



Rethinking Adoption in the 21st Century: Shifting the Paradigm from `Child Placement` to `Family Success`

A Need to Know: The Importance of Origins

Euradopt International Conference – May 28, 2019

National Center on Adoption and Permanency

www.ncap-us.org

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National Center on Adoption and Permanency

Our Vision: Successful Families for All Children

The **National Center on Adoption and Permanency** (NCAP) is a unique “one-stop” organization that provides a broad range of information, resources and multidisciplinary services relating to adoption, foster care and child welfare.



NCAP's mission is not only to achieve permanency for all children – in families of origin when possible and in new ones when necessary – but also to reshape policy and practice to enable those children and their families to succeed.

Our Strength is in Our People and Services

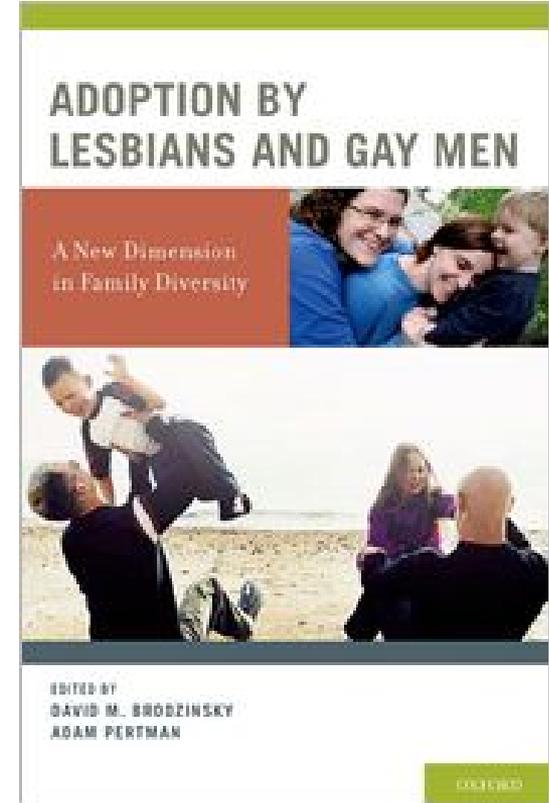
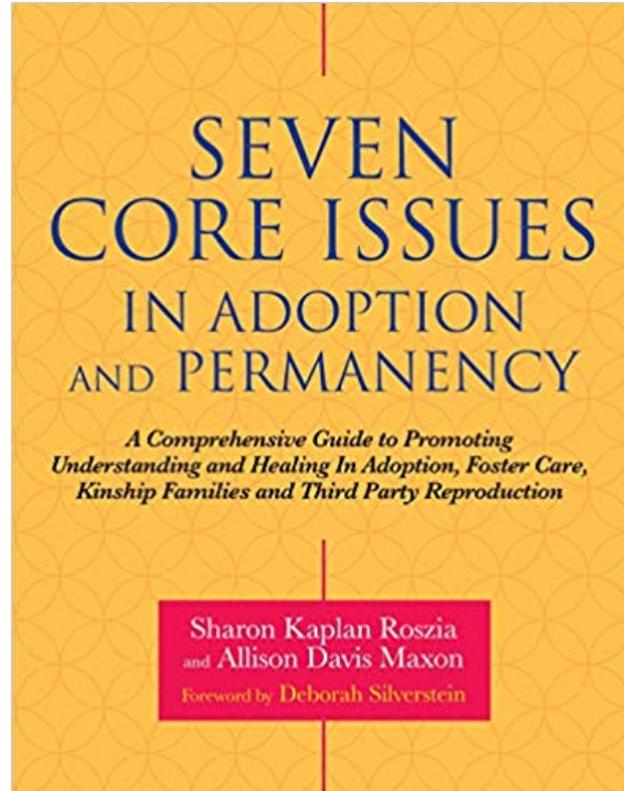
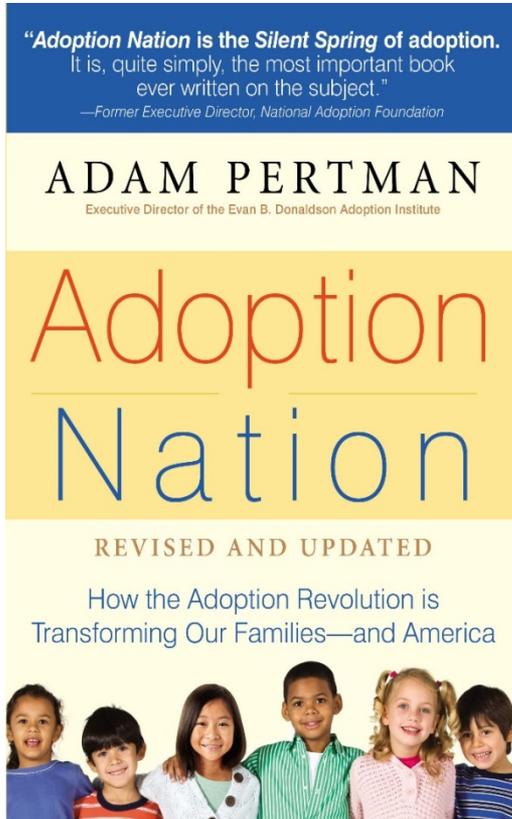
NCAP is led by President Adam Pertman, former head of the Donaldson Adoption Institute; Executive Director Allison Maxon, former Division Director of Kinship Center; and Research Director Joyce Taylor, PhD, Springfield College and Yale University.

Our work includes:

- Research, evaluation, program & project development, consultation
- Board development, consultation and/or executive transition planning
- Staff development and training to improve clinical and practice competence
- Parent/caregiver training for families with children with histories of trauma
- Communications: writing, editing, print, web/social media, script consulting, etc.
- Consultation on development and fundraising, as well as community relations
- Conference/event consulting, including keynote speakers, other presenters
- Executive training/coaching, policy development/analysis, practice protocols

To learn more about our people and services, please write to Adam at apertman@ncap-us.org, call him at 617-903-0554 or go to: www.ncap-us.org.

A Few Recent Books by NCAP Authors



What We Know . . . About Everyone

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

– Alex Haley in *Roots*

How We Got Here:

A Brief History of the Importance of Origins

- For generations, “formal adoption” meant unwed mothers, white babies, white married couples. “Matching” diminished the importance – or even the recognition – of origins.
- Secrecy, stigma and shame characterized the process and all of its participants. No discussion means ...
- Acceptance of single mothers, legalization of abortion, advances in birth control instigate major changes. Turns out that women want to parent their own children!
- World events fill the gap, most notably Soviet Union dissolves and China imposes a one-child policy. Why did so many people look to other countries to adopt?
- Paradigm in U.S. foster care shifts to “best interests of the child.”

So . . . What Has Changed?



A Shift in Understanding and Practice

1950s . . . and . . . Today

- Secrecy “protects” members of the triad
- Birthparents told to go on with their lives as if nothing happened
- Adoptive parents feel entitlement and are protected from intrusion
- Adoptees assumed not to have adoption-related issues, so nothing to do
- More openness & honesty in all types of adoptions
- Most first/birth parents want openness and are usually helped by it
- With more openness, adoptive parents feel more entitlement and less fear
- Adopted persons benefit from knowing about and contact with birth families

Fitting a Square Peg into a Round Hole

Then . . . and . . . Now

- Denial of difference between adoptive, bio families
- Match for race, physical traits > adoption undetectable
- “Chosen child” – it was a “win-win” for all parties!
- Agencies did not “interfere” after finalization
- Minimize importance of adoption in child’s identity
- Searching viewed as a sign of maladjustment
- Acknowledgement of difference is healthy
- Diversity in families makes adoption conspicuous
- Focus on helping deal with loss and other issues
- Professional support is important or even vital
- Adoption is recognized as part of identity
- Desire for information and connection seen as normal

A Result of the Adoption's Greater Openness & Honesty: More Complexity

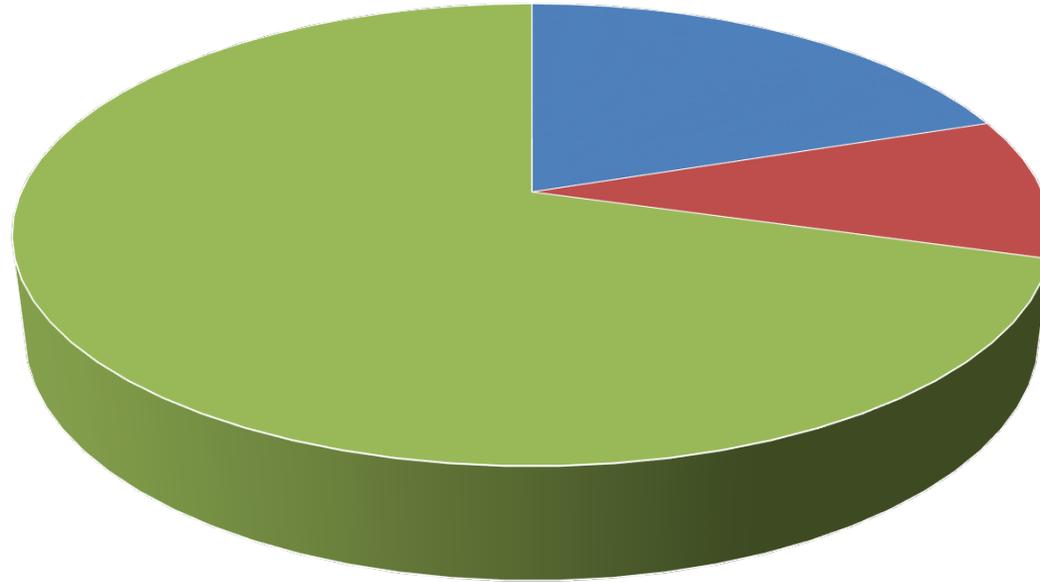
- When do we tell our child she's adopted?
- Who are the members of your family?
- How do families incorporate everyone's identities?
- Remember: Only adoptive families are complicated and have issues – as opposed to say ... step-families, divorced families, grandparent-led families, single-parent families, families with two dads or two moms, families with children who have special needs ...

Where We Are Today

- Fewer than 1% of single women voluntarily place their children for adoption, and most become their parents.
- Stigma, secrets, embarrassment and shame are lifting; we're not there yet, but move is to greater openness and honesty – and **that's a place in which identity can take center stage.**
- Laws, policies, practices and attitudes shifting; we're not there yet, but improving as we learn about adoption's realities.
- Adoption today is still commonly understood as child placement – so most people still don't know much about the issues or people involved, their needs and realities, etc.
- **The adults adopting today are straight and gay, come in all colors, are married and cohabitating and single, young and old – and most children being adopted are not white infants.**

Non-Step-Parent Adoptions by Type

Adoptions by Type 2015



■ Domestic Infant = 20% ■ Intercountry = 10% ■ Foster Care = 70%

Some Bottom Lines

- There's greater openness and honesty in all types of adoption, including realities of including everyone's identity/history/background. Do we know how?
- Adoption has contributed to historic changes in perceptions/understandings of what families are, how they are formed, what they look like, etc.
- The vast majority of adoptions are now of children who were abused, neglected or institutionalized before adoption (see the pie chart).
- Most laws, policies and practices in place today were created for a world that no longer exists.

Historic Shifts, Systemic Impact

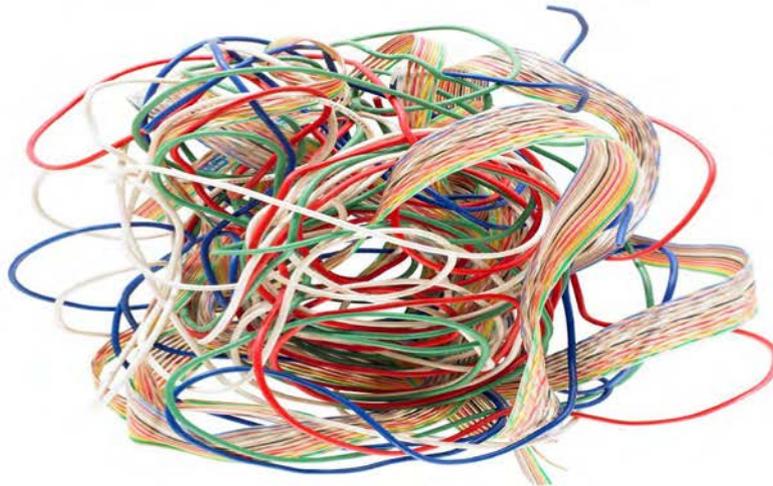
- About 125,000 adoptions in U.S. a year
 - * About 40% stepparent adoptions
 - * 50,000+ child welfare adoptions
 - * 5,000 international adoptions (fell dramatically in last few years)
 - * 14,000 domestic infants (decreased tenfold since 1970)
- **The real numbers: a far bigger population**
- Overall, 40% of adoptions in U.S. are trans-racial/ethnic
 - * 28 percent from foster care
 - * 21 percent of domestic infants
 - * 84 percent from other nations
- Reality on ground (records, LGBT, etc.) outpacing law, policy

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32% 

UNTANGLING THE WEB

THE INTERNET'S TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT ON ADOPTION



POLICY & PRACTICE PERSPECTIVE

December 2012

Jeanne A. Howard, Ph.D.

EVAN B. DONALDSON

adoptioninstitute

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THE DONALDSON ADOPTION INSTITUTE

DECEMBER 2013
POLICY & PRACTICE PERSPECTIVE



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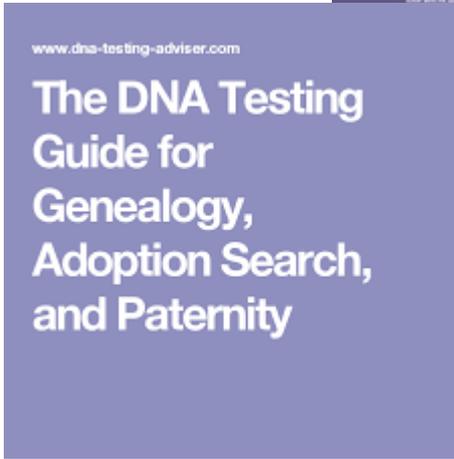
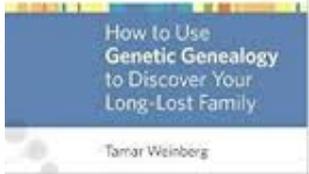
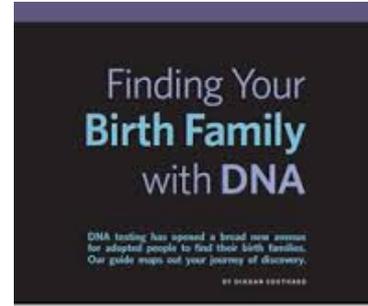
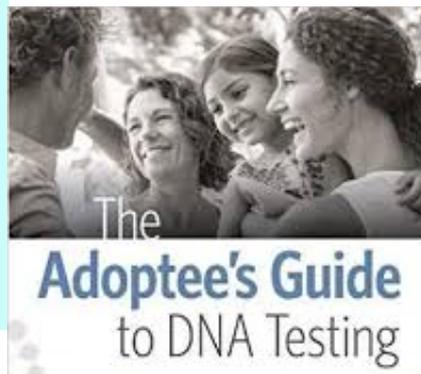


UNTANGLING THE WEB II

A RESEARCH-BASED ROADMAP FOR REFORM

AMY WHITESEL, PH.D. & JEANNE A. HOWARD, PH.D.





What can adoptees learn from 23andMe?



For Now, More Questions than Answers

- Adoption Practice: What's the impact on ethical professionals when internet providers promise babies quickly and offer incentives to pregnant women?
- Search and Reunion: What should professionals tell clients? What should parents tell their kids? What guidance, support, resources does everyone need?
- Law and Policy: How do we address possibly unsafe or traumatizing contacts for children? Do legal obstacles to acquiring information make sense?
- More and More: How do we best utilize all the new resources, research, opportunities and supports, including those that relate to finding and incorporating identity?

Openness in Adoption: From Secrecy and Stigma to Knowledge and Connections

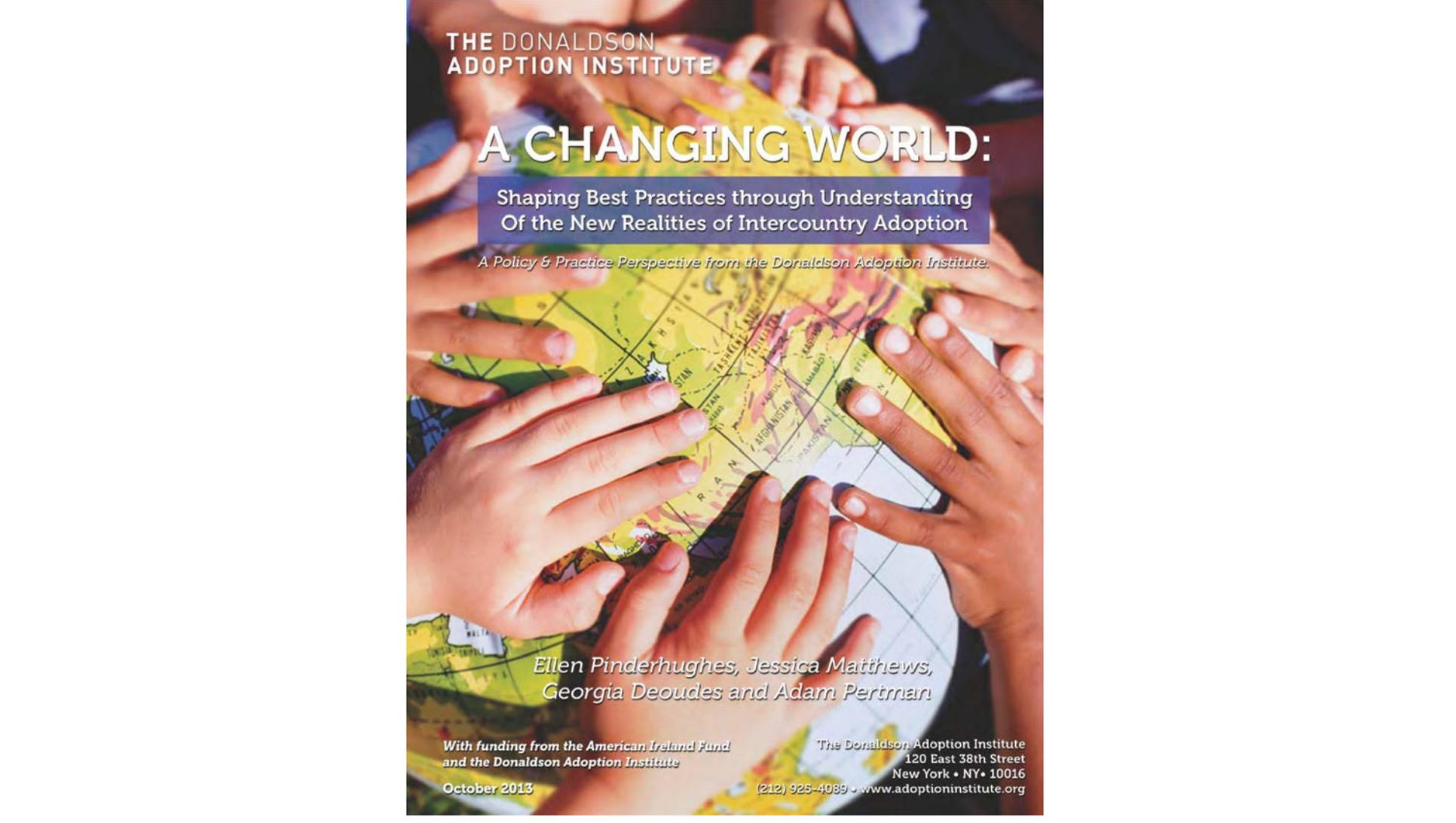
EVAN B. DONALDSON

adoptioninstitute



Keeping the Promise: The Critical Need for Post-Adoption Services





THE DONALDSON
ADOPTION INSTITUTE

A CHANGING WORLD:

Shaping Best Practices through Understanding
Of the New Realities of Intercountry Adoption

A Policy & Practice Perspective from the Donaldson Adoption Institute.

*Ellen Pinderhughes, Jessica Matthews,
Georgia Deoudes and Adam Pertman*

*With funding from the American Ireland Fund
and the Donaldson Adoption Institute*

October 2013

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For the Records: Restoring a Legal Right

Certificate of Birth

It is hereby certified and solemnly attested that

JNTHN MCKLRY

was born at
Torrance Memorial Medical Center

at 2:26 p. m., this 26th day of MARCH, 1999

Authorized under the hand and seal of
Geo. H. Graham
President

McKinsley M.D.
Attending Physician
Special in Births, stillbirths, abortions

 **TORRANCE MEMORIAL
MEDICAL CENTER**

This is not a legal document.

3330 Lomita Boulevard, Torrance, CA 90506-5099

Safeguarding the Rights & Well-Being of Birth/First Parents in Adoption



It's your birth.

KNOW ALL YOUR OPTIONS

Attend Our Free Class

Beyond Culture Camp: Shaping Positive Identity in Adoption



Examples of Findings and Insights

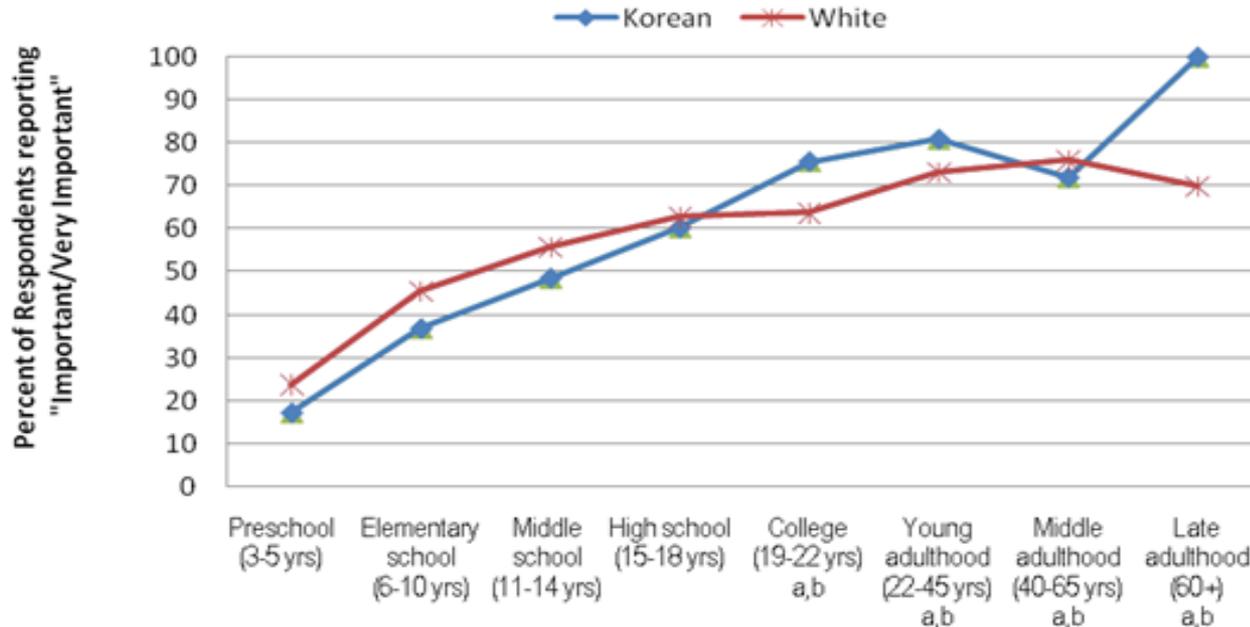
- Openness in Adoption: Only 5% of infant adoptions are closed, so vast majority know or have access to origins.
- Keeping the Promise: Most children come to adoption with trauma histories, so there's a need to know.
- A Changing World: A growing number of parents are changing their minds and opening their international adoptions.
- Safeguarding Rights: Generally better outcomes related to ability to choose adoptive family and maintain contact.
- Beyond Culture Camp: Too many for this page alone!
- Medical, cultural, adoption, etc. information can be vital to positive identity. Such info is the raw material to fill in missing pieces of life and derive an integrated sense of self.

Beyond Culture Camp: Key Findings

- Adoption and race/ethnicity are increasingly significant aspects of identity as adopted people age.
- Coping with discrimination, relating to both adoption and race, is a fact of life (but race trumps adoption).
- Positive racial/ethnic identity development is most effectively facilitated by “lived” experiences.
- White respondents: contact with birth relatives is most helpful factor for positive adoptive identity.
- Transracial adoptees: travel to home country, is most helpful factor for achieving positive identity.

Importance of Adoptive Identity at Different Life Stages

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

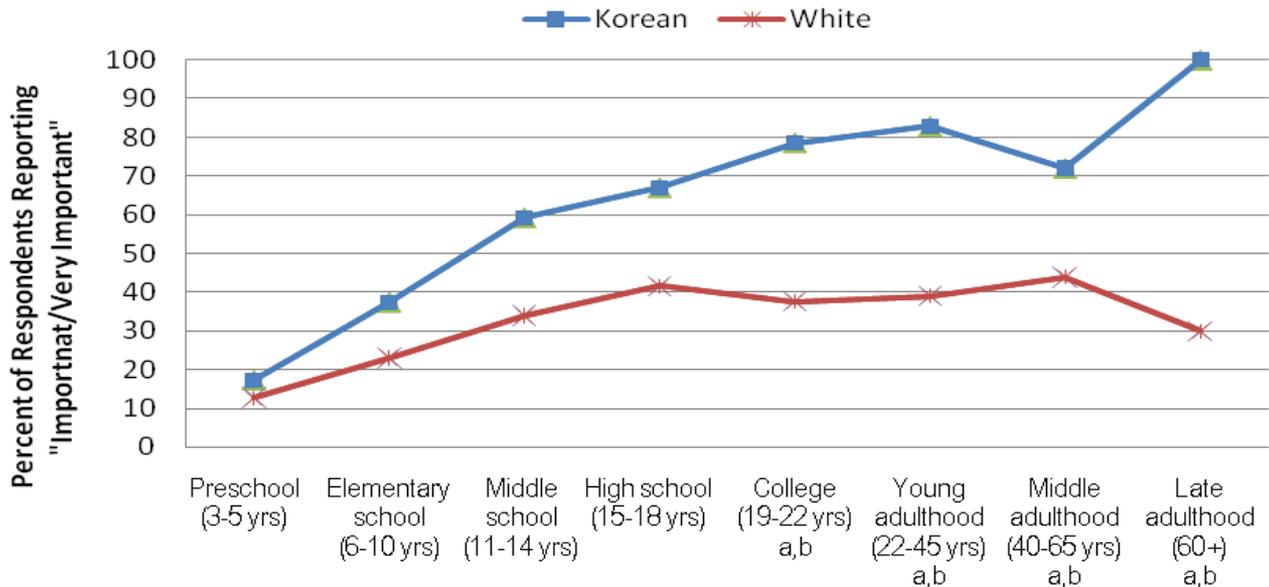


^a. Use of valid percents. Whites: College (N=154); Young adulthood (N=153); Middle adulthood (N=100); Late adulthood (N=10).

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

Importance of Racial/Ethnic Identity at Different Life Stages

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



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

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

Sources of Discrimination

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

Experiences and Services Utilized, Perceived as Helpful in Forming Identity

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

Random Thoughts and Conclusions

- Adopted people want/need information not because they are stalkers, ingrates or children in search of new mommies and daddies. * Alex Haley quote goes here!
- Medical, cultural, adoption, etc. information can be critically important to positive identity development.
- Such information is the raw material to fill in missing pieces of life and derive an integrated sense of self.
- **Bottom line: Learning about one's origins is not just about curiosity, search, reunion or medical information; it's about being a complete person – and is a matter of human dignity and social justice.**

Into the Future: What We Know Will Happen (Almost) for Sure



- The era of closed adoption will come to an end.
- Extended Family of Adoption will continue growing.
- The big majority of adoptions will not be of infants.
- Search and reunion will be routine and expected.
- The internet will enable great and awful practices.
- Access by adoptees to own information will grow.

How Do We Get There?



- Educate parents, families, professionals and the public to understand the importance of openness, honesty and origins/identity/connections in adoption.
- Educate parents to understand that seeking help is a strength.
- Learn and teach about the impact of the internet/social media.
- Reshape policy and practice into a “family success” paradigm – and advocate for systemic changes.
- **We can do this!**



"Oh, I'm sorry. . . You couldn't adopt?"