study can inform a sociological understanding as to whether a three-tier or modified two-tier system might be forming and thus potentially affect the racial consequences of international interracial adoptions. An analysis of racial hierarchy theories is also particularly helpful towards informing this research of one aspect (the racial identity of the prospective adoptee) that influences white Americans’ preferences for adoption. Following from this racial hierarchy framework -- blacks continue to exist as the racial other -- Americans who partake in international interracial adoption appear to also uphold a social understanding rooted in black-white race relations. Therefore, it can be argued that this social understanding undermines the humanitarian aspect of adoption thus affecting which children are adopted from the contemporary international adoption pool as white Americans question their abilities to successfully parent non-white children. If the U.S. is indeed experiencing a reconfiguration of its racial hierarchy, one can predict that the future of black children (and possibly other minorities) in the

adoption arena appears to remain bleak for they will continue to experience difficulty finding permanent homes.

Theoretical Discussion - Contemporary Assimilation

Theories of assimilation often inform sociological inquiries regarding the structure of the United States' racial hierarchy. At the very center of theoretical discussions pertaining to assimilation is an immigrant group's adoption of U.S. customs and beliefs and an immigrant group's ability to acquire upward mobility across the generations (Alba & Nee 2003). Traditional assimilation theorists argue that both components must occur for the eventual integration of an immigrant group into mainstream society, but such theories perceive the process as being unidirectional and primarily address the incorporation of European immigrants into mainstream society. Contemporary scholars of assimilation have declared that this notion of assimilation inadequately addresses the process for non-white immigrants due to their cultural and racial distinctions and a change in the U.S. labor market (Portes & Zhou 1993). Contemporary theories of assimilation canvass the process as it pertains to the more racially diverse influx of post-1965 immigrants. Although racial and social institutional changes have occurred in the U.S. (particularly since the Civil Rights Era, including the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act) covert forms of discrimination towards racial minorities continue causing assimilation to be highly impacted by racial group membership.

The contemporary assimilation theorists assert that among the different immigrant groups some are more disadvantaged than others thus leading to differences in assimilation occurring between and within racial minorities (Alba & Nee 2003; Portes& Zhou 1993). For instance, as of 2009, the median income of Asian households surpassed the median income of non-Hispanic white Americans (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith 2010). At first glance, these figures are representative of upward mobility suggesting that Asians are highly successful at assimilating into mainstream society. However, figures presented by Bonilla-Silva paint a different picture. Though these figures are not recent, Bonilla-Silva presents data that reveals ethnic differences among Asians. In 1990, the mean incomes of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean were much greater than the mean incomes of Hmong, Cambodian, and Laotian Asian ethnic groups (Bonilla-Silva 2004, p. 936). Once an evaluation is made among the different ethnic groups, we find that the Asian story of successful assimilation varies. The segmented assimilation theory has been developed as a tool to investigate why a bifurcated mode of assimilation is occurring among contemporary non-white immigrants.

Portes and Zhou (1993) pose that assimilation (in particular intergenerational assimilation) is bidirectional occurring either upwardly or downwardly. Upward assimilation pertains to an immigrant group's adoption of mainstream society values and expectations; while downward assimilation refers to an immigrant group's adoption of the adversarial stance held by America's impoverished groups (Portes& Zhou 1993). The extent to which immigrants experience assimilation is shaped by the various factors ranging from: education, the volatile nature of the U.S. labor market, immigrant niches,

an immigrant and his/her family's ability to cope with social barriers, parental human capital, social capital and the host country's reception toward particular immigrant groups (Gans 1992; Portes&Rumbaut 2006). Factors prevalent to actions occurring within the family (such as parental human capital and social capital) are particularly significant for the present study.

At the familial level, upward or downward assimilation of first generation immigrants and their children is correlated with an immigrant family's encouragement of one of three paths of acculturation. Acculturation is highly influenced by a family's economic resources (human capital) and the family's ability to enforce parental normative control (social capital) among the second generation children, which is often intertwined with the extent to which parents choose to dismiss their cultural distinctiveness (Portes and Rumbaut 2006, p. 266). Consonant acculturation (i.e. parents and children simultaneously learn the language and culture of the host society) and selective acculturation (i.e. parents decisively choose what aspects from the host country they wish to infuse with their family's current cultural practices) are highly associated with upward assimilation (Portes, Fernandez-Kelly & Haller 2009). Dissonant acculturation (i.e. a child's abandonment of parental cultural practices and the adoption of the host society's language and culture as displayed by a deviant group) is associated with downward assimilation (Portes, Fernandez-Kelly & Haller 2009).

My research seeks to make new contributions by applying the bidirectional analysis of assimilation to the adoptive parents' understanding of: whether they believe

an adoptive child's immigrant group is capable of acquiring upward assimilation and how that understanding informs the parents as to whether they will be successful at ensuring their adopted children acquire successful assimilation. First generation immigrants are often placed into positions where they must strategically choose to what extent their children are exposed to culturally-specific values, norms, and practices as they rationalize the advantages and disadvantages of ethnically socializing their children. The parents' focus on distinguishing cultural aspects that create advantages or disadvantages for their children are aligned with the parents' aspirations for their children to assimilate into U.S. society and gain the social benefits of assimilation. Adoptive parents are therefore placed into a similar position as their first generation immigrant counterparts, for they too must evaluate the role of race and ethnicity in regards to assimilation; prior to adoption such factors might be absent from their understanding of the assimilation process due to their privileged positions. Some adoptive parents may believe that their parental human capital and social capital will transfer to their adopted children and thus lead their children to acquire a high status that will promote successful assimilation regardless of race or ethnicity (Ishizawa, Kenney, Kubo, & Stevens 2006). On the contrary, some adults may find that a prospective adopted child's racial identity holds significance and that this identity may influence the child's prospect for upward or downward assimilation. For example, Kubo finds that:

the racial stereotypes observed and practiced in the domestic arena translate over to parent's imaginations of children in foreign countries, for instance, those

who adopted from China felt that Asian children are more assimilable than black children based on their assessment of perceived Asian superiority (2009, p. 28).

The intellectual contributions of contemporary assimilation theories promote an analysis of international interracial adoptions that directs the present study towards investigating both racial and immigrant identities of the foreign children as factors that influence adoption. In particular, the segmented assimilation perspective advances ideas regarding the adoption of non-white children by white Americans. The adults' inquiries regarding a child's prospect for upward or downward assimilation are guided by the acknowledged accomplishments of the international adoptee's immigrant group. The immigrant group is looked upon as a reliable model predicting a child's prospects for assimilation. In sum, white Americans beliefs of whether they can successfully parent non-white children might also be guided by their beliefs that such children can acquire upward assimilation.

Theoretical Discussion - Ethnic and Racial Socialization

The popularity of international adoption and the growth of interracial families in the U.S. has led to voices representative of adoption communities stressing the relevance of 'culture keeping' (i.e. ensuring the development and maintenance of practices and other aspects inherent to one's native culture) in opposition to cultural assimilation (Jacobson 2008, p. 2). Maintaining a child's native ethnicity is desirable as it contributes to the diversity ideology, this ideology centers on the values promoted by multiculturalism (e.g. the welcoming of cultural difference's), which are highly

supported by advocates of the adoption community. Multiculturalism is a key concept advocated by adoption agency staff and is core to the curriculum addressed during workshops, trainings and other activities for prospective and adoptive parents (Kubo 2009). For example, while attending different adoption conferences Kubo (2009) finds that presenters at these conferences stress the relevance of adoptive families: (1) recognizing they have transformed from a 'white family' to a 'multicultural family' and (2) recognizing the need for adoptive parents to be color conscious rather than follow the more popular notion of colorblindness (p.105). Yet, the truth of the matter is, ultimately it is the adoptive parents' decision to encourage ethnic socialization or not, because they determine what aspects of a child's native culture will be maintained.

The United States is unique in the sense that U.S. society in general supports multiculturalism and therefore there is a common expectation that adoptive parents seek guidance from support groups or other services as a means to develop or maintain a child's birth culture (Lancaster & Nelson 2009). An international adoption market consisting of commodities catering ethnic socialization has emerged ranging from: easily accessible information found on the internet (e.g. "recipes, holiday preparation instructions, book recommendations, and simple phrases in an adoptee's native language"), to language classes, dance classes, cultural camps, and homeland tours (Jacobson 2008, p.3). Parents have the opportunity to expose a child to his/her birth culture through "direct" routes such as, encouraging a child to take part in "ethnic activities and opportunities that specifically engage the child (e.g. friendships, language acquisition, celebrating holidays)" or indirect routes such as, "the parent modeling

appropriate behaviors that promote ethnic culture (e.g. participation in cultural activity, post-adoption support groups)” (Lee, Grotevant, Hellerstedt, & Gunnar 2006, p. 572). In comparison to other Western societies, this market is not as prevalent in Western European countries, such as Sweden, where the primary goal is to cultivate the international adoptee into becoming an authentic Swedish citizen (Yngvesson 2010). However, scholars interested in the ethnic socialization of internationally adopted children have found that the extent to which adoptive parents find it significant to ethnically socialize their child as it pertains to the child’s birth culture is influenced by race.

According to Jacobson (2008) the degree of ethnic socialization encouraged by adoptive families can differ based upon the racial and ethnic background of the child. It becomes less necessary to ethnically socialize an adopted child if the parents do not recognize distinct racial differences. Race and color gradation become important features affecting the degree of relevance placed on ethnic socialization by the adoptive parents; ethnic socialization decreases as a child’s racial complexion lightens (Jacobson 2008, p. 55). For example, Jacobson finds that there are white adoptive families who prefer children of Eastern European descent (in particular Russians) because of their ability to racially blend in with the new family and reduce the need to acknowledge cultural differences due to the racial similarities (Jacobson 2008). Jacobson explains that:

[The] difference brings to light the ways phenotype, cultural identification, and cultural engagements are understood to be inextricably intertwined. The darker the child, [the] view of ethnicity holds, the deeper the need to keep culture; the lighter the child, the less resonance culture has in their lives. This mirrors the popular idea that people of color innately have more authentic and richer ethnic lives than do whites (2008, p. 56).

Central to the ethnic socialization analysis is the option for adoptive parents to ethnically socialize their children as it pertains to the culture of their native country; such socialization is believed to instill a sense of “ethnic pride” and encourage the adopted child to positively identify with other co-ethnics (Tessler, Tuan, & Shiao 2011, p. 37; Lee et al 2006, p. 572). Moreover, ethnic socialization or as better worded by Tessler, Tuan, and Shiao (2011) *bicultural socialization* encompasses the acculturation of American culture alongside a child’s birth culture due to the unique circumstance in which adoptive parents come to familiarize themselves with events, activities, material resources, and relationships that are often new or less common while naturally also instilling their cultural roots (p.37). However, it is more common for the parents to focus on the cultural aspects of the adopted child rather than racial aspects (Tessler, Tuan, and Shiao 2011). But when race is a pronounced feature of the adopted child, the parents are confronted with the challenge of acknowledging a child’s immigrant identity due to the intricate relationship between race and ethnicity for nonwhite children, thus parents are also placed in the position to consider the need for racial socialization. Racial socialization defined as “...the belief and practice of promoting race-specific

experiences that help children develop coping skills to protect them against racism and discrimination” (Lee et al. 2006, p. 573) can occur directly by the parents sharing messages or having the children take part in activities that make the child aware of and able to handle acts of discrimination; or, it can also occur indirectly by the parents personally engaging in practices that discourage discrimination (Lee et al. 2006, p. 572). Which raises the questions, to what extent does ethnic socialization and racial socialization run parallel to each other, or does ethnic socialization often overshadow the process of racial socialization?

Similar to Jacobson’s (2008) findings, Johnston, Swim, Saltsman, Deater-Deckard, and Pitrelli (2007) and Lee et al. (2006) studies reiterate the importance of distinct racial features influencing the role of ethnic socialization in addition to racial socialization in the lives of internationally adopted children. According to Johnston et al. (2007) mothers of children adopted from China or Korea expose their children to their birth culture and educate their children about racial discrimination; but the degree to which mothers participate in ethnic and racial socialization is influenced by their perceived closeness with other Asian Americans, the child’s age, and the birth country (p. 398). Lee et al. (2006) find that parents display greater belief of ethnically and racially socializing adopted children of Asian or Latino descent in comparison to children of Russian heritage (p. 578). When parents acknowledge the racial-ethnic background of their adopted children and refute colorblind racial attitudes, ethnic socialization and racial socialization parallel one other (Lee et al 2006, p. 578).

In those instances in which a child's immigrant and racial identities are pronounced, it can be argued that an intricate relationship exists between assimilation, ethnic socialization, and racial socialization. The adoptive parents may question whether it is possible for an international adoptee to achieve upward assimilation if the adoptee is ethnically socialized in regards to his/her native culture and raised to be aware of prejudice and discrimination. How the parents answer this question ultimately affects the significance of ethnic and racial socialization. Taken as a whole, my review of the literature reveals a general lack of information that addresses if the need for ethnic socialization varies in regards to how the adoptive parents view an adopted child's native culture. How do they evaluate the culture? Do they see it as displaying positive or negative traits? If viewed negatively, does this discourage the adoptive parents from insinuating that their child be ethnically socialized in reference to his/her birth culture? If parents discourage ethnic socialization, is racial socialization also discouraged? This dissertation investigates how parents come to terms with fostering the development of an immigrant (ethnic) identity, racial identity, and/or American identity for an adopted child and it reveals the extent to which a racial-ethnic identity is seen as supporting or hampering adoptive parents' beliefs that they can successfully parent nonwhite children.

Application of Theories

Taken as a whole, my review of racial hierarchy, contemporary assimilation and ethnic socialization theories reveals the strong potential these theories offer towards advancing our sociological understanding of U.S. race relations through the lens of international interracial adoptions. I further elaborate on the segmented assimilation theories by using the concepts of immigrant group and immigrant identity as a way to evaluate the adoptive parents' concerns regarding adopted children's prospects for upward or downward assimilation. In this research, an immigrant group is defined as a group of people who have relocated from the same country of origin. Immigrant identity is defined as the extent to which one identifies with a particular immigrant group (Portes & Rumbaut 2006). However, I argue that for the purpose of this study the adoptee's immigrant identity is primarily formed by the adoptive parents due to their young age at the time of adoption and relocation to the United States. As such, this study focuses on the perspectives of adoptive parents and does not directly include the perspectives of the internationally adopted children because the development of an immigrant identity is based upon the efforts by the adoptive parents, whose efforts include the practice of ethnic socialization specific to the child's origin culture.

I argue that the adoptive parents' preferences for adoption and choices regarding the rearing of their children are influenced by a process that combines concepts from racial hierarchy, assimilation and ethnic socialization theories.

“Originization”⁵ is the process in which parents socially characterize the adopted child based on the child’s country of origin and foster the child’s acquisition of the cultural traits of that country of origin. The originization process influences a child’s candidacy for adoption as well as the prospect of future success because a child is originized in reference to four fundamental characteristics related to the origin: the reputation of the origin country international adoption program, the race’s position in the US racial hierarchy, the achievement of the coethnic immigrant group in the U.S., and the origin culture’s presence in the U.S. cultural diversity.

First, the reputation of a country’s international adoption program informs the parents about the quality of the program and the children. For instance, the parents would take into consideration the quality of the program by investigating its legality, the length of the waiting period, and the type of care provided to prospective children; moreover, they would take into consideration the quality of the children by investigating the common age at adoption (with the hopes of the child being fairly young), the gender, and health status of the prospective children. Second, a child’s country of origin determines a child’s race. The parents consider the position of that race in the parent-perceived U.S. racial hierarchy. For a race that is positioned low in the U.S. racial hierarchy, prospective parents would consider whether crossing the racial boundaries within the family (including the extended family) would be socially acceptable in the community and the society at large. Third, a child’s country of origin is

⁵ The term originization was created as a result of the conversations held with my dissertation committee during my oral defense in the spring of 2012.

conceived as being related to the child's ethnicity. The origin ethnicity is relevant for it can be linked to the assimilation prospect of the coethnic immigrant group in the U.S. The upward mobility trend of such a coethnic group will support a need for developing the child's immigrant identity. Fourth, the origin signals its culture. Ethnic socialization is informed by origin culture. Only through ethnic socialization could the adopted child be led to form an immigrant identity and follow the suit (as displayed by the child's coethnic group) to work hard in order to achieve upward assimilation and mobility as an adult. In all, the perspective of originization not only helps a couple's decision as to whom to adopt, but also helps them determine in their minds how to bring the child up to become a successful adult.

I also argue that there might be circumstances in which white adoptive parents choose to place less emphasis on the development of an immigrant identity and more focus on the development of an American identity. A white couple may be comfortable with the adoption of child who differs from them culturally and racially. This sense of comfort does not always mean the parents are appreciative of or convinced by the multicultural arguments often stressed by members of the adoption community, in particular arguments which address the importance of ethnic socialization and the development of an immigrant identity. Some parents might prefer that the adopted child develop primarily an American identity, because if the family comes to share an American identity, the racial and cultural differences that exist between the parent and child are deemphasized. In addition, the parents foster the development of an American identity because they believe that regardless of a child's racial-ethnic

background, their adopted child will still be driven to work hard and succeed as an adult. Such a belief is built upon the parents' belief of an adopted child's racial potential to be accepted as white by society. The potential for an adopted child to be recognized as a member of the dominant racial group decreases the odds that the adopted child will experience racism and discrimination as factors inhibiting his/her success as an adult. The originization process guides the parents' decision to adopt as a couple carefully considers issues related to birth country, race relations, ethnic socialization, an immigrant identity and assimilation as they: (1) evaluate the potential of being successful parents in regards to socializing, assimilating and making upwardly mobile adopted children and (2) take into consideration what factors shape their parental expectations.

Theoretically, if U.S. society continues to function within the realms of a white/nonwhite racial order (see Appendix C), White Americans who recently adopted or are in the process of adopting draw distinctions regarding their preference and eventual rearing of Eastern European children versus Asian, Latin American, African or Caribbean children. If Eastern European adoption programs have a positive reputation⁶ the adoption of Eastern European children is more acceptable due to the shared racial resemblance between parent and child. The parents are confident in their ability to successfully assimilate and acculturate their adopted child to mainstream American society, even if the child is an immigrant, because the internationally adopted child is

⁶ The emphasis on the reputation of an adoption program will hold relevance regardless of the how the U.S. racial order is currently functioning. Once a couple deems the adoption program as having a positive reputation they will move forward with evaluating a child's racial position in the U.S. racial hierarchy, a child's ethnicity, and origin culture before determining if they wish to adopt from the specific country.

white and thus as a member of the dominant group. As such, race is salient because if a prospective adoptee is racially identified as nonwhite such an identity can prevent adoption from occurring. If parents are contemplating the adoption of a nonwhite child, they take into consideration if such adoption programs have a positive or negative reputation and if they as a family deem it acceptable to interracially adopt in addition to how society in general would respond to such an adoption. If they are comfortable with interracial adoption but are aware that society deems it is unacceptable, the adoptive parents then evaluate their ability to raise a nonwhite child as a successful adult. In instances in which nonwhite adoptions occur, the parents are aware that their child holds a minority racial status but yet they are confident in their ability to facilitate upward assimilation and acculturation of a nonwhite child in American society. The parents' confidence lies in their ability to instill an immigrant identity onto their adopted child. White adoptive parents evoke an immigrant identity for the adopted child as a measure to overcome the racial subordination associated with the child's racial identity. Thus, the adopted child is exposed to a process of ethnic socialization in which the parents work hard to foster the development of an immigrant identity that complements cultural traits specific to a child's origin country. Aware of the child's racial subordination, the parents endorse racial socialization in order to prepare the child for experiences related to racism and discrimination. Racial socialization might take place in the form of parents having direct conversations with their children or the parents engaging in activities that prevent racism and discrimination.

If we are experiencing a change in the U.S. racial hierarchy that reflects a black/nonblack racial order (see Appendix C), white Americans who recently adopted or in the process of adopting would draw minimal distinctions regarding their preferences and eventual rearing for a child of Eastern European, Asian, or Latin American descent because it is presumed that, ethnically, “whatever we are, they will be.” Again the black/nonblack racial order creates distinctions between blacks and nonblacks in the U.S. by focusing on the inferiority of black Americans and superiority of all other racial groups within the U.S. racial hierarchy. The parents would ethnically socialize such an adopted child in accordance to the parents’ ethnic background and focus on the development of an American identity. In U.S. society to be “American” continues to be strongly associated with the norms and values of white middle-class Americans, it has yet to encompass a multicultural perspective; therefore the parents would treat a child of Eastern European, Asian, or Latin American descent -- regardless of his or her country of origin -- as if (s)he is white American (hence nonblack). Since such a child is socially recognized as nonblack this alleviates negative connotations often associated with black Americans from the adopted child’s character. In addition, recognizing an adopted child of Asian or Latino descent as nonblack would also lead to them being recognized as members of the dominant group and lessen the extent to which the adopted child is exposed to racism and discrimination. Thus racial socialization is less likely to occur because it is not seen as relevant for a child’s upbringing. The assumption that *we are all one of the same* is evidence that the adoptive parents would believe that the adoptee’s prospect for upward assimilation is high. As such, race is salient because if a

prospective adoptee is racially identified as black such an identity can prevent adoption from occurring.

There would be limited instances in which these couples would adopt African or Caribbean children because of the minority status these children would continue to hold in the U.S. racial hierarchy. The parents would recognize that it remains socially unacceptable to adopt black children; in addition, to the fact that as parent, they will be dealing with a greater challenge regarding the facilitation of upward assimilation and acculturation because of black children's minority status. If the adoption of a black child were to occur, the white adoptive parents would turn to the fostering of an immigrant identity as a measure to fight against the child's status as a racial minority. The children would be exposed to a process of ethnic socialization specific to their birth country. There may be instances in which it is difficult to play up a positive immigrant identity based upon the history or cultural practices associated with a child's origin country. However, the adoptive parents would continue to believe that it is worthwhile for a black international adoptee to develop an immigrant identity because the immigrant identity has the potential to: (1) instill a sense of pride in the adopted child and push the child to work hard towards attaining upward assimilation as exemplified by other immigrants in the U.S. and (2) it can lead to distinctions being drawn between black international adoptees and African Americans. The parents would incorporate racial socialization but, as they prepare each child for potentially negative experiences impacted by racism and discrimination they will pursue the development of a distinct immigrant identity that disassociates the child from African Americans for they believe

that such a distance may lead to there being less experience of racism and discrimination. Such a distinction could help facilitate upward assimilation and acculturation of a black international adoptee because the child is not viewed as African American and his/her exposure to racism or discrimination may be alleviated if this ethnic difference is acknowledged by others in society

If we are experiencing a transformation that reflects a three-tier racial order (see Appendix C), white Americans who have recently adopted or are interested in adoption would take into consideration the ethnic and phenotypical (e.g. skin complexion and hair texture) differences that exist within a particular racial group if choosing to adopt a nonwhite child. If they chose to adopt a nonwhite child, white Americans would display a preference for a selective group of Asian or Latino American children that are seen as honorary whites, e.g. Chinese, Korean, Peruvian or Colombian children. Although such children are not believed to be members of the dominant racial group, they hold an honorary social status that leads to them being distinguished from children who are members of the minority group. In this instance, race and ethnicity are both salient features. Some parents would foster the development of an immigrant identity because they are aware that as an "honorary white" their child does not attain all of the privileges associated with being a white American. The parents would expose their child to a process of ethnic socialization specific to his/her birth country and the immigrant identity would come to exist as a tool that facilitates upward assimilation and mobility. Racial socialization would also take place. Others would continue to acknowledge that their adopted child does not acquire all of the privileges associated with white

Americans but feel that his/her honorary status still holds the child at an advantage compared to other racial minorities. The honorary status, itself, positively facilitates upward assimilation and mobility. The development of an immigrant identity is therefore optional and racial socialization is seen as less significant because racism and discrimination are not seen as major obstacles that prevent upward assimilation and mobility. At the most, the parents would acknowledge that such children, in particularly children of Asian descent, can suffer from a form of discrimination facilitated by positive racial stereotypes (e.g. "Asians are smart). Even though positive stereotypes can create a form of stress, the parents would perceive such stereotypes as less likely to negatively impact an adoptee's ability to assimilate and acquire upward mobility. Therefore, it is most important that an adopted child develop an American identity and adhere to beliefs and practices of the U.S. American ideology believed to best foster upward assimilation and mobility.

The adopted parents would be less likely to adopt a nonwhite child who displays a darker complexion (or other phenotypical characteristics that are less commonly display by white Americans) , even if the child is not black but his/her coethnic group has yet to display upward assimilation as exemplified by a trend of upward mobility. Society would view the adoption of collective black children as socially unacceptable. The parents would be hesitant in adopting such a child because of his/her lower hierarchal ranking within the collective black (e.g. Cambodian children, Mexican children, or Ethiopian children) in comparison to honorary white Asian or Latino children. Once again, if the parents were to consider the adoption of Asian or Latino

children who are members of the collective black (in addition to African or Caribbean children) the parents would evaluate their ability to facilitate upward assimilation and acculturation for the prospective adoptee because of his/her minority status in the U.S. racial hierarchy. If such an adoption were to occur the parents would foster the development of an immigrant identity among children of the collective black as a means to ensure upward assimilation. The immigrant identity would draw distinctions between international adoptees from the collective black and native members of the collective black. Such a distinction would be deemed important since native members of the collective black are often viewed as racial minorities whose adversarial attitudes and behaviors and their common encounters with racism and discrimination prevent upward assimilation. The relevance of racial socialization is bestowed upon international adoptees of the collective black in a similar fashion to that of black children present in the black/nonblack racial hierarchy – racial socialization would be perceived as both helping such children prepare for and combat racism and discrimination along with creating a distinction between international adoptees of the collective blacks and issues associated with native members of the collective blacks.

Research Methodology

The international adoption market is changing and as the doors of popular sending countries, such as South Korea, China, and Russia ⁷close or only remain cracked open, it is important to understand how white Americans come to terms with *who* they believe they can successfully parent. The present study contributes to the international adoption literature by incorporating a sociological analysis that examines how white Americans' pre-adoption understanding of race relations and experiences across racial boundaries influenced the creation of their adoption plans and how they choose to raise their adopted children. More specifically, it examines the process in which parents came to terms with who they believe they can successfully parent by asking them to restructure their initial thought process as they entered the adoption market as prospective families. The study also asks for the adoptive parents to discuss their current experiences as international interracial families. I examine their responses in accordance to both the significance of the child's racial-ethnic background and the significance of the child's co-ethnic immigrant group's experience in the U.S. Further, this study investigates if their adoption plans and practices reveal signs of a change in the U.S. racial hierarchy.

This is a qualitative project. Data was retrieved from semi-structured interviews and participant observations. Adoptive parents and adoption agency staff were initially

⁷ The U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs, provides up-to-date information regarding the different international adoption programs along with alerts and notices. It is a great source to turn to when accessing prospective parents' eligibility requirements, prospective adoptees' eligibility requirements, and the status (whether or not it remains open) of an adoption program.

recruited from international adoption agencies located in Maryland. The snowballing technique was employed in order to recruit additional adoptive parents. The following sections address the geographic location of the study and the recruitment efforts for finding participants, demographic characteristics of the respondents, and the data collection procedures. Please note that in order to protect respondent confidentiality, the names of the adoption agencies, adoption agency staff, the adoptive parents and their children have been replaced with pseudonyms.

Geographic Location & Recruitment

Initial recruitment for the study began by contacting private adoption agencies in Maryland that were accredited and licensed as of July 2012 and met the minimum requirement of providing child placement and pre-adoption training/education services. The type of international adoption programs provided by an adoption agency was not specified⁸. Maryland was considered an ideal location to conduct research due to: (a) the significant number of international adoptions finalized in the state⁹, (b) Maryland's racial diversity¹⁰, and (c) Maryland's large immigrant population¹¹ (U.S. Department of

⁸ However, the availability of the different programs for an agency is contingent upon their status in the respective home countries and can change from year-to-year. The international adoption market is constantly evolving. The absence or presence of an adoption program is often driven by a change in social norms, natural disasters, war, civil unrest or corruption (Weil 1984). These different factors can affect the number of adoption referrals released per year or lead to the complete shutdown of an adoption program. For example, staff participants from both of the agencies discussed the challenges they were experiencing from their Korean adoption programs which were causing a dramatic decrease in the number of adoption referrals released.

⁹ In fiscal year 2012, Maryland exceeded the national average of approximately 169 international adoptions with a total of 235 international adoptions. It ranked 17 out of the top 20 receiving states in the U.S. These figures include international adoptions for the District of Columbia but exclude international adoptions for the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam and Puerto Rico (U.S. Department of State 2013).

¹⁰ According to Census 2010, in Maryland whites account for 58.2 percent of the population, blacks constitute almost 1/3 of the population (29.4%) and Asians represent 5.5 percent (U.S. Census Bureau

State 2012; U.S. Census Bureau 2011; Batalova 2011). I developed a list of all of the licensed and accredited private international adoption agencies located in Maryland. Focus was placed on private international adoption agencies because public adoption agencies, which are governed by the state or county, primarily serve the needs of children from the U.S. who have been placed into a state's child welfare system and are eventually adopted (Ortiz & Briggs 2003). An agency's licensed status was retrieved from the National Foster Care and Adoption Directory in order to ensure that the agencies followed their obligations as regulated by state laws (Adoption Services 2011). The licensing information for a private international adoption agency is offered on a state-by-state basis and updated annually (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2010a). I retrieved the accreditation status from the Fiscal Year 2012 Annual Report on Intercountry Adoption provided by the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs. I considered an agency's accreditation status in order to account for all countries of interest, which included Hague and non-Hague Convention countries. Hague Convention countries are only served by accredited adoption service providers.

2011). If we compare these figures to the national percentages we find that blacks are over-represented in Maryland; nationally they represent 12.2%. The population of Asians is 0.7 percentage points higher than the national figure (U.S. Census Bureau 2011). Although the percentage of whites in Maryland is lower than its national percentage of 74.2% the difference in percentage points is primarily accounted for by the higher percentage of blacks in Maryland, thus supporting the claim that Maryland in general is racially diverse. Hispanics of all races represent 8.2 percent in Maryland though nationally they represent 16.3 percent (U.S. Census Bureau 2011).

¹¹ As of 2011, Maryland ranked 10th in the nation based on the percentage of its immigrant population (Batalova 2011). Of those immigrants residing in Maryland, the greatest percentage were from Latin America (39.0%), closely followed by Asia (33.3%) (Migration Policy Institute 2015a). Africa and Europe then represented the next highest percentages at 16.4% and 10.1% respectively and 1.3% were from Northern America and Oceania combined (Migration Policy Institute 2015a). Among the immigrant population 28.7 percent racially identified as Asian, 23.1% as black and 31.5% as white; while 31.3% of the immigrant population identified as having a Hispanic background (Migration Policy Institute 2015a).

I reached out to the agencies by sending recruitment letters by email and postal mail to the executive directors of the approved agencies. The contact information was retrieved by performing extensive searches on the agencies' websites and by making cold calls. The administrative assistants were very open to sharing the names of the executive directors but they were reluctant to providing email addresses. On several occasions I was forced to leave my contact information on the executive director's voicemail, often to no avail. After three months of soliciting agencies for participation in my study I received approval from the associate administrator of Bringing Love Adoption Agency. It was not until the end of the year, in mid-December that I received approval from the executive director of True Dreams Adoption agency. Both agencies granted me the permission to advertise my study with present or past clientele (depending on the agency) via a listserv or monthly newsletter.

The associate administrator of Bringing Love Adoption Agency agreed to share details of the study with former clients via the agency's listserv. The executive director of True Dreams put me in contact with the international program manager; she agreed to share the study's detail in the newsletter for their Korean Adoption Program. The snowball technique was also employed after the initial recruitment of parent participants. Parent participants were asked to refer other couples who were eligible to participate in the study. All of the parent participants worked with an agency located in Maryland however they resided among the states of Maryland, Virginia, and

Pennsylvania (from this point on referred to as the Mid-Atlantic region).¹² I also recruited parent participants by advertising within my internship office and university in addition to, contacting international adoption advocacy groups, support groups, cultural camps, and mentor programs for children adoptees. I asked the different organizations to share fliers with their members. I advertised the study while attending various cultural events throughout the Mid-Atlantic region. Although, not the main focus on the study, I also recruited adoption agency staff. Both agencies referred specific staff members as participants in the study. Recruitment began in July 2012 and was completed by the end of February 2013. The study was completed in August 2013.

Demographic Characteristics of Research Participants

The Adoption Agency and Staff Participants. The sample consists of four adoption agency staff participants. Staff participants were recruited in order to examine the extent to which their interactions with the adopted parents prior to the finalization of an adoption impacted the parents' adoption experiences when taking into consideration: (1) messages of race, ethnicity, and culture conveyed by the agencies and (2) the staff's knowledge and experience with different international adoption programs.

Bringing Love is a non-profit religious-affiliated adoption agency. It offers five international adoption programs that include countries from South and East Asia, Eastern Europe, and Africa. Bringing Love also offers domestic adoption services

¹² Among this sample, Maryland continued to exist as the central hub. Even those families who lived outside of Maryland frequently attended cultural festivals, events, or other activities within the state.

although, the agency currently discourages domestic adoptions due to the significantly long waiting period for domestic adoptions. The associate administrator coordinates all of the international adoption programs. Bringing Love provides regularly scheduled adoption information sessions – the information session often consists of a small crowd. During a single session the prospective parents learn about the process and procedures for domestic and international adoption. All attendees must register online prior to attending the info session. Once a couple commits to working with the agency they are required to attend pre-placement parent education trainings, which focus on a variety of subjects ranging from: racial and ethnic socialization, attachment/bonding, the grieving process, introducing the adopted child to his/her extended family, travel information, introductory parenting skills, and Q&As with pediatricians specialized in international adoptees' health.

Three staff participants were recruited from Bringing Love Adoption Agency. They are all middle-aged white women whose ages range from 55 to 62. All of the women obtained their Master of Social Work and have spent at the least 20 years providing services within the adoption field. Two of the participants are themselves international adoptive parents. Their children were adopted from South Korea and India between the 1970s and 1980s. These women were among the pioneers of the international adoption phenomenon. Their children were raised during a time in which international adoptions as a form of family formation was still new; there was little research that addressed the experience of adoptive parents and most importantly the adopted children. Moreover, their experiences are distinct from the present adoptive

parents for their families were formed during an era in which the United States' sociopolitical atmosphere underwent a transformation following the Civil Rights Movement and the introduction of the Immigration Act of 1965 (Ancheta 1998). Interactions across racial boundaries became more acceptable (or at the least were no longer unlawful) as racial minorities gained their civil rights and the presence of nonwhite immigrant groups grew (Campbell 2000). These changes supported an environment where the idea of building a family by the means of an international interracial adoption was less taboo. Today, the social norms that came to fruition as the U.S. slowly became receptive to the idea of international interracial adoptions – in particular, who would best benefit from being raised by a white adoptive family and the stalled development of the adoptee's ethnic identity – are quite different from the present dialogue shared by the adoption agencies of this study, who denounce the colorblind racial ideology and reinforce the need for ethnic socialization. These women openly shared their experiences as international adoptive parents with their clientele.

True Dreams is also a non-profit agency but has no religious affiliation. It offers four international adoption programs; in addition, it is in partnership with a separate organization to serve an additional country. Its programs span the regions of East Asia, South Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Unlike Bringing Love Adoption Agency, each international adoption program is run by a different coordinator. True Dreams provides monthly information sessions that caters to a large crowd. While attending one of the sessions I witnessed how quickly the room became crowded (even though the agency's executive director expressed concern about the rain preventing a few registered

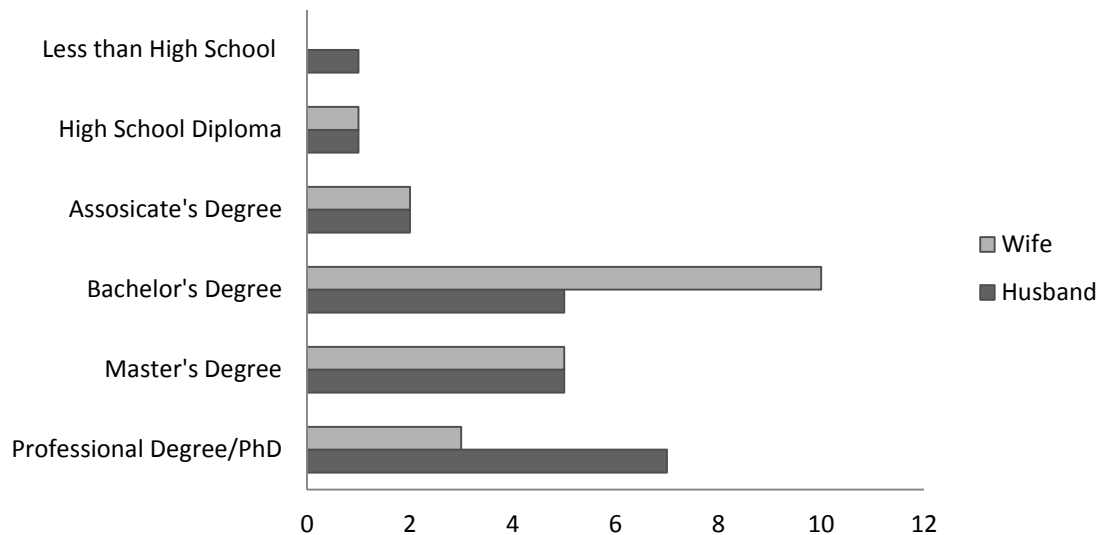
individuals from attending the information session). It is imperative that attendees register for the information sessions. The information sessions address the domestic and international adoption process and procedures. The staff at True Dreams do not addresses topics of race and ethnicity during the training classes; however, panels addressing such topics are often presented at their annual conference. The panels are led by adoption professionals, adoptive parents, and adoptees.

I recruited one participant from True Dreams. Common to the other staff participants from Bringing Love Adoption Agency, she is middle-aged, white, and has obtained her Master of Social Work. At 41, she is the youngest of the staff participants in the sample. Most of her experience has been within the U.S. foster care system. Formerly, she worked as a social worker for domestic adoptions. She was only recently hired by True Dreams as the international program manager; she specifically oversees the Korean adoption program. She did not share that she was also an adopted mother.

Adoptive Parents. International adoption is often referred to as a middle class phenomenon. On the surface, my study also suggests similar findings. The sample consists of 21 adoptive couples which altogether totaled 42 parent participants. All parent participants are white heterosexual married couples who have adopted from abroad between the years 2000 - 2012. The age of the parent participants range from 29 years old to 50 years old. The average age for the husband participants is 43.5, with a median age of 44. The average age for the wife participants is 40.6, with a median age of 43.

Table 2.1 displays the highest level of education achieved by each parent. Over 80 percent (35 out of the 42 parent participants) have earned a Bachelor's degree or higher. Among the wives approximately 85.7% of the sample have earned a Bachelor's degree or higher. Of those wives who have obtained post-secondary education beyond the associate level, over half of them (55.6 %) have earned their Bachelor's degree and 44.4 % earned a Master's degree, Professional degree or Doctoral degree. Among the husbands approximately 81.0 % have earned a Bachelor's Degree or higher. Although the husbands display a slightly lower percentage, in comparison to the wives, of participants who obtained an education beyond the associate level, approximately 70.6 % of these participants have obtained a Master's degree, Professional degree, or Doctoral degree. 29.4% earned a Bachelor's degree. 2 participants (9.5 percent of the total sample) have earned an Associate's degree. There are only three couples in which at least one spouse did not obtain post-secondary education. For two participants, their highest level of education is high school. The remaining participant's highest level of education is 10th grade.

Table 2.1 Counts for the Highest Level of Education obtained by the Adoptive Parents, by Spouse



This individual experienced a difficult childhood. Even though both the mother and father were present in the home, he came from a family that was full of fear, lacked affection, and did not share their emotions. His parents never expressed their love for him. His father suffered from mental illness causing him to be distant and cruel. The participant recalled a situation in which his father chastised and struck him for having difficulty with a homework assignment. Such instances did not encourage him to stay in school. His difficult upbringing helped fuel a reckless lifestyle. At a young age, the participant battled alcoholism and drug addiction. He has been sober for the past 18 years. The participant has not earned his high school diploma, but together he and his wife have been able to secure an earnest household income and comfortable lifestyle.

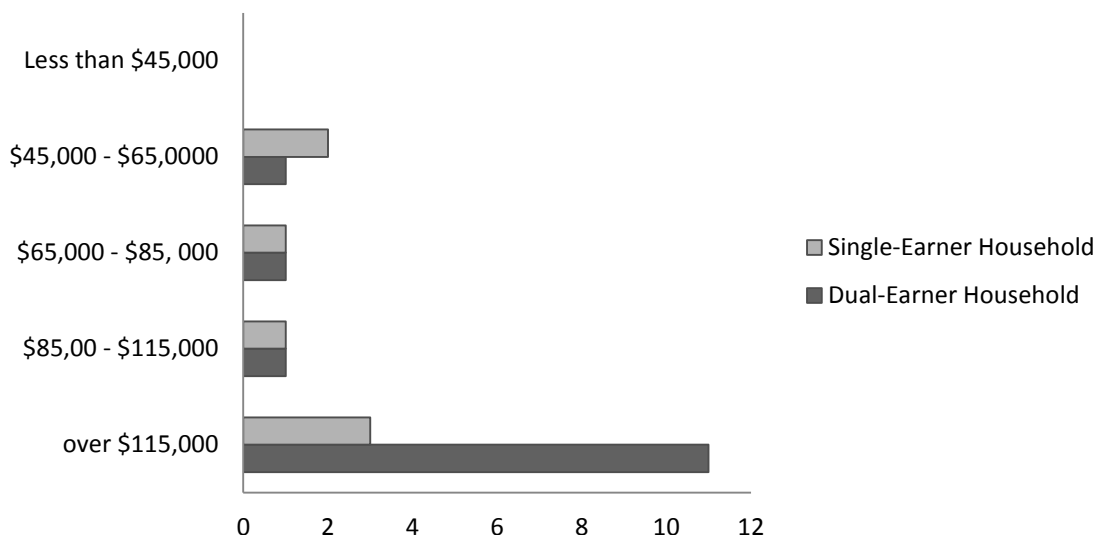
Table 2.2 displays the participants' annual income for single-earner and dual-earner households. Not all of the households consist of dual-earner incomes. Seven out

of the total 21 families were single-earner households, several wives made the decision to stay at home and raise their children. Among the single-earner households, two families earn \$45,000 to \$65,000 annually; two families earn \$65,000 to \$115,000 annually; and, three families earn over \$115,000 annually. Among the dual-earner households, 11 out of these 14 families earn over \$115,000 per year; two families earn \$65,000 to \$115,000; and, one family earns \$45,000 to \$65,000. The brackets created to gauge the range of household income are limited. However, by having the opportunity to carry out the research within almost all of the participants' homes, I used their residency as another way to access their socioeconomic status. I evaluated their residential neighborhood, the upkeep of their yards, the type of home they lived in, the structure and size of their home, furniture, and decorations as cues for socioeconomic status. After taking into consideration educational level, household income, residential characteristics, and the family composition (which is discussed below), I conclude that the socioeconomic status of the sample ranged from the working class to the upper middle class.

However, regardless of their socioeconomic status, a common challenge expressed by all of the participants was the difficulty of financing the adoptions. The difficulty with financing the international adoptions often spawned from the thousands of dollars used to treat a couple's fertility challenges. Many of the families had exhausted their savings prior to adoption as they covered the expenses for the fertility treatments. Thereby, several of the couples turned to their family, friends, or church for financial assistance; the expenses were covered by fundraisers, donations, or loans.

Others chose to refinance their homes or make early withdrawals from their 401K retirement funds.

Table 2.2 Counts for Adoptive Parents' Annual Income for Single-Earner or Dual-Earner Households



The compositions of the families vary; they include: (a) solo adoptions, only one child adopted (b) sibling adoptions, the adopted children have the same birth mother (c) multiple adoptions, the children were adopted through domestic and/or international adoption programs¹³ or, (d) both biological and adoptive children are present. 47.6 percent (10 out of 21) of the families consist of solo adoptions. 9.5 percent (2 out of 21) of the families consist of sibling adoptions. 14.3 percent (3 out of 21) consist of multiple adoptions. And, 28.6 percent (6 out of 21) of the families consist of both biological children and adoptive children. All parents participated in infant adoptions, defined as

¹³ Only one family consisted of multiple adoptions in which the children were adopted through domestic and international adoption programs. This family had three children; the middle and youngest child were adopted internationally while their oldest was adopted domestically. It was their youngest who led to this family being eligible for the study since he was the only child who met the eligibility requirements.

24 months or younger, except for the exception of one family whose daughter's age at adoption was 30 months (2.5 years old). This particular family also had an older son who was adopted at six months. I chose to keep the family in the study due to the presence of their son who was adopted as an infant and the closeness of the daughter's age at adoption to the study's adoption-age cutoff. Infants represent the age-range with the greatest total number of international adoptions occurring between 1999-2013 (U.S. Department of State 2015b). An infant is defined as 24 months or younger in order to account for the current trend in international adoption in which the age at adoption is increasing as some of the most popular programs have instilled new regulations¹⁴. The birth countries' application of the new regulations has led to a decrease in the number of international adoption referrals and an increase in the amount of time needed to finalize the adoptions in the birth country, thus children who are approved for international adoption are now joining their U.S. families at an age older than what was once expected. The youngest age at adoption in the sample is 4 months. 66.7 percent of the children were less than one year old when adopted. The average age at adoption is 11.7 months, with a median of 9.5 months. At the time of the interview, the adoptive children's ages ranged from 1.92 (23 months) to 13. The average age of the adopted children is 5.7 years old, with a median of 5 years old.

¹⁴ Many of the adoptive parents referenced South Korea and the current changes to its finalization process as a factor influencing the increase of age at adoption. South Korea implemented the Special Adoption Act on August 5, 2012. The new Act favors domestic adoptions and efforts that work towards decreasing the international adoption of South Korean children. The adoption of a healthy infant, from the time the parents received the referral to the time the adoption was finalized by the origin country, once took less than a year to complete; now the process takes approximately 4 years (U.S. Department of State 2015a).

The countries of origin for the adopted children included South Korea, China, Philippines, and Russia. However, 92.62 percent of the sample was adopted from the Asian region. Almost three-fourths of the children (74.1 percent, 20 out of 27) were adopted from South Korea. China represents the second most popular program with 14.81 % (4 out of 27) of the children being adopted from there, followed by Russia and the Philippines, 7.41% (2 out of 27) and 3.71% (1 out of 27) respectively. Males represent 63 percent of the children adopted abroad, which is not surprising since South Korea was the most popular origin country for this sample.¹⁵ Two out of the 17 male adoptees are from Russia. Females represent 37 percent of the adopted children but their origin country is more diverse; the females' origin countries include South Korea, China, and the Philippines. Five out of the ten females are from South Korea, four are from China, and one is from the Philippines.

Data Collection Procedures

The primary methods of data collection are semi-structured interviews and participant observations. Adoption agency staff respondents shared their experiences as facilitators of international adoption during a single semi-structured interview. In addition, I attended information sessions provided by the agencies for prospective adoptive parents. Parent participants took part in a series of three interviews conducted over a six-month period and I attended a social activity with each family.

¹⁵ Social norms of South Korea have created a practice in which it is more common for boys of single mothers to be placed for adoption. The practice is based upon the importance of the male child knowing his paternal lineage. The absence or sever of such ties can affect a male's life chances (e.g. occupational attainment) for the remainder of his life should he remain in South Korea (Hermann & Kasper 1992).

Adoption Agency Staff Participants. I asked the adoption agencies for permission to attend pre- and post-adoption workshops or support group meetings over a four-month period in order to gain an initial understanding of what factors related to the adoption process are brought to the forefront and possibly take precedence over concerns regarding race, ethnicity and culture as expressed by adoption agency staff and prospective adoptive parents. I was also interested in observing how such conversations might influence the adoption decision of prospective parents. However, my participation with the adoption agencies lasted for less than the four months originally requested. I spent approximately two months in the field with Bringing Love. Bringing Love had recently forbidden the participation of current clients in research studies conducted with the agency; therefore, I was prohibited from attending the workshops or support group meetings. But, I could attend the information sessions since the individuals present at these sessions were not yet clients of the agency. In addition, Bringing Love invited me to their annual adoption celebration and I had the opportunity to review one of their adoption training videos at their main office.

It was much more difficult to remain in contact with True Dreams. I spent approximately one month in the field with this agency. True Dreams welcomed my attendance at their information session and the Korean waiting parents meeting but unfortunately I lost communication with the coordinator and was unable to arrange any further meetings. I was also unable to establish a connection with the coordinators for the other adoption programs. I took extensive notes while observing the information

sessions and pre-adoption support group meetings of both organizations. I typed up field notes at the end of each meeting.

The staff participants also took part in semi-structured interviews (refer to Appendix G). The interviews lasted for approximately an hour, were digitally recorded, and transcribed verbatim. They were held in private away from other staff members, although two of the Bringing Love staff chose to do their interview together. They felt it would be more efficient and reduce the amount of time needed to be away from their desks. Prior to the interview, staff participants were asked to complete a fact sheet. The fact sheet collected basic information about a participant's level of education, number of years working for the agency, prior work experience, age, race, and gender (refer to Appendix D). The adoption agencies were provided a modest donation for participating in the study.

Adoptive Parent participants. Parent participants were asked to participate in a series of three interviews, which included the introductory interview, formal semi-structured interview, and follow-up interview. Both spouses were present during the interviews. The interviews ranged from approximately 30 minutes to two hours. Each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interviews usually took place in the respondents' home. Although there was one couple who chose to have the interviews at a popular restaurant and for another couple we had to conduct the interview via SKYPE.

The respondents were asked to complete a demographic fact sheet at the beginning of the introductory informal interview (refer to Appendix D). The fact sheet collected basic information about the respondents' level of education, occupation, and household income. It collected basic information about the respondents' adopted children including gender, age at adoption, present age, year of adoption, and origin country. It also collected information about the respondents' biological children (if applicable) in regards to gender and age.

The introductory informal interview, which I referred to as the ice breaker, provided an opportunity for the respondents and I to get to know one another. I did not use a field guide but rather I began each interview with a very generic question, "How would you describe yourself outside of being a mom or dad?" From that point on the conversations flowed freely depending upon the type of information the couples shared. We spoke about subjects ranging from how they met and began dating, college experiences, what it was like when they first met their child, to infertility issues they experienced prior to deciding to adopt. During the ice breaker, I also asked the participants to share family photos. The medium in which the photos were shared was diverse. Many of the families were very shy when it came to sharing their life books. Life books are photos albums prepared by the adoptive parents that display the children's adoption journey. They usually included pictures of the agency or hospital, the child's referral picture, tourist attractions popular in the origin country, cultural symbols, and several prior and post-adoption photos of the children. It is common for an adoption agency to stress the importance of creating a life book. So for many of the

families the amount of significance placed on the life book led to them feeling shy when sharing it because they did not believe it was “good enough.” The pictures were also shared by looking at scrapbooks, laptops, tablets, cell phones, videos and photo albums (which were often prepared by the foster parents). Having the parents walk me through the different photos led to us having very open discussions regarding the arrival of their adopted children, in particular we discussed some of the challenges they faced both before and immediately following the arrival of their children. It was during this moment, as we walked through the photos that the parents in general would begin to relax. They really enjoyed discussing the adoption journey.

The second interview, referred to as the formal interview, was scheduled approximately two weeks after the ice breaker. The formal interview was a semi-structured in-depth interview. The interview field guide was informed by the dissertation work of Dr. Kubo (refer to Appendix E). It consisted of 13 questions that were addressed by each family. Each interview was adapted accordingly for the respondents as determined by the racial-ethnic background and age of the adopted children.

After the formal interview, I asked the participants for permission to attend a social outing with their family, which meant at the least the adopted children needed to be present. If the adopted children were seven years old or older I asked for their verbal permission to attend the outing in front of their parents. It was my goal to make the children feel as comfortable as possible while I hung out with the family. The social

activities provided an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of the relevance of race, ethnicity, and culture within the context of the United States towards influencing their experiences as international adoptive families, whether through observations or dialogue. The social outing was not limited to any particular activity but rather was seen as an opportunity to interact with families in a comfortable setting. I had the opportunity to attend cultural celebrations, hang out with different families during dinner or lunch, witness a Tae Kwon Do demonstration, hop on rides at a local theme park, and visit the national aquarium. Finally, a follow-up interview took place approximately four months after the introductory interview. The follow-up interview allowed me to re-address topics that arose since our initial interview.

Limitations

The primary objective of this study is to examine how US race relations influence a couple's plan for adoption and eventual rearing of their child(ren). The design of my study makes it possible to understand the role of race towards influencing the adoption of a nonwhite child – specifically children of Asian descent with the exception of one family whose children were from Eastern Europe. However, it would have been ideal to include adoptive parents whose children were of African, Caribbean, or Latino descent (two racial groups whose members are often associated with negative racial stereotypes and hold low positions in the US racial hierarchy) in order to develop a thorough understanding of the role of race. The presence of a more varied composition of international interracial families would have allowed me to further investigate how race

impacts a couple's adoption of nonwhite children by expanding the analysis to include African, Caribbean and Latino children. It was extremely difficult for me to locate parents whose children were adopted from these regions even though both of the agencies (in which I heavily relied on for recruitment) offered programs in said regions. The adoptive parents also referred friends or coworkers but their networks primarily consisted of families who had also adopted from Asian or Eastern European countries.

In addition, it would have been very beneficial for me to have developed a more intimate relationship with the adoption agencies as a way to understand how an agency's conceptualization of race might influence a couple's adoption plan. Had I had the opportunity to further my relationship with the agencies I should have developed a more keen understanding of how discussions and trainings regarding race along with how changes in the adoption market influence the promotion of certain adoption programs and the type of services provided by the agencies. However, based on the conversations with the parent participants many of them came to the agency well-informed about the adoption processes of different international programs. Many of the participants walked into their agency with a clear idea of which country they wished to adopt from based on extensive research, recommendations from friends, or exposure to international adoptive families prior to their decision to adopt.

CHAPTER 3: COMING TO TERMS WITH AN INTERNATIONAL INTERRACIAL ADOPTION

It was a brilliantly brisk Saturday afternoon, the first Saturday of the New Year to be exact. I had to hurry inside the mall rather than spend a few minutes soaking in the warmth of the sun after the hour-long drive. The Anderson family was waiting on me. I was late and frustrated; the highway had been difficult to maneuver.

After searching for a few minutes, I found the Andersons in the food court near Sbarro's Pizza. I grabbed a smoothie from a nearby Cinnabon and joined them for lunch. Nancy, Tyler's mother, reminded him it was time once more for him to receive a haircut, and if he behaved, he could ride the electric train. Although the mention of the train ride excited Tyler, his father, Jason, shared that haircuts are one of his least favorite activities. Dad reminisced about Tyler's early experiences at the barbershop, "He would never cry when there was a loud thunderstorm or getting shots at the doctor office, but he would really act up when he first started getting a haircut." Nancy said it came to a point where they would apologize when first walking into the door because they knew an unpleasant experience was about to take place. As I listened to their stories, my interest grew to see how the visit would go.

The barbershop was bustling. All five barbers were of Asian descent; there was only one female barber. Each barber had his/her own personal station that included an engraved name tag above each station. Customers of various racial backgrounds lined up against the wall waiting. A family of Latino boys and their mother left as we walked inside. We sat next to an older white male. A Southeast Asian couple walked in, but eventually decided they would return later because the place was too crowded; and as

they left, a middle-aged black male joined the waiting crowd. Approximately 20 minutes later, a barber called Tyler to the chair. Nancy and Jason watched closely as the barber went to work. Tyler laughed when the clippers tickled his neck and jumped around when the barber sprayed down his hair with water but overall the cut was a success. No tears were shed and his parents kept their word.

Nancy, Tyler and I walked over to the train stop, which was located in front of the Sears Department Store, while Jason went shopping inside of Sears. Nancy allowed Tyler to play a racing game on her phone while waiting for the train. He stood next to his mother maneuvering his body to the right and then to the left as he raced the car down the virtual tracks. Tyler enjoyed the game and played it intensely. The next thing I knew, we heard Tyler exclaim, "Damn it!" In a state of disbelief, Nancy asked him three times what was said and he began to cry once he realized he was in trouble. His mother explained in a calm but stern voice "You are never to say that again."

It happened; for the first time ever Nancy experienced the rush and embarrassment of hearing her son, who was only four years old, swear in public. During a previous interview, Jason prophesized it would happen soon since Tyler's vocabulary was growing and he was learning how to use words within the proper context. It was funny that Jason was away when the moment happened. Nonetheless, as a parent, it might not have been one of her most proud moments but it was an experience that would have been left to their imaginations had Nancy and Jason decided against international adoption.

For approximately 13 years the Anderson family consisted of only husband, wife, and dog. Jason referred to this time as the “us” era; a time in which they were not certain that they wanted children. It was not until 10 years into their relationship that they seriously entertained the idea of having children. But at the time in when they originally contemplated the idea of having children, their interpretation of family meant having biological children. It was not until the Andersons first struggled with getting pregnant and then had to deal with numerous miscarriages that they grew to consider adoption as an option for expanding their family. Adoption came to exist as an option that led to the Andersons redefining, once more, what the concept of family meant to them. Family, according to Nancy, also meant “[a] group of people living together. Their lives [are] as much as a family as blood depending on how you act.” The Andersons, similar to a majority of couples in the sample, experienced several hardships as they tried to conceive; adoption became the most effective route for these couples to continue growing their families. The concept of family evolved from focusing on their spousal relationship to deciding to have children. This chapter explores the process in which adoption became the most feasible option for the couples to build or expand their families. It examines how couples with biological children become interested in adoption and how childless couples’ desires shift from having biological children to adopting children from abroad. Overall, the findings reveal that these couples are willing to build their families through a foreign adoption due to the disadvantages associated with the U.S. domestic adoption system.

Openness to the Idea of Adoption

Compassion for adoption. The familial composition of these white American couples was transformed from same-race family units to multiracial/multicultural family units through the means of international adoption.¹⁶ In order to understand this transformation, it is important to recognize what led these couples to be receptive to the idea of adoption. For some of the couples, expanding their families was a deep desire that became a reality because adoption was the most suitable method for accomplishing this dream. For others, adoption was the most viable option given their past struggles with infertility. Also, in many instances, underlying their desire to adopt is the altruistic calling of providing “helpless” children with a permanent loving home. Infertility and humanitarianism have both been cited as motivational factors for adoption, particularly for international adoption (Shiao et al. 2004; Zhang & Lee 2011; Ishizawa & Kubo 2014).

The presence of biological children is common among couples who later contemplate adoption. Billy and Judy Green experienced pregnancy and childbirth three times in their lives prior to the adoption of their two Korean children. However, the pregnancies were not a small feat for their family. Judy’s pregnancies came with complications. Although Judy and Billy were parents to two healthy biological children – their son served in the military and their daughter was currently enrolled in community college – the pain could still be heard in their voices as they described the loss of their

¹⁶ With the exception of the Cooper family whose composition remained same-race but became multicultural due to their adoption of two Russian boys.

first child who was a stillbirth. Their own challenges with having biological children along with knowing others who dealt with infertility led to adoption being the only alternate option for growing their families during that stage in their marriage.

Adoption is not necessarily tied to the couple's inability to have biological children. It also relates to the fact that at a young age some of the participants were interested in adopting children of different racial or cultural backgrounds. Some of the participants' interest and acceptance of interracial and transcultural adoption predated their marital relationships and thus upon getting married they learned that as partners both were open to the idea of adoption, more specifically *international* adoptions. Judy and Billy explained how both infertility issues of others, in addition to her familiarity with adoption, supported their comfort with the decision to adopt:

Judy: Yes, so before we were even going to have Nora, I felt like, if I can't get pregnant, we'll adopt. There was never any kind of, "Wow, we don't want to adopt, but I guess if we have to, we will." We never felt that way at all. We felt totally comfortable with the idea of adopting – which was kind of funny since none of us have family members who had adopted.

Billy: I think we knew so many people who had problems with some part of the process.

Judy: Of adopting? Or...

Billy: Having babies.

Judy: Oh, oh yeah. We knew a lot of people who had dealt with infertility. I knew, when I was growing up, a family – and I grew up in a really tiny town – I knew a family that had adopted; and I always thought that was a kind of neat thing. You know, and I guess as a kid, I remember thinking, “I would really like to adopt from another culture”.

Interviewer: Oh really, even as a kid?

Judy: Yeah, even as a kid and you know, life goes on. You grow up life goes on, and that becomes like a pipe dream...Some people grow up and want to become a famous ballerina or something...And it's just kind of neat that that dream has come full circle for me.

Similar to the Green's, Shawn and Hazel Freeman also carried out a childhood desire of adoption. Both 29 years old, they were the youngest couple in the sample. Yet they had already been married for 10 years and had their first child, Josiah, while Hazel was in undergraduate school. Shawn explained that he always had a passion for adoption. As a child growing up in rural Missouri, one of his closest friends was a Korean adoptee. Their relationship influenced his passion. Moreover, early on in their marriage he realized that his wife shared similar sentiments:

Shawn: Well we, I had always felt strongly about adoption. One of my best friends growing up was adopted and happened to be adopted from Korea. So I had always kind of thought that I would like to adopt. And, then at some point, I think a couple of years into our marriage, we got on the subject. We hadn't

[talked] about it in advance, but, and then [I] found out that she felt like she wanted to adopt. The thought was kind of like there's enough kids in the world right now that need families; why bring another kid into the world.

Hazel: My mom used to she said that when I played baby dolls I never like had the baby. I always said "I adopted my baby." And I used to...I was the youngest of three, so I would beg my parents "why can't you adopt?" You know, cause my mom would say "oh I'm done having babies." "Well adopt one, adopt one." So when we would go to the store I would pick the black baby doll so I could say I adopt this, you know play like I had adopted it.

For a number of these couples, adoption was not new to them. Many of them have friends or close relatives who adopted (both domestically and internationally), were themselves adoptees (whether through kinship/stepfamily adoptions), or their parents were adoptees. Regardless of how the couples are exposed to adoption they develop an idea of what it means to be an adoptive family before they actually move forward with the decision to adopt. Even among childless couples (particularly the mothers) who had a very difficult time dealing with their inability to conceive, having a personal understanding and connection with adoption enabled them to always be open to viewing it as an option for family-building. For example, Brenda Blackwell was always open to adoption. As an only child she was very close to her mother and well aware of the fact that her mom was an adoptee. Even though Brenda and her husband, Lawrence, dreamed of having biological children, they

were able to “overcome the frustration of five IVF [in vitro fertilization] failures,” and the cost associated with each attempt. They could appreciate adoption because they never saw it as taboo. Brenda witnessed the possibility of developing strong familial bonds from her mother, even though as a child her mother was unaware of her own biological family. While Lawrence, on the other hand, never placed much emphasis on the need for biological ties as a factor determining one’s family because as a child his familial composition changed with the leaving of his biological father:

I was never that deep of a thinker [everyone laughs] really. I, uh, my father walked out on me. I was raised by a stepfather, a single mother household for the most of my growing up. So I got to be honest with you I don’t really see the whole you know blood is everything kind of line, I mean I just don’t. Love will give you everything.

The data reveals that prior to adoption many of the couples, both childless couples and those with biological children, did not view adoption as a strange and unsuitable option for family building. However, for the childless couples who experienced difficulties with conception or the delivery of viable births, the acceptance of adoption is a slow process; but over time, they generally come to realize that it is the most reliable option if they are to move forward with bringing children into their lives.

Adoption as a reliable option. Among couples with infertility troubles a transition takes place in reference to how they define family and what is needed to occur in order for their family to grow. The meaning of family transitioned from the couples’ belief that

the concept of family should follow the traditional nuclear model of the husband and wife raising a biological child to the concept of family including the possibility of the husband and wife raising an adopted child. This transition is driven by the wives acceptance of their own personal struggles with having a biological child because it was the wives who often learned that the difficulties they were experiencing as a couple were driven by their fertility issues. These women dealt with a variety of fertility challenges such as the inability to conceive, multiple pregnancies and miscarriages, the effect of hormonal drugs on one's emotional well-being, and the stress caused by planning their sex lives around the wives' most fertile days for conception. The "infertility roller coaster," leads to many of the women viewing themselves as "failures" and "broken." It is not until after the women felt as though they had exhausted all medical alternatives in their attempt at solving their fertility issues that they released the desire of having a biological child and accepted the option of raising an adopted child.

Inasmuch as the husbands usually cope with the disappointment of being unable to have children, they generally do not react to the fertility problems in the same manner as their wives. Perhaps it is due to the fact that they most often are not the ones found "at fault." None of the husbands referred to male infertility issues or the need for procedural treatments or techniques to address such issues. And, unlike their wives, they did not have to cope with the sadness and even guilt that many of the women felt in regards to being unable to carry a pregnancy to full term. Nevertheless, the husbands' emotional strength and open-mindedness is needed in order for the

couples to move forward together. The husbands often view adoption, much sooner than their wives, as a reliable option that will gift their family with a child; thus, they found themselves patiently waiting for their wives to agree to adoption. Phyllis Cooper described how it took a much longer time for her to come to terms with adoption in comparison to her husband:

Family means everything to me and I really, we both did, but I especially wanted a family. I just wanted that opportunity to have children to be part of me and help them grow into the people I knew they could be. There was never a question. That's always what I wanted to do my whole life if you asked me; I wanted to be a mom. When I couldn't have children I was devastated. I was just, it was a very tough time in my life. And um I didn't even want to talk about adoption for probably six months. He kept saying, "Well what about [adoption]?" And I was like "No, I'm not ready for that" you know. And he was patient with me and waited until I got to the place where I could say "Okay if I can't do it this way, let's try this way."

So over time, the wives come to a similar realization that adoption is another way in which they can produce a family. Adoption exists as the best option because it offers the best promise as far as guaranteeing the opportunity to parent. The couples are matched with children who eventually join their families in the United States as long as they are deemed suitable parents by the state adoption agency and meet the state, federal, and international requirements. Choosing to adopt signifies a change in what

the couples perceived as being most important; no longer do they consider becoming pregnant the most important goal, but rather what becomes most important is the opportunity to raise a child. Carla Burns described the change which took place within her as she grew to accept adoption:

And, and I think getting to just making the change into um from wanting to become pregnant and realizing that the focus should be on wanting to be a parent and being a mom or be a dad. When we changed our focus from let's get pregnant to – what's the goal, what's the real goal we're after – our focus became more about what is involved in becoming a parent.

This realization came to Carla after dealing with a very difficult gynecological appointment. During this visit the gynecologist made it clear that it was time for her to think of alternate methods and move beyond the fertility drug treatments. Carla left the office in a state of shock. Unfortunately her husband was not present to calm her; and, she was expected to return to work immediately following the appointment. While feeling completely hopeless and crying uncontrollably, she noticed “a beautiful blonde southern woman” and her Asian daughter walk towards the pediatric office, which was located in her office building. She closely watched as the mother interacted with her daughter and she came to the realization that:

...The goal isn't about what's happening inside your belly. It's about what's happening in your heart. And that connection, I don't know who they were. I never introduced myself and [said] “where is your daughter from?” I just knew

that was a mother and child and that they didn't look anything like each other but that there was just, you could see the relationship. It had nothing to do with what color her skin was, what color eyes she had, how her eyes looked, how her mother's looked and that's what just did it for me.

In 2004, Carla and Ryan became parents to a 13 months old baby girl from China. Carla's change in thought is similar to that of the other women who experienced fertility problems. The epiphany or realization that adoption offers a predictable solution for family formation leads these couples, more specifically the wives, to redefine their definition of family. The definition of family grows to include the opportunity of raising a child who lacks direct biological connections and a racial resemblance to his/her parents.

However for some couples their openness to adoption, moreover interracial adoption, is complemented by the perception that they are also providing a helpless foreign child with a better future. International adoption provides an opportunity to make their families whole and to participate in an altruistic act.

Altruism and the international adoptee. According to Ortiz and Briggs (2003) adoptive parents make a clear distinction between children from the domestic market versus children from the international market in regards to who is perceived as an "at risk" child and even more importantly, capable of being saved. Adoptive parents perceive international adoptees as unfortunate byproducts of their society; a society that lacks financial, educational, medical, and/or technological development, a society

that is stricken with poverty, or a society that upholds controversial cultural practices (such as China's one-child policy or South Korea's shunning of single mother households). American domestic adoptees are not viewed in the same light as their international adoptees counterparts. American domestic adoptees are viewed as the offspring of individuals who *chose* to act irresponsibly and more importantly do not adhere to the societal norms of the dominant culture (Ortiz and Briggs 2003). Adoptive parents view international adoptees as victims who can be transformed into productive citizens through the help of their new families. On the contrary, Zhang and Lee (2011) find that both international adoptive parents and domestic adoptive parents alike view all of the adoptees irrespective of their origins as "potentially disadvantaged and sincerely want to improve their lives;" but, the interracial adoption of domestic children is viewed as a greater challenge that requires substantial work (p.85). In this research, the couples' sentiments regarding international and domestic adoption better align with the argument presented by Ortiz and Briggs. The couples, more specifically the fathers, believe that both the adoptive parents and the international adoptee benefit from the adoption relationship in that the couples are able to help a needy child, while at the same time meet their goal of becoming parents. The advantages for both the parents and child influence their receptiveness towards international adoption. However, there is less of a draw towards "saving" a domestic adoptee – moreover a minority adoptee – but rather, they focus on the ability to improve the life chances of *foreign* children (who in this sample, primarily refers to children of Asian descent).

The parents take into consideration both the dire situations in which international adoptees are born into (such as poverty) and the circumstances of their births (e.g. being abandoned and left to fend for oneself as a street peasant or being raised within an institution, which can both lead to the stagnation of intellectual, physical, behavioral and emotional development). They also consider the chances that the children could secure upward mobility in their birth country. As the couples perceive these factors as negatively impacting a foreign child's life, such considerations give pause to adopting a foreign child. For instance, Ryan could not fathom the idea of himself living as an orphan child in an underdeveloped society, and living to just survive rather than thrive. It was important for him to be able to parent and provide a better life for such a child. As stated by Ryan and agreed by Carla:

Ryan: I love being a dad, I love being a parent. And, the lady at when we [were] about to adopt she was like "Is it important you pass on your genes or pass on your values?" And I'm like "oh my God. God forbid somebody [gets] stuck with my genes." ...No I rather pass on my value. When she said that that totally cemented it for me. And so the fact that I can't imagine that would happen to me – somewhere in a third world country possibly stitching clothes for Nike, you know working 12 hours a day, dadadada in a sweatshop. You know so the fact that we got to be parents and got to help somebody on top of it...

Carla: It was a win-win.

Ryan: It was a win-win.

The parents also acknowledge – although they do not necessarily agree with – the fact that there are people (even within the adoption community) who find international adoption problematic because of the exploitative nature of international adoption between the developed and developing/underdeveloped nations. Examples of the exploitative incidents of international adoption are well documented dating as far back as the 1970s to as current as the earlier 2000s when Guatemala discontinued the acceptance of new applications as they worked towards revamping their adoption process (Hermann & Kasper 1992; U.S. Department of State 2015a). Some examples of exploitation includes:

- Birth parents from the nations of Sri Lanka, Honduras, Colombia, and Peru being victimized by a system whose facilitators pry on desperate often poor families to release their children for miniscule compensation, especially in comparison to the overall profit derived from international adoptions.
- The coercion of Salvadorian and Guatemalan parents to relinquish their children for adoption or, in other instances, Salvadorian and Guatemalan children are abducted and placed for adoption. Legal documents are falsified in order to secure the illegal adoptions.
- Or, China's one-child policy, which complicates the nature of domestic adoption and penalizes poor rural families who do not want to abandon their "illegitimate" child. International adoption comes to exist as the more promising option for the infants who are unable to remain with

their birth families (and a lucrative business) because of the country's politics (Hermann & Kasper 1992; Johnson 2012).

The occurrences of such incidents have fueled international adoption debates. Opponents of international adoption find it problematic because it can produce instances of child trafficking as these children are reallocated from impoverished countries to wealthy countries. Many feel it is more beneficial to help improve the conditions of the impoverished societies from which these children come from rather than sever the children's ties to their birth families and culture by placing them up for adoption (Smolin 2004). On the contrary, proponents of international adoption believe it is most important to focus specifically on the needs of the children. If such children were to remain in their origin countries, they will endure hardships often caused by poverty, political turmoil, natural disasters, and other ill misfortunes. Therefore, they support international adoption because they believe the primary goal is to improve the life chances of the children by providing them love, a stable home, and access to a number of resources (resources that are most likely not readily accessible in their place of origin such as a quality education and healthcare) (Smolin 2004). Lawrence Blackwell acknowledged that there are people who find international adoptions problematic; but overall he believed that international adoptions offered many benefits for the orphaned children. He blatantly discussed his disagreement with the opposing arguments and paints a grim picture of his three years old Korean son, Karl's, alternate future had he remained in Korea. According to Lawrence, Karl acquired the most advantages by residing with his new family in the States.

Lawrence: I don't see it. We sat through the adoption lectures and I've heard them play down the kind of socioeconomic argument where you're raiding the poor third world country. Look he would have been an orphan or probably on the streets of Seoul. He probably would have been raised in an orphanage. He probably would have been developmentally delayed and a thousand other bad effects. He's in a home now that completely loves him unconditionally. He's got resources that, that, that's true that he didn't have. He's got a family, an extended family.

Brenda: Right.

Lawrence: How you don't see that as a win, you know, on both sides? In truth it works and that's a good thing.

Overall, the couples' initial embracing of adoption varies. For some it is a very natural and non-conflicting decision. For others it takes a while as they first reconcile with their fertility issues and then redirect their focus on the goal of parenting a child. And among a subgroup of the sample, there are couples that desire to provide a needy child with a family, a home, security, and resources. The noble act of humanitarianism is viewed as benefitting both parents and child.

Once the couples come to the realization that adoption exists as an alternate route for building their families (and in some instances participating in altruistic endeavors) they must then determine which market (international or domestic) best suits their needs. The couples are mindful that should they look towards the

international adoption market the adoption will most likely be interracial. For example, the Coopers', a white American couple who chose to adopt from Russia, were well aware that their children could be of European or Asian descent. Therefore, it is important to understand how these parents move forward from accepting adoption to determining from which market to adopt. More specifically, what resonates as important factors when the couples choose their market of choice, and how the parents' perception of race influences their market of choice?

The Evaluation of the Domestic versus the International Adoption Markets

"Why do you not want to adopt from here?" is a familiar yet complicated question. It is one that many of these couples face as their peers, family, and at times complete strangers inquire about their choice to adopt a foreign child rather than an American child. The parents explain that the question often implies that the couples should have preferred the adoption of a white American child. Such individuals boldly challenge the parents' choice to decide against the adoption of a white American child but they overlook the other factors the parents take into consideration (aside from race and ethnicity) when moving forward with an adoption. And, then depending on the situation and with whom they are speaking, the parents may or may not explain their decision to adopt abroad. For these couples, domestic adoption is the less favorable option due to the United States endorsement of birth parents' rights, the marketization of the private adoption selection process, and concerns commonly associated with public adoption agencies (the least desirable form of domestic adoption). International

adoption, on the other hand, is praised as a bureaucratic process in which there exists minimal interference from the birth parents thereby leading to a more predictable waiting period that guarantees the permanent placement of a child.

Domestically, there are various ways for a couple to adopt. The options include private domestic adoption, adoption through a public agency (commonly known as the foster care system), independent adoption which is carried out by a lawyer, and adoption through an unlicensed agency (U.S Department of Health and Human Services 2010b). Private domestic adoption and public agency adoption are the most common forms of domestic adoptions evaluated by the couples when considering their different options; yet both forms are deemed unacceptable by these parents. According to Ishizawa and Kubo (2014) on a national scale, international adoption is the preferred choice among white parents; in comparison to non-white parents, white parents are 2.2 times more likely to adopt internationally than domestically through a private adoption (p. 642). The strong preference towards international adoption has much to do with the intricate role of birth parents in the private domestic adoption process. In order for a private domestic adoption to occur, the birth parents must voluntarily surrender their parental rights to the licensed agency, and this can occur at any point during the pregnancy. Depending on state laws, the birth parents are allotted a time frame in which they can reverse the decision to terminate their parental rights. The prospective parents work with the agency to make the adoption arrangements; and, in many instances the birth parents are involved in the selection of the adoptive parents. The prospective parents provide personal information through different creative means,

such as “profiles, books, or videos” (U.S Department of Health and Human Services 2010b, p. 10). In addition, the birth parents may create an adoption plan for the child that includes keeping the adoption “open”, a practice once abandoned in the 1940s but gained support once more in the 1970s as adoptees and birth parents reiterated the value of having access to one’s familial background rather than keeping it a secret (Ishizawa & Kubo 2014). However, the adoptive parents in this sample view the liberty of birth parents to reverse their adoption decisions (deciding against the adoption of their biological child), participate in the selection process, or arrange open adoptions, as disadvantages of the domestic adoption process that negatively impact the prospective adoptee and the prospective adoptive parents.

Marketing the Prospective Parents. In the United States a practice now common among domestic adoptions is the inclusion of the birth parent(s) in the selection process (U.S Department of Health and Human Services 2010b). Consequently an agency is no longer solely responsible for finding a match for a child. The inclusion of the birth parent(s)’opinions regarding who can best parent their child allows the birth mother or father (if present) to make a more informed decision about the child’s future; and, one can hope that such informed decisions help alleviate any concerns one might have prior to the finalization of the adoption and thus allow it to successfully take place. Their decisions are based upon reviewing such things as couple’s portfolios, letters, videos or interviews with prospective families. Yet the intimate involvement of the birth parent(s) in the adoption process creates a sense of insecurity among prospective couples. The concept of “advertising” or “marketing” oneself as worthy of adoption is found to be

problematic. The couples are concerned with experiencing prejudice from birth parent(s) (for example, due to their age or the presence of biological children) and not being selected for an adoption. The idea of waiting to be chosen as adoptive parents by the birth parent is comparable to the feeling of insecurity you might remember as a child nervously waiting to be selected for a dodgeball team during gym class. Your reputation is on the line; being called last suggests you are a poor player. Impatiently you wait, trying to figure out which attributes are leading to you constantly being passed over until finally your name is called out. Similarly, an indefinite wait to determine the couples' fate as adoptive parents very likely involves being turned away several times before a birth parent deems them worthy of raising her child. Such a wait is found to be unbearable, especially for those who have already experienced the uncertainty of infertility. As stated Ryan Burns:

...We had already been through enough drama with trying to have you know biological [children] that I didn't want someone to – I didn't want to put together a book and have someone like, go to like an interview. You know it's almost like a job interview except it's times a thousand. And, then somebody says "no" you know "he's kind of short, she was kind of" you know and boom. So I didn't want emotionally to go through that at all and I'm not saying that's wrong. I totally understand if you're a birth mother you would like to pick the parents of the child like that's fine. I just wasn't emotionally ready to get through that at all.

Domestic adoption is viewed as lacking a structured process that guarantees a child's placement while international adoption is perceived as offering a more streamlined process guided by bureaucratic rules: first, you select from among a group of countries in which you meet eligibility requirements set by each country; second, you must pass the home study conducted by an U.S. adoption agency and submit all required paperwork; and then finally, you wait for a referral which is chosen by the staff from the origin (birth) country. International adoption is a predictable process. As long as the couples meet the eligibility requirements and provide the needed paperwork they will be placed with a child, unlike domestic adoption where they must wait for someone to "like" them.

Open Adoptions. Another unique feature of domestic adoption is the option for the birth parent(s) and the adoptive family to be involved in an open adoption. Open adoptions allow the child to have access to their family background including tangible knowledge of their birth parent(s), such as their names and pictures. Moreover, open adoptions are beneficial because if and when a child begins to seek an understanding of why (s)he was placed into adoption, that child will have access to valuable information. An adoptee who participates with an open adoption develops agency because the information made available through open adoptions allows the child to have a more in-depth and personal understanding of the conditions that led to his/her adoption. The child does not have to be solely dependent on the adoption stories shared by the adoptive parents (if addressed at all) as his/her identity develops. The degree in which open adoptions occur varies. They can be as intimate as birth family and adoptive

family socializing with one another on a scheduled basis to simply remaining in contact through the exchange of letters/emails. Teresa, a social worker from Bringing Love Adoption Agency, shared that the agency spends time educating prospective families about the benefits of open adoption, but ultimately it is an option primarily determined by the birth parent(s). Teresa stated, “That’s really the birth mother’s decision. They drive the rules.”

However, the couples perceive open adoptions as complicating the situation. The drawbacks of open adoption outweigh its benefits. The parents place a lot of energy into developing a bonding relationship with their adoptive child who, through the act of adoption, is exposed to a new environment in which the smells, sounds, and sights are all different. The parents must console the child as the child grieves the loss of his/her previous home/family; even if the child was raised in an institution because the environment provided some form of interaction with familiar persons. The parents must teach the child to trust them as his/her new but also permanent caregivers in addition to raising the child to respect the rules of the new home. Open adoptions further complicate the bonding process because the parents are placed in a position to discuss the detailed intricacies – in particular the presence of another parent who has chosen against raising the child – much sooner than they prefer with their adopted child. For some of the families parenting is a new concept. They do not want their efforts towards bonding with the child to be undermined by the presence of birth families as both the child and the parents become accustomed to their new lifestyle. Alissa Taylor, the mother of two Korean children, explained “So along with that open

adoption you're going to be the parent, you're going to be [the] big guy and you're going to be the one doing all the work. Then there's going to be this other parent waiting in the wings who's going to come in and be the big hero mommy [or] daddy to go and do whatever they want." Another participant, Wayne Hughes who is the father of a Chinese adoptee, further stated:

...The other thing is even with open adoption, one of the things we talked about is you know we know some people that have kind of been in that situation. The parents come around at Christmas time and birthdays. They want the kid on Christmas Day. They want the kid on their birthdays but they don't want to do the work. And it's like I don't want to be a glorified babysitter. If I'm going to do the work I also want to be able to enjoy the good times. And have you come in and say "We'll I'm taking him." No, no, no. You got to deal with the good and the bad. That's what being a parent is about...If I'm a parent I'm going to commit myself to it and I don't want to have somebody over my shoulder making decisions for my child on my behalf just because they feel some sense of entitlement.

Open adoptions are seen as providing the birth parents with the option to be a presence in the child's life while at the same time relinquishing the responsibilities and commitment that come with being birth parents. The couples find that adoption practices of foreign nations are less inclined to involve the birth parents. International adoptions create a very purposeful distance between the birth parents and adoptive

parents. It prevents the birth parents from having access to the child and interfering with the child's ability to adapt to the new family. It allows the adoptive parents to discuss with their child the complicated nature of adoptions at their own pace and to prepare for the transition. Should there come a point in their lives in which their child is persistent in learning about their biological background, the parents will assist their child with such endeavors but, until then they wish to reveal what they know about the adoption at their own pace.

In all, the parents are not comfortable with the idea of raising their adopted children under the guise of the birth parents. But, over time some parents may find themselves open towards meeting the birth parents if such opportunities became available. For instance, Phyllis was certain that she never wanted to meet her sons' birth mother (they share the same birth mother) but as her oldest son experiences the growing pains of adolescence it is clear that once the resources are available he will begin searching for his birth mother. Surprisingly, Phyllis is no longer concerned about her sons meeting their birth mother. She is now more inclined to meet the birth mother and would love the opportunity to say "Oh thank you. I have two precious wonderful boys because you were selfless enough to give them a chance." But overall, open adoption presents challenges that many of these parents would like to avoid especially during a child's younger years as he or she becomes accustomed to growing up in the new household.

Termination of Birth Rights. A contradiction exists among the couples' feelings and concerns regarding birth parents' termination rights. Uniformly the couples discuss the *right* of birth parents to reverse their decision. They sympathetically believe that it is a very difficult decision to make, yet they do not believe it is *right* (in the best interest of the child or the adoptive family) to reverse such decisions. The couples are less supportive of the right for birth parents to reverse their parental termination because it creates a sense of uncertainty that lasts throughout the entire pregnancy and also during the state-defined time frame in which birth parents can opt out of the adoption following the birth of a child. This uncertainty creates anxiety among the adoptive parents as they wait to see first, if the adoption will go through and second, if the child will remain permanently in their homes. They find it unfair that prospective couples are expected to invest their time and resources into the proposed adoption with the understanding that it could fall apart. Just as detrimental is the idea of the adoptive parents and child bonding only to find out a few months later the birth parents wish to have their child returned. These concerns are real for the couples. They know of others who have dealt with misfortune of failed adoptions because the birth parents changed their minds. For instance, Brenda was exposed to different women from her job who were uncertain of what to do when they found themselves unexpectedly pregnant. Twice Brenda discussed the possibility of adopting the unexpected child but both women's commitment to the adoption fell through. Brenda Blackwell actually withheld from her husband the second potential adoption due to the volatile nature of private domestic adoption and the emotional unrest it can cause.

Brenda: The one girl, gosh what year was this? 2005 or 2006, she found out she had become pregnant, and she already had like two children of her own. She was living on her own, a single mom, and she decided she couldn't afford another one. And she was talking about, "I'll just have an abortion." And, I talked to her, I said, "If you have the baby, we'll take the baby, we are looking to adopt." That fell through, obviously, we got up to the point that she was like, I forget how many months pregnant, but it was right before you could have an abortion – or right before the deadline that you had to cut off. We had agreed to – we had talked about open adoption and all that – we told her we would take the baby and everything. At the last minute, I think she kind of freaked out and she told me she was going on and having the abortion.

Interviewer: Aw, are you serious?

Brenda: It was awful, awful! I cried and she cried. Yeah, it was terrible. And then I had another situation a couple of years later where a lady decided she was going to give her baby up for adoption and then she decided she was going to keep it. So, to go through that emotional roller coaster is rough, for her and for me. The second time, I didn't even tell my husband because I didn't want him to go through that either.

Melanie and Melvin Murray, on the other hand, experienced a fast and successful domestic adoption. They have three adopted children (the middle and youngest children were adopted from China and South Korea respectively) but their

oldest child's adoption was arranged through a lawyer who they found in the local phonebook. Very quickly the lawyer matched them with a birth parent and within hours after his birth they were able to bring home their infant son, whom they affectionately referred to as their "Yellow Pages baby". But a follow-up call from their lawyer following the arrival of their son led to immediate panic; they were afraid he was calling to state that the mother had changed her mind. For 90 days their joy surrounding parenthood was haunted by the possibility of the birth mother changing her mind.

Among the subset of families who investigated public agency adoptions, such adoptions are viewed unfavorable because (1) it is difficult to terminate the birth parents' parental rights and (2) many of the children available through public agencies have experienced trauma at the hands of their birth parents. Public agency adoptions consist of children whose parents' parental rights are revoked by the state because a child is exposed to detrimental treatment, such as abuse or neglect. A child may remain or move in and out of foster care for several years prior to adoption because the state's main priority is for the child to be successfully reunited with his/her birth parents. Public agency adoptions take place if it has been deemed by the court that the child's best interest is to be placed with an adoptive family. The public agency deals with the placement arrangements (U.S Department of Health and Human Services 2010b). These study couples are very pessimistic of the process in which the child becomes available for adoption and of their ability to raise a traumatized child. For instance, Lawrence strayed away from the humanitarian discourse previously used to describe the benefits

of international adoption and discussed the downfalls of raising a child from the child welfare system:

...The domestic adoption I view is kind of like a broken system. And, I don't, I'm not trying to do social work. I'm trying to adopt a kid [Brenda laughs]. I'm not trying to go through cause to be honest here's, here's how it would happen. A kid would wind up in the house. Inevitably, I'm going to fix him and do everything I can to help the kid. And when we get the kid flying right the last thing I need to hear is Daddy's been released from jail, mommy completed rehab, and appears for those days. Um cause I'm not going to give the kid back to circumstances where I know we're doomed. You know so that's and to do that two or three times before I'm given the option, no, no.

The couples' primary goal is the parenting of their new child. They do not want to deal with the issues associated with the birth parents' personal struggles. They do not want their child to be exposed to or at worse harmed by his/her birth parents' irresponsible behavior. It is not appealing that the child could be returned to his/her birth parents prior to the finalization of the adoption or that the couples might go through a similar scenario several times before a child is permanently placed with their family. The couples are in favor of providing a stable/less tumultuous environment for a disadvantaged child; however, an adoption carried out by a public agency is not the most favorable option. The complicated relationship between birth parents, adoptive parents, and the child makes it difficult to rebuild the child's trust and any advancement

the adoptive families may experience in regards to the child's attitudinal and behavioral adjustments may be reverted by the disruptive nature of foster care. In addition, the couples are weary of their ability to handle the psychological damage many of the children deal with after being removed from the traumatizing situations that took place in their birth homes. It is unnerving for the couples to consider how the introduction of a foster-raised child in their family could cause serious issues in their household especially if children are already present in the home. As explained by Wayne Hughes, had he seriously considered a public agency adoption it could have only taken place prior to the adoption of their Chinese Daughter, Sonya:

Well I think one of the things – well one of my first jobs I was at a mental health agency so I was working with a lot of kids that were in the foster care system. Um and they would go into these foster homes and then they would have to be moved out because they had so much baggage that they brought with them that they would molest another kid that was in the household. Or, they would be physically abusive. I'm protective of Sonya and I'm like as much as I would like to help that kid and do that I would have had to done that first. As opposed to now because I would never be able to forgive myself if something happened to her because I was being selfish and said I wanted another kid in my life and wanted to bring them in.

In general, the couples believe that public adoptions present a host of challenges. Therefore, in order to avoid such challenges they turn to the international adoption market as the prefer route for adoption.

Conclusion

The first step the couples take while creating their adoption plans is becoming open to adoption. Next, they must choose from which market to adopt. However, prior to the 1970s their choices were very limited and interracial international adoptions were very rare. Adoption in the United States was traditionally situated around the practice of blending, i.e. the ability to pair a family with a child whose presence appears natural as displayed by the commonalities of “race, ethnicity, religion, and even temperament and personality” (Jacobson 2008, p. 16; Dorow 2006). Historically, white Americans more commonly participated in formal adoptions and their primary preference was the adoption of healthy white infants. The formal adoption of African American children has always been an issue, one which was exacerbated by race-based practices and the underrepresentation of African American families seeking formal adoptions. The informal adoption of children is a more common practice among African Americans (Kreider 2003). However, during the 1960s, structural barriers protecting racial boundaries were alleviated thus leading to drastic changes of the U.S. social context. Such acts as racial minorities fighting for equality during the peak of the Civil Rights Movement and the omission of anti-miscegenation laws beginning in 1967 (Maillard 2009) led to a change in racial attitudes in which Americans grew more

tolerant of interracial interactions (in particularly those of black/white interactions), including interracial unions and the formation of families through interracial adoption. In the 1970s white adoptive parents' interests towards nonwhite infants grew as the availability of healthy white infants decreased due to additional social changes, which included the legalization of contraceptive devices and abortion and society's growing leniency towards single-parenthood. However, the promotion of interracial adoptions was met with opposition particularly from the black and Native American communities (National Association of Black Social Workers 2014; Jacobson 2008; National Indian Child Welfare Association 2014; Briggs & Marre 2009). As the adoption of healthy white infants became less accessible and transracial adoption programs were protested by racial minorities, international adoption became a viable option for white adoptive parents.

However, Ortiz and Briggs (2003) challenge the 'healthy white baby famine' argument because it overlooks an important fact; the availability of white infants for adoption remained scarce prior to the 1970s yet the scarcity did not persuade a large scale movement of white Americans to seek the adoption of foreign-born children (2003, p. 52). On the contrary, Ortiz and Briggs (2003) argue that although the relaxation of racial norms beginning in the 1960s made it more acceptable for interracial adoptions to occur, the introduction of social and political agendas of the 1990s, more specifically the endorsement of the colorblind racial ideology, changed the racial discourse among the adoption community and provided legal support for interracial, moreover international adoptions. The discourse moved from focusing on same-race

adoptions to focusing on the eradication of racial-matching. The adoption community denounced the relevance of race as an important factor influencing the placement of a child for adoption. The adoption of nonwhite children, whether from the domestic or international market, became more acceptable and the children more available for adoption because of the legal frameworks put into place by the Multi-Ethnic and Inter-Ethnic Placement Acts of 1992 and 1994 which prohibit race-based adoption policies (Quiroz 2007). Yet, the colorblind racial ideology simultaneously rationalizes the decision against adopting from the public adoption agencies – ultimately creating another form of race-based practices – because the birth parents of foster children are deemed as social deviants whose irresponsible behaviors lead to the birthing of undesirable children (Ortiz & Briggs 2003, Dorow 2006). The children more readily available from the U.S. child welfare system (which has a surplus of African American children) are less desirable than foreign-born adoptees due to their biological backgrounds – allegedly, they come from the loins of parents who exhibit adversarial cultural traits and lack respect towards reproductive health (Ortiz & Briggs 2003; Ishizawa & Kubo 2013). The parents assume these children to be chronically-ill, e.g. crack babies or victims of fetal alcohol syndrome (Dorow 2006). Overtime, the race of an American child has come to be synonymous with positive or negative attributes associated with the American adoptee and the route to which they were placed for adoption. For instance, Kubo (2010) reveals that through the use of coded colorblind language such as ‘teen mothers and welfare mothers,’ adoptive parents dismiss

domestic adoption as a desirable option because they transpose race and class characteristics of the birth mother onto the child.

In this study Regina Kennedy is one of only a few families in which a spouse specifically questioned their ability to successfully parent an African American child. As a social worker, Regina's extensive experience working with birth mothers was primarily among African Americans and the growing population of Latino immigrants. She came to understand on a firsthand basis the difficulty of placing African American children with adopted families and she was well aware that many of the birth mothers sought adoption following multiple crisis or late in their pregnancy.

I did think about, I mean, I guess for me my experience as a birth parent [working with birth parents as a social worker] it was and it is very different than being an adoptive parent but it was very crisis oriented. I'm obviously dealing with women who are at a crisis point in their lives and it's very unpredictable. And, I, you know it was a hard job for me because the women generally came pretty last minute or right towards the end and [were] dealing with a lot of multiple crises in their lives. And it was difficult to work in it. So I wasn't sure how I would feel being at the parent end. Also, I mean most of the people I know who have adopted domestically Caucasian children are going to different states. You know when you have different laws in different states...there's just so many layers of decisions you have to make, to think about. You know what would it be like to adopt an African American child or a child and how to deal with some of the

outcomes? We were not sure how. Would we be supportive enough? Would our families be supportive enough?

Not all of the couples in the study are as candid as Regina when discussing their decision against domestic adoptions, however the use of colorblind racial undertones reveals once more that race is an influential factor when considering domestic adoptions, particularly public adoptions. They transpose the negative attributes associated with the birth parent onto the adopted child. The negative stereotypes associated with the African American community are unfortunately represented by incidents that lead to many of the children being placed in the state's custody. Coded language such as "drug abuse," "drug exposure," and "jail" (as already addressed) give insight into the multiple crises referred to by Regina. These multiple crises experienced by the birth parent might negatively impact the health of the unborn child. Or, they present an idea of the types of challenges an African American child may experience as an adult in the U.S., for the cultural practices are viewed as innate or, at the least, it will take a lot of resources and support by the adoptive parents and members of the extended family to protect the child from such challenges. Regina's quote also reveals that domestic adoption is looked down upon due to the complicated nature of domestically adopting white children through private agencies. The adoption of white children continues to be associated with private adoption thus suggesting that such children (though difficult to adopt) will ultimately be healthy, while their African American counterparts are viewed unhealthy (e.g. physically, mentally, intellectually, or emotionally) independent of the type of adoption, private versus public, due to "innate" cultural traits.

The parents in this study primarily focus on the shortcomings of the U.S. domestic adoption system to explain their preference for international adoption once they grew receptive to the idea of adoption. In grave detail, they discuss their disapproval of open adoptions, birth parents involvement in the selection process, and birth parents' rights toward parental termination. Although not part of the dominant conversation, these parents also reveal the extent to which race influences their decision to adopt. Aware of the difficulty of moving forward with a private domestic adoption (in particularly the waiting period) the parents compare private adoptions to public adoptions. However, the reality that African American children are disproportionately placed in foster care versus a child of any other racial background (Ishiwaza & Kubo 2014) causes the couple to acknowledge that they will most likely be placed with an African American child should they chose that route of adoption. The acceptance of such a child for adoption places the couples in what they believe to be a vulnerable position for they will have to raise a child who may face serious challenges due to the circumstances which led to them being placed in the foster care system. Or, as byproducts of African American (lower class) culture the adopted child may ultimately find him/herself in a similar position as their birth parents, a position that suggests the inability for African Americans to assimilate into mainstream U.S. society. On the contrary, issues concerning children from abroad are evaluated within the larger social scheme. Social problems such as poverty or warfare take precedence over the prospective parents finding fault in the birth parents, which prevents the children from being stigmatized by prospective American parents. Even though these parents are

open to the concept of interracial adoption, race in reference to African American children influences their adoption choice, specifically the option of choosing international adoption versus domestic adoption.

The goal of the next chapter is to utilize the originization process as a theory to articulate how particular factors influenced the creation of the parents' adoption plans but it also presents the opportunity to better articulate how the negative stereotypes associated with African Americans influence the prospect of adoption for foreign blacks.

CHAPTER 4: ORIGINIZATION AND THE CREATION OF THE ADOPTION PLAN

On the table sat very elaborate cupcakes designed to capture the spa theme for Tanya Burns' 9th birthday celebration. Carla had baked vanilla cupcakes and asked her coworker to decorate them. Female toppers were placed in the center of each cupcake. The toppers consisted of a variation of white females with different hair colors ranging from black, blonde, red and brown. Each doll was surrounded by the bubbles created by Carla's coworker. She shaped the buttercream icing into small bubbles and dusted them with blue food coloring that created the illusion of a bubbling Jacuzzi. All the girls at the slumber party were ecstatic when they saw the cupcakes. They rushed over to the table pointing out those cupcakes which they believed resembled them the most.

A majority of Tanya's guests were white American females with the exception of one guest who was also an Asian adoptee. Her friend was around the same age and height as Tanya. But, unlike Tanya whose hair was a shiny jet black, her friend had long sandy brown hair. Yet, even as the girls rushed to the table asking one another "who do you look like?" Neither Tanya nor her fellow adoptee had trouble locating a doll they felt they resembled. Tanya's friend walked over to the table and pointed out a doll with brown hair and declared it looked like her the most because "it is pretty just like me." Collectively, all of girls selected which doll best favored Tanya. The cupcake they chose included a doll that had two long black pigtails with pink ribbons. The girls decided this was the best option for Tanya because pigtails used to be one of her most popular hairstyles.

The cupcakes are an innovative and ingenious way of capturing the spa-theme party but even more intriguing is the fact that all of the children were able to identify with one of the cupcakes. Perhaps, Carla Burns went to great lengths to find *Asian* female toppers but to no avail; nevertheless, her purchase of white female toppers was a success. Although, the dolls lacked physical variations outside of the different hair colors, not a single child at the slumber party felt alienated because of her inability to relate to one of the cupcakes. Tanya's and the other adoptee's experience at the slumber party illustrate the honorary white status bestowed upon Asian adoptees by their adoptive parents.

According to past research, this sense of inclusion (as revealed by Tanya and her Asian friend) speaks volume to adoptive parents desire to adopt assimilable children. In the international adoption market the perception of which children are viewed as assimilable is closely linked with children of Asian descent. The adoptive parents view Asian children as assimilable because of their presumptive ability to integrate among the mainstream society as suggested by the model minority stereotype. Research conducted by Kubo (2010) reveals that white adoptive parents utilize their understanding of the U.S. racial hierarchy in order to assess which children are best suited for their families and will be accepted by their community. Kubo specifically states (2010):

...Many adoptive parents I interviewed considered racial stereotypes of different minority groups in the United States, which directed them to adopt from

overseas especially from Asian countries. They acknowledged that many available children for domestic adoption are African American. With this in mind, the model minority stereotype of Asian Children steers the adoptive parents' decision to adopt from Asian nations (p. 274).

According to Kubo (2010) a factor influencing the adoptive parents' adoption preferences is assimilation, the likelihood that an adopted child would achieve upward assimilation in the U.S. This chapter contributes to the present dialogue on white Americans' adoption preferences by using the originization process (introduced in Chapter two) as a way to further one's understanding of how the adoptive parents of Asian adoptees come to terms with who they feel they can best parent. This chapter unravels how the four components of the originization process – reputation of the birth country's international adoption program, child's race, child's ethnicity, and child's birth culture – influence the adoptive parents' plans for adoption. Moreover, this chapter reveals that the immigrant assimilation experiences of international adoptees' co-ethnic group is also an influential factor impacting the parents' adoption plans.

As displayed by figure 4.1, the process begins with an evaluation of a country's adoption program, which includes the adoptive parents assessing the eligibility requirements and its reputation.

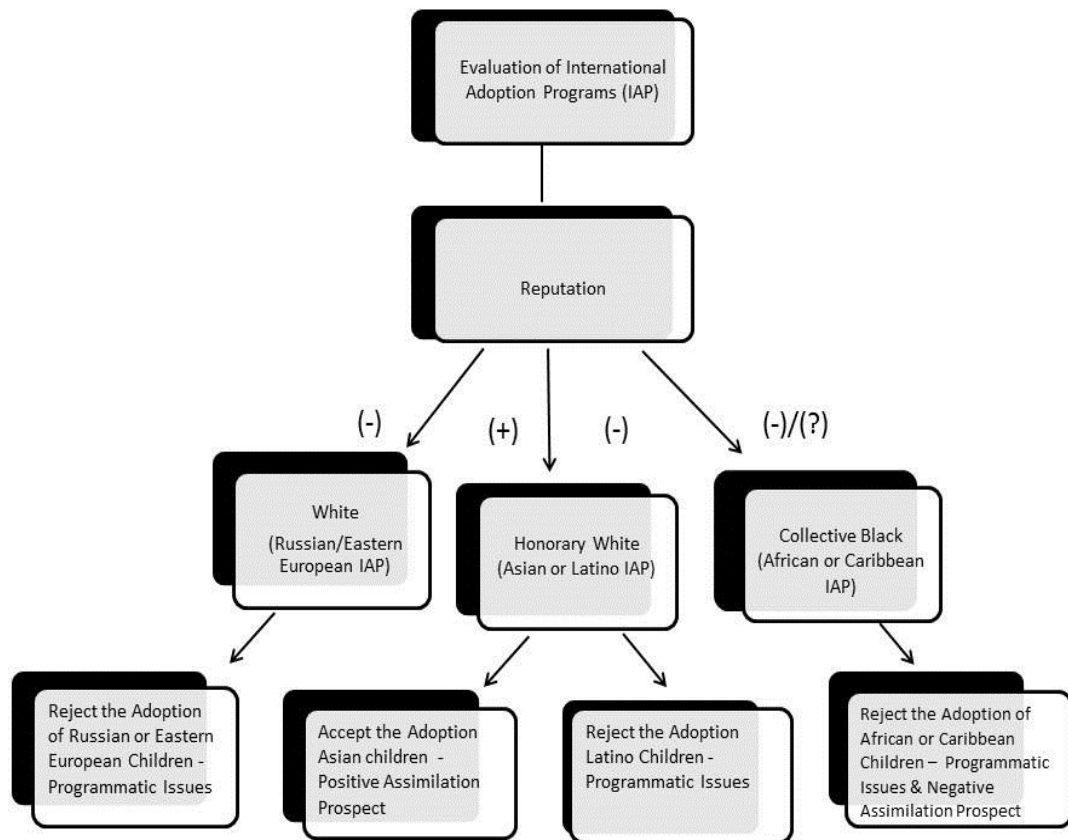


Figure 4.1 Factors Influencing the International Adoption Plans of White Adoptive Parents. (-) negative reputation, (+) positive reputation, and reputation unknown.

Once the couples learn that they meet the eligibility requirements for specific programs, it is the reputation of the adoption programs that both signals the odds of successfully finalizing an adoption, while alluding to cultural practices that promote the birth and development of healthy infants. Such factors can move prospective parents¹⁷ who were once only open to the idea of racial-matching to be receptive towards nonwhite adoptions. For others, objection to interracial adoptions never existed for they were well aware of the negative reputations associated with Eastern European adoption programs, particularly in Russia. In addition, the adoptive parents are open-minded

¹⁷ Prospective parents are defined as couples who are seeking adoption and have committed to the idea of adoption.

towards nonwhite adoptions because of their affinity for non-European cultures. As demonstrated by figure 4.1 the international adoption programs are classified within the three-tier system to capture the parents' perception of the U.S. racial hierarchy because the data reveals that the adoptive parents' openness to nonwhite adoptions replicates a system of racial stratification. Asian international adoption programs have a strong reputation, and with this understanding, the adoptive parents evaluate the meaningfulness of the children's racial identities.

Among one group of adoptive parents, those who de-emphasize the significance of race, the racial identity of an Asian adoptee is not called into question. The parents are either accustomed to being a part of racially diverse social environments or they immediately denounce the negative reactions they expect to receive from members of their extended family. Among the second group of adoptive parents, those who emphasize the significance of race, race comes into question as they think about: (1) who do they believe they feel most comfortable parenting, (2) who do they believe members of their extended family would accept, and (3) how do they expect others in society (which includes evaluating the reactions of adoptee's co-ethnic members) to react to the adoption? This study finds that the adoptive parents are most comfortable with the adoption of foreign-born Asian children because these children are viewed as healthy, developmentally sound, and legally accessible. Moreover, the parents assess the co-ethnics' immigrant experience in the U.S. The adoptive parents believe that the immigrant experience of Asian Americans, in particular Korean and Chinese Americans, suggests both a promising life for the young adoptees and that their children occupy an

intermediary position within the U.S. racial hierarchy as honorary whites. Together, each of these attributes is factored into the adoptive parents' perception of the assimilable-nature of the Asian adoptee; and thus, the adoptive parents are confident in their ability to raise the assimilable Asian child.

On the contrary, the novelty of foreign-born black adoptions leaves many of the parents with little to say in reference to the reputation of the adoption programs; although, in a few instances there are parents who view such programs negatively. The racial identity of foreign-born black children is significant and influences the parents' adoption decision. Primarily, the adoptive parents are concerned with the pervasiveness of racism within the U.S. and even personally within some of their extended families. However, the adoptive parents also use the experiences of African Americans as a proxy for the assimilation prospect of foreign-born black adoptees due to the lack of knowledge regarding immigrant experiences of nonnative blacks. The life chances of such adoptees are viewed less positively. The foreign-born black adoptee occupies a low hierarchal ranking in the U.S. hierarchy as a member of the collective black and such adoptions are rejected by the adoptive parents.

Limited data was collected in reference to the adoptive parents' preferences towards the adoption of foreign-born Latino children. However, this study does find that such adoptions are generally rejected due to the negative reputation of Latin American adoption programs. The negative reputation is primarily associated with the closing of Guatemala, once one of the most popular sending countries to the U.S., or

with the disapproval of program-specific requirements. Unlike the rejection of foreign-born black adoptees, the racial identity of Latino children appears to not be a detrimental factor influencing the parents' choices; very little is stated about their prospects for assimilation. In all, these preliminary findings suggest that Latino children also occupy the intermediary tier of honorary white within the U.S. racial hierarchy.

Factors Influencing White Adoptive Parents' Plans for International Adoption

The Consideration of Program-specific Attributes. Unlike parents who raise biological children, the absence of detailed information regarding adopted children's biographical history leaves the adoptive parents at a disadvantage in comparison to biological parents. It is impossible for adoptive parents of internationally adopted children to rely on themselves or other family members as offering windows in which the parents can peer inside and predict their adopted children's biological makeup. Prior to an adoption, they are unable to hypothesize their adopted children's physical traits, temperament, or intellectual capability. They do not have answers readily available to such questions as: What personality characteristics will my adopted child display? What are his/her potential strengths and weakness? And, what physical attributes can we expect of our adopted child? Moreover, adoptive parents have questions that exist beyond the individual level and that grapple with familial and societal level, such as the following questions: will their child be able to bond with his/her new adopted family, how will (s)he be accepted by others outside their family, and how will the child function in society as an adult? Although, the adoptive parents

may have expectations of their adopted children – both as a new and much desired addition to the family and as a productive citizen of the United States – their questions go unanswered until they are in the presence of and begin to interact with their adopted children. Therefore, for couples who move forward with their decision to adopt, the adoption information sessions are a great source for them to gather details about different international adoption programs, as they determine what factors are most important to them.

The information sessions held by Bringing Love Adoption Agency and True Dreams Adoption Agency are quite similar in nature¹⁸. Each agency offers several information sessions throughout the year. The sessions last for approximately three hours and during that time the attendees learn about the pros and cons of the domestic and international adoption programs offered by the agencies. The agencies also welcome the return of past clients who share with the prospective parents their adoption experiences. While in the field, I had the opportunity to listen to the stories of the guest speakers, which consisted of two white heterosexual married couples. The first couple worked with Bringing Love Adoption Agency and the second couple worked with True Dreams Adoption Agency¹⁹. The couples discussed their reasons for adopting, why they chose their respective agencies, how they chose their adoption programs, and the fear and insecurity they experienced while going through the process. Even though their paths to adoption were different, their experiences closely paralleled one another.

¹⁸ Pseudonyms

¹⁹ The couples' names remain anonymous. This information was gathered through observations taken while attending adoption information session with the consent of the adoption agency since the information sessions are public events.

They both had accomplished successful adoptions through South Korean adoption programs and their interactions with their respective agencies were overwhelmingly positive.

The couple from Bringing Love Adoption Agency sat in the corner of the small room, which caused the modest crowd of attendees (approximately ten people) to turn around and adjust their chairs accordingly. The wife was Jewish American, her husband was white American, and on her lap sat their two-year-old Korean adopted son who had only recently joined their family (two months prior to the couple speaking at the information session). For 15 minutes, the couple discussed with the attendees their pre- and post-adoption experiences. The facilitator of the information session (Tammy Nelson) allowed them to speak from their hearts rather than have them address a guided set of questions. The wife predominantly led the conversation. The husband chimed in from time-to-time; but, he was mostly preoccupied with their Korean adopted son, who kept him very busy during the brief presentation.

The wife began by discussing their reasons for working with Bringing Love and choosing the South Korean adoption Program. Before working with Bringing Love, they had already made the decision to adopt from South Korea. They felt the country had a sound international adoption program. Therefore, the couple selected the agency they felt was most knowledgeable about South Korean adoptions. She also shared that over the years they have developed a very close relationship with their caseworker. Their caseworker was very understanding; the adoptive mother described her comfort in

being able to honestly share her frustrations during moments of the despair, and at times, cry in front of her caseworker as they waited for the process to be finalized. But most importantly, she shared with the crowd their joy in being parents and that their son has not had a difficult time adapting to his new family.

Sitting through the adoptive parents' presentation is an opportunity for the prospective parents to learn about an adoptive family's journey to adoption and witness the parent-child interactions. The presenters' Asian adopted son appeared healthy, active, and well-adjusted. During the presentation he sat comfortably on his father's or mother's lap. He could walk and speak a few words in English; and, for a short moment he colored quietly as his parents continued to speak to the crowd. Having adoptive parents present during an information session allows prospective parents to image how their adoption might work out should they choose to follow a similar path and adopt internationally.

The couple from True Dreams Adoption Agency did not have their adopted child present when they presented at the information session, but their story still offered a chance for the attendees to evaluate the couple's international adoption experience and further determine if it was a route they (as prospective parents) were truly interested in taking. The couple spoke to a crowd of approximately 40 people and stated that it was not until several years into their marriage that they decided they wanted children. However, they experienced fertility issues due to the husband receiving treatments for his cancer diagnosis. They did not begin weighing their options

for adoption until after three unsuccessful rounds of in vitro fertilization. Ultimately, the couple decided to adopt from South Korea based upon the wife's personal experience of having a childhood friend who was a Korean adoptee. According to this couple the international adoption is a process whereby hopeful parents seek a match between parents and child that makes sense for their family. As a concluding remark, the couple asked those present in the crowd, seriously considering international adoption, to make sure they were comfortable with their adopted child knowing (s)he was adopted.

The guest speakers are only one of several sources that help form the parents' adoption plans. In addition to prospective parents having the chance to hear the first-hand accounts of past clienteles' involvement with their agencies, the prospective parents sit and listen intensely during the information sessions as the staff convey an array of information regarding the eligibility requirements (which differ among the international adoption programs), the average wait time for the different programs, the children's average age at adoption, the cost, the type and availability of information disclosed by the birth families, the setting in which the children are raised prior to adoption (orphanage versus foster care), and the social contexts that often lead to children being placed for adoption. During these sessions some of the prospective parents are brave enough to raise their questions in front of the crowd. However, most of the attendants hold off from raising their questions until they are able to speak more privately with a staff member.

By the end of the information session, agency staff provide the prospective parents with a thorough walkthrough of the adoption process and the variety of information they must take into consideration as they create their adoption plans. According to Dawn Saunders, the international program manager for True Dreams Adoption Agency, the information sessions are a critical step for couples seeking adoption because, in many instances, the information learned during such sessions put into perspective the several different factors a couple must consider when moving forward with adoption. As stated by Dawn such information may help some couples (a large number of whom she believes comes to the information session undecided) finalize their decision:

...I would imagine many families come to that information session with maybe some information but not all the information. And, some of it that helps them decide could just be eligibility issues. It could be money. It may not necessarily be something about the kids or the programs versus what's feasible for that particular family. ...There are probably families that know for sure, come in there and they say, "I want a baby from China. I don't care if I have to wait six years. That's what I want," and they stick with that. But I would imagine most families kind of walk away and have to weigh out the different information they've gotten and see what's going to work best for them.

Tammy Nelson and Teresa Campbell, who are social workers for Bringing Love Adoption Agency, believed that many of the prospective parents walk into the agencies

well educated about the various international adoption programs by either acquiring knowledge through their own personal searches or holding conversations with adoptive parents. Yet, similar to Dawn's statement, Tammy stated that it was the information sessions that truly influence the prospective parents' adoption preferences:

I think the information meeting would be the thing that would do most of that, because people come in with one idea and they leave, we have either solidified that or they've changed their mind about that. Or, they come in not knowing anything and the information we give them helps them choose something.

The information sessions allow the staff to not only relay factual information pertaining to the different international adoption programs but also reveal the staff's affinity and praise towards specific international adoption programs they view as well established, well run, and predictable. Undeniably the perspectives shared by the agency staff, in regards to the advantages and disadvantages associated with their various adoption programs along with the presentation from past clientele, leave an impression among the prospective parents. It is to the prospective parents' advantage to learn sooner rather than later about the reputations associated with each program. Because, as they begin to forge an understanding of their adoption preferences, hopefully such information will help the families avoid the ugly situation of losing faith in their ability to raise their adopted children; a sentiment that has recently been documented as leading to the rehoming or returning of international adoptees. The

stories of Artyom Savelyven²⁰ (Russian adoptee), Jay (Haitian Adoptee)²¹, and Emily Svenningsen (Chinese adoptee) reveal instances of adoptive parents retracting their original decision to adopt and severing their commitment to raising their adopted children. The following paragraphs provide a brief description of these internationally adopted children's experiences with their American adoptive families.

The first case involves a Russian adoptee named Artyom Savelyven. In 2010 Artyom (formerly known by his American adoptive family as Justin Hasen) was seven years old when he arrived back in Russia from Tennessee, by himself, with nothing more than a simple note in hand (Osborn 2010). His adopted mother, Torry Hasen, had arranged for her adopted son to be returned to Moscow because, as the note stated, he was unstable and violent (Osborn 2010). Artyom only lived with his adoptive family for six months before being returned to Russia. The Russian authorities pressured the U.S. federal government to prosecute Ms. Hasen and in 2012 the Tennessee State Court ordered that Ms. Hasen pay \$150,000 in child support (Osborn 2010; Savidge 2012).

The second case involves Emily Svenningsen. Emily's story reveals another adoptive family's attempt at reversing their original commitment to adoption. In 1996, Emily was adopted from China by a wealthy couple from Westchester, New York (Ellin 2013). Prior to her arrival, the family had four biological children and their fifth child was born as they prepared for the finalization of Emily's adoption. Her adopted father, John Svenningsen, unexpectedly grew ill from cancer and died a year later after Emily's

²⁰ Also spelled Artem Saveliev (Mirovalev 2012)

²¹ The adoptive mother chose to disclose her adopted son's name as J. Therefore, his pseudonym is Jay rather than only using the letter J.

arrival. In 2003 her adopted mother decided she could no longer care for Emily; originally Emily was placed in a boarding school that provided services for special needs children, but by 2004, her adopted mother terminated her parental rights. Emily who was re-adopted later learned as a teenager she was entitled to \$250,000,000 trust left by her adopted father. Although the Svenningsen (Emily's former adopted mother and siblings) fought to prohibit Emily's access to the trust, Emily was awarded the right to her trust fund in 2013 (Ellin 2013).

The final case involves Jay, a Haitian boy who was adopted in 2005 at the age of five by Stacey and Michael Conner (Robb, n.d.). Jay was described by his adoptive mother as a violent child. She saw him as endangering the lives of her family, which included her one-year-old biological son and one-year-old Haitian daughter (who is not biologically related to Jay). Stacey compared her toddler-aged adopted son's erratic episodes to that of a "domestic violence situation." The Conner family tried alternative parenting styles as a way to combat and control Jay's negative behavior; but after only living with his adoptive family for eight months, Jay was re-adopted by a new family from the Midwest (Robb, n.d.).

In all, each of these scenarios showcase the relevance of parents making decisions that they believe best fit their family so that they may avoid the rehoming/returning of the international adoptee. The effects of the rehoming/returning of adopted children move beyond the personal experiences of the adoptive families; such situations create repercussions for the entire adoption

community as they can affect changes in policy at the both the domestic and international levels. For instances, the return of Artyom Savelyven led to the implementation of the “go slow policy” for international adoptions by American citizens, and what started off as a threat in 2010 by the Russian Foreign Ministries to freeze all American adoptions was implemented by law on January 1, 2013 (The Telegraph 2010; Reuters 2010; U.S. Department of State 2015a). Thus, the words of Regina Kennedy (adopted mother of two Korean children) speak truth in the need for prospective parents to reflect on the positive and negative qualities of the various adoption programs (and the children involved in the programs) in order to for them to be fully aware of their adoption preferences and make their most informed decision:

You know honestly it’s like well “What, what seems easier? What feels more comfortable?”...You just get to the point where when you’re choosing to adopt there are a lot of issues whether you’re adopting domestically, internationally, [or] same race. I think you have to be comfortable with: “This is what I can do. This is what I can do right now.” And, there will be challenges anyways. And you know, “who can I be the best parent to?”

The adoption information sessions offer pertinent information for the couples to review as they answer similar questions posed by Regina when they consider from which country they wish to adopt.

The formation of each couple’s plans for adoption often begins with an evaluation of the various adoption programs. However, the pool of adoption programs

is limited for not all countries allow international adoption; in addition, the eligibility requirements vary from country to country, some are more restrictive than others. These requirements cover an array of different factors. The basic requirements often regard age, marital status, income, and residency (U.S. Department of State 2015a). However, in some instances, the couples must prove that they are in good health (as determined by the country), have no criminal history (or it only consists of minor offenses), have no addictive behaviors, or do not abuse alcohol (U.S. Department of State 2015a). At times, the hurdles created by the requirements immediately cut down a couple's selection of choices. For example, Wanda Hughes, the mother of a Chinese adoptee, stated that "Some of the countries are just you know like China now they're just too strict. They want the perfect parents. No illness, no medication, you have to be a certain weight, you have to be a certain height, [and have] a certain income." Along with determining those programs in which they meet the eligibility requirements, the couples evaluate structural components of an adoption program and the personal characteristics commonly associated with children available from specific programs.

The evaluation of the structural components focuses on the process, the homing situation, and the type and availability of healthcare. Reviewing the process of an international adoption program includes several elements. The couples want to know the length of the process: how long will it take for them to receive a referral and then for the child to actually come to live with them in the United States? They consider the organization of the process in regards to if it is a well-run and stable program, both logistically and legally. They look into the travel expectations when evaluating the

process. Specifically, they are interested in knowing if the travel expectations are reasonable. The couples also want to be aware of the type of living arrangement a child has prior to adoption: was this child raised in an orphanage or was (s)he raised in foster care? Is it common for a child to be placed into different living arrangements prior to adoption? As prospective parents, the couples are interested in knowing the type of healthcare the child received prior to birth and as an infant. Moreover, they want to know if a country is known for providing accurate and truthful medical records. They also take into consideration those qualities they deem important specifically in regards to the prospective adoptee. The evaluation of the prospective adoptees' personal characteristics pertains to the common age in which the children are adopted, the health of the children, the gender, and the children's ability to bond with their adopted family.

Ray, the husband of Caroline Hunter, described adoption as being a private decision. During the interview he withheld intimate details that addressed their decision to adopt from South Korea. However, he did share that their adoption decision consisted of making analytical choices. Ray and Caroline found it important that their program of choice met their key standards, predictability in regards to both the process and the status of the child:

Ray: I think it's more of a roller coaster of emotions. And, the international, especially Korea, was very at the time it was very much you kind of knew how long it would take to do certain things and what was expected. And, it wasn't

that much uncertainty. That helped us think about South Korea and then we knew that children are in foster care. So they get great attention.

Caroline: And medical care.

Ray: And medical care and all that stuff. So it's kind of funny I think when you first start you, you are almost making analytical decisions. It's not as much emotions but then you start learning about the culture and everything else and there's a different level to the adoption process. And I think I wish actually more people would think about that side of it earlier but I don't think most parents are probably ready for that.

According to Ray, as prospective parents go through the adoption process their primary concerns focus on finding a program that suits their demands in regards to qualities specific of the program and the child. Together, the information pertaining to structural components and the adoptees' personality characteristics inform the couples of the reputation associated with a specific program. It is the reputation which stirs them towards or away from certain programs.

The couples' need for a reputable program reigns over all other factors because a positive reputation helps ease their minds as they go through a process in which they have little control of how it will turn out. Wanda and Wayne Hughes saw China as offering a systematic process, in which as long as they abided by the protocol the adoption would be successful. Wanda referred to their primary demand as *selfish*. But, such a selfish demand was necessary because they did not want to deal with a situation

where they were provided the referral of their adoptive daughter, Sonya, only to have that reality invalidated due to unlawful handlings of the adoption. They weighed the options between different programs. Originally, they considered Russia but very quickly determined it was not an acceptable program. They then took into consideration China, South Korea, and Ethiopia and in the end they chose China. Wanda and Wayne's decision was supported by the confirmation they received from their adoption agency and Wayne's former coworker that China was a reputable program:

Wanda: International adoptions were very popular and so that's why we sort of went there. And then, we started saying okay well which country. And of course we started with Russia and then Russia was like we just heard too much bribery. We heard too much of...well one thing with Russia was you had to stay there. It was six weeks.

Wayne: You had to make two trips.

Wanda: You had to make two trips. And there was a lot of bribery. You had to bribe the judges to show up and [we're] just...that's not us. We're rule-abiding people. We wanted to follow the rules and then you receive a product. So we sort of cancelled Russia very quickly. Um and then that's when we started looking at, it was China and...

Wayne: We were looking at China and...

Wanda: Korea.

Wayne: Korea, we looked at Korea. We looked at like Ethiopia. You know we considered all of these things.

Wanda: But China was like six months, get your paperwork in you'll have a kid in six months. Follow these rules. We just everything we read about China it was just our cup of tea. ... You don't have any issues. There's never been like, you know, China comes back and takes the child away from you. I mean everybody just spoke so highly of the process.

Wayne: And typically speaking they were healthy and for being first time parents we were like okay let's eliminate any challenge we can up front. So that was another thing we considered because they had a good reputation for healthy kids unless you went seeking a special needs child.

Wanda: And I liked knowing that I could have a girl.

Wayne: Yes. I was just about to say she was really hoping for a girl so she could you know have her little doll I guess more/less. I was fine either way. I didn't really care...And, yeah, a lot of things factored into it. We, some things about different countries that kind of made us a little bit leery of dealing with them [was] we saw on some adoption sites they weren't dealing with certain countries at that time because of some negative experiences that were going on, kidnappings things like that. And again, you know we spent a lot of time researching this and China just kept coming back as the least amount of problems of what we were looking to accomplish.

Wanda: And the cost was reasonable too...We knew it wasn't like going to a certain country and then you got there and then all the sudden it was going to be 12 percent instead of 10 percent. China was more these are the rules; here are the fees; and then [you're] done. And we did. It was to the penny to where it was supposed to be.

The Hughes found it important for their international adoption program to be efficient and honest. Honesty is a trait that many of the adoptive parents found valuable. It rests upon an international adoption program guaranteeing that: a child is legally available, a child's health is accurately recorded, the length (waiting period) of the adoption process is not disingenuously altered, and the adoption fee does not unexpectedly fluctuate.

There are several international adoption programs (spanning across four major regions Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America) from which the couples can adopt. Therefore, as the couples come to term with their program of choice they find it imperative that the international adoption program meet the criteria they deem most important. A program's reputation helps them determine if an international adoption program meets their criteria.

Eastern European International Adoption Programs

Negative Reputation of Eastern European Adoption Programs. The history of the United States participation in international adoptions is rooted in the placement of European children among white American families. Between the years 1948 - 1962

scores of European children were adopted from the countries of Austria, Greece, and Germany (Selman 2009). According to Weil (1984) the adoption of European children by Americans during this timeframe may have been influenced by the growing number of biracial and illegitimate children fathered by U.S. military men stationed in European countries during World War II (these same factors are also believed to influence the early years of adoption from South Korea). Adoptions from abroad grew in popularity as Americans became troubled by the orphaned children's presence in worn-torn countries (Weil 1984). However, during the mid-1960s the United States experienced a decline in European adoptions and by 1968 European adoptions were surpassed by Asian adoptions (Weil 1984). It is not until the 1990s that European adoptions regained popularity; they were spearheaded by Romania from 1990-1991, and were soon followed by the Eastern European nations of Russia, Bulgaria, and Ukraine (Selman 2009). Russia was a major contributing country to the United States throughout the early 21st century, before the adoption program was abolished by the Russian government in 2013 due to Russian children experiencing horrific encounters at the hands of their American adoptive parents²² (Selman 2012; U.S. Department of State 2015a). Its peak year occurred in 2004 with 5,865 children being adopted by American families (Selman 2012).

Chapter three discusses the idea of the "salvageable child" as a premise for adoptive parents to find interest in international adoptions. They find contentment in

²² The shutdown of the Russian adoption program with the United States was triggered by the incident regarding Artyom Savelyn addressed earlier in this chapter and the documented incidents of American parents killing their Russian adopted children (Selman 2012).

their ability to reach their dreams of being parents, while also removing a helpless child from a dire situation and affording him/her with ample opportunities to flourish as an individual. Moreover, the adoption of children from impoverished backgrounds is acceptable when a child's desolate beginnings are not seen as a consequence of his/her birth parents' poor life choices but rather a consequence of external factors such as social norms, natural disasters, or political agendas. Ortiz and Briggs (2003) address a similar assertion among adoptive parents. They discuss how the different forms of poverty – 'modern poverty' which is built upon individualistic choices influenced by negative learned behaviors and 'traditional poverty' which is built upon external factors – addressed within the culture of poverty framework create distinctions between which children are viewed adoptable (Ortiz and Briggs 2003, p. 43). According to Ortiz and Briggs the traditional poverty argument further demonstrates why adoptive parents find comfort in the adoption of children from abroad (including Eastern European children) rather than children from the U.S. child welfare system:

One notes a consistent representational thread here of children in the developing world that was to characterize popular discourses of their suitability for adoption: these are highly resilient, hardy human products sown in unpromising infrastructural soil. A contemporary cultural variant of this representation stretches to include the citizens of the former Soviet bloc as honorary primitives, the victims of an ideologically perpetuated intellectual and social famine. The children of these populations in need can have their full potential realized in one of two ways: injecting massive resources into their

home countries or airlifting them to a more promising homeland (2009, p. 42-43).

Both the findings in Chapter three and those of Ortiz and Brigs (2003) support the underlying basis for why international adoptions became a phenomenon in the U.S. tracing back to the late 1940s; there grew a desire for Americans to help disadvantaged foreign children. In the early 2000s, Russia existed as a popular sending country to the United States. However, the couples in this study do not perceive Eastern European children as “resilient” following an international adoption. The adoptive parents find it difficult to believe Eastern European children are capable of easily adapting to their new adoptive families. The Eastern European countries are known for the high risk factors associated with fetal alcohol syndrome, invalid medical records, unlawful conduct by Russian authorities during the adoption process, institutionalization (the placement of children into orphanages), and the children’s inability to, or troubles with attachment. Therefore, a majority of the couples in this study (outside of the one family who actually adopted from Russia) quickly dismissed the adoption of Eastern European children. The reputation of Eastern European adoption programs, specifically Russia, is tainted.

According to Jeremiah and Robin Harris, when they began their adoption journey in the early 2000s Russia, China, and South Korea were all recognized as well managed international adoption programs. So as they determined among those three countries from which one they wished to adopt, the Harris took to heart the advice offered by their adoption agency. Their agency, Bringing Love, advised during the adoption training

classes that prospective parents not only take into consideration the reputation of an adoption program but also a couple's interest towards a specific culture. Bringing Love is a strong advocate for ethnic socialization; adoptive parents are expected to do their best at raising their children to be aware of their culture of origin. Due to Robin's affinity towards Russian culture, Russia became their first choice, but they eventually negated that decision. Robin and Jeremiah discussed those factors that eventually led them to adopt from South Korea instead of Russia:

Jeremiah: [Bringing Love Adoption Agency] kind of laid out the advantages and disadvantages of different countries – what the process is like, how the kids entered the system, [what] their health situation/developmental situation is likely to be like. So there were a few that we kind of crossed off fairly quickly. Because of the questionable nature of the Guatemala system, we weren't too happy about that. We didn't really consider that too much but, the big programs – which are Russia, China and Korea – they're all pretty well run and not really ethically questionable that much depending on how you look at it. So then they also said a cultural, of making a connection between the children and their birth culture is um...

Robin: Important.

Jeremiah: Important, so then we were like okay well what birth culture would be the one that we could...

Robin: That we're drawn to.

Jeremiah: Make a connection to the best. So we initially thought Russia.

Robin: That was me. I was interested in Russia.

Jeremiah: Just because Robin was intellectually a Russophile for a long time, interested in Russian literature, music and stuff like that. And so that's, we actually started our adoption process with Russia. Um and then that didn't work out.

Robin: It got very unpredictable.

Jeremiah: ...They had some problems with stories in the news. They changed their rules. They assigned us a child but then that child turned out to not be available for adoption, I mean not legally available...

Robin: We were just like you know I don't think this is for us.

Jeremiah: It started to get kind of complicated. So we said, okay let's go back to the drawing board. And so then instead of looking at what's the cultural connection we just said what's seems the most predictable right now. And so at that time that seemed to be Korea...so that's what we ended up with and we're just making the best attempt that we can to still make that cultural connection through you know a few different things.

The fact that Jeremiah and Robin received a referral for a child only to find out it was not a legitimate referral speaks volumes to what they soon learned was the unpredictable nature of a Russian adoption program. Thus, rather than toying with the

idea of seeking another adoption via Russia they turned towards South Korea, a country who has a longstanding international adoption history in the United States.

The Harris couple is the only family who actually moved forward with their initial plans of adopting from Russia (even though it did not work out). Among the few couples who also initially considered Russia their plans were revised for many of the same reasons that led several of the couples to never considered Russia as a feasible adoption option. The Harris' incident of the invalid referral aligns well with the stories several of the couples heard (and some even witnessed through the experiences of close friends or relatives) that addressed the corruption of Russian and other Eastern European adoption programs.

Brenda and Lawrence's adopted son is from South Korea; but, before they decided upon that program, Brenda was first interested in the adoption of a Latino child. Brenda's friendship with a member of the mom's club piqued her interest in international adoption. Her friend's adopted daughter was from Guatemala. However, Guatemala's program was no longer active once the Blackwell family started their adoption process. Lawrence, on the other hand, immediately dismissed China and Russia. He lacked trust in the Chinese government; his field of work calls for high security clearance. He did not want to jeopardize his clearances by dealing with the Chinese government. On the contrary, he was concerned with a variety of issues pertaining to Russia's adoption program. Together they described all of their major concerns regarding Russia:

Lawrence: Russia concerns me because of the...

Brenda: Fetal Alcohol [Syndrome] and the orphanages.

Lawrence: Where's the one where they had the babies?

Brenda: The orphanages.

Lawrence: They have the orphanages and the babies with the developmental delays and all that. There's the story about the couple going there to visit and they stay for a crazy amount of time, stay for an extended periods of time to support their government.

Brenda: And they told them there [while in Russia] to bring \$10,000 when they arrived.

Lawrence: Right, before they get on the plane with the baby they get stopped by the local militia and it's the old get them out of here and they happened to know the exact amount on their credit cards that are left. And I'm like yeah so.

Interviewer: That's horrible.

Lawrence: Yeah so no I would not [adopt from Russia]. I am not that open to that kind of stuff because you, you're very vulnerable. You know during the adoption process as the person, as the adoptive parents you're very vulnerable in a lot of senses.

Lawrence and Brenda listed a number of different factors that without hesitation led them to dismiss the Russian adoption program. In addition to a Russian adoptee's health – mentally, physically, and emotionally – they discussed their distrust with the travel expectations and the payment arrangements, making note of the incredulous situations in which bribes rather than programmatic regulations guided the exchange of money for adoption fees. The Blackwell perceived Russia's main priority as focusing on financial gains the government earns through the international adoption program instead of the adopted children's welfare. Lawrence and Brenda's passage calls into question the citizens of Russia and their government's concerns regarding the health and well-being of Russia's most vulnerable children population. Furthermore, it is a critique of the country's priority when it comes to its adopted children population.

Concerns regarding the Well-being of Eastern European Adoptees. Russia is well-known for a high rate of fetal alcohol syndrome among its adoptees, a condition with unpredictable long-term side effects that alone dissuade many of the adoptive parents. As stated by Donald Clark, the father of a South Korean adoptee, "...You don't know sort of how it will manifest itself or if that will manifest itself. And you won't, you know it's not like it can be diagnosed. It's something that occurs at some point during their development. It's a huge risk factor." The prominence of fetal alcohol syndrome among Russian adoptees suggests that their society, especially the women, do not value the concept of parenthood. Rather than Russian women working towards securing their children a healthy start in society, they dismiss the responsibilities that come attached with becoming new parents. By the birth mothers exposing their children to excessive

alcohol while in the womb, the children are left susceptible to a condition that affects their desirability as adoptees and hinders their ability to become functional adults.

Moreover, the Russian adoption program is known for fabricating their medical records. The participants discussed the “massive problems” concerning Russian adoptees’ health. Two different participants mentioned young neighborhood boys adopted from Russia who were dealing with heart problems. Melvin Murray, whose adopted children are from the U.S., China, and Korea referred to a young boy who was on his third pacemaker. Sean Taylor described another boy who he did not know well but was aware of his heart issues. The adoptive parents’ awareness of health issues related with Russian children often stirred them away from such adoptions because the health issues linked to Russian adoptees are often much more detrimental than the physical deformity that most of the parents were willing to deal with if they chose the route of special needs adoption. Hence, the idea of taking part in an adoption in which the medical conditions are known for being inaccurate is too risky.

During the initial stage of the adoption process, prospective parents are asked to specify if they are willing to partake in a special needs adoption and if so they must then choose from a detailed list of conditions, the conditions that they are willing to handle. Judy and Billy Green are the parents of two South Korean children who came to the U.S. with special needs. Judy and Billy decided they could best handle the issues surrounding the conditions of cleft lip and cleft palate. In particular, Judy followed the advice of a close friend, who when going through the similar process stated, ‘I would take a special

need that would have happened to me naturally.’ Judy and Billy decided that they would not accept any conditions related to drug/alcohol abuse, nor any conditions associated with mental or emotional health. Therefore, as stated by Billy and Judy, they did not want to deal with the unpleasant surprise that can come with adopting from a country that provides inaccurate medical records:

Billy: These kids from Russia, they get off the plane and they have purple spots everywhere, and you’re like, “What? This wasn’t in the records!” Or, their heads are shaved, and you’re like “What’s going on?” Because you couldn’t read the medical records, they’re in Russian. What should we treat? You wouldn’t know what to treat them for. What do they have? But I said, “We’re not going to deal with any of that”.

M: And with some of these kids, I’ve heard with Russia, is that they over-emphasize the medical records to try to get them out. So if you have an apathetic pediatrician...

D: It can go both ways. They say, “They’re perfectly healthy, and...you get back here and...”

M: They’re not.

D: Or, the kid’s a lot older than they said, you know just all kinds of stuff.

Along the same lines of health, the adoptive parents are also weary of Russian adoptees’ emotional well-being. They believe that the placement of children into

orphanages (a concern voiced by Lawrence, Brenda, and many other couples in the study) and the lack of attention children receive in such settings lead to developmental delays and stall their ability to properly bond with their new adopted family. It is difficult for the couples to discern if the country is truly worried about the state of well-being of their parentless children or if it is the health of the economy they are most concerned about. Therefore, the couples are suspicious of adopting from Russia.

There are a few families whose original intentions focused on the adoption of a same-race child. The matter-of-fact comment stated by Wanda Hughes, "And of course we started with Russia," alludes to the assumption that a preference for same-race adoptions is a natural decision and the most logical decision. However, the change in disposition among those families originally interested in Russian adoptions highlights the fact that a preference for a child of a specific racial background can be triumphed by the need for a couple to have their personal standards for the adoption met.

In essence the idea of racial matching suggests an easier road for same-race adoptive families to travel in comparison to interracial adoptive families. The ability of the white Russian adoptee to racially blend with his/her white American adoptive family protects all family members from being bombarded with questions commonly evoked by the image of the conspicuous family (i.e. families who do not meet the traditional standards of the heterosexual same-race nuclear family unit). A Russian child's racial identity as white also supports the assumption that if adoptive parents provide their adopted child with unconditional love, support and adequate resources, the Russian

adoptee should not have difficulty assimilating among mainstream society. As long as the child is deemed well (physically, mentally, and intellectually) the child will acquire the privileges associated with being a member of the dominant group. However, the abandonment of Artoym Savelyvn (previously discussed) by the Conner family, due to his violent behavioral issues, brings to light the hesitancy a majority of the adoptive parents expressed regarding the adoptions of Eastern European, more specifically Russian children. His story exemplifies the very situation (an adoption gone awry) the adoptive parents from this study wanted to avoid, even if that meant sacrificing an original preference for racial matching.

Children of Eastern European descent may have a racial identity that places them among members of the United States' dominant group, yet they do not hold the same clout as their white American adopted peers. Eastern European children are not revered as healthy and their adoption programs are found to be very complicated, consequently there lacks a demand for such adoptions. The absence of a process-driven, well managed adoption program that encouraged the legitimate adoption of Russian (and other Eastern European children) prompted the couples to look towards the Asian international adoption market.

Asian International Adoption Programs

Positive Reputation of Asian Adoption Programs. As one of the forefathers of the international adoption phenomenon, South Korea has a well-established history with the United States. Dating back to the 1950s Americans began to adopt Korean children

following the aftermath of the Korean War (Weil 1984). South Korea reigned as the top sending country to the U.S. from the 1970s to the 1980s (Weil 1984). However, in the late 1980s the number of South Korean adoptions began to decline following North Korea's harsh critique of the country's continued participation in international adoptions, a growing acceptance towards domestic adoptions, and the nation along with its family units regaining economic security (Weil 1984; Kim 2007). Now, as a developed nation, there is a current push from the country's adoptees and birth mothers to end international adoptions through the implementation of more stringent legislation (Selman 2012).

On a global scale, other Asian countries entered the international adoption scene beginning with the Philippines in 1960 and India and Vietnam in 1970 (Selman 2009).²³ China did not enter the scene until the early 1990s; but, during the first decade of the 21st century China peaked at 7,903 international adoptions occurring in the U.S. and existed as the top sending country to the U.S. from 2009-2013 (U.S. Department of State 2015b). The number of adoptions from China has steadily decreased since its peak in 2004 (U.S. Department of State 2015b).²⁴ The reduction in Chinese adoptions may be attributed to the rising interest of domestic adoptions within China, the country's lack of approval towards single parent adoptions by foreigners, and the ridicule China also

²³ The number of the adoptions from the Philippines is consistently low throughout the 2000s, especially in comparison to the top sending countries that were sending thousands of children at a time to the U.S.; in the 2000s the Philippines reached its peak of 291 in 2008. The highest number of adoptions from India in the 2000s was 542 in 2001 (U.S. Department of State 2015b). On the other hand, Vietnam has not sent a child to the U.S. since 2011 and the highest number of adoptions sent to the U.S. from Vietnam occurred in 2007 at 828 (U.S. Department of State 2015b). Adoptions from Vietnam began to decrease quite a while ago in the 1970s following the "Baby Lift" operation, which was highly criticized (Weil 1984).

²⁴ Since 2004 the U.S. has been experiencing an overall decline in the number of international adoptions (U.S. Department of State 2015b) but this decline is a worldwide trend (Peter Selman 2012).

experienced in reference to its enduring presence among international adoptions (Selman 2009, p. 385). Societal endeavors focused specifically on the promotion of domestic adoptions include: the Chinese government in 1999 modifying the adoption legislation of 1991, couples 30 years or older are now permitted to adopt orphaned and disabled children as an exception to the one-child policy; and, the introduction of more foster care and day care programs as brought about by the works of the Ministry of Civil Affairs, the Chinese Center for Adoption Affairs, and a number of international charities (Högbacka 2008).

Nonetheless, the prominence of adoptions occurring between the U.S. and Asian countries such as South Korea and China reifies the relevance of Asian adoptions in the United States. As adoptive parents of Asian children, the couples discuss how the positive reputation of Asian adoption programs influenced their preference for such adoptions. This study also reveals that to some degree a child's racial identity also influenced the adoptive parents' preference for Asian adoptions.

Lack of Concern regarding the well-being of Asian Adoptees. The adoptive parents admire the Asian international adoption programs for their stability and adherence to bureaucratic procedures; moreover, they believe that children adopted from such programs are healthy. For example, Carla Burns recalled her conversation with her husband as they came to terms with the idea of international adoption. During the conversation Ryan shared with Carla that he always imagined himself "holding the hands of a little Asian girl." According to Carla, they made a logistical decision when

determining their preferred choice among the different Asian international adoption programs. China stood out as a country whose adoption program is process-driven; as long as the couple followed the process they would not come across any grave challenges and their expectations would be met (which resonates with the Hughes' earlier description of China's international adoption program). Ryan and Carla also believed that their request for a healthy child would be honored rather than them being misled about a child's health because the children placed for adoption are generally healthy. The Burn family was fully aware that when relying on the information provided by a child's caregiver that it was possible that the medical information would not be completely accurate; so they looked for countries in which they believed the culture supported the growth of a healthy baby. Carla described their faith in the Chinese culture towards promoting the birth of a healthy infant:

The one thing that we felt we had going for us is the, in China there is such a desire among...in the culture to have boys and they are not allowed to have sonograms. So the mothers take very good care of themselves when they're, while they're you know in the gestation process because they don't know if it's going to be a son or a daughter. And so typically the children – unless the parents die, it's really bad – are generally there's a very good chance that they're gonna have, they are going to be healthy and that their child will be born healthy. Because, there's this you know desire this strong desire and so we kind of felt like "oh we got that, we got that going for us."

Ryan and Carla also expressed little concern regarding the developmental health of Chinese children. They were well aware that children's health is also connected to the environment in which they are raised. Although Chinese adoptees are most often raised in orphanages prior to their adoptions, the Burns felt that overall the children were still well taken care of by the staff at the orphanages. As expressed by Carla, "Though the conditions [of the orphanages] are poor the children are cared for. They're not neglected." The adoptive parents (specifically those of Chinese children) are somewhat apprehensive of the Chinese orphanages because they understand that such living arrangements can cause detrimental side effects if the children are not properly cared for. However, the level of concern expressed by the adoptive parents regarding Chinese orphanages as opposed to the Russian orphanages is lower because they are aware of donations provided by charitable organizations and of adoptive parents towards improving the conditions of the orphanages. Such initiatives encourage the hiring of the appropriate amount of staff, which supports the proper amount of time spent exercising, feeding, and overall engaging with the children. Again, although the children may be raised in an institutionalized setting the adoptive parents still feel it is possible for the children to remain healthy.

The adoptive parents perceive cultural politics of China and South Korea as supporting the birth and development of healthy prospective adoptees. The cultural politics of China create an atmosphere where the inception of the one-child policy and a cultural preference for infant males (whose higher status lies upon the tradition of males carrying the family surname and being regarded primarily responsible of caring

for the elderly) gives rise to the abandonment of female infants who become readily available for international adoption (Högbacka 2008). Therefore, in those instances in which a child is born his/her odds of being healthy are high. The cultural preference for males and the implementation of the one-child policy promote social practices in which a woman's reproductive health is highly regarded because of the potential to birth a healthy infant male. South Korea, on the other hand, is culturally distinct from China; yet, a similar discourse exists regarding the connection between cultural practices and the society's respect for the development of healthy children.

Since the establishment of Korean international adoptions, South Korea has advanced from a war-torn country of the 1950s to an economically stable developed nation (Kim 2007). Among the country's advancement includes the introduction of Western medicine and the implementation of Western healthcare. Donald and Pamela Clark's adoption decision was steered by their desire for a healthy child. Donald and Pamela figured that if they were able to avoid the adoption of a child who had emotional or developmental challenges they would be capable of handling other issues that may arise from the adoption but are not exacerbated by ill-health. As explained by Pamela, "I think we kind of figured if we got a healthy kid we could figure out the rest." The Clark couple viewed Korea's modern healthcare infrastructure and utilization of foster homes as opposed to orphanages as salient factors that support the development of healthy children:

Donald: Korea doesn't have orphanages. Well they don't, none of the kids that are eligible for international adoption from Korea are in orphanages. They're all in foster care. ... They're medical system is also completely Western. So he was born in a hospital. Any sort of conditions that he would have had would have been diagnosed right away and...treated right away. His mother probably, we don't know a lot about her but, she was probably was in [an] unwed mother summit in which she had prenatal care. And like we said, the health was really an important piece to us. Eastern European, a lot of the kids have some sort of fetal alcohol...most of them but that really wasn't the case in Korea. I mean clearly it's the Western medical system in Korea.

Pamela: Yeah and you got monthly updates. As soon as [he] got a physical, you would get monthly updates of how he's doing and you know about other stuff. So that was helpful.

As adoptive parents of Asian children, many of the couples feel that among the different Asian adoption programs South Korea, in particular, is a society that is not plagued by a lack of contemporary medical resources and the nation does not uphold cultural practices that may deter the birth mothers or children from being recipients of preventive medical care or treatment. In addition, the adoptive parents value South Korea's commitment to the welfare of its most vulnerable children. The utilization of foster care versus orphanages creates an atmosphere where the children receive adequate attention. Having the opportunity to build relationships with other individuals

rather than fight for or constantly seek attention, cultivates the prospective adoptees' ability to develop bonds with their eventual adoptive families and prevents development delays. A majority of the adoptive parents view Korean children as the healthiest children available for adoption throughout the global adoption market. It is interesting that Korea's cultural degradation of children conceived outside of a marital union and the cultural relevance of paternal lineage (particularly for infant males) continues to constitute a societal need for adoptions but, ironically South Korea is not perceived as a country that devalues its children. Such societal beliefs may influence the disruption of the family unit and place more emphasis on familial pride yet the children in South Korea's welfare system are taken care of; they have access to conventional medicine and are raised in a suitable environment. Thus, South Korea's application of a healthcare system similar to the United States and usage of a foster care system places its prospective adoptees on the same caliber as a healthy white American infant.

When the adoptive parents take into consideration a child's health as an important requirement, they do not necessarily rave about the two most popular Asian adoption programs, South Korea and China, in the same manner. Quite often parents of Korean adoptees are uncomfortable with Chinese adoptions due to the fear of developmental issues associated with the children being raised in orphanages. Although, Korea is most often seen as the model international adoption program, there is at least one parent who remained concerned about Korean children's health. Sherry Goldsmith, whose daughter is Filipino, questioned Korean adoptions because, as a

former teacher, she felt as though she came in contact with a lot of Korean children who displayed autistic characteristics. Sherry reiterated that the observation is based on her own personal experience, it is not supported by any scientific evidence; yet, this observation influenced her overall perception about the health of Korean children.

Adoptive parents are receptive towards the interracial adoption of Asian children because there is the perception that such children are healthy due to cultural practices that condemn behaviors that would negatively impact the unborn child along with the understanding that their medicinal practices are closely aligned with Western practices. Yet, in the case of Emily Svengssen (the Chinese adoptee whose adoptive mother relinquished her parental rights), her status as a special needs child reveals that there are only certain families who seek and are fully committed to raising a child with diminished capabilities. Adoptive parents prefer the adoption of healthy Asian children; the adoption of special needs Asian children presents unique challenges for the adoptive family that lies outside the realms of race-related concerns but also hints at the fact that such situations may overshadow the model minority stereotype and creates obstacles for assimilation. Thus, there is an understanding among the adoptive parents that the adoption of a healthy Asian child is one of the most comfortable and reassuring routes for family formation, outside the birth of a biological child.

Additional Factors Influencing Adoptive Parents' Openness to Nonwhite Adoptions. As white adoptive parents of Asian children, it is not surprising that there exists a strong consensus among the participants that the race and culture of a child are

less relevant than the reputation of the adoption program. Specifically, these parents do not express a strong inclination for same-race children primarily because they are not interested in hiding the adoptions. Moreover, they believe that children as young individuals do not have control over their lives; therefore, it is the responsibility of abled adults to love, care for, and protect a child regardless of that child's racial-ethnic background. As stated by Carla Burns, the mother of a Chinese adoptee, "...if they're from another country it really doesn't matter. You've got this child that needs to be loved. And at some point in this process they have a 50/50 shot and to me it was about parenthood." Irrespective of race, ethnicity, and birth country, internationally adopted children deserve a loving family who will provide them with stability.

In addition to the adoptive parents' moral beliefs influencing their openness of crossing racial boundaries, the novelty of creating a family that differs from the status quo also entices the parents to participate in interracial international adoptions. The adoptive parents see beauty in their children and they see beauty in the idea of becoming a multiracial family. Jacob Robertson – the father of two biological children, a Korean adoptee, and a Chinese adoptee – described his reaction to hearing a social worker at one of the pre-adoption classes discuss her international adoption experience:

I remember that one of the teachers of the class said that she had adopted some international kids and she felt like the color of her soul had changed. She didn't feel like she had just the soul of a white person anymore and I just thought that

was so cool. I wanted to grow in that way. And so it was really one of those things where we now wanted to adopt from a different race.

Jacob saw international interracial adoptions as leading to a growth in his (and his family's) humanity. When Gordon and Lydia became a part of the Robertson family, the family opened their hearts to interacting with individuals' whose lives existed outside of their normal world. At six months old, Gordon left his foster family in South Korea to join the Robertson family. Lydia, on the other hand, was raised in a Chinese orphanage (and possibly a group foster home) before arriving in the United States at 2.5 years old. As white Americans who were raised by their biological family, Jacob's and his wife Marissa's backgrounds are quite different from their adopted children but the inclusion of Gordon and Lydia among their new family allows the Robertson family to gain new insight. They will have the opportunity to watch and learn what it means for their adopted children to navigate through American society as adoptees and Asian Americans; two separate but meaningful identities.

The desire to become an interracial adoptive family is also sparked by a couple's affinity for a particular culture. For example, Justin Goldsmith was very knowledgeable of Latino culture and fluently spoke Spanish. Therefore, Justin and Sherry (his wife) were initially interested in adopting from Guatemala. However, upon learning that the U.S. was no longer willing to work with the country due to corruption issues, the Goldsmith family turned their attention towards South America's Columbia and Peru adoption programs. But, they encountered more issues when they learned about the

different programs' demanding travel expectations. So, Justin and Sherry settled upon adopting from the Philippines. Part of their interest towards that adoption was the country's Spanish heritage. Although, they quickly learned that Tagalog (the native language of the Philippines) and Spanish were too very distinct languages. Once more, the absence of an Eastern European country among the Goldsmith's list of potential adoption programs reiterates instances in which race is de-emphasized when a couple is deciding from which country they wish to adopt.

The couples' international interracial adoption plans must also be conceptualized outside of how their moral beliefs, affinity for a culture, or excitement towards becoming a multiracial family influenced their adoption choices. There needs to be an understanding of how contextual factors, such as the racial composition of one's social environments, are instrumental towards influencing the parents' receptiveness of nonwhite adoptions. The data reveals there is one group of parents (referred to as the de-emphasizers) who wholeheartedly dismiss the relevance of race as a factor impacting their adoption plans. While, the other group of adoptive parents (referred to as the emphasizees) reveals that race, although minimized in comparison to the reputation of an adoption program, does indeed impact the adoption plan.

The racial composition of one's social environment provides an individual with exposure to others. Through that exposure one gains insight of how to interact with others. It is an experience for an individual to become aware of cultural similarities and dissimilarities across racial (and class) lines because it is a chance for people to learn

about the history, music, food, and religion of other groups. Such interactions reveal the heterogeneity of inter- and intra-racial group experiences, while also bringing to light the commonalities that also exist. Moreover, through the exchange of interactions across racial lines an individual has the opportunity to assess and thereby accept, or reject racial stereotypes commonly expressed in society²⁵. This study reveals that race becomes less of a factor when couples are creating their adoption plans due to at least one of the parent's exposure to a racially diverse or minority-majority environment as a child or as an adult, and if the couples are not concerned about the extended family's reaction.

As a child, Donald Clark was raised in a socially diverse environment. Donald's parents divorced when he was approximately six years old, and then a few years later, his mother remarried to an African American man. His mother and stepfather decided to domestically adopt their black-white biracial daughter due to his stepfather's hereditary blind condition. Sophia, Donald's adopted sister, joined the family when he was about 13 years old. Donald is very close to his mother, adoptive sister, and nephew Omar; they spend a lot of time together. Therefore, Donald is aware of some of the hardships Sophia has experienced in regards to her relationship with Omar's biological father and with keeping employment. Donald only briefly touched upon Sophia's challenges. But, his frequent engagement with his adopted sister along with what he may learn from his mother's experience as a social worker, offers a chance for Donald to

²⁵ The works of Kubo 2010 and Dorow 2006 document racial stereotypes as factors influencing the white adoptive parents' preference for adoption.

conceptualize Sophia's experiences in regards to her identities as an adoptee, woman, biracial American, and her class position. Instead of Donald relying upon grotesque stereotypes – which in this situation would include negative black stereotypes since in U.S. society it is still common for black-white biracial individuals to be racially classified as black – as a way to comprehend his adopted sister challenges. Because of Donald's experience of being raised in an interracial family, Pamela (his wife) had faith in their ability to raise a nonwhite child:

...We discussed ethnicity but it wasn't like a concern or anything. It was just you know I mean the fact that Donald's family is already mixed race – his sister is African American and so is our nephew – and Donald had a lot of experience dealing with that when he was a kid since his, also his step-father was African American. You know it was just something that we would have to be aware of and everything. So we discussed kind of how we might handle situations like that. Of course, making sure that Jared would feel comfortable and everything but it wasn't a concern I think. But, we just discussed how we would handle the situation.

As revealed by Pamela, "ethnicity" is not a concern in the sense that it did not stop the couple from internationally adopting a nonwhite child but rather they understand that their son's racial-ethnic identity as Korean American is meaningful within the U.S. social context. And, any challenges they may experience in reference to his racial-ethnic identity they will handle accordingly. Chapter five reveals that how couples come to

terms with the meaningfulness of their child's racial-ethnic identity varies; however, the Clark demonstrates how the racial composition of the adoptive parents' social environment may influence their adoption decision.

Along similar lines, Pearl and Travis Olson discussed how residing in a diverse area and attending racially diverse schools throughout their educational careers allowed them to interact with people of various backgrounds. In particular, Travis' school settings were unique because at times the racial composition of a school placed Travis as the minority rather than the majority. His high school was predominantly black and his graduate school was predominantly Asian. Currently, two of his closest friends (one a childhood friend, the other a coworker) are both Asian American. Travis and Pamela shared how the experiences of interacting with people of different races helped them be more accepting of others regardless of their racial-ethnic background:

Travis: We're pretty open. Kids are kids.

Pearl: I mean I really will say that's one thing about being from an urban area you know. You get exposed.

Travis: You grow up with everybody. ... I think that made everything easier for us as far as to accept somebody else because I grew up in the city. So I went to an inner city school and it was I went to [a magnet high school]. Yeah, so I went there and of course that was 80 percent African American. I loved it. Growing up I didn't have any contentions with anybody. And then, I went to [a state university] that was mostly white.

Pearl: And I went to [a public University] which was...

Travis: Chinese.

Pearl: Yeah, there was a there was a lot of Asian folks particularly Chinese.

Travis: And where I work now I'm the minority at work and they make fun of me.

So it's all good.

The interactions the Olson had with nonwhite Americans demonstrate the harmonious relationships that can take place across racial lines. Thus, the adoption of a nonwhite child should not be seen as unconventional. It is important to note that during the adoptive parents' childhoods it is their parents who greatly influence the opportunity for them as children to be exposed to more racially diverse environments. And, because their parents were open to them interacting with others they are not concerned about receiving a negative reaction from extending family members when sharing their intention of adopting a nonwhite child.

Finally, within the de-emphasizer group, there a few couples in which the relevance of a child's racial identity hinges upon the priority the adoptive parents place on their extended families reaction to a nonwhite adoption. In these instances, race is not relevant only because the couples choose to ignore any adverse opinions others may have about their choice in not adopting a white child. In particular, as adoptive parents of Asian children, they completely dismissed the expected negative reactions from their extended family, often completely cutting off their ties with certain relatives

rather than taking the chance of exposing their child to a toxic racist environment. Lawrence Blackwell bluntly explained why they choose to isolate their Korean adopted son from his paternal grandmother, once they made the decision to adopt from Korea:

The only issue that came up, and it was probably a uh, like I said it was my mother but let me explain the background. She had two brothers in the Korean War. One was killed when she was about ten years old and it was the fifties. So they literally came and laid him out in a pine box and she was a little girl in the living room. And the other brother was taken prisoner and tortured by the Koreans, all of the finger nails pulled out with pliers. ...It was not a pleasant or a good thing. So you had the whole, you know I'm already not on good terms with her, maybe it's just best that we kind of isolate that. And that's what we've done. It's worked out very well because I can't expect, somebody even the most well-adjusted person, to kind of put all of that behind them when they watched their two brothers come back in boxes. Well one in a box and the other a head case for life because of it. So you know that was, that was, one of the racial issues if you want to be blunt about selecting Korea that we kind of had to confront.

As Lawrence and Breda searched for an international adoption program that met their personal standards in addition to them meeting the eligibility requirements as set forth by the foreign country, they knew that that the adoption of a Korean child would meet resentment from Lawrence's mother. But, they did not let that fact deter them away

from adopting an Asian child. This passage reveals that although the race of a prospective adoptee is acknowledged, it is not significant in the sense that it can persuade or dissuade a couple's adoption choice. As stated by Lawrence, "Country of origin not actually important, culture of origin not actually important, stability in the process and knowing what's going on are the most, head and shoulder above anything else." However, among the second group of parents referred to as the emphasizees, race is significant. Racially-speaking, the adoptive parents feel best equipped to raise Asian children (especially in comparison to foreign-born black children).

Prior to adoption, the couples, who are a part of the emphasizee group, knew they would experience opposition from their extended families if they chose to adopt a nonwhite child. There was a range of reactions that couples expected from extended family upon them learning about a couple's choice to adopt a nonwhite child. The variety of reactions included the family members: blatantly disapproving the adoption of a nonwhite child, expressing concern about phenotypical differences between parents and child, raising concern about the history between the U.S. with the country of origin such as the Korean War, or openly referring to negative racial stereotypes. Many of these adoptive parents come from racially homogenous backgrounds in which their families initially upheld stringent racial boundaries between whites and nonwhites in the U.S. Unlike the de-emphasizer group, these adoptive parents do not come from a home environment that promoted racial integration and tolerance. The adoptive parents recognized that they would eventually have to confront the issue regarding the racial mixture of their families. Yet, they were comfortable with the adoption of Asian

children because they felt they had the tools and resources needed to successfully parent an Asian child. This included access to and acceptance from members of a child's co-ethnic community.

As previously addressed by the Harris couple, a common push from the adoption community is the encouragement of prospective families to adopt children whose ethnic culture the parents both respect and find interesting because of the belief upheld by the adoption community that ethnic socialization is important for adoptees' healthy development. Thus, it is important for those families who value (or at least consider the value of) ethnic socialization to internationally adopt children whose co-ethnic communities the couples view as approachable. The ability to partake in activities hosted by the co-ethnic community and along with the ability to build relationships with the co-ethnics provides opportunities for adopted children to develop strong ethnic identities. The Freeman family discussed the importance of the Asian community being accessible and Asian Americans being open-minded towards the act of white Americans adopting Asian children. As a young couple, Shawn and Hazel Freeman were both under the age of thirty at the time they were adopting so they were only eligible to adopt from a few countries. Even though their selections were limited, Shawn asserted that the overall cost of an international adoption program was a driving force in their adoption decision; the program had to be affordable along with being well established. Hazel, on the other hand, referenced Shawn's childhood relationship with a Korean adoptee and her knowing of other families who adopted Korean children as influencing her interest in the South Korean adoption program. Hazel's and Shawn's familiarity with Korean

adoptions – their ability to witness the adoptees interact with their adoptive families and observe the Korean children’s overall adjustment – provided them with insight of how an interracial adoption may work out if they followed the route of adopting an Asian child. Hazel recognized that the answer to the question, “what [were they] comfortable with as far as a transracial family?,” was the adoption of a Korean child. Her familiarity with Korean adoptees, and other Asian Americans, made her feel as though the Asian community was accessible, especially if their family became interested in ethnically socializing Larry, their adopted son. As revealed by Hazel, she found the Asian American community particularly more accessible than for instance the Ethiopian community (one of the only other adoption programs whose eligibility requirements they met):

...When deciding what country to adopt from I mean I don’t know if you felt this but, I definitely, I mean obviously I would have been making the effort if we had gone with Ethiopia or something but, I felt like the Asian population was more accessible. Um and that’s just my own comfort level I guess. Like in you know, people that I’ve known in the past that I would have an easier time sort of integrating into that culture than like the black, the African American culture. So that was something that wasn’t a deal breaker but when we chose Korea I kind of was like oh that would be [a] little easier aspect of it.

Interestingly, Hazel and Shawn have insecurities about being judged by other Korean Americans, specifically in regards to Korean Americans disapproving the

international adoption or questioning the legitimacy of the adoption. Yet, these insecurities were not strong enough for Hazel to feel as though she would not be welcomed by other Koreans, moreover Asian Americans, if she sought access to their communities. This suggests that Hazel, and other adoptive parents of Asian children, feel that the race relations between Asian and white Americans are amicable or at the least, less contentious than black/white relations.

Sarah Morris, whose son is from Korea, discussed her concerns regarding the United States' black/white racial strife, concerns that she does not believe create issues for Asian/white race relations:

In the United States there's a racial divide between black and white. It's a big racial, that is the big racial divide. ...I felt like there is a huge – a bigger disadvantage on some level – that's not the right word, well maybe it is. I don't know but being in the United States, most of the stereotypes about Asians are positive ones. They're still stereotypes – you know you're good at math, you're nerdy, Asian boys are nerdy – but nobody's going to cross the street, whereas if he's a black male, they will cross...and I don't know what to do with that. I grew up around, most of the friends I had from other ethnic groups were Asian or Indians. I don't have a ton of black friends..."

Sarah paints a vivid description of how Asian/white relations appear to be less problematic than black/white relations by concentrating on the power of racial stereotypes influencing the dominant group's attitudes and behaviors towards

different racial groups. The same stereotypes that cast Asian Americans as smart and nerdy, have led to Asian Americans gaining the respect from the dominant group. Dorow (2006) explains that the white adoptive parents' plans for adoption are informed by the assumption that Asian Americans do not experience racism to the same degree as other racial minorities, but rather "'real' race and racism [are] reserved for blacks, not Asians, whose appreciable cultural characteristics can be read off their bodies" (p.371). The adopted children's racial recognition as Asian is intrinsically connected to the "success" of Asian immigrants in the U.S. thus leading to their "appreciable cultural characteristics [being] read off their bodies."

The adoptive parents take into consideration the perception that Asian Americans are generally accepted by the white majority. In addition, they view the relative success of Asian Americans in the United States as a positive indicator of the future experiences of Asian adopted children. Together these two impressions lead to the adoptive parents viewing Asian children as assimilable and thus adoptable. For instance, Clarence and Carmen Cook shared how they found the similarities between Korean and Jewish Americans as appealing when choosing their adoption program:

Clarence: And you know, another reason why Korea appealed to us as a country to adopt from is that Asians and Jews have a lot of cultural similarities like valuing education, respecting your elders, and scholarly pursuits, being looked upon very favorably, and hard work.

Carmen: I would say also the Korean immigrant experience is similar to the Jewish immigrant experience. Sort of, first generation coming over and focusing on a particular industry [and] really pushing their kids to become professional by the second generation. I think there are a lot of ethnicities where that is the case, the Indian families, Korean families, Jewish families, and various other pockets that have had similar experiences.

The adoptive parents have high regards and respect for the upward assimilation trajectories of different Asian immigrant groups. There is a perception that the principle beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors associated with adoptees' culture of origin attribute to their co-ethnic immigrant groups' positive gains within the U.S. capitalist society. The positive gains also suggest that such immigrants are less likely to be victims of a racist society. Even though adoptees emigrate from their birth countries at young ages, these children are perceived as embodying the cultural attributes of their birth country and not being subjected to blatant racism in the U.S., unlike their foreign-born black counterparts. The adoptive parents may question what talents their children have as adults; however, underlying this question is a sense of comfort in knowing that their adopted children should be capable of integrating into mainstream society and as adults capable of thriving as accomplished American citizens. The stereotyping of Asian Americans, described by Russell Murphy (the father of a Korean adopted daughter) as "gentle, kind people who are hardly ever angry," suggests that it is easier for social interactions to take place between Asian and white Americans. Overall, the adoptive parents believe that with the integration of Asian Americans into mainstream society

more doors have opened for Asian and white Americans to interact and build relationships with one another.

The perception that the relations between Asian and white Americans have improved, while there lacks progress regarding black/white relations in the U.S. is a pivotal distinction made among this group of adoptive parents. The adoptive parents perceive the Asian community as more accessible and Asian children as the recipients of positive stereotypes. The adoptive parents believe that Asian adoptions are less likely to be questioned by society at large. And, although the adoptive parents are aware that they will have to convince members of their extended families to accept the adoption of an Asian child, such a confrontation is easier to handle than trying to convince their families to welcome the adoption of a black child (even if s(he) is foreign-born).

Nancy and Jason Anderson both came from homes in which their fathers openly displayed their racial intolerance of African Americans; therefore, the couple was unsure if their fathers applied the same racial biases towards Asian Americans. Nancy and Jason needed assurance from their parents, specifically their fathers, that they would support their adoption decision and embrace their adopted child. They described the difficulty they had with both of their fathers once they settled on the idea of adopting from South Korea:

Interviewer: So when you were discussing where you were interested in [adopting from] and you took into consideration the fact that some of your family members might not be comfortable with it, how did you negotiate that?

What was the conversation like?

Nancy: We, per our um Bringing Love's advice, we met separately with my parents and with his parents for that purpose. So we were out to dinner one night for, I think it was my mom's birthday, in my home town in Pennsylvania, and it was me, Jason, and my mom and my dad. And I, I brought it up and just said look, you , you know we're going for Korea here, and we need you, we need to know, we need to hear from you that you will be ok with a child that's of another race – particularly Asian because my dad fought in the Vietnam War. And I didn't know if he was gonna have any hostility toward any Asian person, even though he wasn't from Vietnam, and my dad was racist against African Americans unfortunately.

That was kind of our sticking point for my whole life. I was so angry with him for being like that. I know a million friends who are African American, you know, what is the big deal?

Um and so I thought well if he's racist against African Americans, is he gonna be racist against a Korean kid? So we brought [forth the question], we came right out and they were like absolutely not. I wasn't worried about my mom. I was worried about my dad. But we, we couldn't just focus on him so, but he assured us and we took his word for it. I mean we didn't know, but we had to go on faith and trust. And with his parents um...

Jason: Well it was more difficult. It was more difficult with – my mom was fine –

but my dad has definitely, you know, racist, his dad was racist, so he grew up, that's how he, you know that's what he came to know. I always thought mostly against African American, but it turned out that it was also Asian that he was racist against too.

Nancy: Well so we thought.

Jason: No, let me talk, this is my turn.

Nancy: Ok.

Jason: So, he had spent a lot of his time over in Korea, working with the military you know months and months and months. So he got to you know, know the culture and the people. So I thought "oh gosh this is gonna be an easy sell," you know. But it turned out that you know he made a couple of disparaging comments to me in private. He said you know do you think there's any way you can select the facial features of the child...

Interviewer: Oh really?

Jason: Because some of them have really flat, whatever, and he...so that got me really upset. And I confronted him about it very angrily. I don't remember really how it worked out with him. But it kind of, I guess it kind of backpedaled because he said "Well I only ask this in his interest because is he gonna be stigmatized in school? Is he going to have a hard time fitting in with school if he doesn't look American?"

Interviewer: This is what your father was asking?

Jason: Yeah that's right. So, you know then I said there's no way you know I'm gonna grant you this request. I said whatever child we get with, this is the child we get, period. So I mean [it] turns out that was really kinda his concern -- was how he's gonna fit in, and was he gonna look different, you know, and have a hard time in school? So I guess getting that clarification from him was, [it] helped me, but very, just very old school. And where we live in this area, it's very, as you know, multi-cultural, very open, very tolerant. He's from the Mid-west. Fewer than 1% of the people out there are minority, you know, you stand out like a beacon. Right? So anyway, I mean, he clearly loves Tyler very much. I mean it worked out, but early on, there were some terse confrontation[s]. I had to call him out on it and it was very difficult for me to do, you know? To go around and accuse your own father, it was tough.

...This was part of the conversations when we were trying to just let the parents know this is what we're gonna do. Can we count on you to not hold anything against us for this? So, but it worked out. ... I mean we even talked about the possibility of adopting an African American child because we just thought it would be cool. I know that wouldn't work for my dad. He would put his foot down. And I imagine her father would put his foot down as well.

Nancy's conversation with her parents was far less complicated than the several conversations Jason shared with his father. Jason not only discussed with his father the

couple's decision to adopt from Korea but he relentlessly made it clear that they were not going to entertain his father's request of selecting a child who would physically more closely resemble a white American child.

The family is the most intimate atmosphere for social exchanges to occur across racial boundaries. Perhaps Jason's father did not disapprove of the adopted child's racial background because of the popularity and visibility of white/Asian interracial adoptive families. According to Ishizawa, Kenney, Kubo, and Stevens (2006) approximately 53 percent of parents who participate in international adoptions adopt children of Asian descent. The visibility of the white/Asian adoptive family promotes social acceptance; as such families become less of a rarity, American society becomes desensitized to the image of a racially blended family and more people are able to speak on their experiences regarding personal encounters with adoptive families of Asian children. The questions raised by Jason's father reveal that he was less concerned with the merging of white parents and an Asian child as a family than he was concerned with the ability of an Asian child to integrate into the larger American mainstream society. This concern regarding integration highlights the perception that Asian Americans, regardless of the intergenerational success acquired among different Asian immigrant groups, hold a lower hierarchical ranking in the U.S. racial classification system in comparison to the white dominant group.

As a racial group, Asian Americans obtain high median household incomes, sustain low poverty rates, frequently acquire prestigious occupational positions, and

often interracially marry with white Americans (Zhou 2004). The achievements experienced by Asian Americans suggest that overtime they will also be accepted as members of the dominant group, as exemplified by the experiences of white immigrants groups such as the Jewish, Italian, or Irish Americans who were also not immediately categorized as members of the white majority. However, their achievements do not overshadow Asian Americans physical distinctiveness from the white majority nor do they lie to rest unfavorable stereotypes that continue to cast Asian Americans as culturally non-American. Zhou iterates the difficulty Asian Americans (as a group) have had in de-emphasizing their physical distinctiveness from the dominant group and uprooting established or newly emerging racial stereotypes:

Speaking perfect English, adopting mainstream cultural values, and even intermarrying members of the dominant group may help reduce this “otherness” for particular individuals, but it has little effect on the group as a whole. New stereotypes can emerge and un-whiten Asian Americans, no matter how “successful” and “assimilated” they have become (2004, p. 35-6).

As much as an Asian adoptee’s racial identity is favored by the model minority stereotype, the Asian adoptee’s racial identity is also plagued by the “forever foreigner” stereotype. The Asian adoptee is positioned within the intermediary tier labeled honorary whites. As honorary whites, Asian adoptees are welcomed into their new homes by their white adoptive parents and extended family, but there is an understanding that though these children may be raised as “white” (e.g. reside in

neighborhoods and attend schools that are predominantly white – thus making it difficult for them to build relationships with Asian Americans and hence develop an Asian racial identity) they will not be fully accepted as white.

Among the set of adoptive parents who are concerned about race, it is important that they adopt a nonwhite child who they feel they can successfully convince their parents (and other extended family) to accept. They find the acceptance of a nonwhite child valuable because they want to ensure that they will be supported by their extending family as they embarked on the journey of raising an adopted child. They also want to ensure that their adopted child shares a bond with his/her grandparents. The arrival of a family's newest addition is to create harmony not dysfunction within the family.

This group of adoptive parents, the emphasizees, addresses their comfort with the adoption of an Asian child and their discomfort with the adoption of a black child. The adoption of a foreign-born black child is dismissed (if the idea was ever entertained). The couples believe that the generational differences between the adoptive parents and grandparents regarding racial attitudes and tolerance for African Americans is so vast that such adoptions will never be accepted. This finding also suggests that although the adoptive parents distance themselves from their parents' racial beliefs, there is still room for the improvement of black/white relations. The adoptive parents' perception of U.S. race relations, as guided by the older generations' beliefs, prevents the adoption of black children. Perhaps, if the parents are as

comfortable with the state of black/white relations as they are with white/Asian relations there would be less hesitance regarding the adoption foreign-born black children. Or, at the least they would be more willing to discuss such a possibility with their extended family. The next section of this chapter further discusses the reasons why the adoptive parents are uncomfortable with the adoption of an international black adoptee.

African (and Caribbean) International Adoption Programs

Negative Reputation of African (and other Black) Adoption Programs. African countries did not join the international adoption market until the mid-1990s (Davis 2011). Between the years 1996 through 2009 the U.S. experienced small but steady increase in the number of children adopted from African countries (Davis 2011). Davis (2011) highlights that within a 13 year timeframe only seven African nations had more than a total of 100 African children adopted by Americans; the nations included Ethiopia, Liberia, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Kenya and Uganda. Ethiopia prevails as the most popular African sending country to the United States. In 1999, only 42 Ethiopian children were adopted by Americans but by 2010 the number of Ethiopian international adoptions increased to 2,511 (U.S. Department of State 2015b). Between the years 2008 – 2012, Ethiopia remained as one of the top five sending countries to the U.S. However, due to Ethiopia's growing popularity in the early 2000s, the country decreased the number of adoptions processed as it worked towards gaining control over the high volume of cases (Selman 2012). Among the Caribbean nations, Haiti

dominates as a sending country to the U.S. (Selman 2012). International adoptions from Haiti grew following the massive earthquake of 2010, although for the first couple of years following the earthquake the number of Haitian international adoptions were low as the country dealt with the adoption backlog and the processing of new cases was suspended until Haiti updated their standards to meet those set forth by the Hague Adoption Convention (U.S. Department of State 2015a).

Even with the recent contributions of African international adoption programs to the global adoption market, the continent is not identified as a major sending region (nor is Haiti as part of the Caribbean) (Davis 2011). Due to African and Caribbean nations' fairly recent emergent on the international adoption scene, there lacks knowledge among the adoptive parents regarding the reputation of black international adoption programs. At the least, they find the programs' reputations questionable if not completely discarded; they are either concerned with the lack of infrastructure or the use of orphanages. However, Janice Schneider, the associate administrator at Bringing Love Adoption Agency, further explained that questions surrounding the adoption of nonnative blacks focus on more than just the reputation of a program but also include questioning how the circumstances of black children versus Asian children may compare with nonwhite adoptees being raised by white American parents. Janice addressed the comparison made between black and Asian prospective adoptees:

...The infrastructure in many African countries just didn't lend itself to having a paper trail for children that would show that they were not trafficked, so that's a

big part of it. The other part, Korea didn't have the paper trail 50 years ago when it opened. In general, in the past 30 years, there's been more positive stereotypes of Asians. The positive stereotypes of Asians are good at math, good at music, smart, hardworking, da, da, da. You have the positive stereotypes in our culture and then you have negative stereotypes of blacks. That's huge for our families.

The Significance of Race and Its Effect on Black International Adoptions. As we proceed into the second decade of the 21st century, empirical evidence suggests that race remains a salient feature for African Americans in the United States. Recent sociological research reveals that social attitudes displayed by whites and other nonblack groups are often negative in reference to blacks; for instance: Latinos convey more negative attitudes towards blacks than non-Hispanic whites; whites, Latinos, and Asians disapprove of African Americans as marriageable partners; and, whites believe it is less acceptable to live among African Americans in comparison to black immigrants (Forman, Goar, and Lewis 2002; Yancey 2003; Hao 2007). Children of African descent born outside of the United States do not have direct sociopolitical connection to the experiences of African Americans. Ethnically-speaking, one may argue that the experiences of foreign-born blacks differ from those of African Americans, but this research shows that the racial identity of children of African descent as black holds clout over their immigrant identities. Janice addressed the African children's (and other foreign-born black children's) challenge of escaping his/her racial identity and the stereotypes associated with one's racial identity as nonwhite Americans:

...We're a racist country. White parents grow up with it. They think they don't, but they do. They are the beneficiaries of racism, and they are the beneficiaries of a systemic process, and their view of Africans is, I think, probably more positive [than for] African Americans. White people have a whole negative connotation about African-Americans, but they at least know that if they adopt an African child, when that child gets here that child is going to grow up, and the world is going to look at him like a Black male here. They're not going to care that he's originally from where ever. He's going to be looked at as every other Black male, which is in a negative way...

Foreign-born blacks are therefore classified within the lowest hierarchal ranking, the collective black, because they are identified by the dominant group as racially synonymous with African Americans upon arriving in the United States. These children are exposed to the same negative judgments associated with African American children because of their racial identity.

The previous reflections exposed by the adoptive parents regarding the international adoption of children of African descent reveal the precarious status of black children, which Dorow (2006) coins as the “ ‘white noise’ of blackness” (p.357). The life prospects of black adopted children are perceived as the mirror image reflection of the Asian adopted children. Their life chances are perceived as similar because as nonwhite orphaned/abandoned children they share the commonality of being raised by a new white American family. Yet, their mirror images are reversed because the same

resources afforded to each child are not expected to result in similar outcomes. Therefore, as the definition of whiteness continues to evolve from an understanding of anti-blackness, the adoptive parents compare what they know and expect of Asian children to black children. Even though the adoptive parents realize that their Asian adopted child may not have all of the privileges associated with being white in America, the parents believe Asian children are still in a better position than children of African descent who are relegated as members of the collective black within the U.S. racial hierarchy.

Unique challenges associated with black international adoptions. It is difficult to discern if prior to an adoption the parents actually had an in-depth discussion with each other comparing the difference of parenting Asian versus black children. At times it felt as if it such open discussions were occurring for the first time during the interviews. However, there is an underlying awareness among the couples that a black adoption (rarely was there any distinction made between foreign and native blacks) is too challenging. The couples do not believe that their families or communities would eventually accept the adoption of a black child. They find the “black” community as less accessible and it is too difficult to handle cultural difference. They fear for a black child’s safety and his/her likelihood of experiencing racism. They fear that a black child might react negatively to being adopted by white American parents.

The adoptive parents concerns regarding the adoption of a black child stem from the issues associated with the black/white racial divide in the United States. For

example, Shawn and Hazel spent a significant amount of time residing in the south, and it was during Shawn's work as a police officer that he became cognizant of the racial tensions that existed between black and white Americans in certain regions of the United States. The Freeman family relocated from Kansas to Mississippi when Shawn was hired by a local police force and Hazel enrolled in college. As an officer Shawn held uncomfortable conversations with his supervisor; he recalled a conversation in which his former supervisor openly referred to African American children as niggers when describing the voluntary segregation that continues to occur in Mississippi's public school system as the white parents send their children to private schools. Shawn was astonished by his supervisor's free usage of the derogatory term and he was appalled by the fact that his supervisor assumed he would be comfortable with hearing someone refer to African American children as niggers. On the contrary, Shawn was dismayed by black locals' lack of trust and open disrespect towards the local police force. According to Shawn's accounts, it was common for African Americans to assume they were being reprimanded by the police because Shawn and other officers were racist white police officers rather than the individuals owning their unlawful behaviors. (Such individuals had the same regards for black officers, who they felt as members of the police force were far removed from the black experience and more concern with the agenda of the white male dominated criminal justice system). Shawn described his time in Mississippi as "eye-opening" and stated that "I didn't realize racism was so alive in the south. It is, and it's from both directions. It's like everybody hates everybody still." Shawn's

experiences while residing in Mississippi were so unnerving that Shawn could not imagine adopting a black child and moving back to the south.

Earlier in this chapter, Shawn and Hazel revealed that South Korea and Ethiopia were their programs of choice; however, one of the factors that led to the Freeman adopting from South Korea was Hazel's concern with the Ethiopian community not being accessible. The Freeman experience in the south provides a basis as to why Hazel may find the Ethiopian community (who has a presence in the Mid-Atlantic region) as less accessible in comparison to the Korean community. Ethiopians may be a distinct ethnic group but racially they are perceived as black. The usage of racial categories allows for people to make quick judgment calls; thus how Hazel may envision relations between black and white Americans affects her inference regarding the accessibility of the Ethiopian community. Although the Freeman family recognized that what they witnessed as black/white confrontations primarily occurred in a specific region in the U.S., those experiences certainly do not undermine the possibility that, in general, racial intolerance between blacks and whites remains problematic. The black/white racial divide persists as racial tensions remain between black and white Americans. As racial tensions persist, the adoptive parents view the plight of black American lives in the U.S. as bleak and they do not find the black community accessible.

Russell Murphy discussed how issues with black/white race relations lead to black Americans' non-acceptance of white Americans adopting black children. Russell and Evelyn have two children, their biological son Dwight and Korean adopted daughter

Iris. Even though the Murphy family became multiracial with the adoption of Iris they did not feel that their adoption of an Asian child would expose them to grave difficulties in contrast to the adoption of a “dark-skin child.” Russell discussed his skepticism of the black community accepting such adoptions. Based on the current state of black/white relations, there is a belief that black Americans are not trustworthy of white Americans raising black children. Russell believed the distrust of the black community towards interracial adoptions is not as strong of an issue among the Asian community:

I think the other thing for me is – what would other, because, what would other African American people in the country think? “Oh who do you think you are,” I just feel like there would be some animosity out there about it. And maybe there [is]. I haven’t seen it but, I think it’s closer to home to me and so it just felt harder if that makes any sense. Um, now we haven’t had any, knock on wood, we haven’t had any bad experiences around Iris. ... And we’ve been to, you know, we’ve been to...I remember I had a drycleaner who loved Iris when she’d come in. She talked to her and we did ask her how to say their names and stuff...So we’ve had some very lovely exchanges with Korean people.

I also wonder that if sometimes people, some people look at us and wonder what are you doing with – Korean people should be with Korean people – that kind of thing. But, no one’s ever said anything or done anything.

A concern publicly addressed in 1972 by the National Association of Black Social Workers was the interracial adoption of black American children by white Americans

(National Association of Black Social Workers 1972). They were concerned about the adoptive parents' ability to cultivate healthy "physical, psychological, and cultural" development of black children (National Association of Black Social Workers 1972, p. 1). The Association's apprehension of white Americans raising black American children further highlights that significance placed upon the need for a black child to develop healthy ethnic and racial identities through the processes of ethnic and racial socialization; however, if white/black relations remain contentious it is very difficult for the adoptive parents to acquire assistance from members of a black adoptee's co-ethnic community. White adoptive parents would lack access to an important resource, the black community, which is believed to support the healthy development of a black child. Hence, as expressed by Russell, over 40 years later since the National Association of Black Social Workers brought this concern to light, the stigmatic thought prevails that white families cannot raise black children, which includes the upbringing of foreign-born blacks.

An effort that may lead to the eradication of such a stigma is the improvement of U.S. white/black relations and in order for such a change to take place white and black Americans must be willing to interact and build relationships with one another. Regina Kennedy, the mother of two adopted children, understood the value of such relationships as benefitting an adopted child. However, she reiterated sentiments similar to Hazel Freeman of finding the black community as less accessible. According to Regina, there is reluctance from members of the black community to form relationships

with white Americans, which is a disincentive for white Americans to adopt black children. Regina discussed in detail this conundrum:

...I did feel that there was sort of an extra level of challenges to adopting an African child... not that... we both thought that we could certainly parent a child that was black, that we'd love that child. Part [of the challenges] was acceptance within our own family mostly Ronnie's family...and I do feel that there's just social, just I think a lot more social issues of identity, not that... there's issues all over, but I did feel that if I adopted a black child that it would be more important to really be more in a black community or have more real idols. And, not that that's not important for Wesley and Ashley but that it would be more of a stretch too, because you know, we don't, we really don't have any black people, regularly in our lives. And I'm not, necessarily the average person. As a social worker, I mostly work with minority families, foster care social worker, and adoption, and the court system...and sometimes I have found barriers to forming friendships from black people as well. I would have liked to have been better friends, but I just felt like I couldn't get in.

The Kennedy family was not completely opposed to the adoption of a foreign-born black child but, they felt more comfortable with the adoption of their Korean children, Wesley and Ashley. Regina was not sure that they could handle the challenges they found to be unique to the black adoptee's experience.

Evelyn Murphy addressed additional challenges that she perceived as unique to the black adoptee's experience. She expressed concern about white American families who adopted black children without taking into consideration the environment in which they were raising the children and how the children may ultimately feel about being raised by white adoptive parents. As Evelyn expressed her concerns she referenced two instances that suggest raising a black child is more challenging than raising an Asian child:

I don't know. I don't know. I don't think I was ready for the challenges of adopting a kid from Ethiopia, having a dark-skin child. I don't know why. I have a little bit of concern about families that do, do that. ...I just think it's tough for kids sometimes to grow up in that environment. Maybe because my, I have [a] close girlfriend who's white and she had some very conservative cousins in the middle of Pennsylvania, very red state kind of people...and all the sudden they announced one day that they were going to adopt these two African American children. Well they just, I think they thought they were doing a mission or something. And over the years I heard the stories of how they were almost just not sensitive at all to how to do the kids hair and all this stuff. And I thought you just have to really think these things through, what you're doing to the children. And then, also I saw a documentary about a girl from Haiti who was adopted into a white family and she was very angry. She was a teenager. And she was like "I wish they never adopted me! I didn't ask for this! I didn't ask to be brought

here and looked at like that!” It just made me very conscious. So I think that I’m open to anything usually but I think it would take a lot of thought.

According to Evelyn, the priorities of white adoptive parents should be the upbringing of their adopted children rather than their priorities focused on the mission of *saving* a child. Therefore, she called into question the actions of white adoptive parents who are interested in the international adoption of black children, and she asserted that they must truly consider and take seriously the responsibilities that come with raising black children. Because, the adoptive parents’ actions not only reflect upon them as parents but their actions will also either positively or negatively impact the life of a black adopted child.

Interestingly, Evelyn identified Thailand, Cambodia, and India as countries of interest if her family were to ever consider another international adoption. Yet, she did not transpose her concerns regarding the adoption of dark-skin children upon these Asian children, whose skin tone may also be of a darker hue. The racial attribute of dark-skin is directly connected to the physical qualities belonging to children of African descent. Evelyn’s reserved attitude regarding the adoption of “dark-skin” children pertains to those who are racially identified as black. Therefore, Evelyn found it imperative that a couple consider if their participation in a black adoption is in the best interest of the child and the parents. According to some of the adoptive parents there are distinct challenges associated with raising a black child. Those challenges are deeply

rooted in racism, pronounced by black/white cultural differences, and continue to exist due to the contentious relationships between black and white Americans.

The concept of interracial adoptions being viewed as acceptable becomes complicated when taking into consideration the adoption of foreign-born black adoptees. A color line is often drawn in reference to interracial adoption when it involves foreign-born black adoptees because there is an understanding that upon arriving to the United States, such children are plagued with the negative stereotypes associated with African Americans. The children are expected to be recipients of prejudice and discrimination throughout their lives – both at societal level and familial level – since many of the families are aware that their extended family would disapprove of such adoptions. They also expect scrutiny rather than support from the black community if they adopt a black child. The adoptive parents find the adoption of foreign-born black children as challenging because the parents must determine if they are equipped with the skills, resources, and support to raise a foreign-born black child.

The case involving Jay (discussed earlier) exemplifies the continuation of the stigma that white Americans are not equipped to raise black children. The case also exemplifies the notion that black children are unassimilable and it demonstrates how the permeation of negative stereotypes commonly associated with African Americans (in this instance African American men as violent and dangerous) are ascribed to the black adoptee. The Conner family was unable to handle Jay's behavior and rather than analyze his actions within a framework that focuses on the experiences of a young

traumatized child, his actions are compared to those of black male adult criminals. The miniscule presence of black immigrants in the United States creates challenges for the adoptive parents to differentiate experiences of native versus nonnative blacks in America. The lack of knowledge regarding the immigrant assimilation experiences of an international black adoptee's co-ethnic members and the newness of foreign-born black adoptions provide the adoptive parents with very little information to reference, outside of the experiences of African Americans, when trying to evaluate a child's potential for integration within their families and U.S. mainstream society. Therefore, black children are viewed as unassimilable especially when compared to their Asian peers.

Overall, not all of the adoptive parents were discouraged by the idea of adopting foreign-born black children. Quite a few of the adoptive parents mentioned that had there existed black international adoption programs they found trustworthy and reputable, they would have more seriously considered the international adoption of a black child. But, that was not the case at the time the parents were creating their adoption plans. On the other hand, for those adoptive parents who stressed the relevance of a child's racial identity as influencing their adoption plans, some of them expressed that as they have now grown accustomed to raising a nonwhite child they believe they could handle the adoption of a black child. They are still aware of issues addressed above but they have more faith in their ability to conquer the challenges associated with a black adoption. The final section reveals that interestingly the international adoption of black children is viewed more problematic than the

international adoption of Latino children. Even though Latino children are members of a racial group that has also experienced difficulty acquiring full integration among the dominant group and whose members are often subjected to racism and discrimination.

Latin American International Adoption Programs

Negative Reputation of Latin American Adoption Programs. Latin America became a source for international adoptions during the 1970s after many of the Latin American countries modified their laws, which led to the legalization of adoption (Weil 1984, Selman 2009). At the same time in which Latin American countries began to open their doors to international adoption, Korea (the largest sending country in the 1970s) began to enforce more restrictive laws for international adoption; therefore, by the 1980s the number of children outsourced from Latin American (which included the countries of Columbia, El Salvador, and Mexico) were almost as high as the number of children outsourced from Asia to the United States (Weil 1984; Selman 2009). In the early 2000s Guatemala was often a contender among the top five sending countries to the U.S. (U.S. Department of State 2015b). During its peak year in 2007 Americans adopted 4,726 children from Guatemala (U.S. Department of State 2015b). However, as addressed in Chapter three, Guatemala was one of several international adoption programs called out for issues surrounding its adoption process; therefore, the decline of Guatemalan international adoptions began to occur in 2008 as the U.S., a newly joined member of the Hague Convention, recognized it could no longer ignore corruption issues associated with Guatemalan international adoptions and the

Guatemalan government (also a Hague country) suspended its program as the country worked towards improving its adoption program and implementing laws that abided by the legislation set forth by the Hague Convention (Selman 2009; U.S. Department of State 2015a).

The adoptive parents were very knowledgeable of the corruption issues surrounding some of the Latin American adoption programs. A few of the adoptive parents referenced Guatemala as a country they were once interested in but, it was not an option because of the nation shutting down the programs for problems regarding the abduction and “selling of babies.” Furthermore, the adoptive parents did not want to deal with the questionable nature of the adoptions or worry about the legality of such adoptions even if it was still possible to adopt Guatemala children. On the other hand, among the Latin American programs in which the adoptive parents believed to be reputable, such as Columbia or Peru, the parents found the travel stipulations very burdensome. The expectations for length of stay were too long and the government required too many trips. The adoptive parents primarily rejected the adoption of Latino children due to problematic issues.

Absent from the adoptive parents discussions is concern regarding the racial identity of Latino children. According to Janice Schneider’s expert opinion, as the associate coordinator for Bringing Love Adoption Agency, the hierarchal ranking of nonwhite international adoptions places Latinos in a secondary position following white

American's number one preference for Asian children. Janice explained those factors which she believed promoted the lower hierarchical ranking of Latino children:

I think Hispanic again falls on the continuum. Partly, it's where you live in the United States. Like, if you live in the southern tier of the United States, you're going to have more prejudice against Hispanics. But in general, American...White Americans will say, "OK. If we have to adopt transracially, we'll adopt Asians first then Hispanics, then Africans.

Although in the U.S. Latino Americans are often perceived as another disadvantaged minority group, this study finds that the adoptive parents do not hold race as a factor influencing their preference for adopting Latino children. A few of the parents discussed the negative stereotypes associated with Latino Americans; however, they did not perceive the stereotypes as creating particular hardships if they chose to raise a Latino child. In the words of Lawrence and Brenda Blackwell the adoption of a Latino child did not pose the threat of any challenges that might be unique in comparison to the adoption of their Korean son, Karl, or any other children:

Interviewer: So do you think that if you had, had adopted a little girl from Guatemala, or Columbia, that they would be facing any challenges that may be different from what Karl has to face?

Lawrence: No, no. I'll tell you the one thing that worries me is I think Guatemala did get shut down for exactly what I said for, um, selling babies. So that would be...I would be majorly, I'd say having a major crisis of conscience. I mean, you

know, you got this kid you were told one thing and I would never do it, obviously deliberately, but now it's in the news. Gee, what do you do now? Pretty horrible. I don't know. Geez. I don't know. So, no I don't think that if he was Guatemalan, or...

Brenda: Russian, anything. [laughs]

Lawrence: Right, I don't think it'd be any different to be honest with you. I really don't.

Lawrence pointed out the moral responsibility of the prospective parents to avoid situations in which a prospective adoptee may not be legally accessible for adoption. The adoption should not unjustifiably disrupt or dismantle the birth family. The adoption should not create sorrow or guilt for the adoptive family who unknowingly participated in an unlawful adoption. Brenda's quick reference to Russian children suggests that Latino children similar to their white foreign-born counterparts will not experience any particular challenges as a consequence of their racial identity and thus parenting such children will not create unusual difficulties.

In 2012, 46 percent of the U.S. immigrant population was of Latino descent, 38.5 % migrated from the countries of Mexico, Guatemala, EL Salvador, and Cuba (Nwosu, Batalova, & Auclair 2014; Migration Policy Institute 2015b). As of 2013 in the Mid-Atlantic region (which in this study refers to the states of Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania) the foreign-born population for immigrants of Latino descent ranges from

approximately 22% in Pennsylvania, approximately 30% in Maryland, and approximately 33% in Virginia (Migration Policy Institute 2015c).

The immigrants of Latino descent have a strong presence in the U.S. but, unlike the conversations regarding the prospect of adoption for Asian or African children, there is no discussion among the adoptive parents regarding the accessibility of the Latino community. Perhaps this is not addressed because the adoptive parents do not find it important to regularly interact with the Latino community when raising a Latino child, especially if they identify a child as a white Latino who can easily blend with the adoptive family. The ability to blend may cause the parents to find it less important to have an Latino adopted child develop a strong sense of his/her ethnic identity (as informed by his/her culture of origin); the adoptive parents may find it more important to concentrate on the development of an American identity which would further support such a child's effortlessly integration among the dominant group. Or, perhaps it is not discussed because the regional difference in perception of Latino Americans does not cause the adoptive parents to have concern about raising a Latino child in the Mid-Atlantic. They do not fear racism as a problem Latino adoptees will encounter and therefore, it is not important to seek guidance from members of the Latino community to assist the adoptive parents in teaching their adopted children coping skills for racism. Although there was minimal discussion regarding the adoption of Latino children, the data suggests that Latino adoptees, similar to the Asian adoptees, are also positioned within the intermediary tier of honorary white. If the corruption issues did not exist

and the travel arrangements were more reasonable, undoubtedly Latino children would be found more suitable for international adoption.

Conclusion

In the United States racial stratification operates as a system in which racial group membership determines the ranking of a particular group of people within the racial hierarchy. Racial group membership is defined by phenotypic (and to a certain extent cultural) traits perceived to be specific to a particular group. The racial ordering of the different groups creates a hierarchal system in which one group occupies a dominant position while the others occupy a position of subordination. The hierarchy suppresses the political power of minority groups, impedes their access to equal opportunities, and thus influences their ability to acquire political clout, social integration, and upward mobility. The manifestation of racism, "...the practice of discrimination, at all levels from personal abuse to colonial oppression," is rooted in this system of stratification (Blaut 1992, p. 289).

The foundation of the U.S. racial hierarchy is deeply rooted in black/white relations (Bonilla-Silva 2004). It is a racial order that juxtaposes white Americans' position of racial dominance against black Americans' position of subordination; a definition of whiteness is created by rejecting all aspects presumed to be representative of blackness. As addressed by Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001), whiteness is defined as the polar opposite of blackness:

First created in the 1600s and 1700s by dominant whites, this white-to-black continuum runs from white to black, from 'civilized' whites to 'uncivilized' blacks, from privilege and desirability to lack of privilege and undesirability (p.57).

Ethnic groups who exist outside of the black-white racial dichotomy, such as Chinese Americans or Korean Americans, find a racial identity imposed upon them that falls within the continuum of this white/black paradigm. But, it is important to note that the racial identities and social regulations attached to those identities are not static but rather, as the definition of whiteness evolves, the racial identity and thus experiences of other groups may also transform. The main objective of this study is to examine the extent in which white Americans' perception of the U.S. racial hierarchy and U.S. race relations affects their plans for adoption; more specifically, which children (based on their racial identities) do the adoptive parents identify as desirable for adoption.

In the theory section of this study I argue that previous sociological research investigating the state of the U.S. racial hierarchy through the lens of international adoption display limitations in the ability to discern if a three-tier system is emerging. This argument was based upon the lack of data addressing the adoptive parents' preferences for adoption when taking into consideration ethnic differences regarding the preference for Asian adoptees. But rather than I continue to challenge this limitation, I argue that the adoption preference for international adoptees does shed light on the reformation of the U.S. racial classification system as a three-tier system. In this study, it is also difficult to discern the intra-racial group preferences of the adoptive

parents towards the adoption of nonwhite children, however; there is a distinct divide among the adoptive parents' racial preferences for white, Asian, black, and Latino international adoptees. In reference to the adoption of international adoptees, the adoptive parents' preferences reveal that the 21st century is an era in which the U.S. racial hierarchy has transformed from the binary white/nonwhite model to the tertiary white/honorary white/collective black model.

The four components of the originization theory – reputation of a country's adoption program, a child's racial identity, a child's ethnic identity, and a child's origin culture – provide insight into how the adoptive parents come to terms with whom they believe they can best parent. Furthermore, the data reveals that the immigrant assimilation experiences of international adoptees' co-ethnic members also influences the adoptive parents' adoption plans. When the adoptive parents initially approached the adoption process they decided early in the process that an interracial international adoption was the best choice for them. Although, the adoptive parents find the adoption of an Eastern European child as appealing because of the racial similarities, the instability of Eastern European adoption programs, the unlawful practices of the foreign authorities, and the often unhealthy status of the prospective adoptees leads to the parents finding such adoptions as unappealing. In the U.S. racial hierarchy, these children are perceived as members of the dominant group but the unfavorable qualities of the Eastern European adoption programs (and children) leads to the stratification of Eastern European children within the top tier (the white dominant group) of tertiary

hierarchy. The adoption of Eastern European adoptees is not admired to the same extent as the adoption of the healthy white American adoptees.

As adoptive parents took into consideration the adoption of nonwhite children, I find that they are most receptive to the international adoption of Asian children. Ultimately, the adoptive parents are comfortable with the international adoption of Asian children because they: (1) approve of the requirements set by the different countries, (2) believe the Asian adoption programs have a positive reputation, (3) believe the adopted children to be healthy, and (4) they were not overly concerned with Asian children having to deal with racism (not from within the family or from society in general) because of the success co-ethnic immigrants have had towards acquiring upward assimilation. The role of a child's ethnic identity and origin culture as factors influencing the couples' adoption choices is also taken into consideration; although it does not as strongly impact the couples' adoption decision in comparison to the four factors just addressed. A common message expressed by the adoption community, which includes professionals and seasoned parents, is the relevance of ethnic socialization (i.e. the importance of an adoptee developing an ethnic identity by gaining knowledge about his/her birth culture). However, the act of adoptive parents ethnically socializing adopted children in reference to their birth culture is the choice of the adoptive parents. Yes, the adoptive parents seek the international adoption of children whose co-ethnic communities the parents' believe to be accessible. The adoptive parents find comfort in knowing that if they deem ethnic socialization as necessary, an adoptee's co-ethnic immigrants will welcome the adoptive family presence among the

community; yet, a child's ethnicity and origin culture are not driving factors in the adoption decision because ethnic socialization is a choice. In general, the adoptive parents view the Asian community as accessible; their access to Asian adoptees' co-ethnic communities offers yet another resource to assist the parents in raising Asian adopted children and thereby further supports their belief that as white adoptive parents they are capable of successfully parenting Asian children.

The adoptive parents shy away from the international adoption of black children because they question the reputation of the adoption programs. Moreover, because the adoptive parents perceive black international adoptees as members of the collective black, they believe they are not equipped to address the racially-charged challenges that come with the adoption of black. Especially since they do not see the black community as a resource they could turn to if they seek help in raising their children as individuals who could successfully cope with issues regarding racism or as a resource to help their children develop ethnic pride. The parents perceive racial intolerance as an issue that continues to plague white/black relations. A few of the adoptive parents contemplated the international adoption of Latino children but their choices were eliminated due to the closing of a prominent Latin American adoption program and the adoptive parents' disagreement with the requirements established by the foreign nations. Unlike the black international adoptees, the adoptive parents are not concerned about the Latino children's racial identities but rather the adoptive parents perceive Latino children as honorary whites.

The understanding of who the adoptive parents felt they were best equipped to raise rested upon how they reconciled with the stereotypes associated with different racial groups in the United States. Racism may create some troubling situations for international adopted Asian children, but overall the adoptive parents had faith that as Asian Adoptees, their children would more easily integrate into American society and live a healthy and productive life. The success of the Asian adoptees' co-ethnic immigrants' ability to sustain upward assimilation in the U.S. provides the convincing basis that their adopted children will experience similar success.

The adoptive parents make distinctions in reference to which Asian adoption programs are more likely to consist of healthy children. Yet, when asked to share other countries they would willingly adopt from, if the opportunity presented itself, the adoptive parents mention several different Asian countries. Some of the countries they listed even included nations that according to Bonilla-Silva's three-tier racial hierarchy theory would be a part of the collective black (such as Cambodia or Vietnam). However, as Asian adoptees they do not perceive the assimilation prospect of such children as different from their East Asian peers, which is reflected in the fact that in U.S. society racial stereotypes are casted upon an entire racial group; therefore, distinctions are not made among different ethnic groups of a particular racial group.

Thus as prospective adoptees, Asian children reap the benefit of the model minority stereotype as supporting the adoptive parents' adoption choices; as nonwhite children brought up in the U.S., the children are not susceptible to particular hardships

in their lives due the color of their skin. The adoptive parents view these children as honorary whites because they believe they are less likely to be victims of racism. As the couples were making their adoption plans, they felt they were best prepared to raise Asian children; consequently, among the adoptive parents of Asian adoptees their children were adopted from the countries of South Korea, China, and the Philippines.

This chapter focused on using the originization process as a way to think about the adoptive parents' adoption plans and how their perception of the U.S. racial hierarchy and race relations influenced their preferences for adoption. Chapter five examines how three components of the originization process – a child's racial identity, a child's ethnic identity, and a child's origin culture – influence the adoptive parents' perception regarding the relevance of ethnically and racially socialization their Asian adopted children.

CHAPTER 5: EMBRACING THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE VERSUS CAMOUFLAGING THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE – THE RELEVANCE OF ETHNIC AND RACIAL SOCIALIZATION

Pearl and I were chatting in the kitchen as we waited for Travis Olson to put up the car he was currently working on. Lloyd, their 2 year old son from South Korea, was on the couch watching a children's program. He lay quietly with a pacifier in his mouth paying me little attention. Eventually he came over to the kitchen table where Pearl and I were sitting. After waving hello, he excitedly shared with me the colored bubble kit he recently received from his babysitter. As he described the colors of each bottle, Pearl ushered him to the front door and asked that he put on his shoes; the Olsons and I were heading off to Chick-Fil-A for lunch. Pearl sat down on the floor and began to get herself together. As she was getting dressed, Lloyd walked over to me and asked "Why is your skin so dark?" I smiled at Lloyd thinking about how I might respond. But before I could say anything, Pearl got up from the floor, walked over to Lloyd, placed all of our arms together, and explained "A lot of people have different skin colors, which is why her skin color is darker than yours and your skin is darker than mine."

Prior to this occurrence, Lloyd's parents proudly mentioned his exposure to a variety of different Asian Americans. Over the years, the Olson have developed an extensive network that includes Asian Americans they have met through school and their professions. In particular, Lloyd has had interactions with his father's best friend since childhood who is Filipino American, his father's close friend from work who is Korean American, and various others of his father's coworkers whose backgrounds include Korean and Vietnamese. On a more intimate level, Lloyd's current babysitter is

a biracial white-Korean American, while his previous babysitter was Korean. Lloyd's opportunity to build these various relationships suggests that his social environment is not solely confined to the interactions that occur among his immediate and extended white adoptive family. Moreover, The Olson believe that Lloyd's urban surroundings further offer him the chance to meet persons of various racial-ethnic backgrounds, specifically they stated:

Pearl: I mean I really will say that's one thing about being from the urban area you know. You get exposer.

Travis: You grow up with everybody.

Pearl: You really do.

However, it is apparent that my presence in the Olson's home as a person of a darker hue has exposed Lloyd to an even wider society beyond his familiar interactions with his adoptive family and family friends of Asian descent.

Pearl's response to her two-years-old son's inquiry regarding my darker hue is a response that acknowledges the physical differences existing among the three of us. She does not present a dyadic explanation that focuses on lighter versus darker hues because Lloyd's existence as Asian American lies outside the black/white dyad. But rather, I witnessed an act of racial socialization in which Lloyd's mother relays a message of racial equality as she highlights skin tone as a unique physical feature that differs among all people and central to her response is the fact that skin tone is one of several

physical attributes used by U.S. society to easily identify and demarcate racial groups. Yet, this conversation does not address skin tone as one of many controversial physical features used to uphold hierarchal rankings within the U.S. racial classification system. It is understandable that Pearl does not go into a detailed discussion regarding race, the U.S. racial hierarchy, and race relations with Lloyd being so young and having little knowledge of the racial implications underlining his innocent question; however, research conducted by Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) among preschool children, reveals that at a very young age children begin to develop and interpret an understanding of race. Their understanding is built upon the racial knowledge gained through observations and personal/impersonal interactions with adults, children, and the media (p.17). The knowledge passed from adults to children provides insight on the usage of physical features as markers of distinct racial groups along with prevailing racial attitudes and the usage of stereotypes to reaffirm such attitudes. Children utilize physical features, in particular skin color, as a way to categorize themselves and others into groups. Furthermore, Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) reveal that young children do not simply mimic their observations or experiences with adults regarding racial interactions but are capable of processing those experiences into meaningful knowledge that is applied while interacting with other children; they can identify and “properly” use stereotypes/derogatory words during their interactions with other children, for example. Therefore, the main purpose of this chapter is to explore how three components of the originization process²⁶ (in regards to a child’s race, ethnicity, and

²⁶ Please refer to the Application of Theories section located in chapter two for a detailed discussion of

origin culture) influence a child's upbringing due to the understanding that children at a young age are capable of comprehending the meaning of race. It investigates how parents perceive race and ethnicity as attributes impacting their children's daily lives and how that perception influences the incorporation of racial and ethnic socialization²⁷ as part of the children's upbringing. The data reveals that the degree in which parents incorporate processes of ethnic socialization and racial socialization into the lives of their adopted children differs. Figure 5.1 displays the adoptive parents as classified into three groups (proactive racial socialization, reactive racial socialization, and inactive racial socialization) in reference to the varying degrees adoptive parents encourage or refute racial socialization.

The adoptive parents who compose the proactive racial socialization group view racial socialization as important. The parents take into consideration how racism may impact their adopted children's lives during their earlier years and as adults. Beginning at a young age, the adoptive parents openly discuss with their children ways to address negative incidents they have experienced (or may experience) because of their racial-ethnic backgrounds as Asian Americans. They find it imperative that their Asian adopted children have the necessary skills (i.e. coping mechanisms) to handle encounters of racism.

the originization process.

²⁷ Please refer to the Ethnic and Racial Socialization section located in chapter two for a detailed discussion regarding these two processes.

Proactive Racial Socialization Reactive Racial Socialization Inactive Racial Socialization

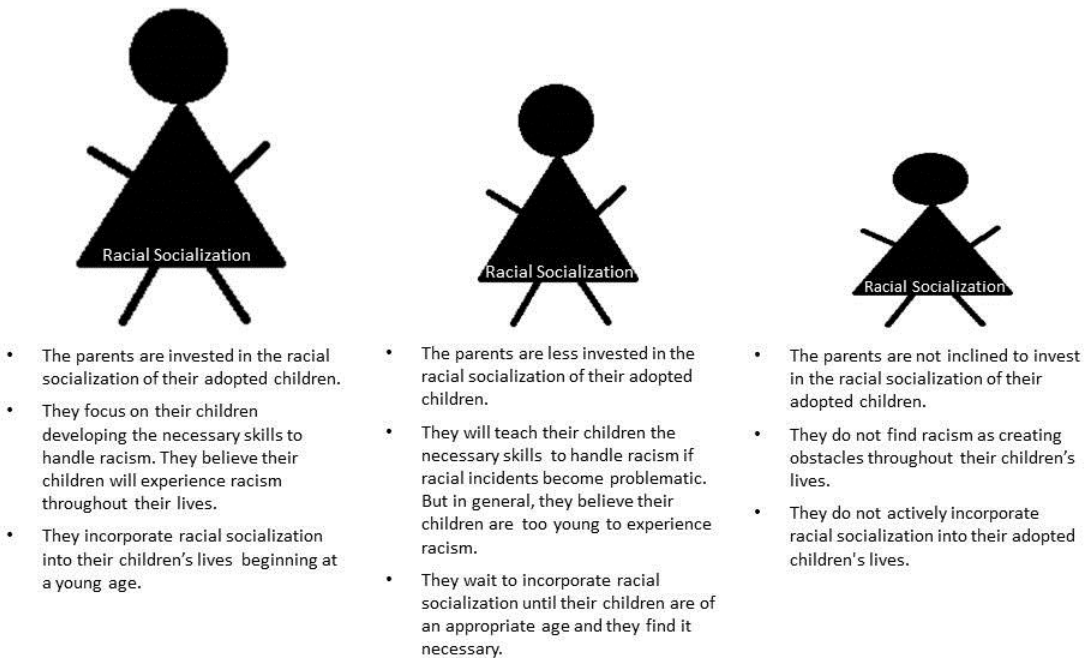


Figure 5.1 The Incorporation of Racial Socialization among Asian Adopted Children by White Adoptive Parents

The adoptive parents who compose the reactive racial socialization group see value in racially socializing their adopted children (if needed) but otherwise hold off incorporating racial socialization into their children's lives. The adoptive parents acknowledge their children's racial background but they are less concerned with racism impacting their children's lives. They handle life on a daily basis and will teach their children how to respond to racism if there comes a point in time in which their adopted children are confronted with issues related to racism.

The adoptive parents who compose the inactive racial socialization group are not wholeheartedly invested in the racial socialization of their Asian adopted children. The children's racial backgrounds do not hold much significance within their homes. These

adoptive parents are fixated on their children's early childhood experiences that often only involve minor racial incidents (if any). Thus, they do not foresee their children facing prejudice or discrimination in the near or distant future due to their racial background as Asian Americans.

Figure 5.2 displays the adoptive parents as classified into two groups, those who are compassionate towards ethnic socialization and those who are indifferent towards ethnic socialization.

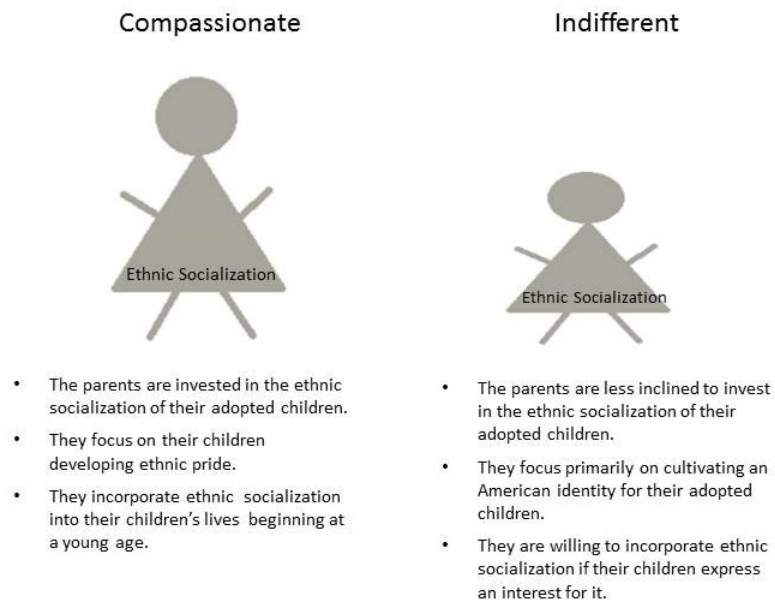


Figure 5.2 The Incorporation of Ethnic Socialization among Asian Adopted Children by White Adoptive Parents

The first group consists of white adoptive parents who display compassion for the ethnic socialization of their Asian adopted children and thus these parents are invested in the ethnic socialization of their Asian adopted children. The adoptive parents

are compelled to helping their children build a connection with their birth culture because as international Asian adoptees the parents want to honor their children's native origins. They help their children form relationships with other co-ethnics and have their children involved in ethnic activities. These parents view ethnic socialization as important. The second group of parents, those who are indifferent towards ethnic socialization, focuses mostly on cultivating an American identity for their Asian adopted children. They are not wholeheartedly invested in the ethnic socialization of their adopted children. These parents are open to their children's participation in ethnic activities should the children express interest but they are less inclined to take it upon themselves to invest in such activities. Ethnic socialization holds less significance in such households.

In those households where the adoptive parents revere ethnic socialization, the parents embrace the immigrant identity²⁸ of their adopted children by cultivating a sense of ethnic pride. In those households where the adoptive parents do not revere ethnic socialization, the parents camouflage the adopted children's immigrant identity by refraining from emphasizing their children's ethnic background. Parents who cultivate a sense of racial awareness among their Asian adopted children, through the process of racial socialization, promote the development of Asian adoptees' racial identity. On the other hand, those parents who are less inclined to racially socialize their

²⁸ Immigrant identity is defined as the extent to which one identifies with a particular immigrant group (Portes & Rumbaut 2006).

adopted children, thus choosing against the cultivation of racial awareness, stall the development of Asian adoptees' racial identity.

The description of Lloyd's and Pearl's interaction following the toddler's inquiry of my dark skin displays one of the different ways (as addressed above) that adoptive families may address race and thus incorporate racial socialization into their adopted children lives. Sooner than Pearl may expect, Lloyd will refer to his skin color (and others) not only as an inquisitive feature but as a way to develop an understanding of who he is and how his identity relates to others. As a toddler he may find his racial identity supported or refuted by his peers; he may experience his first encounter with racism although he might not be able to recognize the experience as such. Lloyd will develop an understanding of what it means to fall along the white-black continuum that categorizes racial groups in the United States, and as he matures into a young adult, the questions he raises to his parents may become more difficult to answer. Although he came to the U.S. as an infant, is raised in a white household, and has little recollection of his origin and ethnic background, his encounters with others will expose how society racializes him as Asian even if he does not agree with that identity.

Tessler, Tuan, and Shiao (2011) discuss how the racialization process unfolds for international adoptees:

As adoptees grow up and become more independent of their families, they experience first-hand what it's like to be viewed and treated as minority group members. For some, there are warning signs in early adolescence when they

first encounter racial prejudice and discrimination. By early adulthood, many more will experience racial stereotyping, exclusion, and teasing similar to other minority group members. Racialization tends to occur, albeit in different forms, regardless of ethnic identification or interest in cultural exploration.

At the turn of the 20th century, Asian Americans once encountered a level of racial intolerance that was equivalent to the level of racial intolerance experienced by black Americans (Ancheta 1998). However, following the Civil Rights Era, Asian Americans grew to be recognized as model minorities because of their academic and economic achievements that surpassed the achievements of other racial minorities (and presently the white majority)(Chou 2008). Although the success of Asian Americans might suggest that racism is becoming an issue of the past, studies show that there are still instances in which Asian Americans are subjected to prejudice and discrimination because of their racial background (Alvarez, Juan, & Liang 2006; Tuan 1998). As a racialized adult, Lloyd may experience workplace discrimination or the questioning of his American authenticity as suggested by such questions as “Where are you from?” or “Do you speak English?” Should Lloyd witness such experiences with his parents, Travis and Pearl will be placed in a position in which they can either ignore or acknowledge the role of racism as a factor impacting Lloyd’s life. Such discussions would also place the Olson in the position to consider the relevance of ethnic socialization. Having knowledge of and pride in one’s heritage is but one way to help an international adoptee address negative encounters they may experience due to their racial-ethnic

backgrounds. This chapter reveals the extent to which the adoptive parents incorporate racial and ethnic socialization into the lives of their Asian adopted children.

Racial Socialization

The Role of Racial Stereotypes in the U.S. Racial Context. Both the staff of Bringing Love Adoption Agency and parent participants who worked with the same agency discussed, in vivid details, a well-known exercise commonly referred to as the bead-cup exercise. The staff of Bringing Love Adoption Agency conducts a racial diversity exercise in which they place a pile of colorful beads and a cup in front of every prospective family. The beads represent different racial groups: black is African American, white is Caucasian, red is Native American, yellow is Asian, brown is Latino/South American, and purple is Other/Mixed. Even though the color distribution used for the bead exercise has its own racial implications that some may find offensive (historically many of these colors have been used as racially derogatory terms) the exercise is the staff's attempt to have the parents think about the racial composition of their social networks, professional and personal. Thus, the exercise challenges the practice of immersing adopted children into predominantly white environments with the belief that they will adapt and be easily accepted among such circles. The exercise calls for the parents to eventually develop organic relationships with people from different racial backgrounds, especially people who share the same ethnic background with their adopted children. Such relationships provide an opportunity for the parents to involve their children with positive role models. These relationships also help the children find ways to suppress feelings of

alienation that may encounter during adolescence and young adulthood – times in which children may become more curious about their adoption story and racial identity, while also experiencing their first encounters with overt racial discrimination. Moreover, the racial diversity exercise calls for the prospective parents to recognize patterns of systematic racism that lead to the racial composition of white Americans', and even nonwhite Americans', social networks to be predominantly white, particularly one's professional social network. Janice, the associate administrator of Bringing Love Adoption Agency, described the powerful visual display provided by the racial diversity exercise:

Janice: ...Everybody will have a pile of beads in front of them in a cup, and then it starts with "I am." OK. You can't change who you are. You're white, or not. Most of my co-workers are. There's some you can't change, you can't change who your wife is, you can't change who your CEO is.

There's some things you can't change, but what can you change, because, you're asking your child to change everything. How are you modeling your values of...that you value [difference] if everything in this thing is white? The books that you read are mostly by white people, the music that you listen to.

Interviewer: Right [that] makes you think about a lot.

Janice: Yeah, even black people, and Asian people who do this, their cup's pretty white, because our culture is racist! They might have more, but our culture is so white-oriented that everybody's cup is more white than they would want it to

be.

As revealed by Janice, the exercise asks that the parents imagine the changes their children experience as they become members of their families. The exercise asks as well that the parents move beyond simply expressing their openness towards racial integration, as demonstrated by their willingness to adopt a nonwhite child, to actively promoting racial integration and celebrating racial diversity. It suggests that the adoptive parents become involved with more racial minorities for the sake of their children. The relationships developed by their involvement with racial minorities become an example of how racial diversity can promote positive interactions between members of different racial groups. Moreover, the parents' interaction with nonwhite peers provides an opportunity for them to understand from the perspectives of their peers how the lives of their adopted children as nonwhite Americans may differ from the parents' experiences as white Americans. Their children navigate through a world in which the racial identity bestowed upon them greatly influences how they are perceived and how they will be treated by society. This study specifically draws upon the experiences of white adoptive parents whose children are of Asian descent. When the parents develop relationships with Asian Americans, these relationships provide their children with positive role models and an opportunity to form a bond with others whom they feel they can relate to because of their racial, and in many instances, ethnic ties²⁹. The adoptive parents gain insight from their Asian American friends and acquaintances.

²⁹ Race refers to the grouping of people based upon biological markers often seen as an indisputable traits possessed by certain individuals (Waters 1999, p. 45). Ethnicity refers to similarities shared among individuals regarding cultural attributes and common descent, a broad term which makes reference to ancestry or native origins (Waters 1999, p. 45; Cornell & Hartmann 1998; p. 19-20).

They can turn to their Asian American friends as resources for racial socialization. Asian Americans can also instill their adopted children with coping mechanisms that teach them how to handle discrimination or prejudice as they strive to be productive members of society.

The bead-cup exercise is one of many ways Bringing Love Adoption Agency tries to convince the parents to create a more racially diverse environment and promote racial socialization for the sake of their adopted child³⁰. Such training was not received by all of the participants. Fifteen out of the 21 study families worked with Bringing Love Adoption agency. Two families worked with True Dreams Adoption Agency and the remaining four families worked with four different agencies located in the mid-Atlantic region³¹. The parents' experiences with the aforementioned adoption agencies ranged from the social workers gauging the prospective parents' acceptance and comfort with raising a nonwhite child during the home study visitations, the participation of prospective parents in computer-based training exercises, and/ or prospective parents optional attendance to annual conferences that hold race-centered sessions. For example, Dawn Saunders, the international program manager of True Dreams Adoption Agency, shared that her agency does not hold race or ethnicity trainings for the prospective families; the prospective families have already come to the decision that

³⁰ In addition, Bringing Love Adoption Agency held exercises during their two-day orientation in which the prospective families had to participate in skits that dealt with public incidents of prejudice and discrimination, particularly the acts of being questioned about the adoption of their nonwhite child or a child's response to racial slurs. They were asked to spend time in public spaces predominately frequented by racial minorities, especially co-ethnic natives/immigrants. The agency also had the parents participate in cultural exploration exercises in which they were asked to bring to the class different objects representing their adopted child's ethnic culture.

³¹ There were families who had multiple adoptions through different agencies.

they are open to interracial adoptions and there is minimum need to focus on such discussions. However, during the information session the executive director, Lillian McCoy, rose the forthright question “If you have not grown up in a minority culture -- always been in the majority, how can you raise a child to recognize [and] reject racism?” Indeed, there is an underlying assumption that the prospective families of True Dreams Adoption Agency have truly considered not only their willingness to raise a nonwhite child but also their willingness to confront a racist society on the behalf of their adopted child.

Overall, these varied training experiences show that all agencies are not as direct with their prospective families about the need for racial diversity and socialization. Yet, these agencies, to some degree, ask the parents to take part in introspective activities. They ask that the parents take the time to look within themselves and think about what it means to transform from a same-race family to a multiracial family. As shared by Janice of Bringing Love Adoption Agency, it is imperative that the parents’ decision to adopt is primarily driven by the needs of the child. The transformation to a multiracial family leads to color (aka race) becoming highly visible. Thus, the needs of interracial adopted children are unique in that they are also driven by nonwhite racial identities; unlike their white adopted peers, nonwhite adoptees will have to deal with the effects of racism at some point in their lives. Therefore, the parents’ endorsement of a colorblind racial ideology is ineffective because it ignores the pervasiveness of racism among American society that exists outside of their homes. Janice argued that as parents, they must do more than simply shelter their children. They must actively seek

actions against racism and prepare them for encounters they will endure because of their racial background:

Janice: These parents, some of them just say, "Oh I don't see color." Well baloney, our culture sees color, your children are going to see color, they're going to look in the mirror and see color. They're going to be discriminated against. They're going to experience racism, and you can't just ignore that. You have to be much more proactive against racism, against things that maybe you said you were, but it's very different when you have a child in your family.

However, the data reveals that messages of racial diversity and socialization raised by an adoption agency are not always positively received by all adoptive parents. The receptiveness to such messages is greatly influenced by the extent to which adoptive parents perceive their children's racial identities as posing a shortcoming within the racial context in the United States.

Chapter four illustrates the honorary white status bestowed upon children of Asian descent as the adoptive parents made careful selections of who they were comfortable parenting. A status of honorary white places children of Asian descent in an intermediate position within the U.S. racial hierarchy; and, it suggests that the lives of Asian adoptees will be less affected by a racist society in comparison to other racial minorities. Two racial groups more commonly associated with the lowest tier of the tripartite U.S. racial hierarchy in which Bonilla-Silva (2004) refers to as the collective blacks are African Americans and disadvantaged Latino Americans. Jeremiah and Robin

Harris discussed the opposing views of Asian Americans in comparison to African Americans' and Latino Americans' racialized experiences in the U.S.:

Jeremiah: Black children and Hispanic children face more or I mean people in general face more negative stereotypes. And the whole you know, driving while Black or Hispanic thing, I mean there's definitely more issues there I think that are especially challenging. I think that the racism that Asian-Americans face is hurtful but it's not as dangerous, you know what I mean?

Robin: Yeah, it's softer in a way. I mean like the expectation is like oh your kid is Asian, he's good at math. He's really smart in school. He plays musical instruments, um doesn't do sports. And that's, it is a harmful stereotype. It's not seeing my kid for who he is. But it's not the same thing as saying because your skin is the way it is I assume that you are doing something illegal or that you've stolen something or whatever it's not the same.

The racial identity of internationally adopted Asian children does not place them in great disadvantage compared to their African or Caribbean³² counterparts. (The adoptive parents more often contrasted the experiences of African Americans to Asian Americans.) Negative stereotypes are not as commonly associated with Asian Americans thus they are not villainized to the same extent as other racial minorities in American society.

³² As of Fiscal Year 2013, international adoptions from Caribbean nations continue to remain lower than adoptions from African nations (U.S. Department of State 2014).

The model minority stereotype is one that is rooted in the past experiences and assimilation success of Asian immigrants. This stereotype is also imposed on the Asian adoptees even though they differ from other 1.5 generation Asian immigrants (i.e. immigrants who migrate as young children) in that they are not raised within a household among other Asian Americans who can expose them to authentic Asian culture.³³

Tuan (1998) discourages the assumption that culture is static and therefore, people must be careful with making the assumption that even among native Asians such exposure will lead to the engraining of traditional Asian culture. Over time, as Asian culture is passed down among later-generation Asian immigrants it becomes a hybrid of American and ethnic-specific practices and values. The attributes associated with *traditional* Asian culture believed by Americans to garner the social success of Asian Americans have left a lasting positive impression upon Americans, particularly members of the dominant group. This impression is also attached to international Asian adoptees, children who unlike their Asian American peers have very little recollection and connection to their origin culture. Racially, these children are seen as honorary whites for their origin culture attributes and their perceived ability to assimilate and acculturate among America's dominant group. This fact supports the idea that they will do well as adults.

³³ Ethnic socialization is favored by professionals in the adoption community and many white American families make the effort to cultivate an ethnic identity. This chapter will reveal the lengths some parents take to supplement ethnic socialization among their adopted children. But, this chapter will also reveal that the acts of ethnic socialization often occur on the surface and lack the development of personal relationships with the adopted children's co-ethnics.

The same cannot be said of African adoptees. The adoptive parents' believe that the life chances of African and/ or Caribbean prospective adoptees' are bleak in comparison to their Asian counterparts. Black international adoptees' immigrant identities are warped upon arrival in the United States; the immigrant identities and origin cultures of foreign-born black adoptees lose salience because the children acquire the racial identity of native black Americans. The parents believe that mainstream society casts the negative stereotypes affiliated with African Americans upon African or Caribbean adoptees. Therefore, they perceive the assimilation and acculturation of foreign-born black adoptees as difficult to acquire. As racism continues to prevail in the U.S., foreign-born black adoptees are predicted to experience prejudice and discrimination similar to native blacks. The parents openly discussed the pervasive nature of negative stereotypes associated with blacks by providing telling accounts of childhood experiences (such as Wayne's family and friends warning against his association with black children from the nearby town) or workplace dynamics (such as Carla retelling a upsetting dispute between herself and a black tenant who insinuated she was dismissing his arguments because she thought he was not intelligent even though Carla never challenged his intelligence).

The pervasiveness of black negative stereotypes is so entrenched in American society that a participant was unaware of the racial implications underlying his response to a question that I raised as we drove past a group of young men practicing their dance routine outside of a high school's performance art center. The young men were mostly black with the inclusion of one white male dancer and as they danced their hand

movements were very similar to cheerleader movements. Aloud I stated, “I can’t tell the difference as to whether they are cheerleaders or dancers.” I looked over to Donald Clark, a father to a Korean adopted son, and asked if he had seen them dancing to which he responded, “Oh they’re probably gang members.” Two pairs of eyes looking at the same scenario; one pair saw them as youth perfecting their dance routine, the other thugs hanging out on the school grounds. Donald’s adopted sister is of black-white biracial descent and his nephew is a black American yet his intimate involvement with black Americans within his own family does not allow him to yield away from negative stereotypes. The very comment iterates how blacks in America are subjected to destructive stereotypes. For those families who accept the assumption that Asian Americans are not susceptible to racism in the same manner as those members of the collective black, in particular black Americans, racial socialization is played down in their households. For those who reject this assumption, racial socialization occurs within their household. The families’ perception of the Mid-Atlantic region’s racial diversity greatly influences their perception of racism and thus the relevance of racial socialization³⁴.

Diversity in the Mid-Atlantic. In general, the adoptive parents refer to the Mid-Atlantic region as racially diverse. And, for those families who did not live in particularly diverse cities, the metropolitan areas of Maryland and the District of Columbia (DC) are referred to as the central hubs for racial diversity. For instance, mixed metro, a scale

³⁴ Originally, this study also sought the participation of white adoptive parents of black foreign-born adoptees but unfortunately I was unable to locate such participants. Therefore, this study lacks the opportunity to analyze how parents of black adoptees come to terms with the negative stereotypes associated with blacks in America and how such stereotypes might affect their adopted children’s experiences in the United States.

created to measure diversity at the census tract level, reveals that in 2010 Central Maryland was moderately diverse. Within Central Maryland the racial composition of the different moderately diverse cities primarily consisted of a white majority (i.e. of the different racial groups present in a particular area one racial group continues to still have a significantly higher composition in comparison to the other groups). For example, in 2010 the racial composition of Columbia, MD consists of 55.5% whites, 25.3 % black, and 11.4% Asians (US Census Bureau: State and County QuickFacts 2014). Columbia is a moderately diverse city with a white majority. The racial composition of Bowie, MD consists of 48.7% blacks, 41.4% whites, and 4.1% Asian (US Census Bureau: State and County QuickFacts 2014). Bowie is moderately diverse with a black majority. Although Baltimore City is 63.7 percent black, 29.6% white, and 4.2% Latino (US Census Bureau: State and County QuickFacts 2014), there are city areas that are moderately diverse with a black majority, Latino majority, or white majority. In Central Maryland there are also a few pockets of high diversity areas (i.e. no one racial group represents more than 45 percent of population) that are closer to DC.

My study results show that almost all of the families live within two-hour driving distances from Central Maryland. More than half of the sample participants reside in racially homogenous neighborhoods; however, many are willing to make the drive in order to attend cultural events, adoption-related events, or spend time with acquaintances who also have internationally adopted children. Table 5.1 exhibits 11 out of the 21 families or 52.38 percent live in racially homogenous neighborhoods. This is a very interesting percentage because 10 out of 11 families reside in low diversity (i.e. one

racial group represents more than 80 percent of the population) white dominant neighborhoods, with the exception of one family who interestingly resides in a low diversity, black dominant neighborhood. Eight families (38.10 percent) reside in moderate diversity, white dominant neighborhoods, while 2 families (9.52 percent) reside in moderate diversity, black dominant neighborhoods. None of the families reside in neighborhoods that are primarily or moderately Asian dominated.

Table 5.1 Level of Diversity by Census Tract for Adoptive Families

n = 21				
	White Dominant	Black Dominant	Asian Dominant	Total Count (%)
Low Diversity	10	1	0	11
	47.62%	4.76%	0%	
Moderate Diversity	8	2	0%	10
	38.10%	9.52%	0%	
High Diversity	0	0	0	0
	0%	0%	0%	
Total Percent	85.72%	14%	0%	21 (100%)

top row = count

bottom row = percentage

Source: mixedmetro.com

The cities throughout the Mid-Atlantic regions offer exposure to people from several different racial-ethnic backgrounds, immigrant populations, and accessibility to different cultural environments. Moreover, several of the parent participants state that it is not uncommon to see interracial families, whether the families are formed through marriage or adoption. Therefore, the diversity of the regions leads to the adoptive

parents being less concerned about their families appearing to the public as strange and their children having to deal with harsh reactions because of their racial-ethnic background. They would be more concerned if their children were raised in more predominantly white regions in the U.S. (for example, the Midwest) or a region like the South where the parents perceive racial tension as a remaining conflict. For instance, Shawn and Hazel discussed the advantages of living in a rather diverse area:

Interviewer: When I first met you, one of the things you shared with me was like this situation in Mississippi, and how you came to realize that in certain areas of the country, racism is still alive and thriving. Can you talk about kind of how your experience here in Maryland has been in comparison to Mississippi?

Shawn: I mean it's very diverse here. And not just like within in the military, which has always been diverse. [The camp] in Mississippi was diverse, or at least lots of white, lots of black, and so you didn't have a lot of the racism that was outside of that community. But like here it's very diverse. The Asian population, black, white, Hispanic, I mean there's lots of people here in the Baltimore area. So, I am sure there is still racism from every angle but not to the extent I mean just because of the populous here. Historically, this is where everyone came on the east coast from ships, so it's probably more prone to diversity. I don't know if I have any specific examples.

Hazel: Yeah I don't really notice, 'cause when we're out you don't really see like a majority. I'm sure in other areas probably if we were living back in our small

little town in Kansas, we would get more “Oh their family looks different than what we’re used to seeing.” But like even before we adopted Larry, we would sometimes take my [friend’s] girls out with us and you know we would have Josiah and two little Korean girls and no one ever looked at us like we were you know different or odd in anything. So I don’t and I’m sure that just plays in part that people you know you see all kinds of people here. Like you know it’s not really unique here.

The parents believe that the racial diversity of the area, and the frequency of interactions and exchanges occurring across racial groups, promotes racial tolerance. The racial tolerance fosters positive attitudes that protect racial minorities from prejudice and suppress discriminatory encounters by members in society. This belief drives the way in which racial socialization occurs among the different families; the data shows that among the adoptive families, racial socialization occurs in three different forms – proactive socialization, reactive socialization, and inactive socialization.

Proactive Racial Socialization. There are families who still identify racism as a challenge their children may face as youth or as adults although the Mid-Atlantic region is racially diverse and believed to offer greater racial tolerance in comparison to other areas in the country. They are forward thinkers; they try to visualize how their children’s lives may fare in the near and distant future. Many refer to the troubles the children may face during their early years in school, like teasing or constant reminders they do not share the same racial/biological connections with their parents. For others

their concerns move beyond school-aged incidents to taking into consideration how their children will fare as young adults navigating the world and the social realities that exist outside the comfort of their homes; homes are where they are protected from such issues. Their concerns are validated through discussions held during adoption agency workshops or through encounters they have dealt with involving their children (who are generally school-aged children). They find it important that they create an environment in which their children are comfortable sharing and discussing with their parents any troubling incidents they encounter, particularly those that are instigated due to racial prejudice or discrimination. They also find it important that their children develop relationships with other co-ethnics in order to provide positive role models and prevent feelings of alienation.

This group of parents is referred to as the proactive racial socialization group. During the early years in which parents and children are adapting as a new family unit the parents learn to handle questions often raised by strangers or young children triggered by the presence of their “conspicuous families.” They learn how to effectively respond to troubling incidents or questions and pass these lessons on to their children. Alissa and Sean, the parents of two children adopted from South Korea, described a situation involving their oldest child, Ramon, during a playground incident. Ramon, a kindergartner, asked if he could play along with two of his male classmates during recess. While he was expecting a positive feedback from his peers, unfortunately the boys responded, “No because you have brown skin.” Although the incident occurred approximately four years ago, Ramon continues to recall this incident during his

conversations of prejudice and discrimination with Alissa and his sister Lillie. Parents who represent the proactive racial socialization group find it imperative that their children are able to handle any future incidents, even those that others might regard as minor. Ray Hunter, whose South Korean son only turned four by the end of the couple's interviews, discussed how it is the parents' role to equip their children with the necessary skills to cope with life challenges. Racial socialization is not regarded as unique, but rather necessary when parenting an internationally interracial adopted child:

Ray: Yeah and with each...you know the different cultures have different things you know. There's certain stereotypes about Asian Americans than African Americans that's different about Indian Americans. And it's you know, it's interesting and then it's sad that he's going to have to deal with some of those things. And we can only try to help prepare him; try to give him the right way to deal with those things and hope that we've done the right things so that when he gets older – like any parents – actually prepare him for what it is going to be like when he is on his own taking care of himself. That's what our job is, to give him all of the tools hopefully to handle those things.

In addition, as white parents of Asian children, these families find it important to develop relationships with other racial minorities. Although their attention primarily focuses on the development of co-ethnic relationships, there are some parents who seek environments such as daycare, preschool, or elementary school that are racially

and economically diverse so that their children are exposed to children from several different backgrounds. At times the racial expansion of the adoptive parents' social networks is a small feat because their networks already consist of Asian Americans and, in some instances, other racial minorities prior to adoption, which include childhood friends or coworkers. The children interact with their parents' various acquaintances. Other families acknowledge that their world was predominantly white prior to the arrival of their children so they take it upon themselves to build relationships with others upon the arrival of their adopted children, with some viewing it as a gradual process. For instance, Regina Kennedy has faith that as her children (who are of Korean descent) grow older their networks will broaden as they meet more diverse children through school. Regina discussed how it is not necessarily easy but important that her children build relationships with other Korean Americans:

I don't think, you know, being blind and I don't feel like, I know Wesley and Ashley will have experiences that aren't all pleasant. ... So if you look at us from the outside I may not be the, we're not like, you know, [our] connections may not look as diverse, but I do, I don't, I know my kids are open to everybody. You know, we do, our neighbors are changing. They like everybody, they wanna play with everybody, and I just you know I will continue to support and encourage and really put myself out there so to make sure that those are the people in their lives.

So of course I think it will happen more through them then necessarily me

developing the relationships first than kind of like trying to get them like it just makes more sense to me. But, they form those friendships and I encourage them and I nurture them. But it's, you know, slowly how...happening, and it's like ok, well, you know. They, if they have a person who cuts their hair who's Korean or if they're you know, they know these people are out there, they're doctors or you know, it's good for them to see people. But I want them to have more real relationships with people of Korean background, of other backgrounds too. But I do think we live in an area where it can happen.

Parents of the proactive racial socialization group encourage the development of racially diverse relationships in order for their children to meet others who can serve as role models and empathetically relate to their experiences as racial minorities. Such parents also take it upon themselves to educate and prepare their children for the possibility of negative encounters rather than solely responding to negative interactions as they occur. They acknowledge that as racial minorities, albeit honorary whites, their Asian children are not insusceptible to prejudice and discrimination.

Reactive Racial Socialization. Among the second group of parents, the extent to which they witness racially provoked encounters towards their children influences their understanding of the need for racial socialization and in particular how such socialization is incorporated into their children lives. This particular group of parents tends to have younger, preschool-aged, children. Their racial experiences as a family revolve around the curious (and in some instances insensitive) remarks, questions, or

looks from others. The appearance of these adopted children as physically distinct from their adoptive families leaves them vulnerable to the interrogation of their validity as a member of their families; such interrogation can be detrimental to the children, for it can create a feeling of alienation. Interestingly enough, although the concept of being “different” exists as a major concern among this group of parents, its relevance is downplayed because of the fact that the parents have witnessed very few troublesome encounters. Jeremiah Harris, whose sons are from Korea, discussed the couple’s original concerns regarding the adoption of nonwhite children and how those concerns have yet to come to fruition:

Interviewer: So before you adopted did you ever consider the differences between, that might present themselves between you and your child, you know in regards to race, ethnicity or culture when you were thinking about [from] which country to adopt? And now that your sons are a part of your family, how are those differences now? What do they mean to you? Do you notice them?

Jeremiah: ...I think we thought about that. In terms of how I feel about it now I do think my, you know my worst fears, were definitely not realized. One of the things that we heard from the Bringing Love Adoption Agency social workers that sort of thing beforehand is you know when you go out you’ll get the triangle look. Uh you know like up and between the parents and the kids and back to the parents and the kid you know, looking up and down. And we haven’t really got that. I think it’s maybe it’s the fact that this area does have a fair number of

families that have adopted from Korea or other Asian countries and maybe that because there's a lot of mix families and so on. You know we don't stand out as much as they kind of predicted we would really.

The lack of troublesome encounters, as highlighted by Jeremiah, suggests that Americans in general are becoming more accepting of white-Asian mixed race adoptive families. Society's growing acceptance of white-Asian mixed race adoptive families supports the idea that Asian adoptees have acquired the honorary white status. The fact that the children have not endured crude comments while among "rednecks" as other parents have stated, suggests that for the time being they do not need to be concerned for their children's well-being in regards to undergoing racial injustice. Again, the diversity of the region and hence the promotion of racial tolerance lessens their worry for their children; but such concerns are rooted in the experiences of their children as young individuals.

To a degree the adoptive parents of Asian children are not completely convinced their children will not endure prejudice or discrimination (outside of unwanted stares or questions). Therefore, they do not refute racism but extend their concerns to the distant future in regards to how their children will be treated as adults, a time in which they are no longer protected by their innocence and charming youth as cute babies. They choose to delay from focusing on such issues with their children due to the children's young ages, the infrequency with negative encounters, and the inability for their younger children to comprehend what is taking place should negative encounters

occur. The time between childhood and adulthood allows these parents to hold off from discussing, among their children, disadvantages they may experience due to their racial-ethnic backgrounds. Overall the white adoptive parents understand they cannot completely relate with the challenges their Asian children will experience. Robin and Jeremiah Harris revealed how they look towards others to help prepare them for future encounters:

Interviewer: So the last time we spoke you had shared with me that one of the things that was helpful to learn from the camp was hearin' about the other parents' perspectives in regards to ethnicity and race, especially those who have older children. Was there anything in particular that you know still continues to stand out from what you learned from their perspectives?

Robin: I mean I don't know if I necessarily got like do this when this type of thing happens... but it is reassuring to like share your experiences and know that you're not the only ones who've experienced that or something. I, you know kids do, it's it's, one thing that it has done is it's made me I think more aware that my kids are probably taking in more than I think. They are and I should be mindful of that.

Jeremiah: I don't know I guess there's the, the adult-adoptive perspective we get through the adult adoptees who are involved with [a cultural organization] is really useful. Like some of the I, I have the impression from some of the things that they've said that if you would've asked their parents when they were

growing up are your kids experiencing overt racism they would've said "I don't think so" and the kids would've said "Yes! I am." So it's good to get that perspective to be more sort of in tune and kind of expecting that...

Robin: And just because they aren't talking about it doesn't mean that...

Robin & Jeremiah: it's not happening.

Interviewer: I see. Okay.

Robin: So I still kind of feel like I'm not really, I don't know how best to help them deal with that because I've never had to, to deal with that. But you know I, I know that they're gonna encounter it.

Jeremiah: They're gonna have to deal with it.

Robin: They're gonna have to deal with it, yeah. So I'm looking to other families to help me with that when the time comes.

Parents of the reactive racial socialization group are very focused on living in the present. They try to provide their children with a positive environment that offers stability and love. In the meantime they prepare for the possibility of negative encounters that may occur as their children grow older by educating themselves and using resources they acquire over the years; they read literature, watch films, attend cultural camps, or discuss their concerns with adoptive parents of older children. All of the families in the sample know other families (e.g. relatives, friends, or coworkers) who have adopted. However, among the reactive racial socialization group such families not

only exist as a resource for guidance but this is also their first step towards extending their children's social networks. In such instances the relationships were formed as a branching out of support groups created while the parents waited for their adopted children to arrive. The reformation of the support groups as playgroups provides the adopted children the opportunity to build relationships with other children who share a similar racial, ethnic, and adoption background. The parents' utilize the knowledge acquired from their different sources when there are instances in which they feel their families have been disrespected (due to the presence of their nonwhite children). The adoptive parents refer to those moments as an educating experience; they believe most people are simply ignorant but nevertheless they do not shy away from addressing insensitive remarks. However, unlike the proactive racialization group these parents do not address how they specifically prepare their children for the future; the extent to which they racially socialize their children is limited. The discussions are more focused on their preparedness as parents. The work by Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) reveals that children as young as three are able to apply racial slurs in context and carryout racially-demeaning actions. Thus, however limited, racial socialization among the younger adopted children helps prevent the children from effectively mishandling racial encounters when the parents are not with them.

Inactive Racial Socialization. The final category of parents is referred to as the inactive racial socialization group. As previously stated, the Mid-Atlantic is a well-traveled commuter region. Although all of the families do not reside within high diversity neighborhoods, the more racially diverse areas are easily accessible.

Therefore, the racial diversity of the region is important in part because it leaves the impression among the adoptive parents that their families are not unique due to the common presence of Asian Americans, moreover white adoptive families with Asian children. This impression is reinforced by the fact that while out in public they have not experienced incidents of racial intolerance. The parents of the inactive racial socialization group more commonly notice inquisitive stares from strangers, which is similar to the experiences of the parents from the aforementioned groups (proactive racial socialization and reactive racial socialization); however they tend to believe such stares are not due to the children's racial-ethnic background but rather to the fact that individuals are simply admiring their adopted children because they are beautiful/handsome. Thus, their children's presence as racial minorities being raised by a white family is not seen as strange.

For instance, Evelyn and Russell Murphy recently moved from a racially diverse suburban neighborhood to a racially homogenous, predominantly white rural community. The parents raved about the diversity that existed among their former community. As stated by Evelyn, "It was fabulous, every family with some different background. It was great." This fact alone made the decision to move somewhat difficult. As parents of two children – biological son Dwight and adopted Korean daughter Iris – they were torn between providing their children access to a stellar school system located in the new community versus remaining in their racially diverse suburban home. Yet, the Russells chose to move and their daughter is now one of very few Asian Americans residing in her neighborhood and attending the local elementary

school. During the interview, Evelyn and Russell originally admitted that while out in public they hardly ever recognized their daughter drawing attention from others (in regards to public outings in both their new and old communities); specifically, Russell stated that he did not notice it at all, while Evelyn recalled only one incident. The one incident took place a couple of years prior to their move, the parents' relocation to a racially homogenous community has not led to them being more racially-conscious when taking into consideration Iris' experiences in the new community. As the conversation evolved they came to the conclusion that from time-to-time their daughter may experience unwanted attention but the extent to which it is negative attention is unclear.

Evelyn: Yeah, it just seems to me that sometimes when she walks around people's eyes follow her a little bit.

Russell: But she's so cute.

Evelyn: She is so cute. She's very cute. And mostly that's the reaction that you get. People almost always, no one has ever said anything negative, but they're like "oh she's so cute." She is cute. But whether or not we consider it [her racial differences], we did. I think we really did. I think Bringing Love asked us to consider it more deeply. But I have to say I think we were optimistic, um, maybe overly optimistic. I think my style has been like "oh it will be okay" you know what I mean. But if I was critiquing myself about the whole process I think that I, we, for me at least I think I need to think more about it and not just jump to the

conclusion that it will be okay. I think we need to continue to be mindful about the differences because it's a different world for her. We don't know. You know we don't know what her experience is going to be like. It's bound to be hard. It has to be whenever you look different from everyone else. You know there's certain ages where that's really hard.

Russell: I also am probably completely oblivious.

Evelyn: I wouldn't have said that word but.

Russell: But I mean, I guess I like to think about how it should be than how it really is. So I'm making this maybe I'm doing the blinder's thing too by saying look at the world *today*. Look at the election last night. Look at...I don't know if you watched any of the results. Obama and the Democratic Party are paying attention to what the world looks like now.

By focusing on the children's "cuteness" (cherubic attributes upheld by their young ages) adoptive parents infantize the racialized experiences of their adopted children. It deters them from addressing the microaggressions (e.g. the act of constantly being singled out due to one's racial differences) their children may experience on a daily basis. Moreover, by focusing on their children's lives as youth they place little regard on how the children's experiences may change as they reach adulthood, similar to the group of parents belonging to the reactive racial socialization group. However, unlike the reactive racial socialization group, these parents and their children are not only unprepared for racist incidents that may occur, but to a certain extent, the parents

disregard racism as remaining a 21st century issue. As revealed by Russell, the change in the United States' political climate is reflective of the transformation of the country's race relations and the dismantling of a racist society.

The endorsement of a post-racial attitude is also reflected in the parents' initial reactions to race and ethnicity lessons taught by the adoption agency. The workshops are built upon the recent research findings regarding adult adoptees' experiences and the anecdotal experiences of the facilitators as adoptive parents. Yet, some of the parents find that the lessons overemphasize the significance of race and racism as affecting their adopted children's lives. Ryan Burns revealed his frustration with the workshops:

Don't forget she's Chinese and she's going to come from China. She's going to look different and sound different and smell different. Okay *and* [emphasis his] well she's going to be okay and they made almost *too big of a deal about it* [emphasis his]. You know I mean just I don't and I mean I just... you know just almost too big of a deal over the difference in that. You know and we don't, we don't care. And, we just happen to surround ourselves with people that don't care.

The parents view the workshops as antiquated and oversensitive; the issues the workshops address are no longer relevant in the present context. As we proceed through the 21st Century, race is seen as less of a concern. It will not create any

particular hardships for their Asian American children but rather all groups in society to some degree will experience a form of discrimination. Ryan further stated:

Like everybody there was this like this defensive, the world might...you know what the world looks on people that are tall, from other countries, short. That's part of life. So don't give me this whole piece on that you know. That's life. African Americans live with it. People, I have Jewish friends who live with it, everybody culturally.

Carla: Short people live with it.

Ryan: Short people. [Carla laughs] Get made fun of because they're short or tall people, people who are fat that's life. So let's not hide it or pretend it doesn't exist. Somebody ask me where my daughter is from I'll tell em "She's from Guangzhou, China and she was adopted and we *love* [emphasis his] her." You know like I don't know what this big kind of defensive.

The parents find it most important that they focus on developing children to be more confident, strong, resilient, and proud of whom they are. They believe that such characteristics are more important should their children encounter negative situations because the children will be able to think for themselves. The parents have faith in their children's ability to think themselves through negative situations by raising their children to not focus wholeheartedly on their racial identities but rather focus on developing strong personal characteristics. For those adoptive parents of the inactive racial socialization group who offer their adopted children the opportunity to build

relationships with other co-ethnics, the major source for such relationships to form is through their bonding with other adoptive families. But in general, the parents do not view the lack of racially diverse relations as detrimental because their children, as honorary whites, are perceived as not having a difficult time integrating into their predominantly white worlds; the parents do not foresee exclusion by whites and thus the need to relate to other co-ethnics/racial minorities as a problem their children will face.

Regardless of a family's position on racial socialization, this studies reveals that within their homes, parents see past the color of their children's skin. However, families who comprise the inactive racial socialization not only disassociate their adopted children from their racial identity but they reject the very notion of race and racism. This rejection is greatly influenced by the fact that their children have only dealt with minor incidents regarding questionable looks. But, racism must be understood beyond the parents' need to be concerned with prejudicial attitudes (e.g. concern with a child being perceived as racially different). They generally disregard how those prejudicial attitudes influence how groups of people are treated in society (e.g. being discriminated against for being racially different). The parents' post-racial, albeit optimistic attitude, veers them away from addressing the impact racism may have on their children's lives and it dissuades racial socialization. It becomes the children's responsibility to: (1) recognize when they are being treated unjustly, (2) bring it to their parents' attention should such instances occur, (3) and determine a solution. The parents focus more on (*ad hoc*) responses in which they as a family will figure their way through any difficulties that

may arise. However, due to the absence of racial socialization, one must wonder if the children would even be comfortable holding difficult conversations regarding racism with their adoptive parents; moreover, if they will be prepared to handle such incidents publicly. Self-confidence, pride, and strength are all important attributes, but are they enough to handle situations where one is being targeted for physical traits (a racial identity) which they cannot control?

It is important to note that the different categories presented in this chapter – proactive racial socialization, reactive racial socialization, and inactive racial socialization – are not mutually exclusive. A number of the families adopt multiple philosophies regarding the need for racial socialization, especially among the families with younger children. The Burns are an example in which the parents reveal different views about their children's racial realities in the U.S. and how as a family these realities can be addressed. Within households that display multiple philosophies, the responsibility of racially socializing their adopted children falls more heavily on one parent (quite often the mother).

The racial realities of Asian Americans are confounded by racism. Research conducted by Alvarez, Juang, and Liang (2006) reveals that although Asian Americans are revered as the model minority and thus are not subjected to negative stereotypes in the same manner as other racial minorities, Asian Americans do experience racism. Among the sample of undergraduate Asian American students, their encounters with racism more commonly occur at the expense of other Asian Americans (such as they

witness such persons being the target of racist acts); but, they also experience racism at a more personal level through microaggressions. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that participation in candid conversations with individuals close to them directly influences how Asian Americans perceive racism. Racial socialization leads to them developing an understanding of what is taking place and how to reconcile with such occurrences (Alvarez, Juang, & Liang 2006). In order for racial socialization to effectively take place, adoptive parents must become comfortable with the idea of sitting down with their children and holding open, honest discussions (albeit often difficult and uncomfortable discussions) about the mechanisms of racism and how the system operates within the United States. Such an understanding is acquired by educating oneself and developing relationships with racial minorities. Preparation for racial socialization exists beyond the conversations held within their homes between parents and children. It also includes providing their children access to others who can relate to their children's experiences and exist as role models. The knowledge acquired through exposure to relationships with other Asian Americans also informs the *ethnic* socialization process.

Ethnic Socialization

The Morris family and I were feasting on several different Korean dishes – sushi, bulgogi with rice, rice noodles, dumplings, vegetables, and rice flour with cinnamon-filling dessert – when the sound of pounding drums caught our attention. A procession of Korean drummers with large wooden drums, 3 males and 1 female, entertained the crowd as they headed from the auditorium to the sanctuary for the closing ceremony.

We had spent the day at a Lunar New Year celebration with a Korean church community located in a neighboring city. The celebration included various activities; such as the attendees coming together to sing both the U.S. national anthem and the Korean national anthem, the performance of a young dancer's routine to a medley of Korean pop-music before asking children from the crowd to join her on stage for Gnam Style (a number-one charting Korean pop song), and children's arts and craft workshops that took place in the basement. The celebration brought in a large crowd that consisted of Korean Americans, adult Korean adoptees, and several adoptive families with Korean children. A white adoptive father and adult Korean adoptee (no relations) led the opening ceremony. The mistress of the ceremony revealed her lack of Korean cultural exposure as an adoptee raised in the Midwest but expressed her happiness to be afforded such opportunities as an adult. Jokingly she stated, "I am proud to say my refrigerator now stinks from different Korean dishes." As the opening ceremony was ending the church asked that attendees join them in a group photo. It was a powerful image, an amalgamation of Korean Americans, foreign-born, native, adult adoptees, and

children adoptees alongside their white American families; the photo highlighted the diverse experiences of Korean Americans; moreover, how they have joined one another in the celebration of a popular cultural event that came to include both American and Korean traditions.

Sarah and Emmanuel Morris involve their two-year- old Korean son, Reginald, in different cultural activities as a way to honor his native origins while also forming his immigrant identity. They are one pair of only a few parents, who continue to utilize basic Korean words (e.g. Eomma – mama, Appa- father, and uyu – milk) as Reginald learns English. He receives his haircuts at a Korean barbershop and the family attends different cultural events throughout the year. Ethnic socialization, “...the idea that building cultural bridges early in a child’s life will be helpful in forging ethnic pride,” presents opportunities to promote both pride and acknowledgement of adopted children’s origins” (Tessler, Tuan, & Shiao 2011, p. 37). The adoptive parents view ethnic socialization in comparison to racial socialization as the light-hearted approach for explaining the biological (and racial) differences between parent and children, along with addressing the children’s adoption stories. Ethnic socialization presents opportunities for children to feel a sense of connection to their origin countries, culture, and people although they now live thousands of miles away. It can occur through structured formats such as having a child train in Tae Kwon Do or informally by having dinner at a local restaurant. The popularity of international interracial adoptions has sparked the growth of an ethnic goods and services market that caters specifically to the needs of foreign-born adoptees; for example, the adoption community provides foreign-

born adoptees a means towards developing a connection with their culture of origin through the introduction of cultural camps, cultural schools, and homeland tours.

According to Tessler, Tuan and Shiao (2011) “few adoptive parents encourage their children to identify totally with their birth-culture. Most strive for a balance with American culture. Whatever the point of emphasis, bi-cultural socialization implies some degree of competence in both cultures sufficient to allow adoptees to feel at ease in either one” (p. 37). This reigns true within the present sample; none of the parents encouraged their children to only identify with their origin culture. However, the parents’ support for ethnic socialization is influenced by whether or not they perceive ethnic socialization as relevant for their children’s development. This study finds that parents either regard ethnic socialization as relevant for their children’s upbringing or they are indifferent towards ethnic socialization.

Indifference towards Ethnic Socialization. As young immigrants with little knowledge of their culture of origin, international Asian adoptees rely on their adoptive parents to supply resources that supplement the development of their ethnic identities. Different voices from the adoption community highly recommend adoptive parents to invest in the ethnic socialization of their adopted children. This study shows that there are families who are indifferent towards the need of ethnic socialization (or what Tessler, Tuan and Shiao (2011) referred to as bicultural socialization) in which the children have just as strong of a connection to their immigrant identity as their American identity. This indifference is based upon an understanding that even though

the children immigrated to the United States they are now U.S. citizens and therefore it is their parents' job to equip their adopted children with the knowledge, skills, and experiences that allow them to easily maneuver America's cultural terrain. The adopted children are to master the English language, wear acceptable attire, fashion themselves after appropriate behavior, and adopt traditional mainstream values as a way to effortlessly integrate into the dominant culture. For example, Jason Anderson corrected my suggestion that his family is dedicated to finding a delicate balance between his son, Tyler's, Korean and American identities; rather he stated, "No, I do not know if it's a delicate balance. I would say that he's 90 percent steeped and raised according to U.S. culture and ideals." Jason and Nancy critique adoptive families who choose to have their children heavily immersed in their birth culture. For example, the Andersons are friends with a couple who also adopted a child from Korea; once their friends' child arrived, that couple began to really center their lives on Korean culture. Their friends attend a predominantly Korean Catholic Church, regularly cook Korean dishes, and mostly shop at a popular Asian grocery store. On the other hand, Tyler attends service with Nancy at her Catholic Church where mass occurs in English and the congregation is not predominantly Korean. In addition, the Andersons most often prepare American dishes for dinner and they do not place a lot of emphasis on changing their daily routines in order for Korean culture to be incorporated into their lives. Although they find it appropriate to provide their son with exposure to Korean culture, they also find it impractical for a family to place so much energy into providing a Korean lifestyle when their child resides in the United States. According to this group of parents, who is

indifferent towards ethnic socialization, the children are to be raised by the same cultural values which formed the parents' own identities. In general, the parents do not completely dismiss the children's origin-ethnicity; instead they are either not currently participating in cultural activities or they present varied but not necessarily routine activities for cultural exploration.

Shawn and Hazel Freeman, who have a six-year-old biological son and a two-year-old Korean adopted son, are from a small town located in the Midwest. Shawn was raised in the more rural area while Hazel lived closer to town only minutes away from the local shops and restaurants. Shawn grew up on ten acres, hunting was common, and as a child he was not called to come inside the house from playing outdoors until he heard the cowbell ringing. As a couple, they long for their family to eventually return to Shawn's family estate.

The description of Shawn's childhood came to mind as I watched Josiah (their biological son) and Larry (their adopted Korean son) walk towards the restaurant doors as I waited for the family for lunch. They were arriving from church and the boys' western boots had caught my eyes. Josiah had on a pair of turquoise and brown cowboy boots that Shawn was not very fond of but could not talk his parents out of buying them for Josiah, whereas Larry had on a less flashy pair of boots since his wide feet limited the selection of children's boots he could choose from. Although the western boots only offer a glimpse of some of the cultural artifacts Shawn and Hazel

may relate to, based upon their small town/rural upbringing, Josiah and Larry embody aspects of their parents' ethnic origins as rural Midwestern Americans.

As the Freemans work towards making Larry feel like a natural part of their family (such as dressing him in similar attire as his adoptive brother), Shawn discussed the importance of developing a balance between Larry's American identity while also involving him in Korean-centered activities as an effort to form his Korean identity. But Shawn's interpretation of "balance" is that the parents should not be overly concerned with having their adopted children involved in cultural activities. His stance towards ethnic socialization was influenced by the experiences of his childhood friend who was also adopted from Korea.

Shawn: So a lot of this is based on my experience with my friend who was adopted from Korea and her not wanting any real ties or association, which is fine. That's her prerogative, and if she did – also her prerogative. So, I think my opinion is less of pushing it on them like certain people in the community think we should, and more so providing opportunities.

Um you know like one of my friends at work who speaks Korean – she's not from Korea but her parents were both born in South Korea – was like "Yeah do you have him in a language class or something?" He's not even speaking English yet, why would I worry about Korean? Like, it's one language at a time. Also, he's growing up as an American, and it's like well that is his culture. It is. Our culture is America. And yes it is important that's where he's from but I am a firm

believer that we're all American first. Not, and I don't want to get on my soapbox and get offensive it but I hate hearing people say African-American and Korean-American, and all different Americans. Why can't we just be Americans? So, I have a very firm opinion on all that. ... Absolutely provide him those opportunities if he likes it and wants to see more of it. ... But I'm not going to sit here [and] force [it]. I don't want to force him, like the big trend is to take your kid to the Korean restaurant after they get their citizenship, and have a nice dinner. And I'm like, "Well he just got his American citizenship not his Korean citizenship, let's go get barbeque, let's go do something American".

Shawn rejects the spectrum of American experiences that varies across racial-ethnic backgrounds and collapses them into one singular experience labeled as American. Yet this understanding brought forth by Shawn reveals how the term American is one that embodies the values and beliefs modeled by white middle class, which are to be perceived as exemplary, relatable, and achievable. In as much as American becomes the children's new nationality it also purportedly becomes their ethnicity. This passage also reveals that as Asian adopted children learn more about their immigrant identities they also learn more about their adoption identities; at the root of their children's adoption stories is a narrative of how the cultural dynamics and political atmosphere of their origin countries influenced the reasons behind the children's placement for adoption. When the Asian adopted children embrace their immigrant identities, they eventually become more aware of the issues associated with adoption; moreover, when these children embrace their immigrant identities they also highlight the biological differences

that exist between parents and child (and in the case of the Freemans, between siblings). Thus among this group of parents, they are willing to have their children participate in different activities over time (they do not completely ignore their children's immigrant identities); but, ethnic socialization does not hold precedence over the development of a child's American identity.

In addition, age becomes an important determinant regarding ethnic socialization. As the children grow older the parents look to the children to express whether or not they wish to participate in such activities. They do not want to create a sense of division between parents and children. Better stated, they do not want to ostracize their adopted children from the rest of the family as "different" if the children feel as though their parents are imposing the immigrant identity on them. For example, for years the Hughes attended Chinese New Year celebrations with their daughter Sonya. They always believed it was important that she be involved in different activities. However, at six years old, Sonya began to express her disinterest in cultural activities. Sonya was against attending the Chinese New Year celebrations. She adamantly turned down the opportunity of enrolling in Chinese classes offered at her school and enrolled in an ice skating class. And, when asked to complete a school assignment that focused on her culture she made it clear to her parents it was to focus on her *current* culture. According to Wanda, part of her disinterest was the unwanted attention she received from other co-ethnics while out in public. So Wanda and Wayne understood Sonya's desire to disassociate herself from her immigrant group and culture of origin. Although

this may only exist as a short lived phase, Wayne described how they are patiently addressing the present challenge of maintaining her interest:

So regardless of how I feel or what have you, it's whatever she's comfortable with is okay with me. I don't want to force it on her but we do let her know that hey if you're interested let us know because that's great. But if you don't want to deal with it...like this weekend we even asked her teacher because Sonya said "No she wants her to do it on our current culture." And we thought well if the whole class is doing it maybe what she's thinking is do you know about your ancestors, where they are from? You know tell us about that so we asked her, "Sonya said well it's got to be your current culture" and the teacher said "Well no it can be whatever," so it's going to be interesting when we sit down with her and sort of start putting these things together so we can see where she heads. But if she insists on it's going to be now – that's what it's going to be. I mean I'm certainly not going to force it on her.

Wanda and Wayne believe that it is best that Sonya has the chance to determine to what extent she becomes involved with her origin of culture, which is the same way they have approached her religious beliefs. Even though Wayne was raised Catholic and Sonya attends church with her grandmother during her visits to her father's hometown, the Hughes have not baptized her but rather have decided when the time comes Sonya may chose her religious faith as she sees fit. Sonya is at an age where the Hughes believe she can start making her own decisions. Parents such as these feel that it would

be more of a detriment for the children to feel as though their parents force them to participate in cultural activities. Therefore, they believe it is best that the children are actively involved in the decision to participate in cultural activities and determine the extent to which they want to engage in such activities. Approaching the decision to have their children involved in ethnic activities in such a manner, especially among those families who choose to slowly expose their children to different activities as they grow older, allows the adopted children to make an informed decision which the parents will support even if the children deem ethnic socialization as irrelevant.

The parents further contemplate the relevance of ethnic socialization based on their relationships and observations of Asian immigrants of the 1.5 or later generations (i.e. immigrants who came to the country as young children or were born in the U.S.). They have shared conversations with friends and coworkers of Asian descent, who as children growing up in the United States, were taught to acculturate among the dominant culture. Travis Olson shared advice received from his Korean boss regarding the upbringing of his son:

So my boss gave me some Korean advice...and his advice was: "don't worry about anything." Because at Bringing Love they pushed a lot of like maybe you want to take him to Korean school and this, that, and the other and my boss was like "No he's American once he comes here."

As a first generation Korean American, his boss chose to not ethnically socialize his 2nd generation children. His choice is similar to research presented by Tuan (1998) in

which it is not uncommon for Asian immigrant households to push for their children's seamless assimilation as American because the ultimate goal is for their children to achieve integration into mainstream society. For instance, Tuan (1998) finds that there are Asian immigrants who refrain from teaching their children their native languages, from celebrating cultural holidays, or even passing down the recipes of ethnic dishes from one generation to the next. Thus as American adoptive parents, they feel they should also be able to follow suite of their immigrant friends since they recognize that their friends were raised American and their friends' children are being raised American. Therefore, these parents believe that the pressure from many in the adoption community to also raise their children as Chinese, for example, needs to be minimized.

Furthermore, it is difficult to provide their children with a "genuine" cultural upbringing if the people whom they are close to (later generation Asian immigrants) are not inclined to live traditional cultural lifestyles. The lack of enthusiasm expressed by the adoptive parents' Asian American friends or associates leads to many of the adoptive parents finding that they must either turn towards their adoption community or seek companionship with recent immigrants if they choose to support ethnic socialization. Even though the Mid-Atlantic is a diverse region some of the parents do not find the Asian immigrant communities very accessible. The parents perceive such communities as unwelcoming to non-coethnics. There is concern that members of these communities condemn international adoption or they view the parents' interest in said culture as cultural appropriation.

Hazel and Shawn (the adoptive parents of a Korean son) relocated from the Mid-Atlantic region at the beginning of the summer. Prior to leaving the area Hazel, who shared a close relationship with a Korean family living in the neighborhood, revealed her concern with having to become acquainted with new Korean families following their move. Hazel described her relationship with Donna as occurring by chance; she had not intentionally sought out Korean Americans to build friendships with as they anticipated the arrival of their adopted son. She actually refrained from sharing with Donna their adoption plans for a couple of months because she did not want Donna to misinterpret their relationship as only existing because of Hazel's new interest with finding Korean families. Hazel pointed out that if their family were to seek the ethnic socialization of their adopted son, Larry, they will have to reach out to more recent immigrants (1st generation Korean Americans) who were less assimilated than the later generation immigrants; but, Hazel saw her family as being less accepted by such persons:

I've noticed with Donna and her mom like observing that it feels like there's a pretty big generational gap from first generation Koreans and to their children who were born and raised here in America. And you know I think and as far as in Korea the dynamics there are still not very pro-adoption, you know still very much blowbinzer [sic]. Pretty important, so I think you know people of Donna's generation who were born here they are like "Oh you adopted. That's cool." Whereas if you go one generation before that which is where they would probably get more of that like actually you know they would hear the language, cause you know they are very much still living as Koreans here in America,

whereas people of our generation are living as Americans. They just happen to be Korean. You know, that generation doesn't seem accessible to me at all because some of them are maybe in the mindset where they frown upon their children you know Korean children being taken away from Korea or adopted and then just in general you know."

In turn the ethnic socialization of Asian adoptees is often left in the hands of members from their adoption community, although, as expressed by Hazel Freeman, the parents realize that such efforts often involve "...show-type things that adopted families are trying to connect them with." In essence, Hazel feels that many of the cultural activities adoptive families become involved in are somewhat disingenuous and such activities lead to the adoptive families putting on an act rather than truly being engaged in the ethnic socialization of their Asian adopted children. In general, the parents perceive the adoption community as more accessible because it offers a social environment in which the parents do not have to face fears of alienation or isolation provoked by their outsider status among other Asian Americans. The commonalities shared among adoptive families create a sense of community where the adoptive families work together towards incorporating origin-specific activities into their adopted children lives. But, such an advantage is at the expense of not providing their children with "authentic" cultural experiences. Moreover, the parents must determine the extent to which they want to be involved with the adoption community because at times they confront the issue of other adoptive parents who they view as overzealous. As stated by Jason, the balancing act of ethnic socialization should not be one that leads

to an adoptive family “[turning] their home into a Korean temple.” The parents’ indifference towards ethnic socialization is influenced by their interpretation of “American,” the opinions of other Asian Americans, access to Asian American communities, and ultimately whether or not their children are interested in holding on to an immigrant identity.

Compassion for Ethnic Socialization. The complexities of international interracial adoption – the bringing together of people from different racial-ethnic backgrounds – lead to racial differences coexisting within a single household. The predominantly white family transforms into a multiracial/multiethnic family through the introduction of their nonwhite child. For instance, although Alissa Taylor could no longer state verbatim the message conveyed by her adoption agency regarding the transformation of one’s family following the adoption of a nonwhite child, she agrees with what was ultimately stated:

“When you adopt a child from a different ethnic background, or whatever, you are really becoming a...” What did they say? “We are no longer a Caucasian family,” and that’s really true. I don’t know – some people may think I push the Korean stuff too much, but my kids really enjoy it.

Contrary to the group of adoptive parents who are indifferent towards ethnic socialization, is the group of adoptive parents who show compassion towards ethnic socialization by immediately investing in their adopted children’s development of an immigrant identity.

With the formation of the new family, comes new responsibilities and part of those responsibilities include incorporating different cultural aspects into their children's lives because the parents believe it is just as important that their children embody a sense of pride in reference to their immigrant identity as they do in reference to their American identity. The parents involve their children in culture camps and schools. They take the time to point out objects that may have been invented by co-ethnics or manufactured in their origin country. They read and watch television programs that focus on the children's origin culture and history. They encourage their children to learn their birth language. And, some of the parents even make the effort to cook cultural dishes from time-to-time along with frequenting ethnic restaurants. Each one of these activities is the parents' attempt at encouraging strong cultural awareness among their children. The parents believe that as their children grow to learn more about their ethnic origins, the combination of their American and immigrant identities will prompt a stronger sense of self-awareness.

At the center of Ronnie and Regina Kennedy's identities is their Jewish heritage. They find it important that their children are grounded in both their Korean and Jewish backgrounds in order for them to have a strong sense of self and have the strength to deal with obstacles that may present themselves as they grow older and people begin to inquire more about their background. As stated by Regina:

...I think the most important thing to do is kind of building their confidence in who they are. Because, I think the more confident they are within themselves

about their background of being adopted, being Korean, being Jewish, being... you know that, that they are... that is all part of him and they're all important parts. You know one part is not more important than you know another part. So, I think that will build him to be able to deal with, you know, whatever, like any kid, that means whatever he comes across.

Regina most often refers to Wesley (who is five) rather than her younger daughter Ashley (who is three) when thinking about her children's experiences as racial minorities living in the U.S. Because, of Ashley's young age and developmental delays, Regina and Ronnie are taking a slower approach with introducing Ashley to age appropriate ethnic activities and the opportunity to build relationships with other co-ethnics. Nonetheless, Regina believes that in order for her adopted children to have a keen understanding of who they are as individuals, the understanding must be rooted in both their parents' ethnic origins and their birth culture. Within the first few months of arriving in the United States, each of their children went through the process of conversion so that religiously they are accepted as Jewish. The children attend preschool at their synagogue and they go to Sunday school at the synagogue on a regular basis. Even though Wesley, who has aged out of preschool, will attend kindergarten at a public elementary school, Regina and Ronnie will enroll him in Hebrew school where he will learn the Hebrew language and Jewish history. In addition, when the Korean culture school is in session Wesley and his parents attend culture classes. And, soon Wesley will enroll into Tae Kwon Do classes since his parents feel he is outgrowing the karate classes he currently takes. Both, Ashley and Wesley frequently

attend events hosted by Korean Focus, an organization that caters to the needs of adoptive families and immigrants. So just as the Kennedys focus on building their children's Jewish identity, they also strive to achieve a balance between developing the children's Korean identity.

As a parent Regina finds herself constantly questioning whether she is doing enough to form her children's Korean identities. It is her goal to learn from the past experiences shared by adult adoptees (she gathers such information by speaking with adult adoptees and frequently attending annual adoption conferences) and to ensure that she provides her children with varied experiences as a way to build Korean identities that are as strong as their Jewish American identities; even though, she ultimately understands it will be their choice to determine how closely they align with either identity.

Ray and Caroline Hunter are members of a Korean church and through their membership they have had the opportunity to build relationships with not only Korean Americans but also Korean adult adoptees. One of their friends, an adult adoptee who is approximately 30 years old, shared with the Hunters that she felt as though she missed out on the opportunity of taking part in activities that would have helped form her Korean identity. Her adoptive parents raised her in an area that was much less racially and ethnically diverse in comparison to the Mid-Atlantic. She also grew up during a time in which the common message conveyed by the adoption agencies was one of assimilation rather than ethnic socialization. Nevertheless, as an adult she is now

making the effort to learn more about Korean culture and incorporate it into her life. Her story reiterated the Hunter's belief of the importance of ethnic socialization. According to Ray and Caroline it would be a disservice to their son if he was not aware of his Korean heritage as much as he was aware of his American heritage:

Caroline: I think that if we didn't do a lot with him, granted we do a lot more than some parents do. Some parents don't...Still don't do much, but I feel like it would be such a big disservice to him of identifying who he is. I mean People are like, "Oh he's American." Well he's Korean-American you know, he's not just American, and it's...

Ray: In a lot of what we're... a lot of the histories. I mean...I think it's still getting a little bit better here in the United States, but I know when we grew up, pretty much what you learn about in history is the European history. So that's why it is important to us, why it's important to incorporate it now so that he knows that Korea and [Asia] is just as important as any other part of the world.

As children living in the United States it is only natural that they are exposed to all aspects of American culture. However, such exposure is often far less varied than the composition of ethnic diversity that exists in American society, and consequently the adopted children's absorption of American culture involves a process heavily driven by the interest of the dominant group. As exemplified by Ray and Caroline, the adoptive parents acknowledge that the privileges they experience as white Americans create a disadvantage for their Asian adopted children. For example, as nonwhite Americans

their children live in a society that often deemphasizes racial minorities' contribution to American history and airs media programming that often excludes diverse non-stereotypical cast of characters. So the adoptive parents go to great lengths to expose their children to positive images and positive activities that reinforce the importance of their ethnic heritage.

As stated earlier, many of the families (even those who are not particularly interested in ethnic socialization) frequently turn to their adoption communities as a way to expose their children to other co-ethnics. Several of the families have their children involved in playgroups; or, the parents strive to develop relationships with adoptees met through the culture schools or camps (which include adult adoptee counselors). Such relationships exist as opportunities for their children to foster relationships with others who share similar backgrounds. Co-ethnic adoptees can relate to the feelings the adopted children may have towards developing an immigrant identity. Being aware of other families who have their children involved in ethnic activities and meeting young adults who show pride in such participation further instills the value of ethnic socialization among the adopted children. It is beneficial for their children to build relationships with other co-ethnic adoptees but such relationships may not include individuals who continue to have tangible connections with their ethnic origins. Therefore, some of the parents develop close relationships with co-ethnics outside of their adoption communities; they have relationships with non-adopted Asian Americans, which include Asian Americans of the same ethnic background as their adopted children. Their adopted children are able to learn more about their culture of

origin and have access to additional co-ethnic role models through the exchange of personal interactions with non-adopted co-ethnics.

How the parents expose their children to non-adopted co-ethnics varies. As Jewish Americans, Carmen and Clarence Cook find themselves having a stronger connection culturally rather than religiously to their Jewish background and they believe it is also important that their four-year-old daughter, Sidney, also have a connection to her Jewish background. As shared by Clarence the same values admired and practiced by Jewish Americans (such as “valuing education,” “respecting your elders,” “scholarly pursuits,” and “hard work”) are very similar to those practiced by Asians Americans. With Sidney being so young, there are still times when Carmen has to remind Sidney about her Jewish heritage especially during the Christmas holiday season when the brilliant Christmas lights are beaming, the pine trees are well decorated, and Santa’s image is everywhere. But, as they focus on developing Sidney’s Jewish identity they do not neglect the development of her Korean identity. They introduce her to co-ethnics with whom they wish for her to build a relationship. The Cook family allowed Sidney, to spend some quality time with one of their close friends. The family friend took Sidney to a Korean market and they had a meal together. Shopping at the Korean market allowed Sidney to be a part of an environment she is not accustomed to. The store setup, the different type of groceries, and even the smells are different from what she is familiar with when grocery shopping with her mother. The time Sidney spent with her parents’ friend, along with other cultural opportunities the Cooks have presented to her, exposes Sidney to the culture of “her” people.

Another example includes the Taylors, who along with a few other families, hosted Korean youth (e.g. students or athletes) at their home for a short time during the summer. The Taylors invited two Korean children to stay with their family for two weeks. The boys were part of a Korean youth baseball league that was competing for an international World Series title. Their children, Ramon and Lillie, had a great time getting to know the Korean children who were both 12 years old. Lillie and Ramon learned silly phrases in Korean and witnessed the differences between Korean and American cultural mannerisms. For instance, Sean was very impressed with his first encounter with the boys. He recalled the boys bowing at him when the family met them for the first time. After everyone settled for the evening, the Taylors ordered pizza for dinner. Sean handed both boys their plates and drinks. He signaled for them to sit down and eat as he finished preparing everyone else's plate but they refused to sit down until Sean and Alissa were able to join all of the children at the dinner table. Sean praised the boys as being respectful and very discipline.

At times, the adoptive parents' enthusiasm for ethnic socialization is ridiculed. They are judged by other families (both adopted and non-adopted families) as overenthusiastic when it comes to ethnically socializing their adopted children. According to the beliefs of the other families, the adopted children are first and foremost American; therefore, they have a difficult time understanding why the adoptive parents find it so important to also develop their children's immigrant identities. Referring back to Caroline's and Ray's earlier comments where they identify their son as Korean-American, demonstrates that there are people who both de-

emphasize the children's immigrant identity and, to some extent, see the identity as being forced upon the children. Aware of such opinions, the parents remain convinced that ethnic socialization is important. On the other hand, the adoptive parents are also teased by other Asian Americans who recognize the amount of time the parents invest in having their children engaged with ethnic activities. Billy and Judy Green shared that they have Korean friends from church who tease them from time-to-time but are also proud of them for making the effort to ethnically socialize their adopted children:

Judy: We have a couple of Korean families at church, and they just all think it's great. And the one mom was teasing me and she said, "Gosh, you do more Korean stuff than we do." [laughter] She said "You cook Korean food more often than I do. You're making me look bad".

Billy: And she said, "Where's the Made in Korea label on you?"[Laughter] And, I said, "Do you have one?"

Unwavering, the adoptive parents are committed to their children being knowledgeable of their culture of origin and showing pride towards their immigrant identities. They make constant efforts to expose their children to several aspects of their culture with the understanding that more opportunities will become available as their children grow older. The adoptive parents have their children engage in different activities and meet different people with the hope that their children view such opportunities as fun and meaningful regardless of the different approaches they use to expose their children to their culture of origin.

Conclusion

Historically, the experiences of Asian Americans have more closely mirrored those of black Americans. As stated by Ancheta (1998):

For most of the nation's history Asian Americans have been treated primarily as constructive blacks. Asian Americans for decades endured many of the same disabilities of racial subordination as African Americans – racial violence, segregation, unequal access to public institutions, and discrimination in housing, employment, and education (p.5).

Asian immigrant predecessors of the mid-to-late-19th (such as the Chinese and Japanese immigrants) and early 20th century (such as the Filipino, Korean, and Indian immigrants) bared witness to blatant discrimination due to the coupling of physical features (e.g. the shape of their eyes, skin complexion, and hair texture and color) and nonwestern cultural backgrounds that differed from the white majority (Chou 2008). By the 1920s these immigrants who were once sought after as a form of cheap labor for the mining and railroad industry throughout the Pacific Coast and Hawaii, were viewed as a threat to American culture and further jeopardizing the economic stability of white laborers as their populations expanded and the economy experienced an economic downturn (Ancheta 1998). In order for white Americans to preserve racial dominance, the United States addressed the growing concerns of the majority by implementing federal laws specifically targeted at Asian immigrants, such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the Immigration Act of 1917 that prohibited the migration of selective Asian immigrants; in addition to enforcing a quota system through the Immigration Act of 1924 that

avored Northern And Western European immigrants (Ancheta 1998). Asian Americans lacked legal citizenship, experienced public, residential, and educational segregation, and racial violence (Ancheta 1998). Therefore, Asian Americans, who as a racial group lacked physical and cultural resemblance with members of the white majority, found themselves being racialized under the guise of their inability to assimilate into the dominant group. The absence of whiteness – western culture, western education, English as mother language, and phenotypical characteristics – led to the experiences of Asian Americans closely paralleling those of black Americans.

However, the 1960s marked a unique era in U.S. history. For decades the voices of marginalized populations (such as racial minorities, women, and gays/lesbians) diligently challenged legal frameworks, which supported discriminatory social norms. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, spearheaded by charismatic leaders from the black community who fought for racially inclusive agendas, transformed U.S. social relationships. The enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Immigration Act of 1965 led to the eradication of blatant discriminatory practices against Asian Americans (and of course other racial minorities) once instituted by the nation's government and lifted the ban against Asian migration into the U.S. (Ancheta 1998). Together these Acts prompted the relocation of an increasingly diverse pool of Asian immigrants to the United States (Ancheta 1998). The 1960s also revealed a change in the perception of Asian Americans by the dominant group. Asian Americans who were once perceived unassimilable began to receive recognition for obtaining middle-class status. By the late 1980s the term, model minority, not only signified successful assimilation, but also drew

attention to the disparities that were growing between Asian Americans and other racial minorities (Chou 2008). The dominant group grew to revere Asian Americans as exemplary because of the popular held belief that as followers of a traditional Asian culture, Confucianism, they believe in a value system that parallels American mainstream values. Their adherence to Asian culture explained the ability for Asian Americans to successfully maneuver the terrain of the American capitalist society and succeed as racial minorities (Chou 2008). More importantly this distinction moved discussions that addressed racial inequality and injustice from structural arguments to cultural arguments. The moniker “model minority” now suggests that: (1) the experiences of Asian Americans are homogenous, (2) the barricades faced by racial minorities in general have fallen and (3) in order for other racial minorities to excel they must relinquish adversarial cultural values and adopt an ethos reflective of mainstream society (Chou 2008; Zhou 2004). However, such an understanding reduces the varied experiences of Asian Americans; it denounces their diverse cultural backgrounds (the arrival and settling of low and high skilled immigrants) and the varied challenges they may face towards integrating into U.S. Society.

The stereotype, model minority, which is recognized as a positive characterization of a group, reveals how culture rather than biology is now the defining feature that draws distinctions between racial groups (Chou 2008). The dismantling of overt racial discriminatory practices prompted a paradigm shift in which the experiences of racial minorities are evaluated within the prism of culture. Cultural arguments – the perceived morals, values, and attitudes upheld by a racial group – are referenced as a

way to understand and discern the racial disparities that continue to exist between whites and nonwhites. Cultural arguments move discussions of racial inequality from focusing on structural elements, the systemic mechanisms targeted at specific racial groups in order to maintain a racial order that privileges white Americans, to examining the effects of oppositional culture on a racial group's ability to achieve equality. Again the model minority stereotype highlights the accomplishments that Asian Americans as a group have made in American society while simultaneously reifying the distinctions drawn between Asian Americans and white Americans. Regardless of the socioeconomic accomplishments made by Asian Americans (e.g. educational success at the secondary and post-secondary levels, frequent representation among high-earning occupations, and high median household income) they continue to be regarded as culturally distinct from the white majority (Zhou 2004; Sakamoto, Goyette, & Kim 2009).

Though the success of Asian Americans is highly regarded by society, they have yet to acquire full integration among the dominant group. Therefore, culture in conjunction with racial characteristics, such as skin color, leaves Asian Americans susceptible to racial discrimination and prejudice. For example, Tuan (1998) discusses how 2nd generation Chinese and Japanese immigrants whose culture more closely aligns with their white American peers were still subjected to "stereotypes and intentional prejudice" during adolescence; they recalled memories of their white peers taunting them, calling them by racial epithets, or taking part in physical altercations (p. 78). Research conducted by Alvarez, Juan, and Liang (2006) further confirms that Asian Americans continue to experience or witness racism (at the expense of others) as the

U.S. society progresses through the 21st century. Second generation Asian Americans who lack an ethnic accent and have obtained residential and marital integration, all of which were key indicators of assimilation achieved by previously white, and racially-excluded ethnic groups such as the Jewish Americans or Italian Americans, find their authenticity as Americans challenged. They have yet to overcome the “perpetual foreigner” stereotype because the notion, “American”, continues to exist as a homogenous term that resonates with the physical image and cultural traits representative of white Americans (Zhou 2004). Furthermore, the experiences of Asian Americans are often compared to those of white Americans due to their position as the dominant group within the U.S. racial hierarchy, this is not to suggest that issues concerning racial tensions between Asian Americans and other racial minorities do not exist; but, to reiterate that race in some way or another, whether pronounced or subtle, impacts the lives of Asian Americans.

When taking into consideration the lived experiences of international Asian adoptees, one may suggest that their lives are quite different from their non-adopted Asian American counterparts. For instance, Tesseler, Tuan and Shiao (2011) explain how Asian adoptees inherit the social and cultural capital and to a certain extent the racial identity of their white American parents:

Inside the home, adoptees are sometimes perceived and treated by loved ones as if they are members of the majority culture (that is, as if they are racially white and ethnically European). Outside of the home, they sometimes evoke

similar responses. 'Colorblind' responses from neighbors, teachers, and others may also be an extension of growing up in white families with the considerable advantages of education, class, and social position. While this 'honorary whiteness' is a more general experience for light-skinned ethnic minorities, it is probably amplified for international adoptees (p.38).

Outside the presence of other adopted siblings or kin, Asian adoptees often lack personal relationships with co-ethnics external to the family unit. They are raised in predominantly white households, reside in predominantly white neighborhoods, and attend predominantly white schools. International Asian adoptees are brought to the United States by their adoptive families as 1.5 generation immigrants due to their young age at adoption. Because these children are often adopted as infants or toddlers, many of them have very vague (if any) memories of their ethnic origins. Juxtaposing the experiences of 2nd generation Asian Americans to international Asian Adoptees reveals the commonalities that exist between these groups. Even though as children their lives operate in different worlds, in reference to their family-unit composition and other social relationships, they are racialized by society as Asian and thus that identity influences social encounters throughout their lives whether as children or adults.

This chapter examines how three components from the originization process (the adopted children's race, ethnicity, and origin culture) influence the adoptive parents' incorporation of racial and ethnic socialization among the children's upbringing. The originization process shows that as children of Asian descent, the adoptees inherit

the model minority racial stereotype. This stereotype operates in such a manner that society disregards the role of racial practices negatively impacting Asian Americans because there is belief that traditional Asian culture facilitates the effortless upward assimilation of Asian Americans. Thus this commonly held societal belief leads to the adoptive parents imposing a status of honorary white upon their Asian adoptees, which causes the significance of racial and ethnic socialization to vary widely among the different families. The parents' incorporation of racial and ethnic socialization into the children's lives depends on the degree to which the parents perceive that the status of honorary white privileges the adopted children. The parents are classified into three groups – proactive, reactive, and inactive racial socialization – in order to demonstrate how the parents come to terms with encouraging or discouraging the racial socialization of their Asian adopted children. The parents are classified into two groups, those who show compassion towards ethnic socialization versus those who are indifferent towards ethnic socialization, in order to demonstrate how they come to terms with ethnically socializing their Asian adopted children.

Parents who belong to the proactive racial socialization group focus on providing their children the skills they need to operate in a society in which racial practices continue to create obstacles for assimilation among nonwhite Americans. The adopted children's status as honorary white is not enough to protect them from racial discrimination or racial microaggressions. These adoptive parents find value in teaching their children how to cope with racism and prejudice. The adoptive parents begin to racially socialize their adopted children at a young age.

Parents who belong to the reactive racial socialization group recognize that racism does create unwarranted challenges for racial minorities in the United States. But, they are less concerned with racism having a negative impact on their adopted children's lives because the children's racial identity as Asian allots them the status of honorary white by the dominant society. Therefore, they do not emphasize the need for incorporating racial socialization into their children's lives. They hold off from racially socializing their adopted children until they feel that their children are at an age where they can comprehend the subject of racism or a racial incident sparks the need for racial socialization to take place.

Parents who belong to the inactive racial socialization group view the honorary white status bestowed upon their Asian adopted children as an advantage because the extent to which their children are exposed to racism will be minimal in comparison to other racial minorities residing in the U.S. Thus, they do not partake in the act of racially socializing their adopted children.

In regards to ethnic socialization, there are adoptive parents who display compassion for the ethnic socialization of their Asian adopted children. They find the children's culture of origin important because they have an affinity for the culture and they respect the culture. Therefore, even though their Asian adopted children are essentially American, they find it imperative for their Asian adopted children to also develop their immigrant identities. They believe that by their children having knowledge of their origin culture, such a connection can help them acquire a stronger sense of self.

On the contrary, there are parents who are indifferent to the ethnic socialization of their Asian adopted children. These parents are more focused on cultivating the children's American identities. The children's immigrant identities are less important because as immigrants to America it is essential that their children are able to easily integrate into mainstream society.

CONCLUSION: INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION, A REPLICATION OF THE U.S. RACIAL HIERARCHY

This study focuses on the experiences of white American adoptive parents and those of their Asian adopted children as revealed through the voices of their parents. I asked adoptive parents to reconstruct their adoption journeys. The conversations commonly began with a discussion of how they became open to adoption, moved forward with a discussion of the routes that led them to the international adoption of an Asian child, and ended with a discussion of their current experiences as interracial international adoptive families.

The parents' racial and cultural tolerance is exemplified by their willingness to adopt interracially and transculturally. Many of the adoptive parents state that irrespective of an adoptee's racial-ethnic background, all children deserve to be placed with a loving family; but, in order for the placement to occur the family must be careful in their adoption decision. The most important factors influencing the international adoption decision is the reputation of an international adoption program along with the child's attributes (e.g., age, gender, health status) meeting the couples' preferences. However, among a subset of families, race exists as a significant factor that impacts their adoption plans. As the couples create their adoption plans, racial practices that lead to the racial stratification of international adoptees (and domestic adoptees) are at play even though this occurs largely unknowingly.

As a couple, the parents conclude that the expansion of their family through adoption is the most suitable and reliable option. Often their decisions are driven by

personal experiences relating to infertility issues, complicated pregnancies, or the desire to fulfill the childhood dream of being adoptive parents. However, the route to adoption includes a fork in the road whereby the couples must choose between traveling the international or domestic adoption routes. Many of the adoptive parents immediately choose to bear left and travel the road of international adoption. Others contemplate bearing right and moving forward with a domestic adoption; although, they ultimately decide to adopt from the international market.

Domestic adoption becomes the road less traveled because of shortfalls associated with the American adoption process, which include private and public domestic adoptions. The adoptive parents describe their discontent with open adoptions, the act of marketing oneself to the birth parents as reputable adoptive parents, and the birth parents' termination rights. The adoption of a child through the public domain (often referred to as the foster care system) adds further complications as the couples express concern about the issues which lead to a child being placed into the system in the first place; such issues may lead to health, behavioral, developmental, or attachment challenges which the parents feel ill-equipped to handle. Moreover, the overrepresentation of African American children in the foster care system poses an additional challenge.

The adoptive parents recognize that if they chose a public domestic adoption, it is highly likely that an African American child will be placed with them. In the United States, the very definition of race is based upon the physical (along with *cultural*)

distinctions of white and black Americans. The color of one's skin, the textures of one's hair, the width of one's nose, and fullness of one's lips are all physical attributes that highlight the racial differences between black/white interracial adoptive families that are immediately noticed by the public. The challenges that follow the adoption of an African American child begin with the visibility of the adoptive family; the visibility of the adoptive family leaves it vulnerable to scrutiny from the American public. In addition, a select group of parents perceive the adoption of an African American child as difficult based on a few other factors, which include a child's exposure to trauma prior to adoption, the adoptive parents' awareness of the cultural deviance/ negative stereotypes associated with African Americans in the U.S., and the lack of acceptance by African Americans towards the adoption of black children by white parents. As stated by Ronnie Kennedy (the adoptive father of two Korean children) these factors not only create a sense of discomfort but reiterate the unique challenges that come with the adoption and parenting of an African American child:

And, on the African American side also for me there are real pressures the way I saw it. And it's you know, for what it's worth I mean there are different pressures domestically. You know the Korean community to the extent that Wesley wants to get involved there is a very clear cohesive community and in the African American community in the U.S. depending upon where you are, what cities, it's trickier. It's a trickier thing to get into, to somewhat be accepted by if you're white parents with a black child.

White adoptive parents perceive the race relations between white and black Americans as tense and the African American community as tough to navigate. Unfortunately, the adoptive parents' limited personal interactions with African Americans – interactions that primarily occur at the workplace – have not evolved into close friendships. Therefore, the absence of diverse, personal, and positive relationships with African Americans leaves the parents with few experiences to counteract the negative stereotypes associated with black Americans. The current state of white/black relations limits the adoptive parents ability to even imagine having access to members of the African American community (irrespective of their class backgrounds). Moreover, they do not believe members of their extended family would accept such adoptions; the lack of support from family members makes it even more difficult for the adoptive parents to handle a black/white interracial adoption. The parents' interpretation of black/white relations and recognition of negative stereotypes associated with African Americans reveals that their perception of the U.S. racial hierarchy is one in which black children are positioned as members of the subsidiary third tier, the collective black. The African American child is deemed unassimilable.

In reference to the international adoption of nonwhite children, a clear division exists between their openness towards the adoption of Asian children (and to a lesser extent the adoption of Latino children) versus black children. As adoptive parents of Asian children, they reflect on the difficulties of raising a black child in comparison to the raising of an Asian child. This research reveals that the parents' concerns with raising an African American child transcend to the international adoption of black

children because these children share the same racial identity as black within the U.S. social context. Foreign-born black adoptees lose their immigrant identities upon arrival in the U.S. and thus the adoptive parents also view the adoption of black international adoptees as challenging. Challenges follow the international adoption of black children because of the children's racial identities in addition to programmatic issues presented by their international adoption programs, such as limited and inaccurate medical information pertaining to an adoptee and the less favorable dwelling conditions of the children being raised in orphanages. All black children, irrespective of their native origins, are seen as unassimilable and members of the collective black.

Adoptive parents choose against the adoption of Latino children due to the negative reputation of the Latin American international adoption programs (e.g. corruption issues) and the couples' disregard for programmatic standards upheld by the foreign nations (e.g. unreasonable travel expectations). The adoptive parents do not address in detail concerns regarding Latino children's racial background³⁵ or the perpetuation of negative stereotypes as affecting their children's lives in the United States. The findings suggest that adoptive parents do not perceive the racial differences between international Latino adoptees and white American parents as stark, which further support the notion that the adoptive parents view children of Latin American descent as members of the intermediary tier, labeled honorary whites.

³⁵ It is important to note that this study focuses on the laymen usage of the term race because during the in-depth interviews the adoptive parents do not make reference to ethnic distinctions (such as the U.S. Census Bureau distinction of white verse black Latinos) when addressing the potential adoption of international Latino children.

Adoptive parents highly regard the adoption of Asian children, in contrast to the adoption of other nonwhite international adoptees. First, they view the international adoption programs as very reputable. Second, the adoptive parents view the racial differences between parent and child (white Americans and Asian Americans) as minimal. Even though, racially, Asian international adoptees may display physical attributes that differ from their white adoptive families such as the shape of the eyes, the color of their hair, or the color of their skin. Adoptive parents believe that mixed-race white/Asian adoptive families are not viewed as racially deviant. They contribute the normalization of white/Asian adoptive families to the positive race relations that exist between white and Asian Americans and the belief that Asian and white Americans are less likely to disapprove of such adoptions. Moreover, the adoptive parents perceive Asian children as assimilable based on their experiences with Asian Americans (for example, their relationships with colleagues or close friends) and their opportunities to witness on a personal level the perpetuation of positive racial stereotypes by their Asian American associates. The adoptive parents acknowledge that Asian Americans may encounter prejudice and racism due to racial biases in U.S. society, but they are less worried about such acts leading to the downward assimilation rather than upward assimilation of Asian Americans. The parents are comfortable with the adoption of Asian international adoptees because they have faith in their ability to successfully parent such children. They perceive Asian adoptees as honorary whites when taking into consideration the U.S. racial hierarchy.

In addition, this study reveals that the couples' perception of their Asian adoptees as honorary whites influences the adoptive parents' receptiveness towards the racial and ethnic socialization of their adopted children. The degree to which the couples regard racial and/or ethnic socialization as important varies. The degree to which the couples regard racial and/or ethnic socialization as important varies. The racial socialization continuum ranges from adoptive parents who are adamant about the need to racially socialize their Asian adopted children, adoptive parents who will incorporate racial socialization in their children lives when it is deemed necessary, to adoptive parents who are not inclined to racially socialize their adopted children. The adoptive parents' regard for the relevance of ethnic socialization is demonstrated by the parents either being fully invested in the ethnic socialization of their Asian adopted children or they are indifferent towards ethnically socializing their Asian adopted children.

Based on the similar racial attributes shared by white adoptive parents and international white adoptees, the merging together of white Americans and Eastern European adopted children leads to the formation of families – who, according to the American public eye – follow the dominant social norm of being a same-race biological family. Therefore, one may think that the advantage of not being perceived by society as a conspicuous family would encourage white Americans to be more inclined to adopt foreign-born white children in comparison to nonwhite adoptees. However, in this study adoptive parents do not have a desire to internationally adopt same-race children, particularly children of Russian or other Eastern European background, because of

concerns regarding the corruption surrounding Eastern European international adoption programs and the health status of Eastern European children (who have a reputation for poor health and developmental delays). Although, Eastern European culture is distinct from U.S. culture, the adoptive parents do not perceive the children's cultural background as threatening their ability to integrate among the dominant culture. This finding relates to the concept that the lighter the complexion of the international adoptee the less there is a need for ethnic and racial socialization, and the belief that the adoptee's closer racial resemblance to the dominant group will lead to a child more readily assimilating into U.S. society (Jacobson 2008). The adoptive parents view Eastern European children as members of the white dominant group however they have less clout in comparison to the healthy white American infant.

Högbacka (2008) states that the parental preferences of adoptive parents are not to be viewed negatively but rather their preferences should be viewed as a natural aspect of family planning. The desires of adoptive parents do not stray far from others who chose to build their families by means other than adoption. Undeniably choosing to build one's family through adoption is a personal choice influenced by several factors such as the eligibility requirements of the sending and receiving country, the reputation of an adoption program, the birth country and culture, and the racial-ethnic background of the prospective adoptee. However, these factors do more than simply provide profiles for various international adoption programs. They help the parents determine which children are the most likely to be healthy, stable, and capable of attaching to their new families. In other words, these factors help the couples decide who they believe

they can successfully parent. Furthermore, such qualities help them determine their ability to socialize, assimilate, and promote the upward mobility of their adopted child. However, the research findings suggest that we must look beyond an interpretation of the couples' adoption choices that only focuses on identifying their preferences to developing an understanding of how their preferences both replicate and perpetuate the U.S. racial hierarchy. As much as the adoptive parents are practicing their free-will to create a family they envision as their form of perfect, underlying their preference for the international interracial adoption of Asian children are racial practices that are a manifestation of cultural racism; therefore, the racial stratification of international adoptees is best explained by understanding how cultural racism influences the adoption plan of the adoptive parents.

Cultural racism is the root from which other forms of racism (most notably individual racism and institutional racism) are derived.³⁶ It is defined as "a process of social comparison that results in the subordination of an 'out group' by an 'in group' that uses its own group as the positive point of reference to measure the worth or merit of out group members" (Cook 1992, p. 302). In U.S. society, social comparisons in

³⁶ Most commonly known and more often openly denounced is individual racism "a consciously held belief in the genetic, intellectual and/or anatomical inferiority of another group. ... The individual or group is conscious of its racist beliefs and is prepared to act on those beliefs" (Cook 1992, p. 298). Institutional racism "denies the relationship between the exclusion of certain groups by the institutional norm and the history of overt institutional racism and deprivation that resulted in the absence of qualities now deemed fundamental to meritocratic consideration" (Cook 1992, p.300). Institutional racism is heavily supported by the colorblind racial ideology which deemphasizes race, racism, and racial discrimination; the focus on merit and equality leads to the understanding that it is the failing of the individual that ultimately prevents any form of achievement, whether it is academic, economic, or social – not the policies or procedures put in place by different institutions (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Ebert 2004; Cook 1992).

reference to attitudes, beliefs, practices, language, religion, and aesthetics (to name a few) are made against those of the white dominant culture (Powell 2000, p. 8). That which is in opposition to or deviates from the white dominant culture is viewed inferior. And, as Cook (1992) further explains, cultural racism molds members of the dominant group to view the challenges that a minority group may face in society as a consequence of their subcultural practices rather than as a consequence of institutional practices:

Cultural racism socializes and conditions the individuals comprising the institutions whose norms, though neutral on their face, contain the countless assumptions of white superiority that countenance an insensitivity to the plight of the oppressed (p. 302).

Cultural racism is so entrenched in American society that adoptive parents are unaware of its functioning.

U.S. society is inundated with rhetoric and images common to white dominant culture; the norms that govern parenthood have 'socialized and conditioned' the adoptive parents to view children who can assimilate and acculturate within the dominant society as more desirable than the foreign black adoptee. Högbäck (2008) reveals those norms which govern the institution of the family:

That [adoptive parents] prefer certain kinds of children is connected with the norms and values concerning the nature of parenthood that they share with the rest of society. The interviewees talked about wanting to protect their children and to have a bigger influence on their development. They also wanted to

perform their parental roles to perfection. A small and healthy child fits these concerns more easily (2008, p. 327).

The adoption of a foreign black adoptee is perceived as impractical. These children are byproducts of societies that (a) lack the ability to efficiently and succinctly streamline the process, (b) lack the ability to provide stable protective homes (c) and, lack the medical advancements or customary practices, beliefs, and attitudes that lead to delivery and rearing of healthy children. The children's humble beginnings in African or Caribbean non-Western/un-modernized societies leave the adoptive parents with little reasons to believe the children will meet one of their most basic standards – a healthy child. In addition, they question their ability to protect a child whose life, as a black child residing in America, is destined to be plagued with issues because (1) the child will be raised in a society that continues to discriminate against those of the collective black who are perceived as inferior or (2) central to the black international adoptee's racial identity are cultural traits that are in opposition to the dominant culture and lead to downward assimilation. Moreover, even though adoptive parents may work hard to instill values and beliefs within their adopted child that align with the dominant culture, their child's eventual associations with African Americans may jeopardize such teachings. The adoptive parents' existence as a major influence on the black child's development may be jeopardized. The challenges that come with raising a black child make it difficult (if not impossible) for the adoptive parents to perform their parental roles to perfection. Thus, the foreign black child acquires the ethnic identity and perceived experiences of African Americans rather than that of their co-ethnic

immigrants. One may argue that since these adoptions take place overseas it is inappropriate to rely the 'the plight of the oppressed' (i.e. African Americans) to that of foreign black adoptees. However, in this study *black* is a racial identity that is imposed on all persons of African descent; there are very limited instances in which distinctions are made between the experiences of native and nonnative blacks in the United States. As parents look for signs of upward assimilation and acculturation into U.S. mainstream society – such as health, ability to attach, and association with positive stereotypes – among the pool of international adoptees, they view children of Asian descent as more desirable and thus capable of successfully parenting than children of African descent.

The adoptive parents perceive Asian children (especially Korean children) as byproducts of a society in which: (1) the origin country's healthcare and child welfare systems are similar if not better than that of the United States and (2) customary practices, attitudes, and beliefs of co-ethnics are highly regarded as constituting upward assimilation. In addition, the children's fair skin and straight hair more closely resemble the phenotypical characteristics common with white Americans. The physical qualities of an Asian adoptee offer more features that support rather than inhibit the integration of Asian adoptees as nonwhite Americans among the dominant group, so much so that there is variance among the adoptive parents regarding the relevance of ethnically and racially socializing the Asian adoptee.

Many of the adoptive parents come from backgrounds in which their parents openly revealed their racial intolerance towards nonwhite Americans, throughout the

adoptive parents' childhood, and quite frankly, up until the adoption of their grandchildren. Often through their own journeys as adults (e.g. gaining college education and moving to more diverse areas) the adoptive parents relinquish themselves from the racist foundation cultivated by their parents and other extended kin. So unlike their extended kin, these adoptive parents do not consciously take part in racist practices; yet, the racial stratification of international adoptees is justified because even though all children deserve the right to be loved by a family, these couples believe they are best equipped to successfully raise nonblack children. As stated by Blaut, "Racism most fundamentally is practice: the practice of discrimination at all levels, from personal abuse to colonial oppression" (1992, p. 289). Although not recognized as discrimination among the adoptive parents the adoption of black children is impeded because they believe children of African descent do not meet the normative standards upheld by the dominant society.

This study focuses specifically on the stories of white adoptive parents who comprise the majority of Americans participating in international interracial adoptions. Their participation in such adoptions triggered my sociological curiosity because of their willingness to take part in an alternate route of family formation that involves openly crossing racial boundaries in a country where racial divides remain fairly stark. This research reveals that some of the adoptive parents believe there is still much work that needs to occur before U.S. race relations, especially between black and white Americans, are at a state that respect and tolerance is displayed by and towards all Americans regardless of their racial-ethnic background. The adoptive parents primarily

perceive international interracial adoption – although a positive act that broadens the racial exposure of the adoptive family – as a small phenomenon that is most influential at the familial level. For example, they describe the change in attitude and behavior they witnessed among their own parents (and other extended family) with the arrival of their nonwhite adopted grandchildren. However, for a number of the families such a change is enough to convince them that international adoption (although a small phenomenon) significantly influences U.S. race relations, even at the societal level. They believe international adoption is yet another form of the family that challenges Americans' perception of what constitutes a family. As Americans gain more exposure to unconventional racially diverse families that exposure leads to interactions and the interactions lead to the development of relationships that will eventually help improve U.S. race relations. Even though, there is still much work to be done, these parents believe race relations in the U.S. are slowly but surely improving. American society will come to a point where the U.S. racial hierarchy will lose relevance as Americans acknowledge their commonalities more so than their differences. In the words of Emmanuel Morris, whose son is from South Korea, Americans will realize “these things that separate us are really in the scheme of things, are so incredibly small. And I just think that sooner or later – well, later, not in our life time, this stuff is going to work itself out.” But, in order for progress to occur individuals, must: (a) be willing to evaluate how one's actions may contribute to the problem instead of the solutions and (b) find ways to elicit change (within themselves and at the societal level). The findings from this research offer reason for the adoptive parents to question how their actions may

unknowingly preserve racial practices that sustain rather than eradicate racial divides in the United States.

Implications for Future Research

This study offers important insight about how white adoptive parents' perception of the U.S. racial hierarchy and race relations influences their plans for adoption; however, it also reveals areas in which further research is necessary. Research on international adoption very often focuses on the experiences of white adoptive parents. Moreover, the international interracial adoption research is spearheaded by the experiences of white adoptive parents of Asian adoptees due to the long-standing history of Korean international adoptions in the U.S. and the growth of Chinese international adoptions during the 1990s. The lack of research that focuses on the experiences of white adoptive parents of black international adoptees makes it difficult to discern those factors that lead to the adoption of a black international adoptee. This is an important research area to address since Ethiopia during the early 2000s (prior to the country's decrease in the processing of international adoptions) was a major sending country to the United States. Such research also allows for an analysis of those factors which influence the parents' choices in the international adoption of the black adoptee versus the domestic adoption of the black adoptee. For example, an interesting comparative study could examine how the immigrant identity of international black children influences their prospect for adoption in comparison to the domestic black children's ethnic identity as African American.

Studies regarding the adoption of black international adoptees could also advance the international adoption literature by taking into consideration how prospective adoptive parents' marital status and sexual orientation may influence their adoption plans. Both marital status and sexual orientation are major factors that influence prospective parents' eligibility for certain international adoption programs thus limiting their adoption choices. Such research would help us understand the demographic characteristics of prospective parents who choose to participate in black international adoptions.

Also, it would be interesting to investigate black adoptive parents' participation in international adoption. Although, it is less popular for nonwhite Americans to adopt internationally, these actions do occur and most often they consist of same-race adoptions. In addition, it is more common for black Americans to participate in informal adoptions. Therefore, it would be very interesting to learn those factors that lead black Americans to participate in formal adoptions moreover international adoptions, especially since it is a well-known fact that black American children are overrepresented in America's foster care system.

This research provides a detailed account of why white adoptive parents are less interested in same-race adoption, specifically the adoption of Eastern European children. However, this research only briefly addresses those factors which influence the adoptive parents' decisions regarding the adoption of children from Latin America. There should also be additional studies that further investigate white adoptive parents'

preference for Latin American adoptees. Such information provides more insight for examining the current state of the U.S. racial hierarchy and race relations.

In addition, a common critique of international adoption research is the need for more studies that focuses on the experience of the adoptees. It is important for the adoptee to add his/her voice to their adoption stories. It is through their accounts (in addition to non-adopted siblings that may be present in the household) that sociological research of racial identity, racial relations, and the U.S. racial hierarchy can come full circle and paint a picture of the more complex realities that coexist with the perceptions and lived experiences of the adoptive family.

Another area of research that requires further investigation is the adoptive parent's incorporation of racial and ethnic socializations into the lives of their Asian adopted children. It is essential for future sociological research to also examine the children's perception of the significance of racial and ethnic socialization. First and foremost, there is a need to understand if Asian adoptees' perception of their racial identities and experiences align with their adoptive parents. Adoptive parents both teach their own philosophies of race while also being cognizant of their adopted children's racial experiences; however, for many of the families in this study, it is difficult for the adoptive parents to interpret their children's racial experiences because their children are at an age where they remain unaware of their racial identity or the concept of race (in general) remains novel. Therefore, there is value in learning the meaning of race for Asian adoptees, gaining more personal insight from the adoptees

about their racial experiences, and developing an understanding of how they view the significance of racial and ethnic socialization. For example, is there a collective voice among the Asian international adoption community regarding the relevance of racial and ethnic socialization? Does an Asian adoptee's perception of the relevance of racial and ethnic socialization change with age? If so, what factors may influence their change in perception? Moreover, how might Asian adoptees' racial and immigrant identities be influenced by interacting with non-adopted Asian Americans (or more specifically their co-ethnics)?

This study also indicates that many of the adoptive families feel their adopted children are protected from incidents of racism because they reside in a racially diverse region. Therefore, another research area to explore includes the examination of how Asian adopted children's racial experiences compare when taking into consideration the diversity of the region. This study reveals that even though the adoptive families may live in a racially diverse region, they do not necessarily reside in racially diverse neighborhoods. Interesting research can develop from the investigation of the racial and ethnic diversity of Asian adoptees' social environments and how their experiences are affected by the racial composition, immigrant composition, and class composition of their social environments. It would also be insightful to learn if Asian adoptees' racial experiences vary greatly when a child is raised in a racially homogenous region in comparison to a racially diverse region. Furthermore, it is important to examine if Asian adoptees reveal a difference in opinion regarding the relevance of ethnic and racial socialization when considering their upbringing in a homogenous region versus a

heterogeneous region. Together, these questions would further one's understanding of Asian adoptees' perception regarding the relevance of racial and ethnic socialization. And thus, further inform adoptive parents' perception (and incorporation) of ethnic and racial socialization when they consider their adopted children's well-being.

Concluding Remarks

In all, developing a deeper understanding of those factors that influence the adoption plans of white adoptive parents reveals the continuing need for progress of U.S. race relations. The findings from this research indicate that as race relations improve a child's position in the U.S. racial hierarchy may become less of a factor that impacts his/her adoption prospects. The findings may also have an effect on the adoption community. The data may influence outreach efforts carried out by members of the adoption community as they try to think of effective ways that lead to the adoption of stigmatized children, specifically the domestic and international adoption of black adoptees. The international Eastern European adoptee is also stigmatized but issues concerning their adoption are strongly connected with concerns regarding the reputation of the adoption programs and the health of the child. The findings from this research also offer food for thought for the federal government, policy makers, and employees of the Eastern European adoption programs. If there remains a need for international adoption to exist as an alternate form of family formation for orphaned/abandoned Eastern European children, there needs to be a national overhaul of the different Eastern European adoption programs. They should work to eradicate

issues associated with corruption in order to behoove the livelihood of those nations' most vulnerable population (parentless children).

In addition, with the introduction of Barack Obama as the United States' first African American president there is a popular consensus that the U.S. is now a post-racial society; however, my research suggests otherwise. As Asian Americans, the international adoptees acquire a status unparalleled to that of black or white Americans. Adoptive parents do not perceive their adopted children as being condemned by the larger dominant society because of their racial identity as Asian. On the one hand, the Asian adoptees are the recipients of positive stereotypes that promote rather than obstruct upward assimilation (unlike their black counterparts who occupy the lowly position of the collective black and have a difficult time ascending the racial hierarchy due to a host of negative stereotypes routinely associated with their racial group). On the other hand, Asian adoptees' physical distinctions from the white majority prevent full integration among the dominant group even though these children are raised in white households (and thus have adopted the cultural traits of the white dominant group). Consequently, these Asian adopted children's racial experiences are unique. Therefore, it is important for facilitators of international adoption to find innovative ways to teach adoptive parents about the unique racial experiences of Asian international adoptees. These messages do exist but there are a number of families in this study who found them antiquated and irrelevant for the current day and age. Hence, current messages of race and ethnicities as addressed by the adoption community may fall upon deaf ears for those who perceive U.S. society as post-racial.

Overall, the data reveals that there are several factors that influence the creation of adoptive parents' adoption plans. However, it cannot be ignored that adoptive parents' perception of the U.S. racial hierarchy and race relations leads to the racial stratification of international adoptees. Their perception of the U.S. racial hierarchy and race relations also creates differences among the adoptive parents' regarding their beliefs of racially and ethnically socializing nonwhite adoptees. Yet, the international adoption market is changing. The adoption programs that were once readily available (e.g. South Korea, China, and Russia) have or in the process of being discontinued. Therefore, it is important to produce new research that examines those factors that influence the international adoption and parenting of nonwhite children by white Americans, as new or returning families approach a market that might eventually be dominated by the availability of "dark-skin" children.

Appendix A: List of Adoptive Parents Interviewees, Family Composition, and Characteristics of Adoptees

Adoptive Family ³⁷	Total Number of Children	Total Number of Adopted Children	Birth Country	Year of Adoption	Age at Adoption (months)
Phyllis & Bruce Cooper	2	2	Russia	2001, 2004	24, 17
Evelyn & Russell Murphy	2	1	S. Korea	2005	4
Wayne & Wanda Hughes	1	1	China	2006	10
Judy & Billy Green	2	2	S. Korea	1999, 2006	6, 4
Carmen & Clarence Cook	2	1	S. Korea	2008	8
Antonio & Monica Bennett	1	1	S. Korea	2010	15
Shawn & Hazel Freeman	2	1	S. Korea	2012	22
Regina & Ronnie Kennedy	2	2	S. Korea	2008, 2012	7.5, 8.5
Carla & Ryan Burns	1	1	China	2004	13
Melvin & Melanie Murray ³⁸	3	2	USA, S. Korea, China	1991, 1996, 2005	1 day, 6, 8.5

³⁷ Pseudonyms

Adoptive Family	Total Number of Children	Total Number of Adopted Children	Birth Country	Year of Adoption	Age at Adoption (months)
Pearl & Travis Olson	1	1	S. Korea	2011	11
Ray & Caroline Hunter	1	1	S. Korea	2012	11
Sarah & Emmanuel Morris	1	1	S. Korea	2012	20
Jacob & Marissa Robertson	4	2	S. Korea, China	2005, 2010	6, 30
Jeremiah & Robin Harris	2	2	S. Korea	2006, 2008	4.5, 7.5
Alissa & Sean Taylor	2	2	S. Korea	2003, 2004	4, 4
Nancy & Jason Anderson	1	1	S. Korea	2009	9.5
Pamela & Donald Clark	1	1	S. Korea	2012	21
Cynthia & Terry Young	3	1	China	2005	11
Lawrence & Brenda Blackwell	1	1	S. Korea	2009	9.5
Justin & Sherry Goldsmith	1	1	Philippines	2011	2013

³⁸ Experiences related to the two older children were excluded from the study due to their less recent adoptions.

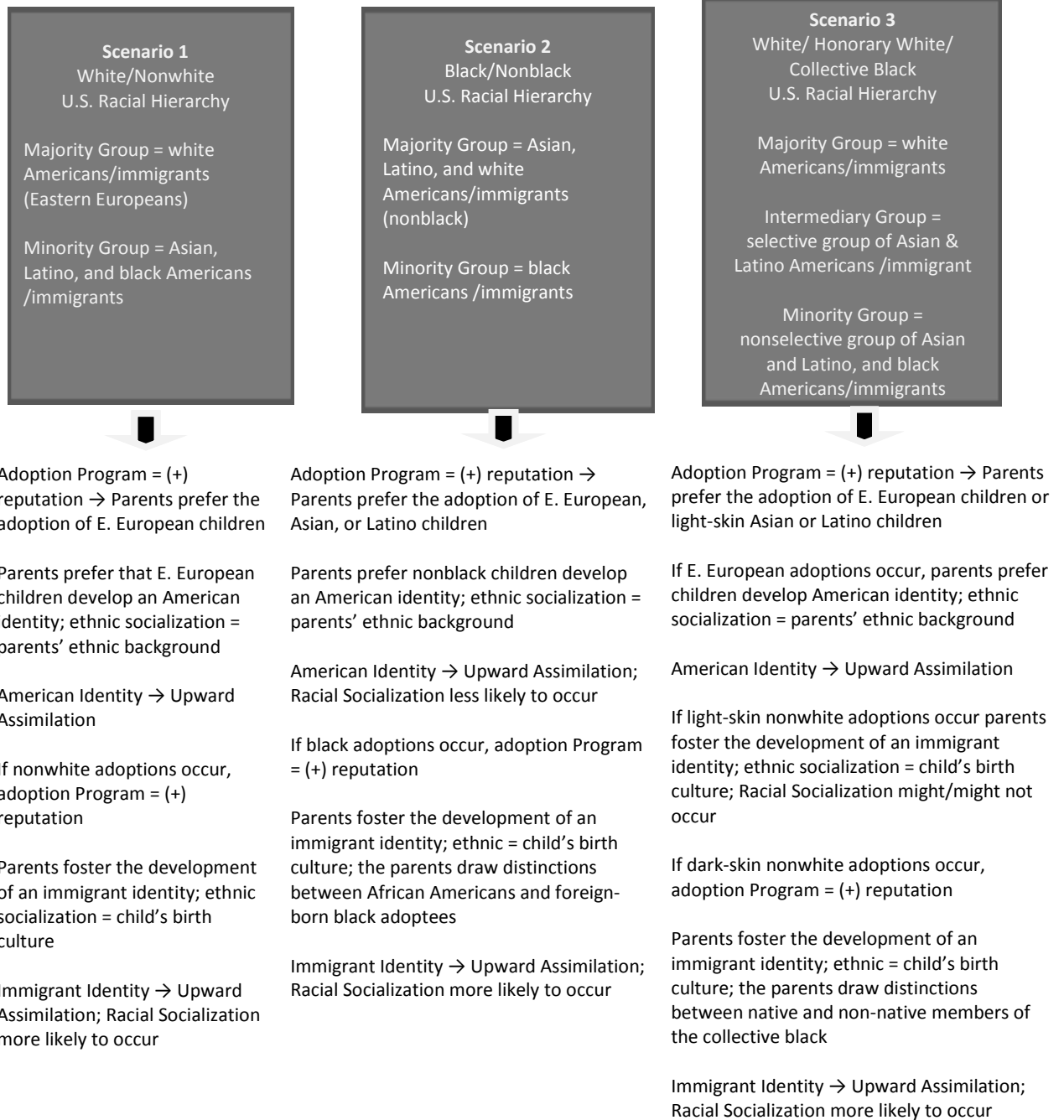
Appendix B: List of Adoption Agency Staff Interviewees

Adoption Agency Staff³⁹	Adoption Agency	Occupational Title
Janice Schneider	Bringing Love	Associate Administrator
Tammy Nelson	Bringing Love	Social Worker
Teresa Campbell	Bringing Love	Social Worker
Dawn Saunders	True Dreams	International Program Manager

³⁹ Pseudonyms

Application of Theories:

The International Adoption of Nonwhite Children by White Americans



Appendix D

Demographic Face Sheet for the International Adoption Study – Adoptive Parents

Code: _____

Date: _____

Participants:

Age of Husband _____

Age of Wife _____

Education – Highest Level Achieved Husband:

Education – Highest Level Achieved Wife:

Husband's Occupation:

Wife's Occupation:

Household Income:

- ☐ Under \$45,000
- ☐ \$45,000 - \$65,000
- ☐ \$65,000 - \$85,000
- ☐ \$85,000 - \$115,000
- ☐ Over \$115,000

Number of Children ____ Number of Biological Children ____ Number of Adopted Children ____

Age(s) of Biological Child _____

_____, _____, _____, _____, _____

Gender(s) of Biological Child _____,

_____, _____, _____, _____, _____

Age(s) of Adopted Child _____,

_____, _____, _____

Age(s) at Adoption (in months)

_____, _____, _____,

Year of Adoption _____, _____,

_____, _____, _____

Gender of Adopted Child _____, _____,

_____, _____, _____

Adopted Child's Country of Origin

Appendix E

International Adoption Study

The Johns Hopkins University

Department of Sociology

Investigator: Sika Koudou

Interview Field Guide - Parents

(Alternate appropriately for the different families)

The interview is semi-structured in order to promote free flowing conversations between the participants and the interviewer. The interviews will occur in the privacy of the participants' homes or in a secluded public environment that the participants find more comfortable. The following questions address areas of particular interest that I wish to capture during the interviews. The respondents will also be asked to share a photo album (if available) as the interview proceeds. The photo album is included as a tool to help elicit conversations regarding experiences relevant to the research. Basic demographic information is collected on the Demographic Face Sheet at the beginning of the interview.

Interview Questions⁴⁰

1. What were some challenges you faced once you decided to adopt? What were some concerns that were discussed prior to adoption? [probe for gender, race, ethnicity, culture, health/disability]
2. What led you to adopt internationally? How did you decide what country to adopt from? Was there ever a time in which you considered domestic adoption?
3. How was your experience with the adoption agency? What were some of the things learned from the education training programs offered by your agency? Did they discuss race? Or culture, ethnicity?

⁴⁰ This field guide was informed by the work of Kubo (2009, p.72).

4. Have you attended any support group meetings? What has your experience been like during these meeting?
5. Before you adopted, did you ever consider the differences that might present themselves between yourself and your adopted child – for instance, race, ethnicity, or culture, –when deciding what country to adopt from? How do you feel about those differences now?
6. How would you describe reactions from family, friends or co-workers when they heard you were adopting? [could also ask for specific ways they have been involved or not involved]
7. Prior to adoption, how would you describe your ideas of what a family meant to you? How have ideas about your family changed since the adoption of your child?
8. Prior to adoption were you concerned about your child's (or children's) ability to adapt to their new family and country? How has it been for your adopted child? [probe for extended adoptive family experiences, school experiences, public experiences]
9. What factors do you deem important for providing a positive upbringing environment for your adopted child(ren)? How has it been for your adopted child(ren)?
10. How did you decide what type of school your adopted child(ren) would attend, or what type of neighborhood the family would live in? [probe for discussion addressing the racial/ethnic composition of the school and neighborhood]

11. Is your adopted child(ren) involved in cultural activities? How have those experiences been? (only ask if appropriate, depends on the age of the child)
[probe, are the parents also active participants]
12. How is life now for your family?
13. If you had the opportunity to adopt again, are there other countries other than your adopt child's birth country that you would be interested in adopting from? Do you remain interested in any particular country, if so why? Is there a country you would never consider adopting from? Would you consider adopting a child from an African country? What about an Asian country or Latin American country? [choose the appropriate region]

Appendix F

Demographic Fact Sheet for the International Adoption Study – Adoption Agency Staff

Code: _____

Date: _____

Basic Information

Gender: _____

Age: _____

Race/Ethnicity:

- ☐ White/Caucasian American
- ☐ Black/African American
- ☐ Latino American
- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ☐ Asian/Pacific Islander American
- ☐ Bi/Multiracial American
- ☐ Some other race: _____

Education - Highest Degree Completed: _____

Work Experience

Current Job Title: _____

Number of Years at this Agency:

- ☐ 0-5
- ☐ 5-10
- ☐ 10-15
- ☐ 15-20
- ☐ 20-25
- ☐ 25 or more

International Adoption Study

The Johns Hopkins University

Department of Sociology

Investigator: Sika Koudou

Interview Field Guide – Adoption Agency Staff

The interview is semi-structured in order to promote free flowing conversations between the participants and the interviewer. The interviews will occur in private location of the participants' choice which might include a secluded public environment away from their offices. The following questions address areas of particular interest that I wish to capture during the interviews.

1. I would like to learn more about your professional life. How did you become involved in the adoption field? What led you to work in the area of international adoption?
2. Please describe the mission of your adoption agency?
3. What is your role within the adoption agency?
4. What are some major topics that the agency believes must be discussed with couples prior to the adoption of a child? [probe race, ethnicity, culture, behavioral issues, age, special needs children, international versus domestic adoption] Are these topics generally discussed during parent workshops, support group meetings, or individual sessions?
5. What would you label as sensitive topics often discussed with prospective and adoptive parents? What type of techniques do you employ as a means to address sensitive topics?

6. How do parents in general react to discussions regarding sensitive topics?
7. As you deal with parents on an individual basis, what concerns are often raised by parents prior to an adoption? After an adoption? [probe race, ethnicity, culture, behavioral issues, age, special needs children, international versus domestic adoption] When necessary, how do you help calm them down?
8. Have you dealt with couples who are very reluctant to adopt children from specific regions (or countries) [make sure to address the international adoption programs a specific agency offers] What are some examples of why a couple might avoid particular regions or countries? [e.g., political, cultural, racial, fear of rejection from family or friends, etc.]
9. How do you think the topics discussed during the workshops, support group meetings, or private sessions might influence prospective adoptive parents' preferences for adoption?
10. In what ways might the topics discussed during the workshops, meetings, or private sessions influence how the adoptive parents parent their children (or in other words, raise them to be successful adults)?

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RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

- Summer 2005 Research Intern
Summer Research Opportunities Program (SROP), University of
Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Urbana, IL
Principal Investigator, Helen Neville, PhD
- Collected and entered data obtained from U.S. Census
Bureau files for the Educational Psychology Laboratory
 - Developed a research paper that addressed the
acceptance of the color-blind racial ideology among
African American undergraduate students
 - Presented the research during roundtable discussion at
the Committee on Institutional Cooperation Conference
(2005) through SROP
- Summer 2006 -
Spring 2007 Research Assistant
Department of Sociology, Xavier University of Louisiana, New
Orleans, LA
Principal Investigator, Amy Bellone Hite, PhD
- Conducted in-person surveys for the *Hurricane Katrina
Evacuee Study*

- Presented preliminary findings at the Race, Class, and Gender Conference (2007) and the Southern Sociological Society Conference (2007)
- Fall 2007 -
Spring 2008,

Research Assistant
Department of Sociology, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD
- Spring 2011

Principal Investigator, Katrina Bell McDonald, PhD

 - Recruited Participants and organized interviews for the Contemporary Marriage Study
 - Conducted Interviews
 - Collected and Coordinated field notes and profile sheets
 - Transcribed, coded and analyzed data
- Fall 2008

Volunteer
Community Greens Project, Ashoka
Project Lead, Ben Nathanson

 - Recruited Participants and conducted in-person surveys
- Spring 2009

Research Assistant
Baltimore Education Research Consortium, Baltimore, MD
Principal Investigator, Stephen Plank

 - Certified in the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) - a classroom observation technique – for a classroom management project spearheaded by BERC
 - Conducted observations and wrote narratives/reports of elementary school classrooms in the Baltimore City Public Schools

CONFERENCES

Eastern Sociological Society – Doctoral Dissertation, *Who Can I be the Best Parent To? An Analysis of U.S. Race Relations through the Lens of International Adoption*, February 2014

International Organization of Social Science and Behavioral Research – Doctoral Dissertation, *International Interracial Adoptions among White Adoptive Parents: A Contemporary Analysis of U.S. Race Relations*, October 2013

Program of Social Inequality, Department of Sociology Seminar – Doctoral Dissertation, *International Interracial Adoptions among White Adoptive Parents: A Contemporary Analysis of U.S. Race Relations*, October 2013

Race, Class, and Gender Conference – *Hurricane Katrina Evacuee Study* (2007)

Southern Sociological Society Conference – *Hurricane Katrina Evacuee Study* (2007)

Committee on Institutional Cooperation Conference, Summer Research Opportunities Program – *Contextual Factors of Color-blind Racial Ideology Acceptance among African American Students* (2005)

LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

Johns Hopkins University Black Graduate Student Association, Co-President, Fall 2009 – Spring 2010, Fall 2010 – Spring 2011

Johns Hopkins University Center for Africana Studies, Graduate Liaison, Fall 2010 – Spring 2011

Johns Hopkins University Diversity Task Force, Member, Fall 2011 – Spring 2012

Johns Hopkins University Mentoring Work Group, Member, Spring 2012

Johns Hopkins University Multicultural Affairs Student Center Residential Council, Member, Fall 2010 – Spring 2011

COMMUNITY SERVICE

- | | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Fall 2014 | Volunteer
Minority Access, Annual National Role Model Conference <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Facilitated undergraduate research presentations |
| Fall 2009 -
Spring 2013 | Diversity Fellow
Office of Graduate Affairs and Admissions, Johns Hopkins University, Krieger School of Arts and Sciences/Whiting School of Engineering, Baltimore, MD <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Recruited underrepresented graduate students to 35 full-time graduate programs▪ Participated in panel discussions with prospective graduate students▪ Attended, as needed, recruitment events – both on and off-campus▪ Communicated with prospective applicants via email or phone |
| Spring 2008 -
2009 | Mentor
Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Maryland, Baltimore, MD <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Mentored adolescent female residing in Baltimore City |
| Spring 2007 | Student Intern
Access Pregnancy and Referral Center, Kenner, LA <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Tested and provided counseling for pregnancies▪ Coordinated follow-up interviews |

Fall 2006 – Spring 2007	Wellness Peer Counselor Xavier University of Louisiana, New Orleans, LA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Coordinated biweekly meetings ▪ Assisted in the development of monthly displays that highlighted healthy regimens or addressed health concerns pertinent to Xavier’s student body
Spring 2005, Spring 2007	Volunteer Xavier University of Louisiana, New Orleans, LA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mentored and tutored school-aged children ranging from kindergarteners to pre-teenagers from New Orleans
Spring 2004	Volunteer Pair Care Xavier University of Louisiana, New Orleans, LA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Organized social events for terminally ill children residing in New Orleans
Fall 2003	Volunteer Adopt-a-Grandparent Xavier University of Louisiana, New Orleans, LA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provided companionship and organized activities for elders residing in a senior residential facility in New Orleans

ACADEMIC HONORS AND AWARDS

Johns Hopkins University Department of Sociology Summer Research Grant, dissertation research, 2012
Johns Hopkins University Department of Sociology Program of Social Inequality Seed Research Grant, dissertation research, 2012
Johns Hopkins University Center for Africana Studies, Graduate Liaison, 2010
Xavier University of Louisiana, Ronald E. McNair Scholar, 2005-2007
Xavier University of Louisiana, Alpha Kappa Mu Honor Society Zeta Phi Rho Chapter, 2006
Xavier University of Louisiana, Howard Hughes Biomedical Honor Corp, 2003-2004
Xavier University of Louisiana, Dean’s List, 2003-2007

TECHNOLOGY SKILLS

Blackboard
MaxQDA (qualitative data analysis software)
Microsoft Office (Word, Outlook, Powerpoint, Publisher, Excel, Sharepoint)