

IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT IN ADULT OFFSPRING OF TRANSRACIAL ADOPTEES

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In transracial adoption, a child is taken in by a family with an ethnic or cultural background that differs from their birth family. This situation has many significant impacts, and while these impacts have been well-documented, there has been little investigation into how the adoptee's children are affected. This research project was designed to examine how identity formation in the adult offspring of transracial adoptees was influenced by their parent's adoption. The methods utilized in-person, semi-structured interviews, which were reviewed and analyzed for thematic elements pertaining to identity and identity formation. Two siblings participated in interviews. The findings show that these participants experienced many adversities faced by transracial adoptees. However, because of their transracially adopted parent's efforts to reconnect to their birth culture and share it with their children, these two individuals experienced a multicultural upbringing. Nevertheless, this diversity was accompanied by confusion. In these participants, a sense of belonging to multiple racial and cultural backgrounds was complicated by other social factors, preventing them from fully integrating into either group. Altogether, this study highlights the complexities of identity formation in the offspring of a transracial adoptee and accentuates the need for continued investigation into how transracial adoption influences outcomes in future generations.

Identity Development in Adult Offspring of Transracial Adoptees

Throughout the 20th century, researchers have scrutinized the complex impacts of transracial adoption (Lyman, 2017). Social workers, sociologists, psychologists, and others have devoted time and resources to understanding how this phenomenon impacts children raised by racially dissimilar families. While there is evidence that some adoptees develop into well-adjusted adults, other research highlights the many complications (Lee, 2003; Lyman, 2017; Silverman, 1993). An implicit ambiguity of identity is perhaps the most noteworthy feature, resulting in *identity confusion*. Researchers have responded by asserting that, in order to “develop positive racial and adoptive identities,” transracial adoptees must have diverse settings, accessible role models, and strong racial and ethnic connections (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute,

2009). However, despite this focus on the impacts of transracial adoption on an adoptee, there has been little—if any—research into how these impacts are passed on to future generations.

Accordingly, the intergenerational outcomes of transracial adoption beg to be explored: How are the offspring of transracial adoptees impacted by their parent's adoptive identity? The dearth of information on this topic is conspicuous. This research project aims to fill this gap by demonstrating the significance of transracial adoption on the offspring of an adoptee. Further, it strives to inspire future researchers to investigate this meaningful topic.

Literature Review

This literature review explores the impacts of transracial adoption in the United States. First, it summarizes the historical background of transracial adoption in America. Next, it offers a general examination of identity and identity formation, then focuses on identity formation in the transracial adoptee. Finally, it highlights the absence of research into the potential intergenerational impacts of identity formation on the offspring of transracial adoptees.

Transracial Adoption

The United States has undergone at least four major events relating to transracial adoption and its impact on adoptees.

WWII Adoptees. The beginnings of transracial adoption in the United States are linked to the international upheaval caused by World War II (WWII). The conflict created high numbers of orphaned children in foreign territories, later taken in by United States social services (Ittig, 2003). These children spurred a transformation in the existing adoption system, setting a national precedent for handling orphans caused by U.S. wars. Later, this example would guide social service agencies when a second influx of orphaned children was created by the Korean War (Kim, 2010).

Korean War Adoptees. In 1965, Korean adoptees comprised an estimated 10% of the U.S./Korean population (Kim, 2010, p. 21). By the 1970s, this had increased dramatically. At this time, Korean adoptions accounted for more than 50% of adoptions into the U.S. from other nations. This inflow contributed to a growing trend that began with WWII adoptees and significantly increased the overall number of transracial adoptions in the United States. However, international adoptees were not

the only factor in the growing number of transracial adoption; there was also a domestic counterpart.

Indian Adoption Project. The Indian Adoption Project (IAP) was developed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) in 1958 (Thibeault & Spencer, 2019). The project's general operations involved removing Native American children from their birth communities and placing them into White homes. The reasoning behind this practice was based on the belief that Native children would have more opportunities in White homes than in their birth communities and was fueled by racist attitudes against Native American families, parenting, and communities. Altogether, the government-sanctioned removal of Indigenous children from their communities continued for two decades before significant changes to adoption policy occurred. However, Native Americans were not the only minority group impacted by transracial adoption policy in the United States.

Adoption of Black Children. The history of transracial adoption in the Black community has a few significant events. First, following the National Adoption Survey of the Child Welfare League circa 1945, and the National Conference on Adoption in 1955, the high number of orphaned Black children prompted the U.S. to create new adoption policies (Madison & Schapiro, 1973). Despite various efforts to develop new approaches to finding homes for the growing number of Black children, after nearly two decades, the situation was still unresolved. As a result, in 1960, U.S. social service agencies officially supported transracial adoption as the solution. Consequently, the following decade would demonstrate the inherent challenges Black children face in White homes. In response to the cumulative issues of transracial adoption, the National Association of Black Social Workers advised significant reforms to adoption policy in the United States.

Response to Transracial Adoption

The vast number of transracial adoptions in the United States provided an invaluable pool of information reflecting how being adopted into a racially different home can impact adoptees. As a result, two major reforms to adoption policy laid the foundation for more culturally sensitive practices going forward.

Indian Child Welfare Act. In 1978, the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) established new regulations for how Native American adoptions should be handled (Thibeault & Spencer, 2019). ICWA's primary goal was to protect Native American communities from continued cultural genocide through assimilation. As a result, adoption agencies would no longer be permitted to remove Native chil-

dren from their communities and place them with families of another race (U.S. Department of the Interior, n.d.). Around the same time, the National Association of Black Social Workers urged additional policy changes.

National Association of Black Social Workers. In 1972, the National Association of Black Social Workers released its Position Statement on Transracial Adoptions. It establishes a case against transracial adoption in just over three pages, illuminating several negative impacts on children raised by families of differing racial backgrounds (National Association of Black Social Workers, 1972). First, they argued to "receive the total sense of themselves" physically, psychologically, and culturally, that Black children should be raised in Black homes (National Association of Black Social Workers, 1972, p. 1). They also highlight the importance of family, saying, "the family is the basic unit of society; one's first, most pervasive and only consistent culturing life experience" (National Association of Black Social Workers, 1972, p. 1). Further emphasis is given to Black children's significantly different developmental needs than White children, especially in terms of racial socialization: "Black children are taught, from an early age, highly sophisticated coping techniques to deal with racist practices perpetrated by individuals and Institutions" (National Association of Black Social Workers, 1972, p. 2). Altogether, the history of U.S. adoption policy is fraught with complexity and underscores the impacts of transracial adoption on the development of racial identity.

Identity Formation

Background

Identity formation is a complex topic that does not have a universal definition (Phinney, 2000). Identity development comprises two interrelated components: *personal identity* and *group identity*, though professionals debate which of these identities is foremost. While individualistic cultures emphasize *personal identity*, collectivist cultures regard *group identity* as the most important. However, in both cases, these identities are interdependent: one influences the other. It's also important to consider how one's context and "individual choice" shape identity formation, suggesting that we have some ability to choose who we become (Phinney, 2000, p. 30). Thus, the diverse landscape of privilege, opportunity, and environmental context play foundational roles in a youth's developing identity. Finally, a well-developed identity is essential to long-term flourishing and can be linked to "better adjustment, . . . positive personality, . . . supportive

parenting...academic achievement...[and overall] well-being” (Meeus, 2011). This meaningful process is an essential developmental task, yet it’s not so straightforward for transracial adoptees.

Identity Formation in Transracial Adoptees

The concept of racial identity is more complex than the color of one’s skin. While traditional notions about race are based primarily on skin color, more complex dynamics influence how individuals position themselves within the racial spectrum (American Anthropological Association, 1988, May 17; Ung, O’Connor, & Pillidge, 2012). Ung et al. (2012) presented a more nuanced perspective on racial identity in their paper, *The Development of Racial Identity in Transracially Adopted People: An Ecological Approach*. This approach introduced a five-part system emphasizing distinct factors influencing the construction of racial identity. These factors are “*genetic racial identity, imposed racial identity, cognitive racial identity, visual racial identity and feeling racial identity*” (Ung, O’Connor, & Pillidge, 2012, p. 73). These dimensions of racial identity are essential to understanding how transracial adoptees—and potentially their offspring—form their self-concept. A brief summary of each dimension follows.

Genetic Racial Identity is linked to the physical characteristics of one’s parents (e.g., skin tone, hair type, and other physical attributes). However, while this dimension of racial identity emphasizes the biological factors of race, it does not support biological notions of race. Genetic Racial Identity adheres to the position outlined by the American Anthropological Association’s Statement on Race, which says that race is a social construct, not a biologically valid concept that distinguishes groups based on genetics (American Anthropological Association, 1988, May 17). Nevertheless, genetic factors can help locate an individual within a larger context and support a sense of belonging (Ung, O’Connor, & Pillidge, 2012, p. 78).

Imposed Racial Identity is assessed externally and assigned to an adoptee by their community—sometimes accurately, but not always. Imposed racial identity “is a label given to the individual based on the perception of their race, which gives him or her an automatic relationship to the dominant and subordinate group” (Ung, O’Connor, & Pillidge, 2012, p. 78). This assignment of a racial category can impact multiracial adoptees by limiting their identity to externally-determined groups.

Cognitive Racial Identity is an imprint of an individual’s genetic and imposed racial identities and represents what they think or know themselves to be. This aspect of racial identity is a reflection of

labels and meanings a child internalizes through interaction with society. In daily life, this aspect of identity “is used to navigate and explain” an adoptee’s experiences and environment (Ung, O’Connor, & Pillidge, 2012, p. 79).

Visual Racial Identity “is the color one sees one’s skin to be” (Ung, O’Connor, & Pillidge, 2012, p. 80). This is not straightforward because a person’s skin color does not accurately indicate racial background. Fascinatingly, for many transracial adoptees, a sense of visual racial identity may not develop due to themes in their social environment. For example, the absence of individuals who share their physical attributes and discrimination of their race can distort a transracial adoptee’s ability to form an accurate visual racial identity. In their research, Ung et al. interviewed several transracial adoptees who, despite having dark skin tones, believed that they were White.

Feeling Racial Identity is the most complex dimension of racial identity and relates to an individual’s “internalized sense of self” (Ung, O’Connor, & Pillidge, 2012, p. 80). This dimension is the product of how an individual integrates racial and ethnic traditions, values, beliefs, and language into their self-identity: “Feeling racial identity is...heavily influenced by the race of the social community that surrounds an individual” (Ung et al., 2012, p. 81). As a result, an individual can be racially Asian or Hispanic yet White in their feeling identity, especially when living in a White community.

Altogether, this model of racial identity illumines the complexities inherent in a transracial adoptee’s formation of a self-identity. It also highlights how potential conflicts between the different dimensions of racial identity can confuse an adoptee’s identity formation process. These complications are reflected in some of the known impacts of transracial adoption.

Transracial Adoption Outcomes

Transracial adoptions have been the focus of research since at least the 1970s (Lyman, 2017). What follows is a brief review of significant findings concerning protective factors for transracial adoptees associated with integration and belonging.

Integration and Belonging

An individual’s sense of belonging to an ethnic group is referred to by the term *ethnic identity* (Pinderhughes & Rosnati, 2015). This aspect of identity is formed through an individual’s social relationships. Consequentially, the nature of transracial adoption can preclude the formation of significant ethnic relationships in an adoptee. This can impact their ability to form a sense of belonging to

their genetic lineage. As a result, many transracial adoptees face the challenge of integrating into their adoptive society and family while possibly searching for connections to their birth culture.

The most important finding of this study was that a moderate emphasis on ethnic identity in a transracial adoptee contributed to positive outcomes. In contrast, overemphasizing one's heritage culture complicates an adoptee's integration into their adoptive culture. The same type of relationship can be seen when the adoptive culture is more prominent than the heritage culture.

Bicultural Identity Integration

Bicultural Identity Integration measures how multicultural individuals "organize and combine their dual cultural backgrounds" and is influential in developing a positive, encompassing self-identity (Ferrari, Rosnati, Manzi, & Benet-Martínez, 2015). In fact, Bicultural Identity Integration "acts as a protective factor not only against risk behaviors but also in promoting adoptees' well-being in terms of self-acceptance, autonomy, and the ability to face life challenges" (Ferrari, Rosnati, Manzi, & Benet-Martínez, 2015, p. 9).

This study highlights "the complex process of identity construction among adoptees." It shows how emphasizing Bicultural Identity Integration can help adoptees "develop skills, motivation, and resources in order to better integrate their national identity with their ethnic identity" (Ferrari, Rosnati, Manzi, & Benet-Martínez, 2015).

Need for Additional Research

As this literature review outlines, the dynamics of identity formation and transracial adoption are complex and can have extensive repercussions on an individual's experience. The impact on transracial adoptees is evident. However, how these circumstances affect the children of a transracial adoptee remains to be examined. Therefore, research is needed to understand how having a transracial adoptee for a parent influences identity development in their offspring.

Methods

Research Question

How does having a transracial adoptee parent influence the process of racial identity formation?

Participant Recruitment

Participants were recruited through an IRB-approved call of interest dispersed via social media, email, and personal reference. An eligibility survey was used to identify appropriate participants. Two individuals participated in the research.

Confidentiality

Participant confidentiality was maintained by removing identifying information from forms and transcriptions when possible. When identifying information could not be redacted, sensitive files were safeguarded in an encrypted database.

Research Design

The research for this project was ethnographic, paying "particular attention to culture...or...how people make meaning," and consisted of in-person interviews with two participants (Green, Camilli, & Elmore, 2006, p. 279). Significantly, participants were siblings, raised in the same home, and share the same parents. Two interviews were conducted and recorded. Audio recordings were later transcribed, analyzed, and coded, highlighting themes.

Rationale

"Listening is probably the most important activity of an ethnographer during fieldwork" (Green, Camilli, & Elmore, 2006, p. 286). Semi-structured interviews were used to uncover how participants' experiences relate to the underlying research question. A semi-structured approach enabled the interviewer and interviewee to engage in friendly conversation, establishing rapport before delving into potentially sensitive areas (Spradley, 1979, p. 58). As noted by Spradley, an interview that is too formal or focused on the pointed gathering of information can block the development of empathy, which is an indispensable component of a successful interview. Additionally, questions were divided into three classes. The first class focused on participants' history, with little probing into deeper topics. The second class focused on a deeper level of participants' past and asked for information about their feelings. Finally, the third class focused on the specifics of participants' identities.

Data Analysis

Data analysis went through several phases. First, audio recordings were transcribed. Next, transcrip-

tions were reviewed for themes and coded to represent similar and differing experiences between participants. Importantly, the researcher consciously reviewed personal biases before examining the data to enhance opportunities to discover new connections. Next, using *structured query language* (SQL), the coded content was processed into dynamic reference tables, organized to show subject-matter relationships (Melton & Simon, 1993). Finally, the resulting data was considered and carefully assembled to represent similarities and differences between the two participants' experiences.

Results

Three classes of questions were used to investigate identity and identity formation in two participants, who are siblings raised in the same household and sharing the same parents. Question classes correlate with *adoption, family activities, and racial and cultural identity*. Structured interview questions were used to focus discussion on one of these three question areas; subsequent free-form conversations explored participants' related life experiences. Results reflect responses for each of the question classes.

A brief note on terminology: the words *Anishinaabe, Ojibwe*, and their derivatives are used interchangeably in this section, reflecting real-world usage when referring to Indigenous groups in the Great Lakes region. These terms do not comprise all Native peoples in this area.

Adoption

In both interviews, participants discussed their parent's adoptive status and relationship with their birth and adoptive families. For example, Participant A described being constantly aware of their parent's adoptive status, saying, "I feel like it was something we always were aware of, ... from childhood, I always knew." She continued, "Mom... kind of wore it on her; ... it just was always a part of her." Similarly, Participant B said, "we all knew that my mom was adopted. It was just... a standard part of our family knowledge."

Participant A also expressed how her personal perspective on raising children was shaped by her mother's adoptive status, saying, "I don't understand how you could give your child away." However, she quickly added, "I don't fault [my mom's] parents for giving her up because I know that in some situations, that is the best option." Later, she contemplated the impact being "given away" had on her mother, implying that her mother's personality was "developed... quite a bit" by this experience. Consequently, these developments led her mother to impose the ramifications of her adoption on her family. Participant

A noted, "as a child... I thought, 'well, that's your problem, and I wish it wasn't my problem.'"

Family Activities and Holidays

Both participants reflected on how their family celebrated holidays, stating that holiday celebrations were not linked to religious practice but instead focused on "family getting together." Additionally, while Participant A dismissed the idea that celebrations had a cultural component, Participant B felt differently, saying, "we spent summers going to powwows... we went to a lot of ceremonies." When asked to talk more about these cultural activities, he said the family attended powwows together from the time of his birth: "there are pictures of us at powwows in my mom and dad's arms." Other types of gatherings appeared later in life: "I think things like the shaking tent ceremony... [started] when I was 14 or 15... Going to sweats [also began around that time]." Additionally, both participants' responses indicated that a significant theme of all family activities during their upbringing was a connection to nature.

Connection to Nature

A connection to nature was prominent in both participants' responses to questions. They described various activities like canoeing, backcountry walks, large outdoor gatherings, cabin stays on Northern lakes, and family foraging for wild foods. Participant A referenced this connection throughout the interview, remarking, "that's probably my biggest tie" to [my Native] heritage. She feels her Native ancestry helped develop her respect for "all the animals, ... all the plants, bugs, ... and the little things." Later, she used her inborn connection to nature to oppose "European colonization" and the attitude of "more, more, more, ... take, take, take." Participant B emphasized the connection to the natural world, saying family activities "pretty much centered around nature."

Racial and Cultural Identity

The topic of racial and cultural identity elicited the most significant response from both participants. However, their perspectives emphasized different experiences and their influence on the development of racial and cultural identity. Several subtopics were covered in the responses: loss, cultural obscurity, belonging, and how cultural knowledge was included in their upbringings.

Cultural Obscurity

Throughout the interview, Participant A described how a sense of obscurity surrounded her identity and expressed curiosity about the role her

ancestors might have played in her identity. She mused, what can be attributed to “my Native American side?” What can be attributed to “my Scandinavian side?” She continued, “whenever I read books that are set in a culture that I know I have a heritage in, I wonder, is that why I am like that?” Later, when talking about how her family frequently attended powwows, she said, “it’s neat to witness them, and I guess it makes [me] wonder if I grew up in that kind of community... would I be dancing out there?”

She also discussed how a feeling of disconnection and “unknowing” made her “feel excluded.” However, she remarked, “it’s the way it’s always been... it feels like... a loss of something that I didn’t ever really have... but that the opportunity to have never really existed.” Participant A also noted, “one thing you lose when you don’t know your relatives before you is... the ability to compare yourself to... your grandma or [others] and understand” what traits you might have inherited. Even so, this participant imagined where some of her qualities might have originated. She speculated, “when I think about my Scandinavian side, I think... I’m such... a potatoes and fish and... butter” kind of person.

She also mentioned how she has taken steps to realize her Native culture, clearing away the cloud of obscurity: “I think the reason I learned how to tap maple trees and make syrup is because I know that... traditionally, the Sugarbush was passed down through the women... they were the ones who made it, and I felt like that was a strong connection that I could have within me.” This comment brought into focus another salient theme of the interview: the connection to cultural traditions.

Cultural Knowledge and Traditions

Connection to cultural knowledge and traditions played a significant role in many of the responses given by both participants. These instances included their father’s Scandinavian ancestry and their mother’s Anishinaabe birth culture. Participant B remembered how despite Ojibwe not being “spoken conversationally in our house, it was used for naming things like” the name of a cedar tree—“giizhik,” or how Lake Superior is called “Gichigami.” Additionally, he recalled how his mother “made a real effort to make it [the Anishinaabe culture] present and real.” For example, “going on walks... she would always be showing me plants... and tell me their English name, and then tell me their... Ojibwe name.” These walks also included teachings about how these plants could be used medicinally and spiritually.

His mother also taught him how putting tobacco down was a way of giving thanks: “she taught me that things aren’t just mine to take,” emphasizing the

importance of relationship: “if I need this plant—if I need to gather the sweetgrass..., I don’t just get to rip it up out of the ground. I have to have a relationship with it [first].” Participant A mentioned her commitment to tapping maple trees for syrup and also stated, “I’ve never been wild ricing, and I think that would be amazing.” Participant B mentioned the educational and cultural resources available in his home.

We had “books that... spoke to Ojibwe culture” and even an early 19th-century version of the Gospel of Matthew written in Ojibwemowin [the Ojibwe Language], which the participant admitted to having “mixed feelings about.” He explained that “thinking about how the cultural genocide of the Native peoples was intertwined with the spread of Christianity in the United States makes me feel really—I guess I just have really strong mixed feelings about that document.” However, the Native heritage from their mother’s lineage wasn’t the only cultural wellspring in the home.

Participant B talked about enjoying cultural foods native to Scandinavia, “like pickled herring, lefse, and sylta (head cheese), saying they were “always present and... celebrated.” He also remarked that later in life, after “going to Scandinavia and visiting the farm where... my family immigrated from and seeing how people in Norway live their lives, I realize that a lot of things—even though I didn’t know it...—a lot of the things that were just like a mirror of what I saw in Scandinavia.”

Loss and Belonging

Participant A reflected on feelings of loss surrounding her ethnic identity. She described not participating in [Ojibwe] cultural activities often and that when she did, she somehow didn’t belong: “I think that we are lacking in having traditions come down through culture.” She continued, saying it would have “been neat to have as part of my life.” She also expressed her reluctance to incorporate cultural traditions into her life now, saying they “didn’t get passed down, so they’re not part of my life now, and like trying to make something up is a little hokey to me.” However, while Participant A conveyed a sense of irrevocable loss, she also noted an internal strength. She believes this resilience was inherited despite her disconnection from her cultural lineage. “I think we’re strong,” she stated, “we must be really strong because people tried to eliminate our ancestors on two different continents.”

Participant B referenced belonging, inclusion, and exclusion in numerous ways. He discussed how, as an adult, he had become aware that whenever referring to his Native heritage, it was always an attribute of his mother: “I would say, ‘my mom’s

family; I would never say, “my family.” Similarly, he discussed how he felt hesitant to claim his Native heritage because his visual appearance set him apart from the group. Participant B said that even though he was “welcomed by the Anishinaabe people” in his life, he still “perceived... [himself] to be different because... [he] looked different.” He said, “that was huge for me.” He continued,

it was really complex because I felt like I was around/participating in that culture from an early enough age that it was my culture. So, when I was in the culture, I understood what was happening. I understood the unspoken context of things in a lot of ways an outsider wouldn't, but because I didn't visually present like a lot of people in the culture did, I felt excluded even though I don't think anyone was excluding me. I felt separated out.

However, he followed up by saying, “now I've learned that there are a lot of people... who are Native who don't” [present with a stereotypical visual appearance]. Later in the interview, when asked how he identifies racially, he said, “[these days,] I am more willing to claim, especially my Anishinaabe side. Even though I think I secretly always did, I don't think that I felt comfortable... I always felt like I was lying. I don't feel that way anymore.”

Participant B disclosed that “belonging is really important, and I think more important,... [is the] feeling... I don't belong to my own racial ancestry.” He continued, “a lot of people have that experience, and that is something I keep learning. And it's not, maybe, not just due to adoption,...—especially with the Ojibwe people. It has to do with intergenerational trauma.”

Discussion

The exploration of how transracial adoption impacts identity development in the offspring of an adoptee revealed several significant areas of interest. First, cultural loss and a loss of connection with family lineage were contrasted with the impact of deliberate personal choice. Second, responses highlighted how self-identity is influenced by one's environment and community. Finally, participants' accounts emphasized the complexities of group membership, the dimensions of racial identity described by Ung et al., and how their preexisting confusion complicated their developing self-concept. Each of these pieces can be connected to their mother's transracial adoption.

The reality of their mother's adoption appears to have been hard-wired into both participants' family knowledge. Correspondingly, their mother's feel-

ings of cultural loss and disconnection might have been integrated into participants' learned experience of identity, leading to some confusion at a deep level of self-understanding. Even so, an awareness of their mother's ambiguity seems to have inspired both children to make conscious choices concerning identity and self-expression. This suggests that awareness and choice are vital components of how a transracial adoptee's offspring are involved in consciously creating identity.

Despite the obscurity surrounding participants' racial and cultural identities, interview responses underscored how engaging in cultural activities has created a connection to participants' multi-racial heritage. This appeared to be true for both their Native American and Scandinavian ancestry. These connections suggest an important distinction: cultural affiliations predating colonization (in the case of their Native heritage) and immigration (in the case of their Scandinavian heritage) are essential ingredients in how these individuals have taken part in forming their identities. These examples of personal determination reflect the power of engagement and choice in identity formation.

Loss of connection to culture and family lineage was a common theme in the interviews. The disconnection caused by their mother's adoption evidentially separated participants from an essential body of self-knowledge. Accordingly, responses indicated how a lack of awareness regarding the roots of character traits left participants to ponder the origins of such qualities and whether they could be attributed to familial or cultural characteristics. Consequently, these and other instances of intergenerational inheritance suggest the importance of understanding how one's self-identity can be linked to a larger picture and, without it, how obfuscation predominates self-exploration.

Ambiguous cultural and racial group membership influenced the lives of both participants, making it difficult to establish a clear understanding of self. However, interestingly, little of this doubt originated externally (i.e., by hearing messages from other group members). Instead, the source of this ambiguity resulted from internal confusion and a lack of confidence. Curiously, this insecurity persisted despite a pattern of repeated positive and welcoming cultural experiences and seems to have been based on *visual racial identity* and the participants' recognition of looking unlike others in the Anishinaabe community (Ung et al., 2012).

These interviews gave insight into how transracial adoption impacts identity formation in the offspring of an adoptee. Furthermore, responses revealed how transracial adoption created significant adversities that affected the formation of

self-identity and group belonging. Nevertheless, other elements exposed how the parent's adoptive experience activated protective factors that supported active connection to participants' family lineage. Overall, these interviews underscored the complex interplay of factors influencing how transracial adoption shapes identity formation in the offspring of an adoptee and how active engagement creates opportunities for reconnection.

Limitations

This research faced a few limitations, mainly due to the niche target identity of participants. The specific characteristics needed to explore the research question made it difficult to reach eligible individuals within the study's timeframe.

Further Research

A strong sense of self-identity is an essential component of well-being, and one's self-identity is regulated by their environment, group membership, and cultural embeddedness (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). At the macro level, this notion underpins the need to understand how transracial adoption impacts future generations. However, on a mezzo and micro level, this topic concerns an individual's relationships and quality of life. It's about connectedness and how community nourishes self-understanding, how self-understanding supports well-being, and lays a stable foundation for future generations. With this in mind, the significance of further research cannot be overstated. A deeper understanding of how transracial adoption impacts the offspring of transracial adoptees encompasses individual quality of life and the well-being of society as a whole. Further research can provide vital context to individuals navigating complex identity issues, the social service providers who assist them, and policymakers who pave the way for a new system that accounts for the nuances of identity development in transracial adoptees and their descendants.

Conclusion

The heart of this study is about connection. It's about how connections between people are the building blocks of well-being and how, without them, we can struggle to understand our place in the world. It's also about disconnection and how transracial adoption contributes to a sense of detachment from one's cultural, communal, and familial identities. This detachment can produce feelings of isolation and doubt, resulting in a vague sense of belonging that can have life-long impacts. Yet, this study also highlights resilience, personal choice, and humanity's instinctual search for meaning.

As shown in the participant's responses, the

reality of having a multiracial background and a history of transracial adoption is complex. There are no discrete black-and-white categories. Instead, cultural loss and active engagement amend each other, making way for people to enrich their lives proactively. And while transracial adoption may contribute to a sense of disconnection, it may also bestow a kind of *tabula rasa*. Such a *clean slate* might enable individuals to follow their curiosity without bias, creating meaningful connections and empowering them to shape their own unique identities. At the same time, inborn curiosity might also extend from the current of intergenerational genetic memory, which flows freely from ancestor to heir without being affected by a history of transracial adoption. Paradoxically, these perspectives may coexist, forming a synergy akin to the relationship between individual and community and creating the opportunity for the offspring of transracial adoptees to participate in the developmental process of identity formation. While the scope of this process is abstruse, it seems that with enough support, a curious individual can transform the labor of creating a self-identity into a work of art.

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