

Significance of ethnic and racial identity in inter-country adoption within the United States.

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#### Development of inter-country adoptions

The modern practice of inter-country adoption emerged immediately after World War 11 when the disruption of families in war-torn countries left behind large numbers of abandoned and orphaned children. These children migrated from one European country to another and from Europe to the United States where many were placed in permanent adoptive homes (Joe, 1978; Resnick, 1984). Under the Displaced Persons Act of 1948, over 4,000 children from Europe were adopted by American families.

It was the Korean conflict that brought inter-country adoption fully into the American national consciousness. In 1953 the United States government passed the Refugee Relief Act (repealed in 1961) that enabled American families to obtain a visa for a child adopted by proxy under the laws of another country. Proxy adoptions allowed the placement of a child in an American home, sight unseen. This greatly enhanced the procedures for adopting a foreign child and reduced the cost and time associated with more standard procedures (Adams & Kim, 1971; Bennett, 1976).

Hundreds of immigrant children from Japan and Korea were brought to the United States for adoption. At that time children born outside marriage or who had American and Korean parents were virtually unadoptable in Korea, whose society emphasised the importance of bloodlines. Moreover, many felt that the mixed race Korean child would be discriminated against, would have very different physical characteristics and could develop identity problems in so homogeneous a society as Korea (Kramer, 1975; McRoy and Zurcher, 1983). Many of these mixed race abandoned children were brought to the United States through various inter-country adoption programmes, such as the Holt International Children's Services in Oregon. The numbers of Korean inter-country adoptions began to decline somewhat in 1974, after Korea passed legislation that called for the domestic adoption of one Korean child for each inter-country adoption. This policy led many families and adoption agencies to seek children from other countries (McRoy, 1990).

In the mid-1970s Vietnam became the focus of much attention for many adoption agencies and adoptive parents. Through Operation Baby-lift, orphaned Vietnamese or Vietnamese-mixed children were evacuated from that embattled country and brought to the United States for adoption.

Since 1973, the annual number of inter-country adoptions in the United States has increased from 4,323 to a high of 10,097 in 1987 with a slight decline to 9,180 in 1988. Inter-country adoptions represent approximately one-fifth of all US unrelated adoptions annually. The number of US agencies providing inter-country adoption services has also increased from 50 in 1977 to 130 in 1987 (Smith, 1988).

Fifty-five per cent of the children adopted internationally are female and 63% are under one year of age. Although over half of the children still come from Korea, American families are also adopting children from many other countries including India, Colombia, the Philippines, Guatemala, Chile, Mexico, Brazil, El Salvador and Honduras. In fact, the number of children adopted from Latin America has increased dramatically since the mid-1970s. Latin America has become the second major source area for adoptable children, outranking Europe and Canada. In 1975, 977 Latin American children were admitted to the United States through inter-country adoption and in 1987 that number had increased to 2,315.

The American adoption movement was developed to meet the needs of primarily white, middle-class, infertile couples (Ladner, 1977, McRoy, 1990). Thus little consideration was generally given to the ethnic identity needs of the child placed across national boundaries since it was generally felt that the child's primary needs were being met by being rescued from persecution, poverty, or war and being provided a permanent home.

#### Ethnic matching in transracial and inter-country adoptions

The question of ethnic matching of children and adoptive parents is one of the most debated issues in the adoption field today (Meezan, 1980). The Child Welfare League of America Standards have changed dramatically over the years with regard to ethnic matching. The 1958 standards which advised matching between parents and children were changed in the late 1960s to suggest that families could be found in most communities who have the capacity to adopt a child of a different background than their own (Child Welfare League of America, 1968). This change occurred as inter-country and transracial adoptions increased in the 1960s, due in part to the nation's focus on integration and the civil rights movement. However, after the National Association of Black Social Workers protested against transracial adoptions in 1972, indicating that, 'Black children belong physically and psychologically and culturally in black families where they receive the total sense of themselves and develop a sound projection of their future' (National Association of Black Social Workers, 1972, pp 2 - 3), the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) reversed its 1968 position. In 1973, the CWLA Standards advocated in-racial or 'same race' placements. Similarly, as Native Americans became increasingly concerned about the numerous placements of Native American children in white adoptive homes, the Indian Child Welfare Act was passed in 1978, which called for the placement of American Indian children in American Indian families (McRoy and Zurcher, 1983; McRoy, 1990). The 1987 CWLA Standards reflected continued support of same race placements, but warned agencies against prolonging or denying a black child a placement because of the lack of same race adoptive families (CWLA, 1987). Transracial adoption cases are constantly being heard in the US judicial system today as white foster families fight to adopt black infants in their care and agencies debate the legality of policies which advocate same race placements for black children. Despite the changing policy and political controversy surrounding transracial placement of black children in white adoptive families, only limited attention has been given to inter-country placements, in which Children come from not only a different

ethnic background, but also a different country and are placed with white American adoptive families.

#### Inter-country adoption studies

In the United States inter-country adoptions have received less research attention than transracial adoptions. Although it is estimated that only about twelve hundred transracial adoptions take place annually in the United States, since the early 1970s over twenty published studies have been conducted on this practice and it remains at the forefront of US media attention on adoption issues (McRoy, 1990). The majority of these transracial studies have focussed on the adjustment of black children in white families (McRoy & Zurcher, 1983; Scarr and Weinberg, 1978; Silverman and Feigelman, 1981; Simon and Altstein, 1987). However, a couple of studies have looked at Native American and Hispanic children in white adoptive families (Fanshel, 1972; Andujo, 1988).

Inter-country adoption has been less controversial, in part perhaps because its practice developed out of the devastation created by war and other natural and man-made disasters. Many, perhaps, believe that issues such as ethnic identity of inter-country adopted children has less effect than the consequences of remaining homeless or in an orphanage in a war ravaged or economically depressed country. There may also be a prevailing attitude that it is more difficult to generalise in meaningful ways inter-country adoption studies and their impact on the adoptive relationship for the children and adoptive parents. This may contribute to the apparent lower demand for research in the area of inter-country adoptions to inform or provide direction for adoption practice or policy. Ressler, Boothby, and Steinbock (1988) noting the paucity of studies on inter-country adoptions, concluded that despite the greater frequency of inter-country adoptions than transracial adoptions, inter-country adoptions are less politicised than transracial adoptions in the United States. Since 1970, only nine studies were found in the published literature that focussed on inter-country adoption.

The majority of US inter-country adoption studies have very limited samples and reported on family demographic data and general adjustment patterns of the adopted children. Most of these studies have focused on adopted Asian children and none have focused upon Latin American children in adoptive homes. Many are anecdotal accounts of Korean children living in white American families. Some of the research findings on inter-country adoptions and transracial adoptions are presented below. Issues specifically related to ethnic identity in inter-country adoptions will be emphasised.

Several researchers (Adams and Kim, 1971; Kim, 1978; Pettis, 1958) have noted parallel issues between transracial and inter-country adoptions. Some of the issues common to both transracial and inter-country adoptions include: behavioural, psychological, emotional and physical adjustment to the home environment; adjustment of the adopted child and the parents; the development of self-identity and ethnic identity of the adopted child; parental motivations for choosing to adopt a child that has a different racial and ethnic background; and questions about the long-term effects and adjustment of the child and the family.

In the first nationwide study of internationally adopted children in the US, Kim (1977) found that their overall adjustment and socialisation appeared to be positive and healthy. The study conducted on 406 Korean children and children of mixed Korean parentage, whose ages ranged from 12 to 17 years, indicated that the children appeared to have little Korean identity. Their self-concept was described as being similar to that of other American children. Though no significant differences were noted, the study did indicate that those children adopted after six years of age had a somewhat lower self-concept, were less

well-adjusted, and lower in socialisation skills than those adopted at an earlier age.

In a follow-up report on the children and their families, Kim (1978) indicated that there were latent signs that seemed to point to possible pathological symptomatology among the 406 Korean children. Both sexes reported to be extremely concerned with their physical appearance, complaining of their small stature, dark skin, short legs, flat noses and other perceived negative characteristics. Though more than 60 per cent of the adopted children were racially pure Koreans, they tended to reject their own racial background as more than 35 per cent of the children believed that they belonged to the 'American' group, only a little more than eight per cent identified with the 'Korean' group, and the majority identified with the 'Korean-American' group. The author suggested that the children's preference for group identity may have been influenced by their parents' attitudes. Many of the adoptive parents indicated that they saw no colour, race or nationality in their adopted children. A majority of the families planned to train the children for complete Americanisation (27.9 per cent) or to make them Americans, but aware of their Korean heritage (58.6 per cent) (p 482).

Earlier studies of internationally adopted children described parental experiences with the children's initial adjustment problems. Rathbun, DiVirgilio, and Waldfogel (1958) described children who exhibited problem behaviours relating to food, such as overeating, hoarding, and secreting stockpiles of food. Other early researchers (DiVirgilio, 1956; Valk, 1957) reported a range of sleeping problems exhibited by recently adopted foreign children, including insomnia, night terrors, and acute discomfort with their beds. In a follow-up study, thirty-three of the thirty-eight children in the earlier study conducted by Rathbun, et al (1958) were re-interviewed by Rathbun, McLaughlin, Bennet, and Garland (1965). Six years after the initial adoption of the children they reported that the majority of the children displayed an 'almost incredible resiliency' (p 608). Fears of major adjustment problems of the adopted children were greatly reduced and the authors suggested that early psychic damage can possibly be reversed.

Reporting on their initial phase of a longitudinal study of internationally adopted children, Kim, Hong, and Kim (1979) interviewed fifteen American couples with adopted Korean children. Exploring the adjustment of the children and the families in the adoptive relationship, nine couples reported behavioural problems severe enough for them to seek professional help. Ten adoptive couples anticipated social problems and difficulties for their adopted children, such as racial heckling, teasing, dating problems and other difficulties in the community and school. Two couples anticipated no problems and three couples had never thought about such adjustment problems. More recently researchers (Kim, 1980; Ressler, et al, 1988) have emphasised the transience of these types of adjustment problems and highlighted the resiliency and capacity of the children to adapt to the behavioural, linguistic, and cultural demands of their new home and community.

Hei Sook Park Wilkinson (1985) reported on her study findings of eight Korean children who had been placed with white families in Detroit, Michigan. The four boys and four girls had an average age of 5.9 years and had been in the United States an average of 2.6 years. Wilkinson noted that although their adoption workers viewed these children as well adjusted to their new environments, she found that despite the noticeable Oriental features, they regarded being Korean as less desirable than white. Wilkinson proposed the following five stages that Korean adopted children may experience as they begin to acknowledge and accept their ethnic background. Initially children are in stage one, denial, in which they deliberately choose not to acknowledge anything Korean. Children in this stage may be very uncomfortable upon seeing another Korean and wish to be

identified with their American adoptive families. Inner awakening is the second stage in which children may gradually become more comfortable with their heritage. They are no longer rejecting anything Korean, but tend to passively express interest in their native country and culture. Passive expression changes to active interest in the third stage, acknowledgement. They may speak with great delight upon seeing or learning about the culture. Some Korean children after coming from a Korean culture camp, surprise their parents upon their return, as they excitedly talk about the many Korean children who were at camp. When they reach the fourth stage of identification, these children actively seek out other Koreans with whom to relate, and may become immersed in learning more about the culture. They may become proud of their features and feel good about their background. When they reach the final stage, acceptance, they can generally relate to both worlds while feeling good about themselves. They come to some resolution of their situation and have a deeper understanding of themselves as Koreans living with white adoptive parents in American society (Wilkinson, 1985). These stages described by Wilkinson are fluid, not static, and are very similar to the stages of black racial identity development proposed by other researchers (Cross, 1987; Bell and Evans, 1981).

Koh (1988) interviewed 60 parents, children and teachers to gain a better understanding of outcomes of inter-country adoptions. The children in the study were between four and 16 years old at the time of placement. Koh reported on the impact of physical as well as emotional differences between American and Confucian cultures. She noted the conflicts many older inter-country adoptees experience as they attempt to deal with divided loyalties between birth and adoptive parents or between their culture and that of white Americans. She found some parents who encouraged their child to learn a great deal about their culture, but the child had no interest. Some of these children may have felt anger or shame based on their recollections of life in their home countries, and wished to reject any reminders of this.

Some adopted children want so much to be like their families, they sometimes even forget the obvious physical differences. Koh gave the following illustration of a comment made by a fifteen-year-old girl in her study: 'Since I live with American parents, I feel and talk like an American, but when I see myself in the mirror, I see a Korean face and get startled' (p 116). Other children may have still had an allegiance to their home countries and culture, but sense that their parents desired that they identify with them and American culture. Therefore, they make special efforts to become Americanised.

#### Development of racial and ethnic identity

Identity development is a complex task for all young adults, but it is especially complex for youth who look differently from their other family members and peers. Inter-country adopted youth must answer, 'Who am I; Why was I adopted?; Why was I placed in another country with a family so different from my own?'.  
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Children as young as three become aware of racial differences and soon are able to understand the significance society places on those differences. Black children quickly become aware of the negative stereotypes often associated with their racial group and learn what it means to be black versus white in American society. Several transracial adoption researchers (McRoy and Zurcher, 1983; Feigelman and Silverman, 1983) reported an association between parental perceptions of the child's racial identity and the child's racial self-perception. McRoy and Zurcher (1983) noted: 'Parents who indicated that "human identity" or other characteristics such as intelligence or hobbies were more important than racial identity, and who discouraged the adopted child focussing on racial issues, tended to have children who were reluctant to refer to themselves as belonging to a particular racial group' (p 36).

If they are in a family environment which supports their black identity and gives them positive feedback on their appearance and their racial background, they will develop positive racial self-feelings. If they are in an environment which takes a 'colour-blind approach', and does not address differences and recognise how vulnerable and uncomfortable the child may feel being different from his or her peers and family, the child may grow to feel that there is something negative about his racial background or appearance and may either deny it, disassociate with all reminders of his background, or try to change his appearance (McRoy, 1990). In one of the author's studies on transracially adopted children, an eight-year-old boy attempted to set his hair on fire in order to destroy the part of his body which he felt set him apart from his adoptive family.

Korean children or other inter-country adoptees often find that they are viewed as 'exotic' children and their differences are considered very positive, even beautiful. Many find that throughout their childhood, they are on display - almost like 'china dolls' - worthy of much admiration and attention. Some at times just wish that they could blend in like everybody else. They are frequently asked questions about their adoptive status and the whereabouts of their birthparents. Adoption becomes a major issue as they must continually find ways to respond when asked about their adoption story.

When these inter-country adopted children get older, they often are no longer viewed as such a novelty and are sometimes subjected to racial taunting and teasing. In a race-conscious society such as the United States, children tend to be judged by their phenotypic characteristics. They sometimes report having been confronted with racial slurs and name calling such as Chink, Jap, flat nose, and slanted eyes (Koh, 1988).

Children who have physical characteristics which suggest that they are black or perhaps Asian or Mexican-American are viewed by other youth with suspicion if they are operating in Wilkinson's (1985) stage one of denial of their ethnic heritage. Latin American adopted children living in the south-western states are often confused with local Hispanic, Mexican American children. They may experience the negative stereotypes often associated with Mexican Americans, and find that if they do not associate with Mexican Americans they are assumed to be 'coconuts' - brown on the outside and white on the inside (Nelson-Erichsen, 1991).

They may be challenged not only by whites but other Asian and other ethnic group members as well. Some older inter-country adoptees feel a great deal of allegiance to their white adoptive families but often are confronted by other youth who express anti-white sentiments and a desire for minority group solidarity. Upon experiencing ostracism from other Asians or Mexican Americans, many inter-country adoptees begin to become even more identified with white society and rejecting of their own culture.

As in the case of transracially adopted children, inter-country adopted children who have parents who de-emphasise their heritage similarly learn to de-emphasise their ethnicity and may become uncomfortable when confronted with reminders of their heritage. These adopted children use a variety of defence mechanisms and coping strategies to deal with ethnic differences. Some use denial, i.e., 'I'm not black, I'm mixed'; 'I'm not black, I'm tan'. Others, feeling that they can never be accepted, no matter how much they deny their background or choose to identify with the negative stereotypes they have learned about their heritage. They may become hostile and rejecting towards whites and seek out deviant peers to reinforce negative identity (Gibbs, 1989).

Others over-identify with their white adoptive families or peers and indicate

that they have no interest in ever dating a Korean or have no interest in going to a Korean culture camp. As they strive for acceptance by their families and peers, they seem to undergo a process of attempting to minimise the differences between themselves and their families and peers by denial, or rejecting all reminders of their origins. Some desire to completely change their appearance so they can be 'more white'. A parent of a Korean teenager reported that his daughter had asked to have plastic surgery so that her eyes would look more like her white adoptive mother's.

Kim (1981) reported the findings of a study of Asian-American ethnic identity formation. Although the sample population was not adopted, the stages of identity formation seem applicable to inter-country adoptions. From an assessment of adult Asian women, Kim (1981) found a similar evolutionary process as discussed by Wilkinson (1985). Initially, there is an acceptance of white beauty standards and a tendency towards white identification. An ethnic awakening experience may trigger the next stage of social political consciousness. The third stage involves an immersion in Asian culture and rejection of white society. Finally, a confident secure sense of self emerges as one can more accurately assess one's own ethnic group and others.

#### Implications for adoption agencies and families

Ethnic similarity of parents and children is a factor that is relevant in adoption practice and policy. The adoption home study should include an assessment of the total psychological and social milieu of potential adoptive families. Studies on inter-country adoptions and transracial adoptions tend to suggest that white families seem somewhat polarised on the issue of emphasising ethnic identity. Some believe that ethnic identity is not important and that the adopted child is better off becoming Americanised and living like all other Americans. Others recognise the significance of the child's ethnic reality and wish to help the child address these issues (Gill and Jackson, 1983).

Research on transracial adoptions suggests children who develop positive racial and ethnic self-feelings have families who acknowledge the significance of ethnic identity. The child receives subtle and perhaps not so subtle messages about his/her racial identity from friends, family and society. Families who deny the significance of nationality and ethnic background are failing to prepare their children for a world which believes these are important.

Historically US adoptions have conformed to a matching philosophy. This was based upon the notion that children with similar characteristics as their parents can more easily blend into a family. Where great dissimilarity exists, in terms of physical features, personality traits or cultural characteristics, mismatch problems can occur. In keeping with this philosophy, adoption agencies should consider cultural compatibility between families and children in making adoption decisions. Decision-making should be child-centered with the needs of the child being given priority over the desires of fee-paying families.

For a variety of reasons, we cannot always conform to the matching philosophy. However, when inter-country placements seem to be in the best interests of the child, consideration should be given to finding a family in a country which is culturally more like the child's birth country. The child should not be forced to find ways to adapt - to have to minimise cultural, racial and physical differences. Families should be selected who accept the responsibility of minimising the difference between the family and the child. The adoptive parents and family must be willing to learn as much as possible about the culture and background of the child and be willing to accept the ongoing responsibility of understanding the child's reality.

Adoptive families who seek and have ongoing contact with persons of the same

ethnic background as their adopted child, model for the child acceptance, not only of their minority child, but of others who have the same ethnic background as their child. The child in this situation views others like him and no longer feels so very different from everyone. The child also learns more about and from persons of his or her own ethnic and racial background. They find that they no longer have to deny their heritage - instead they become bicultural and accept both worlds.

Some agencies, for example Children's Home Society in Minnesota, offer Korean children's groups and teen groups to help children develop positive identities. Parents are also encouraged to nurture the child's identity, as this is critical to healthy adjustment. Children clearly need to have an opportunity to come to terms with their past -whether they were abandoned or whatever negative feelings they may have about their birth families or birth countries. Special efforts are needed on the part of inter-country adoptive families and agencies to facilitate this adjustment.

Some studies have suggested that families and agencies sometimes emphasise cultural awareness when the child is very young, but as the child grows older, these issues seem to become less salient (Gill and Jackson, 1983). Longitudinal studies of transracial adoptions have shown that some families who initially moved to a racially integrated area when the child was young, may have moved back to an all-white area once the child reaches middle childhood or adolescence (Simon and Altstein, 1987). However, it is during this period of development when identity issues become even more salient for the child. Just as the child's understanding of adoption evolves developmentally, so does the child's identity. Identity issues, as well as adoption concerns, at the age of five may be very different from those during the adopted child's adolescence, and the family and agency must be prepared to address these identity issues as they emerge.

Racial and ethnic identity is extremely important in inter-country adoptions as well as transracial adoptions. Much more research is needed to assess the evolution and long-term adjustment and identity of children who have been placed internationally. However, most importantly, attention should be given to improving, where possible, the situation of Joe B, 'In defense of inter-country adoption', Social birth parents and families in other foreign countries to eventually reduce the need for inter-country adoptive placements.

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**Objectives:** We examined ethnic-racial and gender identities and their relations to self-esteem and well-being among Cherokee early adolescents. We also explored gender differences in the significance to boys and girls of ethnic-racial and gender identities. **Method:** The sample consisted of 212 Cherokee 6th, 7th, and 8th grade girls and boys (M age  $\bar{X}$  12.7 years). Adolescents completed survey measures of gender and ethnic-racial centrality, gender private regard, ethnic-racial private regard, ethnic-racial public regard, self-esteem, and three measures of well-being. **Results:** Both genders reported high levels of the importance of being Cherokee to their identity (i.e., centrality), and strong positive attitudes toward being Cherokee (i.e., ethnic-racial private regard). The country of origin most commonly cited among those who identify themselves as Arab American is. The term White ethnic refers to those Americans whose ancestors came from Europe within the last century and a half, including people of which of the following ancestries? Polish German Irish Italian. Many Jews in the United States have chosen to blend in with the larger society through. "Copyright owner", with respect to any one of the exclusive rights comprised in a copyright, refers to the owner of that particular right. A "Copyright Royalty Judge" is a Copyright Royalty Judge appointed under section 802 of this title, and includes any individual serving as an interim Copyright Royalty Judge under such section.6. (B) simultaneously in the United States and another treaty party or parties, whose law grants a term of copyright protection that is the same as or longer than the term provided in the United States; (C) simultaneously in the United States and a foreign nation that is not a treaty party; or.