

Transracial Adoptees in America:
Key Components Impacting Identity and Development

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INTRODUCTION

Within communities, the environment and culture people interact with, constantly influences individual's sense of identity. Individuals have a lifelong journey of forming and understanding their identity by “‘taking in’ and ‘keeping out’” (Volf 66) experiences, characteristics, and statuses the community gives them. Most of the time, an individual's primary community consist of people who share cultural and ethnic similarities which makes forming a personal identity simple. Unfortunately, this is not the case for transracial (sometimes transnational or transethnic) adoptees. Transracial adoptees are individuals who were adopted by parents whose race is different than their own. Growing up in communities and cultures that are vastly different than their place of origin, transracial adoptees face unique, and often challenging, experiences. These unique experiences impact the complex formation of their individual identity. My mom, a white upper middle-class single parent, decided to adopt three racially diverse children. She raised my sisters and me in Colorado which is not a racially diverse state. Since our family was very different from those around us, many of our impactful life experiences are connected to the fact that we are a transracial adopted family. Currently, living independently from the norms of my hometown, I realize how my adoptee identity impacts my overall identity formation.

Two years ago, I began seeking out adult adoptee communities. Knowing that certain events in adoptees' lives can shape unique perspectives, I hoped to be able to share, process, and understand this piece of my identity with others who have similar perspectives. After a few months of looking, I joined an adult adoptee community. To my surprise, the group and I quickly became aware that life experiences of transracial adoptees and non-transracial adoptees differed immensely. While discussing this observation with Tanisha Hanson, a fellow transracial adoptee, I found multiple commonalities in our stories. My heart resonated with Hanson's story as she

described her emotional struggle of comprehending her adoptee identity. Until five years ago, Hanson had never met another transracial adoptee. After she met another transracial adoptee her curiosity about her adoptee identity increased over the years. Our conversation concluded with a mutual desire to embrace the journey of understanding our adoptee identities. In order to accomplish this, we recognized our need for support and resources from the adoption community.

After talking with Hanson, I choose an ethnography approach to my research. Ethnography is research that synthesizes information about the life of a people or group (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater 4). I focused on gaining understanding of what local support systems currently exist for adult transracial adoptees as they process their adoptee identity. By using the appreciative inquiry approach (Hammond 36) I was able to uncover common themes and circumstances regarding what must be addressed as transracial adoptees process their adoptee identity. I conducted interviews with adult transracial adoptees, interviews with adoption organization leaders, and analyzed literature reviews that focus on transracial adoptees and adoptee identity. My field work indicates the need for a larger support system to help adult transracial adoptees process their adoptee identity.

In the United States, the first generation of adoptees lacked support and resources focused on identity formation throughout their adoption journey. Angela Tucker, a well-known advocate for transracial adoptee voices, mentioned how younger generations have acknowledged that adoption is not a one-time transaction and they need lifelong support systems. This acknowledgement created the beginning of the adoptee movement. This movement has not only brought attention to the importance of the adoptee perspective or story, but also informs others that there is still a lack of adoptee related resources. For those who support transracial adoptees,

many agree that the future of the world relies on individuals knowing how to deal with his or her identity (Volf 20). To best provide support systems that address the adoptee identity, adoption organizations must focus on: engagement within transracial adoptee communities; educating adoptees about voicing one's own adoptee story; discussing various racial tensions that transracial adoptees in America may encounter; and finally, navigating the positives and negatives the internet and social media have on an adoptee's journey. Knowing there is a lack of organizations that currently do this, I address the importance of these topics in this thesis and also provide a program proposal that adoption organizations can use.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

History of transracial adoption in the United States. According to the American Adoptions website (www.americanadoptions.com/), the United States created the legal adoption process in 1851. Families were limited by law to adopting only children of the same race until 1948 when the law allowed transracial adoptions to occur ("Adoptions Before the 20th Century"). This decision occurred right before the Civil Rights movement when racism was a cultural norm. In light of this, transracial adoption was met with some resistance. However, the US government continued allowing transracial adoptions and also legalized the adoption of foreign born children in 1970 ("Adoption Statistics"). From that year forward, the number of communities in America that accepted diversity of race continued increasing.

Post the Civil Rights movement, even though the majority of communities accepted racially diverse families, certain communities still had concerns about transracial adoption. Some African American communities feared that white parents who adopted African American children would not acknowledge the racial discrimination or prejudice African Americans encounter ("Adoption History in Brief"). In a YouTube video produced by StoryCorps, Alex Landau, an African

American adoptee raised by white parents, tells his story of the first time he experienced racial discrimination. During a normal summer evening Landau and his white friend were driving around downtown Denver. That evening, even though Landau was not intoxicated, police officers pulled him over for inspection. After little interaction with the officers, Landau realized they thought he had done something wrong because he is African American. Growing up under the protection of his parents, Landau initially resisted their questions which made the situation worse. He was taunted and beaten so badly by the officers that he had to be taken to the emergency room for treatment. Before the incident with the cops, Landau struggled to believe people still discriminated against African Americans. However, now Landau acknowledges how unaware he and his family were unaware of this potential bias, and awareness of prejudice could have prevented this horrible escalation with the officers.

Christian faith and adoption. As adoption became more popular in the United States, Christian families also began to accept adoption into their communities. While adoption is not a Christian invention, it is regarded as a particular Christian moral act grounded in traditions of neighbor love and familiar belonging (B. Waters 305). B. Waters explains how “orphaned children are neighbors in need, and adoption is a loving response to meeting their need” (306). While many Christians understand adoption is for children who need a home, others interpret adoption as a savior act Christians should take. Having a savior mindset when adopting is unhealthy and a disservice to adoptees.

Having a savior mentality when adopting implies the mindset that a parent’s love can fix all issues. Unlike the love God exudes, the love humans provide is imperfect. In the movie *Lion*, which is based on a true story about an Indian adoptee named Saroo, one scene clearly shows the savior mindset. As an adult, Saroo began searching for his birth family and became more distant

from his adoptive parents. After months apart from his adoptive mother, he visits her and realizes how depressed she has become. She mentions how her “good” child (Saroo) being distant made dealing with his brother, another Indian adoptee, very difficult and exhausting. Saroo, who believes she adopted because she couldn’t have children, apologizes to her and comments how unfortunate it was she had to adopt. His mother tells him she could have had children naturally, but her initial reason for adoption was because of a vision. Growing up, Saroo’s mom felt she had no purpose or peace because of the family hardships she experienced. Then, at the age of 12, she had a vision from God. In her vision, she stood next to a “little brown boy” (*Lion*) and she describes how in that moment she finally felt at peace. Saroo’s mom interpreted this vision as the Lord showing her that by adopting a little brown boy, she could have feelings of peace and purpose in her life. Unlike how she envisioned her life would be after adopting, she recognized how even with all the love she provided Saroo and his adopted brother, feelings of peace and purpose no longer existed for her. This specific scene from the movie *Lion* clearly portrays a Christian parent finally recognizing that her love could not fix her family’s issues. Adoptive parents must love their children, but not so they can “fix” them.

Another misguided perception selected Christian communities believe is that adoptees do not need time processing their adoptee identity because their identity in Christ is more important. Although the faith may believe an identity in Christ is foundational, adoptees still need time exploring, processing, and gaining a better understanding of their adoptee identity. Individuals’ pasts influence their perspectives, experiences, and sense of who they are, but if a person cannot explore his or her past confusion may cloud his or her present identity. Knowing that an adoptee’s past does not disappear, Christians must not disregard the importance of an adoptee’s need to process his or her full identity.

Trauma within adoption. Another topic that must be acknowledged when discussing adoption is how some adoptions can be very traumatic. Volf states, “Deep wounds from the past can so much pain our present” (133). Although all adoptees are taken from one environment and placed in another, at any point in the adoption process, if an adoptee has a traumatic experience, he or she will be impacted throughout his or her life.

Within the adoption process, while “not all adoptees share the same experiences” (Largen 285), certain individuals may have gone through traumatic situations. Even though traumatic scenarios occur regardless of where an adoptee was prior adoption, the researcher Megan Julian focused on trauma within institutional care prior adoption. Julian acknowledges the first months and years of life are crucial to later development (101). She continues to explain how issues later in life are typically related to a person’s early experiences (103). Crucial to the formation of an adoptee’s identity, experiences that adoptees have at a young age, some of which may be traumatic, must be addressed.

In addition to institutional care, foster care can also have lifelong impacts on a child. I was placed in seven foster homes before my adoption was finalized. Growing up, I didn’t realize how my past impacted my present. Recently, when I started to question how my adoption influenced various aspects of my life, I realized my deep fear of being rejected by friends or family members developed from my experience of living with multiple families before the age of 11 months old. Unfortunately, my experience with trauma isn’t uncommon for adoptees, which is why it is crucial that adoptees have resources to help them process their adoptee identity.

COMMUNITY

An important topic to address that impacts transracial adoptee identities is community. The groups individuals belong to can impact how he or she perceives his or her identity. It is common

for people to associate with communities of people who share similar physical characteristics.

While this may be the case for most people, transracial adoptees grow up in communities where their physical characteristics can be extremely different from the majority of their community.

Normally, children learn from their family, clan or tribe (Baker 262) however, transracial adoptees grow up in families and communities that do not reflect their original clan or tribe.

Transracial adoptees feeling like they belong to their community often times is challenging.

Belonging to communities. The desire to feel included within a community is universal and crucial in forming identities for all people; however, transracial adoptees often question if groups they interact with truly accept them for who they are. In a *Washington Post* article, Justin Moyer describes the stories of transracial adoptees who grew up in America. Moyer states, “Many struggled being raised in families – and often communities – where those around them look nothing like them.” Having obvious physical characteristics that are different from others within a group is the most common reason transracial adoptees feel separate from their communities.

Communities must also recognize that transracial adoptees form unique perspectives based on their experiences as an adoptee. Many transracial adoptees express having such different experiences from the majority of people within their community made connecting with others in crucial identity formation years difficult. Not being able to relate with others makes transracial adoptees question if they belong. Richard Beck, the author of *Unclean*, explains the process of belonging as drawing a circle around a group of people, biological and non-biological, who we identify as “my tribe” or “my family” (100). As people choose who they include within their circle, having similar life experiences is a common factor on why people associate with one another. Even though transracial adoptees from circles of people, relating or understanding certain experiences with most are still uncommon.

Having people who are able to understand specific challenges or situations is needed as individuals form their identities. Focusing on Alcoholic Anonymous (AA) groups, Sonia Waters conducted a study seeing how participating in communities of people who share similar experiences and perspectives impacted individuals. Describing one specific AA member's viewpoint, S. Waters states, "Experiences were normalized by others who felt similar to her, helping her to believe she might be the whole, thinking, feeling, and experiencing person she once denied herself to be" (777). Normalizing and expressing similar situations creates a sense of belonging that helps positively transform people's identity. Psychology researchers Birgit Voté and Elaine Kaset agree that communities must include people who relate to the experiences and perspectives adoptees voice (15). Transracial adoptees who do not have a community of people who can understand their viewpoint or experiences feel alone.

Another community transracial adoptees express feeling they do not belong is communities of people who share their ethnicity. Transracial adoptees typically grow up in communities that lack people with physical characteristics also impacts the variety of cultures they encounter. Without celebration or acknowledgment of other cultures within communities that include transracial adoptees, continues confusing transracial adoptees about how they should perceive people who share their ethnic identity. To avoid negative feelings, communities that include transracial adoptees must create cultural pluralism. Cultural pluralism is "the existence of and mutual respect for a number of cultures within one society" (Willis 134). Introducing and exemplifying cultural pluralism, transracial adoptees will feel more positive about their identity. ***Integrating into new communities.*** Although interacting with transracial adoptees is needed as they create their adoptee identity, understanding how other ethnic and non-ethnic communities perceive adoptees. Estela Andujo researched the experience of Hispanic adoptees in America.

She states, “The majority of transethnic adoptees possess physical characteristics of Mexican Americans, society might react to them based on stereotypes” (534). People making assumptions based on adoptees’ ethnicity or physical appearances (Rosanti, etc. 92) create a disadvantage for transracial adoptees believing they belong.

Being a Hispanic adoptee, I found that people made preconceived judgements about who I am solely based on my ethnicity when they first met me. While getting to know new people I often mention facts about myself that they don’t assume because of their preconceived judgements they initial made. New people begin realizing I am not a stereotypical Hispanic when I mention I don’t like spicy food, I can’t speak Spanish, or I haven’t experienced traditional Hispanic family experiences. Seeing the confused reaction by others, I feel obligated explaining my adoption and being raised by a white mother. Although there is nothing wrong with my story, having to explain myself makes me feel like I am not fully accepted for who I am. Recently, I have begun noticing feelings of not being accepted occur more when interacting with Hispanic communities.

After reading the memoir of Jane Jeong Trenka, Ina Seethaler also confirms transracial adoptees struggle feeling accepted within new communities because of their ethnic identity. Seethaler states, “Trenka had trouble understanding her adoptee identity when interacting with a new community. Growing up where the majority of people were White, Trenka struggled with identifying as White or Korean” (80). In an interview with Chinese adoptee Esther Bullock, she mentioned growing up identifying like a banana – yellow (Asian) on the outside and white on the inside. Once she began her studies at the University of Washington (UW), she decided to interact with more Asian communities. Similar to Bullock’s experience, interacting with communities that represented a transracial adoptee’s ethnicity while attending a University were common for

the transracial adoptees I interviewed. Korean adoptee Gaylen Lieberworth explained his desire for participating in communities that represented his identity never occurred until attending college. Lieberworth stated, “There was no need to as a child. None of my friends were interested in Korea so why would I have been?” Although he initially had no desire to understand his ethnic background, during his college years his interest in learning more about Korea culture steadily grew to the point that he pursued a B.A. in Asian studies.

Although many transracial adoptees began participating in communities that reflect their ethnicity during college, many still may have hesitations about being accepted by groups that represent their ethnicity. When invited to join an Asian Christian group, Bullock initially felt cautious. She feared she was “not Asian enough” and if she attended this group where all members are Asian, she would be viewed as an imposter. Bullock stated, “I didn’t have the traditional Asian experience; my parents aren’t Asian, I didn’t grow up eating authentic Asian food – I felt like I was lying to the entire group about who I actually was.” Feeling disconnected from ethnic groups that represent a transracial adoptee’s ethnicity is common among transracial adoptees. Willis states, “People themselves should be able to choose the way they want to live without being made to feel that they are somehow ‘inferior’ or ‘backward’” (125-26). Transracial adoptees joining communities of people who share their ethnicity need to feel and know they belong even if their life experiences are different.

As a teenager, I struggled feeling comfortable being Hispanic. I became frustrated because my experiences differed from my friends’ experiences and I wanted to be more like them. My feelings I expressed during my teenage years were the opposite of someone who has identity security. According to McNeil, identity security is “a sense of connection with people that you believe are like you and an appreciation of your own ethnic and cultural heritage” (70-

71). One evident example when I lacked identity security occurred during seventh grade. My friends were able to wear their mom's make-up even when they didn't have permission to. Frustrated that I couldn't apply my fair skin mom's make up, I stood alone watching all my friends enjoy applying their mom's foundation, mascara, and lipstick. This reality made me feel left out for not being able to do something as simple as put on my mother's make-up.

Current Example. Organizations that want to best support transracial adoptees must provide opportunities for them to interact with adoptee-centered communities. An example of an adoptee-centered community can be found at Amara, a Seattle-based adoption and foster care organization. In February 2017, Angela Tucker, the Post-Adoption Director, along with two teenage transracial boys, created the Strong, Tough, and Resilient (S.T.A.R.) mentorship program. When interviewing Meridian Mayer, a mentor in the program, he stated, "When I walked into the room it felt amazing to simply be surrounded by people who understand what being a transracial adoptee is." He continued to share, "I felt like I didn't have to explain everything about my adoption, because everyone just understood my perspective the first time I said anything" (Mayer). By building this adoption community, transracial adoptees are experiencing a positive step forward receiving support.

ADOPTEE STORY AND VOICE

There is power and healing that comes from using one's voice and sharing one's story. In the United States, it is uncommon for transracial adoptees publicly sharing their stories and experiences which has led to misguided perceptions of adoption. Limiting hearing adoption experiences of only certain perspectives discounts the important stories transracial adoptees must tell which can help them process their identity.

The impact of perspective. In the United States, the main story, voice, or perspective that is heard regarding adoption comes from the adopted parents. Baxter acknowledges the adoption story “has multiple tellers and might take on different features, depending on the perspective of the teller” (265). McNeil instructs society to “amplify the message and voices of others, especially those who are not being heard” (98). All the voices from the adoption triad – birth parents, adoptive parents, and adoptees – must be heard so people can fully understand adoption. As people hear all the perspectives of members within the adoption triad, they must have the expectation that there are things to learn (B. Meyers 213) about adoption.

The Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie quotes the famous words of the Palestinian poet Mourid Barghouti: “If you want to dispossess a people the simplest way to do it is to tell their story.” In past years, it was common for adopted parents sharing their child’s adoption story without asking permission first. As adopted children watch their parents share their story with others, feelings of obligation arise. Adoptees who feel obligated to give their parents the rights to their story is not helpful in forming their identity. Instead, parents must demonstrate respect to their child when considering sharing his or her story. Waiting to share their child’s story until the adoptee is old enough to understand all details provides respect and the opportunity for the adoptee voicing if he or she wants certain topics discussed with others. Respecting the adoptee’s story can also occur as parents continually seek permission from their adoptee. Respect shown to adoptees about sharing their story helps them as they process their adoptee identity and gain better understanding of their adoption story.

Family support. The need for reflection about one’s narrative will naturally occur for adoptees (Wrobel 319), therefore, families should be supportive of the adoptee’s questions about his or her story. A lack of family support has been a repetitive issue for transracial adoptees. Tiffany

Bluhm, an adult transracial adoptee from India, recalls never having the freedom to discuss or process her adoption story with her family: “We never discussed it; I’m not sure why, but it always felt like if I were to bring up my adoption I would have offended my parents, especially my mom, in the greatest way possible” (Bluhm). Her statements confirm that families who adopt need open dialogue with one another about the adoptee’s story. Families of transracial adoptees who continue silencing adoptee’s stories, the adoptees will continue feeling discounted, rejected, and violated” (Ledearch 118). To counteract those feelings, transracial adoptees must have support and encouragement from their families to speak their stories.

The healing power of storytelling. Adoptees need an outlet for storytelling in order to gain understanding of their identities. Adoptees will feel empowered as they receive more opportunities to tell events, actions, or episodes about their adoption (Baxter, etc. 266).

Kranstuber and Kellas state, “From the cradle to the grave, humans construct and reconstruct the story of their identities” (180). Transracial adoptees’ stories are complex, but as transracial adoptees express their stories they will discover healing (Baxter 268). Storytelling as a means of healing is common for people who have experienced trauma. Sonia Water’s study on community and belonging with the example of AA members, also addressed the positive effects that storytelling has on individuals. She comments, “Storytelling becomes a relational process where one doesn’t focus on differences in the others, but instead to identify with one another” (771).

The attendees of AA are in a “place where a new story of healing can be claimed and an alternative identity shaped through the power of communal story” (S. Waters 773). After experiencing trauma, loss, pain, or suffering – whether in adoption or in AA meetings– speaking one’s story within a safe community can bring healing.

Another reason individuals find healing through storytelling is that storytelling brings ownership. To create a positive adoptee identity, their experiences and stories must be validated as truthful and impactful. Jo Salas observes the universal nature of storytelling when she writes, “Personal storytelling is also, for many of us, an act of claiming identity and affirming meanings by saying, ‘This happened to me, this is what I lived and witnessed’” (114). Although it may be difficult, speaking a person’s truth and story brings healing.

Current example. An adoptee from India named Reshma McClintock is the creator of the blog *Dear Adoption*. In her blog, she provides a platform for adoptees all over the world to write their letter to “adoption” as if it was a person. McClintock’s explains she is “a firm believer that the adoptee voice ought to be elevated; that all adoptees should have space to share their personal lived experiences and be heard” (Purpose). Along with McClintock, an increasing number of adoptees desire voicing their story, sharing their experience, and telling their truth. Adoptees need more platforms like *Dear Adoption* that allow them to express all of those.

RACE AND CULTURE

Culture is the beliefs, languages, and lifestyles that people share within a specific community which impact transracial adoptees’ perception of identity. The formation of a transracial adoptee’s identity is continuously influenced both by his or her birth culture and the culture he or she grew up in.

Families must address race and culture. Transracial adopted families in the United States must address racial topics because acts of racism and prejudice still occur. Wrobel suggests families should discuss ethnic identity, because society makes assumptions about transracial adoptees based solely on the adoptee’s ethnicity (320). Families must encourage and provide transracial adoptees time for exploring their ethnic identity which will always be a part of their identity. As

transracial adoptees begin exploring their ethnic identity, families must address the reality of difficult racial interactions their child may encounter. During this conversation with their child, it is important parents stay focused on attacking the problem of racial discrimination rather than the individual who acts on it (Love 5). Referring back to the unfortunate interaction Landau had with police officers is an example where a person (Landau) choose to focus on attacking the problem rather than the individual. In Landau's case, after his experience he could have stereotyped all white police officers as racist. Instead, Landau recognizes an act of racism could have occurred with anyone, not just police officers. Not stereotyping all white police officers demonstrates how Landau attacked the problem, not the person. Unfortunately, in the past five years, the public has become more aware of situations where white police officers discriminated against African American males. Recognizing racial discrimination and acts of prejudice is commonly discussed throughout society, adoptive parents must be diligent to inform their children about both. While being diligent in informing their children, adoptive parents must also communicate this information to their children in ways that do not stereotype people's specific occupations.

Along with preparing transracial adoptees for difficult situations or interactions they may encounter, families must also avoid displaying ethnocentrism by expressing the beauty of all cultures to their children. According to the Webster's dictionary, ethnocentrism is "the belief in the inherent superiority of one's own ethnic group or culture". Parents who demonstrate ethnocentrism are likely also displaying acts of prejudice or outgroup hostility (Bizumic 887). Transracial adoptees become confused when this occurs because they perceive their parents believe ethnic identities similar to theirs are negative.

Not addressing a transracial adoptee's ethnic identity doesn't just inform the adoptee his or her family might be ethnocentric, but it also negatively impacts the individual's wellbeing.

Mohanty states, “Families who reject the importance of their child’s heritage culture may not have prepared the child to accept adoption-related thoughts and feelings, which could also lead to the preoccupation with ethnic identity issues” (41). In the past, interacting with an adoptee’s birth culture was not typically allowed or accepted within adoptive families. In a National Public Radio (NPR) podcast, Kaomi Goetz interviews transracial adoptees asking if their families allowed them permission or opportunities to explore their ethnic identities. One Korean adoptee named Jaeran Kim, explains to Goetz that many adoptees, like herself, were not encouraged or allowed time for exploring their own racial identities as children. As an adult, Kim is now discovering and embracing her Korean identity. Families must provide opportunities for engaging their children in communities, lessons, or activities that reflect their birth culture. Without providing opportunities for exploration, transracial adoptees are missing out on multiple benefits of gaining understanding about their identity. Two of these benefits transracial adoptees can experience are having a better understanding of cultural norms from their place of origin and feeling more comfortable with their physical looks. In a YouTube clip produced by Multiethnic Multiplex (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fOL1OO6QUUI>), adult transracial adoptees discuss the importance of incorporating transracial adoptee’s birth culture at a young age. One of the spokespeople, Lea, believes a benefit of exploring one’s birth culture at a young age is finding role models who share similar physical attributes. She states, “role models play a huge part in who a person is”. Having role models who provide support to a young person as he or she navigates his or her identity can be transformational for transracial adoptees.

Current example. As transracial adoptees explore his or her ethnic identity, having support during this process is crucial in identity formation. Two examples of current adoption organizations in the United States whose programs address racial issues along with providing

transracial adoptees information about their birth culture are PACT Adoption Alliance and Heritage Camps.

PACT invites transracial adoptees and their families to a week-long camp where all participants have various opportunities to engage in activities that address racial and cultural issues. The purpose of this camp is to fully support transracial adoptees and their families in an environment where the children are provided opportunities for learning, embracing, and cultivating their ethnic identity. Heritage Camps is another organization whose mission is to provide resources for transracial adoptees as they embrace and explore their ethnic identity. During the summer months, Heritage Camps has various camps focusing and gathering adoptees who share specific ethnicities. During those camps, transracial adoptees meet other children who were adopted from their region, are educated on their birth culture, and experience activities founded from their place of origin. According to Pam Sweetser, the director of Heritage Camps, these camps positively impact multiple transracial adoptees as they explore their ethnic identity. Sweetser mentioned how many transracial adoptees who attend the camp as children express that camp was one of the most important weeks of their entire year. Both PACT Camps and Heritage Camps bear evidence that other adoption organizations must also provide programs that allow transracial adoptees opportunities gaining a better understanding of their ethnic identity.

THE IMPACTS OF THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Using the internet and social media have become common daily resources. These resources have also become more commonly used by adoptees as they search for birth families, find out more about their culture, and explore a life that could have been. The use of these resources is not going to slow down in the future, so it is extremely important for adoptees to understand how using these resources can affect them in both positive and negative ways.

The impact of quick information access. Adoptees have not always had easy access to information about their birth families or birth culture. However, since the internet was developed in 1991 (“History of the World Wide Web”), gaining information on a topic has become easier and faster than ever before. While many see the evolution of technology as a positive, it is important to keep in mind that others, such as parents of adoptees, interpret quick access to information as intimidating. While quick access to information has benefits, some adoptive parents fear the information their children discover could change their family relations.

Understanding how common adoptive parents provide opportunities for their children to gain information about their adoption was the focus of Brooke Skinner-Drawz research. Once the study was complete, Skinner-Drawz concluded the majority of adoptive parents avoid sharing information with their adoptees (184). Although some adoptive parents initially prefer denying their children access to information, Whistel and Howard stress adoptees are negatively impacted psychologically (27) when denied access to information about their adoption. Parents of adoptees must be proactively providing their children information about their adoption or birth culture. Rather than demanding adoptive parents share all information regarding their child’s adoption, they must only be willing to share their adoptee’s information with them at appropriate times.

Having discussions about adoption often occur when adoptees experiences physical, emotional, and mental change, such as adolescence (MacDonald and McSherry 89). An adoptees curiosity about his or her adoption information entails adoptive parents are prepared to answer the various questions their child inquires. The Adoption Curiosity Pathway model helps families communicate with one another when their adoptee becomes curious about learning more information about his or her adoption. This model has three-phases: “Phase 1- telling the adoption story, Phase II-responding to adopted child questioning, and Phase III- adopted child

independent information gathering” (Wrobel and Neil 224). Adoptees and their families gain insight on the types of conversations adoptees initiate as their curiosity about their adoption increases.

In the Adoption Curiosity Pathway model, Phase II promotes the crucial discuss between transracial adoptees and their parents about their adoption story. Wrobel and Neil explain four different responses parents might express after their adoptee initiates this phase. They state, “parents may (i) share all available information; (ii) share all available information while seeking more; (iii) share some information and withhold other information; and (iv) withhold all available information” (Wrobel and Neil 225). Instead of addressing which option parents should follow, Wrobel and Neil acknowledge an adoptee experiences complexities when their parents withhold information (240). The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute researched whether or not providing information about an adoptee’s birth culture or family impacted the adoptee positively or negatively. The research results reiterated the fact that withholding information from a child is more harmful than helpful. It explained how it is not only a right for adoptees to have information about their medical history, but also adoptees can foster a better sense of identity by having access to more information at a young age (Whistel and Howard 24).

Organizations need to focus on the content of adoptees’ research to best support their identity formation. Skinner-Drawz found the common type of information that any adoptee sought regarded his or her birth family (Skinner-Drawz 183). Another study conducted in 2012 involved over 2000 participants reveals what adoptees searched for online regarding their adoption (Whitesell and Howard 10-12). Agreeing with Skinner-Drawz’s results, 74% of adoptees in this study accessed the internet to search for their birth families (Whitesell and Howard 15). Internet research by adoptees has increased significantly since the conclusion of

these two studies.

Searching for answers about one's birth family can provide insight to adoptees about themselves. In the blog of transracial adoptee Lisa Marie Rollings describes her feelings of incompleteness prior to her online search for her birth family and information regarding her adoption. She states, "My adult life as an adopted person has been a life full of wondering, imagining what has been lost and a well-documented ache for things I have been missing". In my own experience as a teenager, I would stay up late in order to review my baby book (the binder where my mom kept information about my adoption) memorizing all the details about my adoption. After I received my own laptop, I spent hours flipping through my baby book looking for information that could lead me to information about my birth family. I felt like I was searching for puzzle pieces that would eventually help me see who I am and where I came from. Other adoptees share my experience of searching and longing for more information about their adoption. As the number of adoptees use the internet to search for information about their adoption, organizations must begin enlightening adoptees about how this resource impacts their identity formation. Programs, lectures, or events that address the positive and negative impacts these resources have on adoptees is crucial.

Finding one's birth family. According to research done by The Donaldson Adoption Institute, having quick access to information greatly expands the ability of adopted persons to search for their birth/first family members (Whitesell and Howard 6). Although some individuals intentionally search for their birth family, others may accidentally find them. Accidentally finding or having unplanned contact with one's birth family can negatively resonate with adoptees. In one specific study, researchers MacDonald and McSherry found that unplanned contact typically occurred between an adoptee and their birth siblings (89). They explain how specific agreements

to deny sibling contact is rare or unheard of (MacDonald and McSherry 89). Organizations must recognize the possibility of adoptees accidentally finding members of their birth family and then offer support systems to them prior and post contact.

For many transracial adoptees, including myself, contacting and building a relationship with one's birth family is a fantasy that rarely comes true; however, for those who eventually do make contact with their birth family, they rarely fully understand how their life will forever be impacted. Instead of just focusing on adoptee's response to finding and contacting their birth family, being aware that finding one's birth family affects all members in an adoptee's adoptive family. Seven months ago, I accidentally found my birth family on social media. After knowing who they were, I decided to contact my birth siblings first. After contacting my birth siblings, myself and my family experienced positive and negative emotions contemplating how this would affect our family. While in conversation with one of my uncles, he asked me how my sisters, who are both adopted, responded to me finding my birth family. As I silently processed this question, I realized I never once thought how my news would impact them. A few months after the excitement of finding my birth family simmered, while talking to my older sister, who was adopted from an orphanage in India, about a girl she believed was from the same orphanage. Talking to my sister I could hear her excitement and joy of finding someone she too could associate as family. I never expected to have a conversation about birth families with her, but I instantly realized she longed to have what I had found a few months prior. Both my sister's and my identity were changed after I contacted my birth siblings.

Hardships quick access of information create. Having quick access to information can be helpful, but it also can be harmful in helping create a positive adoptee identity. Since information can be found quickly through social media, blogs, and news stories, it is crucial that adoptees

become aware of how the information is portrayed and by whom. The issues surrounding quick access to information may include: adoptees seeing false perceptions of an individual's identity on social media, too much information about adoption which then creates an internal struggle for transracial adoptees as they search for community, and adoptees being overwhelmed by the amount of information pertaining adoption.

Social media, a networking tool that is used everywhere, is like a mirror into people's lives. Even with most people using this resource, many are very particular about how they want others to perceive them. Depending on how transracial adoptee associates with his or her ethnic identity can determine which communities he or she connects with online. Social media allows people to create online exclusive groups. In my exploration for online adoption communities, a fellow transracial adoptee told me about the Transracial Adoption Perspectives (TAP) community. At first, when I was invited to join this exclusive group, I believed this would be a great resource to me as I began exploring my transracial adoptee identity. Although that was my initial thought, over time I struggled with constantly receiving notifications about transracial adoption. Instead of easing into this adoptee community, I was overwhelmed with information at all times during my day. Instead of feeling supported as I continued exploring my adoption identity, the constant discussion about transracial adoption became so overwhelming I distanced myself from seeking more information.

Current Example. Human beings are naturally curious about understanding their identity. The number of adoptees using online research tools have increased which implies adoption organizations serving transracial adoptees must address how support adoptees using this resource. Currently, organizations or adoptee groups use the internet and social media as a resource to build online communities, but without addressing all impacts this resource has on

adoptees is disserving adoptees. Creating workshops, lectures, or interactive programs where adoptees can access online resources, but also hear both the positive and negative consequences of searching for information are needed.

CONCLUSION

Adoptees experience trauma to some degree through their adoption, and yet for many decades adoptees were not encouraged to discuss about their adoption experience. Although statistics show transracial adoption is decreasing in the United States, many adult transracial adoptees still need resources that support them throughout their adoption journey. An adoptee's experience does not end at the time of adoption, but instead it is a lifetime process in which the adoptee continuously forms his or her adoptee identity. Organizations that want to best support adoptees must create programs that include: engagement within transracial adoptee communities; educating adoptees about voicing one's own adoptee story; discussing various racial tensions that transracial adoptees in America may encounter; and finally, navigating the positives and negatives that the internet and social media have on an adoptee's journey. When adoption organizations provide programs that include all these topics, transracial adoptees in America will have the resources to be empowered and supported as they develop a better understanding of their adoptee identity.

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APPENDIX:

Proposed Project Description. This paper examines current examples of how the adoption community is addressing the adoptee identity, however I am proposing a new program called The Truth Behind the Mask (TBM). This 10- week program supports adult transracial adoptees who want to start processing their adoptee identity. Within that time, the adoptees will learn about the importance of adoptee-centered community, be allowed to voice their story, discuss race and birth cultures with one another, and hear how the internet and social media may positively and negatively impact their adoption journey. To help demonstrate how this program works, I created a Logic Model and Curriculum. The Logic Model provides an overview of goals of the program, while the curriculum goes into depth about how each session will help adoptees better understand their adoptee identity.

The first element of this program supports transracial adoptees who want to better understand their adoptee identity by being in community with other transracial adoptees who also desire this. The intentionality behind this stems from understanding the importance of allowing the transracial adoptees to go through this piece of their journey with a community of people who may have similar life experiences. TBM is structured for cohorts of transracial adoptees to participate in the program together. This helps illustrate the first topic TBM addresses: the importance of building and participating in adoptee-centered communities.

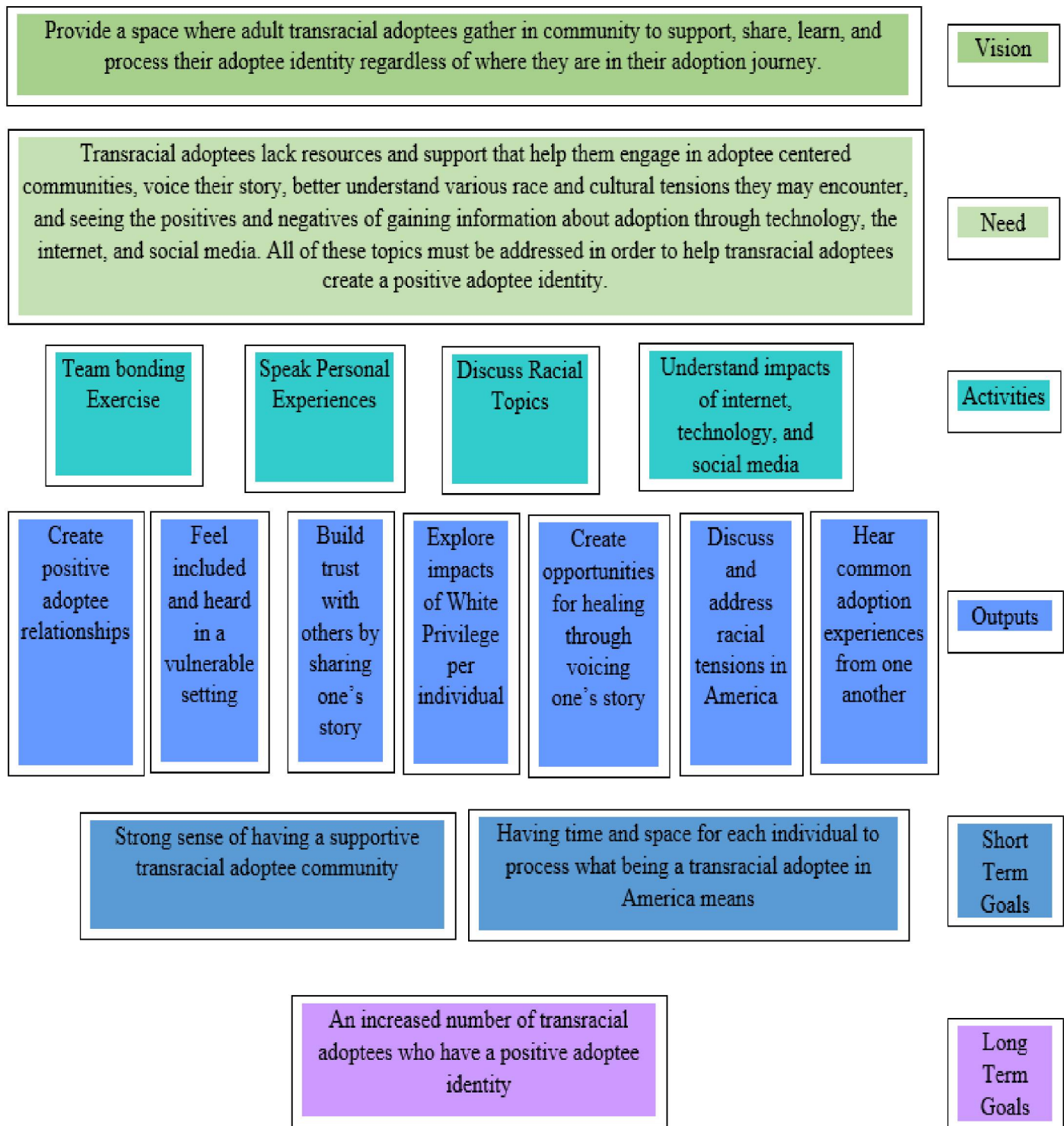
The important topics of voice and story make up the focus of the next four sessions. TBM's curriculum provides opportunities for all participants to reflect, share, and voice their story if they so choose. This program informs the adoptees about how voicing their stories is empowering and transformational to others. By providing these sessions, TBM offers each participant the tools needed to further process their adoptee identity.

Following those four sessions, the TBM curriculum supports transracial adoptees as they unpack how their birth culture or ethnic identity impacts their adoptee identity. TBM focuses on this topic is crucial for transracial adoptees in the United States.

The ninth session of this program is dedicated to helping the participants navigate the internet and social media. In today's age, technology has advanced very quickly, and access to information is easily accessible. Participants in the group are educated about how the positives and negatives to using the internet and social media as resources to better understand their adoptee identity.

The final session will be more celebratory than educational. TBM provides a formal dinner where adoptees can reflect with their cohort, the TBM leaders, and other representatives from current adoption organizations. The purpose of inviting representatives from current adoption organizations is to connect them to the participants of TBM. Adoption is a lifelong journey, and even if a transracial adoptee completes the 10-week curriculum, he or she may still need support afterwards. Overall, the hope for any participant who completes the TBM program is for them to have experienced a community of people who encourages, supports, and engaged with them as they began to process their adoptee identity.

APPENDIX I: Logic Map



Program Curriculum

The Truth behind the Mask:

**Helping Transracial
Adult Adoptees Process
Their Adoptee Identity**

PROGRAM NAME: The Truth behind the Mask (TBM)

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This is a 10-week program created for adult transracial adoptees who desire to better understand their adoptee identity. TBM is designed to solely focus on the transracial adoptee's needs and narrative. Participants learn from and interact with other transracial adoptee leaders from their community during each 3-hour session. As transracial adoptees complete this program, in 2-week increments, participants will be introduced to the following key topics: connecting to transracial adoptee communities; the importance of the adoptee story; voicing transracial adoptee experiences; how race and culture impact transracial adoptee's identity in the United States; and finally, the positives and negatives the internet and social media have on an adoptee's journey. Each topic significantly impacts transracial adoptees as they process their adoptee identity.

COURSE OVERVIEW: The five topics that impact transracial adoptees as they process their identity must be addressed to best support them in this program. The first topic addresses adoptee-centered community which may be brand new to some participants. Having a group of people who can easily relate with one another is crucial for the success of this program. This not only supports each participant, but it also provides an opportunity for the participants to form lifelong relationships that may be transformational to them. The second topic addresses the adoptee story. Again, each participant may be at a different stage of understanding their own adoption story but can begin to explore this in a safe community. Following weeks 3 & 4, participants will begin to see the power of voicing their story if they choose. Participants will be able to understand the power of storytelling and speaking their truth through various exercises and examples. The next two sessions will focus on culture, race, and ethnic identity. Being a transracial adoptee provides unique experiences surrounding race – especially in the United States. TBM allows them to unpack this topic through discussion. Session 9 will be the only time to focus on how the internet and social media positively and negatively impact an adoptee's journey. Because the internet and social media is a common resource adoptees turn to, TBM's program is designed to bring awareness and help transracial adoptees navigate them well. The final meeting time will be more of a celebration for the participants as well as a fun way to connect them with other adoption organizations in their area. It's important to recognize that completing the program is a huge accomplishment and yet it still isn't the end of the processing journey for many.

COURSE OUTCOMES: For TBM to be successful, an outcome of this program is to have participants feel supported, connected, and empowered to continue their journey of processing their adoptee identity.

RESOURCES: While participating in TBM, transracial adoptees will regularly meet with the TBM team and other adoptee leaders within their community. Each leader will attend specific sessions depending on their strengths or knowledge.

POLICIES:

All adoptees who desire participating in the program are required to fill out an application to determine which cohort they will join. The application process includes:

- Attend a 3- step interview process.
- Verbally commit to attending all 10 meetings unless there is an illness or emergency.
- Fill out a questionnaire to provide more information about oneself.
- Write a 500-word essay on why he or she wants to attend.

Once accepted into the program, before the first meeting each participant will provide:

- Pay the \$200 program fee in full or complete a payment plan worksheet.
- Receive the objectives for each session meeting along with a welcome journal.

For organizations that want to attend the final session they must:

- Pay a \$75 fee by Session 5.
- Provide names for each participant planning to attend the final session.

Session 1: Getting to know you

This week we will work to achieve the following objectives:

1. Introduce each member of the session through getting-to-know-you games.
2. Explain the purpose and mission behind The Truth Behind the Mask program.
3. Have the group set “rules” or “values” that they want to abide by during the program.

To achieve these objectives, please think about the following prior to attending our first meeting:

1. Why am I attending this program and what do I hope to gain from this program?
2. How do I believe this program will impact my life?
3. What has my adoptee identity meant to me?

Schedule of Session 1:

2:00 PM	Meet and Greet
2:15 PM	Introduction and welcome to program
2:30 PM	Team 1
3:00 PM	Small lecture of history of transracial adoptions and the reason for this program
3:20 PM	Start of the break (20 minutes) Mingle with food
3:40 PM	Team Activity 2
4:10 PM	Team Activity 3
4:35 PM	Final project and allow adoptees to use photo booth
4:55 PM	Good byes and closing statements (surveys)
5:00 PM	End of session 1

Takeaways while you embrace the world:

1. How did I feel when I was in a room with other transracial adoptees?
2. Community is important; have I found it anywhere else?
3. My favorite part of today was _____ (fill in the blank). Why was it this?

Session 1

Team Activity 1: Group BINGO

Objective: Getting to know different facts about the people in the cohort

Time Frame: 20 minutes, 3 rounds

Instructions: After introducing everyone in the group hand out bingo cards to each person. The goal of the game is to get five spaces initialed. People can only initial one space at a time in boxes that have statements that are true about themselves. A person can initial a box twice after a person gains two initials from other people. The game will be played three different times, but all rounds all players will keep their same card. The first round is traditional bingo; the next will be getting the outside spaces initialed, and the third round will be blackout – all spaces will be covered.

Team Activity 2: Working together

Objective: There will be three stations that all cohort members must complete together. Each station has a different task they must complete in order to proceed to the next one.

Time Frame: 30 minutes, 3 stations (approximately 10 minutes per station)

Instructions:

- Begin at the **Knot Station**. Here you will all place your hands in the center of the circle. You must grab onto someone else's hands that aren't directly next to you. As a team, everyone must work together to untangle themselves. As the team keeps succeeding, new obstacles may be introduced to the task.
- The next station is the **Birthday Line**. The goal of this station is to line up in order of chronological birthdates without talking.
- Lastly, you will come to **Magic Carpet Ride**. This is when all participants are on one mat that must be flipped over in order to complete the task. Make sure all members of the cohort stay on the carpet at all times or else you will have to start over again.

Team Activity 3: Values for our community

Objective: Explore what participant's desire for the program and create values and culture to achieve that community.

Time Frame: 25 minutes

Instructions: This is a place where participants must feel safe and respected and yet it is also a place where we want to encourage, challenge, and love on one another. Each person will receive three sticky notes on which to write down the kind of culture they desire. Once everyone has posted their sticky notes on the wall the group will collectively create the rules and values they desire for this specific community.

Session 2: Becoming stronger as one

This week we work to achieve the following objectives:

1. Continue forming community.
2. Understand how transracial adoptees might have common experiences.
3. See the strengths and weaknesses behind the mask.

To achieve these objectives, please complete the following prior to attending our meeting:

1. Create your own journal and spend time reflecting on your experience. Try to write one entry prior to meeting.
2. Think about some of the ups and downs of your adoption journey. You don't need to share them with others, but what might you see as strengths or weaknesses?
3. Bring an item that makes you feel safe.

Schedule of Session 2:

2:00 PM	Hello again! (Refresh and remember last week)
2:10 PM	Team Activity 1
2:45 PM	Debrief from Team Activity 1
3:00 PM	Small lecture about the importance of shared experiences in regard to community
3:20 PM	Start of the break (20 minutes) Mingle with food
3:40 PM	Team Activity 2
4:10 PM	Reflection on Team 2
4:25 PM	Review the importance of community and why this community is needed
4:55 PM	Good byes and closing statements (surveys)
5:00 PM	End of session 2

Takeaways while you embrace the world:

1. What aspects of this community do you most appreciate?
2. How does having an adoptee community strengthen your identity?
3. Do you see this strength being incorporated into other communities?

Session 2

Team Activity 1: Find a Match

Objective: Explore different perspectives that each participant brings to the community.

Time Frame: 35 minutes

Instructions: Each participant will receive a card with a word on it, however, they are not allowed to look at their word. Participants will interact with other members in order to accomplish to tasks: first, to figure out what their card says by having other cohort members answer yes/no questions, and next to match words that are in similar categories together.

Team Activity 2: Finding strength together

Objective: Seeing the power and strength that comes from groups.

Time Frame: 30 minutes

Instructions: There will be three different stations the adoptees can go to. At each station, there will be activities that show the strength that comes from more than one.

Station 1. One will see the strength of one cord vs. 5 cords stranded together.

Station 2. The next station will have the participant try to complete a puzzle as quickly as they can first by themselves, and then with a partner. When the partner helps put the puzzle together, they should find that it is easier to complete.

Station 3. The final stage will involve the groups to partner up. One will be blindfolded while the other is not. The person who is blindfolded must listen to verbal cues his or her partner provides to pick up the correct object in the room.

Session 3: Putting the puzzle together

This week we work to achieve the following objectives:

1. Understand different stages of a person's story and see that it's ok to be anywhere in the process.
2. See how the truth of our identity can play a role in the bigger picture which is our life story.
3. Acknowledge the strengths of our personal adoptee identity within and where those originated in our story.

To achieve these objectives, please think about the following prior to attending our meeting:

1. Journal about how last week made you feel and write down 3 words that others use to describe.
2. Bring your favorite book to this workshop.
3. Take the Clifton Strength Finder test

Schedule of Session 3:

2:00 PM	Hello again! (Refresh and remember last week)
2:15 PM	Team Activity 1
2:30 PM	Debrief from Team Activity 1
2:40 PM	Small lecture about the importance of acknowledging a person's story
3:00 PM	Journal and reflection time about what your storyline
3:20 PM	Start of the break (20 minutes) Mingle with food
3:40 PM	Team Activity 2
4:00 PM	Reflection on Team 2
4:10 PM	Team Activity 3
4:45 PM	Reflection on Team 3
4:55 PM	Good byes and closing statements (surveys)
5:00 PM	End of session 3

Takeaways while you embrace the world:

1. Do I want to be in a different place in my story in the next year or so?
2. What storyline do I want to portray within my community?
3. Is there someone in my cohort whose story is similar to mine and do I want to consider reaching out to them as a friend?

Session 3

Team Activity 1: Rory's Story Dice

Objective: Create a story using the dice based on the picture that you roll

Time Frame: 15 minutes

Instructions: Hand out the dice and roll. Once the dice stops moving create a sentence or phrase that incorporates the picture into the story.

Team Activity 2: Break out Story time

Objective: Get into partners a few different times to describe your favorite story and why that is your favorite story.

Time Frame: 30 minutes (should be able to discuss this with at least 3 different people)

Instructions: Grab your favorite book and reflect on why it is your favorite. After a few moments of reflection, individuals will find a partner to share and discuss their books with. Once each partner group has shared, they will join another group to share about their partner's favorite book. Once the group of four have all shared, switch partners and repeat the whole process again.

Team Activity 3: Strengths in one's story

Objective: Think about the storyline of a superhero and how they have strengths and weaknesses. Create poster boards that list superhero strengths and then on the back list your strengths.

Time Frame: 35 minutes

Instructions: Split up into smaller groups to do this. People will choose the groups based on their favorite or one of their favorite superheroes. From there they will list different strengths that they can see within that particular superhero's story. After this is done each person will have a sheet of paper to list their strengths since they too are superheroes.

Session 4: Open the book

This week we work to achieve the following objectives:

1. Write and reflect on our own story.
2. Understand different ways our story becomes our super power, but also our kryptonite.
3. Knowing that although our identity is a piece of us, it doesn't always define us.

To achieve these objectives, please think about the following prior to attending our meeting:

1. Who do I present myself as and is that the truth about who I believe I am?
2. What are some of my superhero strengths and weaknesses?
3. Who do I think about sharing my story with and why?

Schedule of Session 4:

2:00 PM	Hello again! (Refresh and remember last week)
2:15 PM	Team Activity 1
3:00 PM	Debrief from Team Activity 1
3:15 PM	Small lecture about the strengths and weaknesses of our story
3:40 PM	Start of the break (20 minutes) Mingle with food
4:00 PM	Team Activity 2
4:15 PM	Reflection and lecture on Team 2
4:55 PM	Good byes and closing statements (surveys)
5:00 PM	End of session 4

Takeaways while you embrace the world:

1. How can I embrace the superpower of my identity over the kryptonite?
2. When the kryptonite appears, how do I counteract it?
3. Who else do I believe is on my superhero team?

Session 4

Team Activity 1: X-Ray Vision

Objective: Describe the object within the box.

Time Frame: 45 minutes

Instructions: Each person will have the opportunity to feel inside the box, but they won't be able to see what they are feeling. While the individual is figuring out what is inside the box, the rest of the group will be able to watch on the other side. The group must remain quiet as the individual guesses three different times what object is in the box. He or she will be able to receive three hints from his or her group, but may only receive these hints after asking a yes or no question. The individual will have a time limit of 5 minutes so everyone can have a turn.

Team Activity 2: Telephone

Objective: Get one phrase or sentence from one end of the line to the other without it changing.

Time Frame: 15 minutes

Instructions: Everyone needs to get in a line but there needs to be space between the people. One person will start on one end with at least three phrases. Each person can repeat it once if asked by the next, but after that they must continue to move the phrase down the line. The person at the end of the line will have to write down the phrases as they hear them. Once all phrases have been sent down the line, the group will hear what the initial phrases were to see if they were able to stick to the phrase each time.

Session 5: Do I dare speak?

This week we work to achieve the following objectives:

1. Explore whose voices have been heard in adoptee communities.
2. Hear personal examples of the positive impact that sharing one's voice has had for adoptees.
3. Explain why the voice is a special piece of our identity.

To achieve these objectives, please complete the following prior to attending our meeting:

1. Research a person whom you believe spoke up and made a difference in their lifetime.
2. What does your voice mean to you?
3. Watch clip "Adoption in 6 words"

Schedule of Session 5:

2:00 PM	Hello again! (Refresh and remember last week)
2:10 PM	Introduce the concept of the adoptee voice
2:40 PM	Adoptee panel to discuss the importance of voice
3:15 PM	Panel Q & A session
3:30 PM	Start of the break (20 minutes) Mingle with food
3:50 PM	Team Activity 1
4:20 PM	Team Activity 2
4:40 PM	Review session 5 goals and concepts
4:55 PM	Good byes and closing statements (surveys)
5:00 PM	End of session 5

Takeaways while you embrace the world:

1. Do I or have I used my voice for good?
2. Are there some practical ways I can use my voice to tell my story?
3. What was my favorite part of the adoptee panel?

Session 5

Team Activity 1: Name that person!

Objective: Match the voice of a character to the movie, TV show, or artist.

Time Frame: 30 minutes

Instructions: The cohort will be divided into teams. Each team will have one person listening to the soundtrack or clip of a famous quote. Then, he or she will have the opportunity to say the clip back to his or her team to see if they know who the person is. If his or her team guesses the correct name of the person, they receive a point. Each team will have a minute turn before the next team is able to guess. The goal is to get more points than the other team.

Team Activity 2: Writing letters

Objective: Providing space for the adoptees to write their “Dear Adoption” letters in order to give their voice.

Time Frame: 20 minutes

Instructions: Find a comfy place to write their letter. You can play music quietly, talk to someone, or speak out loud. Either way it is a safe place for you to find your voice and express your story. You can choose if you share this letter you with others not.

Session 6: Transforming others

This week we work to achieve the following objectives:

1. See how one voice can transform others.
2. Look at differences in words when speaking our truth and understanding the effects that each word has.
3. Finding one's voice within their communities outside this program.

To achieve these objectives, please complete the following prior to attending our meeting:

1. Bring a picture of someone you trust to listen to you.
2. Write down ten words on ten notecards that describe your perception of adoption.
3. Think and journal about last week's meeting.

Schedule of Session 6:

2:00 PM	Hello again! (Refresh and remember last week)
2:10 PM	Introduce the difference in words and how they impact a person's story
2:40 PM	Team Activity 1 instructions
2:50 PM	Team Activity 1
3:20 PM	Team Activity 1 debrief
3:30 PM	Start of the break (20 minutes) Mingle with food
3:50 PM	Team Activity 2 instructions
4:00 PM	Team Activity 2
4:40 PM	Reflection on Team 2
4:55 PM	Good byes and closing statements (surveys)
5:00 PM	End of session 6

Takeaways while you embrace the world:

1. Did I change any of the words I have used to explain my story or experience?
2. Who might I share my story with that doesn't already know?
3. What are some of the positives from speaking my voice?

Session 6

Team Activity 1: Trace Me

Objective: See the impact of positive words that describe each person.

Time Frame: 30 minutes

Instructions: Using large sheets of paper each participant will lay down and be traced. After a person is traced other participants from the cohort will fill in their outline with positive words or phrases that represent that individual. Towards the end, participants have the option to share with the group.

Team Activity 2: Adjective Scavenger Hunt

Objective: See the power of words and how it can lead people to demonstrate positivity.

Time Frame: 40 minutes

Instructions: Each participant will find a partner from the cohort. The groups then have around 20 minutes to explore and take photos of different words that are on a sheet of paper. The goal is to be creative in how the teams display words.

Session 7: Mirror on the wall...Who am I after all?

This week we work to achieve the following objectives:

1. Focus on each person's birth culture and discuss the importance of acknowledging this culture.
2. See how culture impacts each person's story.
3. Discuss ways to incorporate birth culture.

To achieve these objectives, please complete the following prior to attending our meeting:

1. Write down names of any organization/workshop/gathering that you attended that discussed your birth culture.
2. Bring a family photo. You don't have to share, but please bring.
3. Journal about a time where people treated you according to your birth culture rather than the culture you were raised in.

Schedule of Session 7:

2:00 PM	Hello again! (Refresh and remember last week)
2:10 PM	Discuss the importance of having an adoptee's birth culture.
2:40 PM	Team Activity 1 instructions
2:50 PM	Team Activity 1
3:20 PM	Team Activity 1 debrief
3:30 PM	Start of the break (20 minutes) Mingle with food
3:50 PM	Cultural panel with organizations
4:40 PM	Q & A with cultural panel
4:55 PM	Good byes and closing statements (surveys)
5:00 PM	End of session 7

Takeaways while you embrace the world:

1. Do you think you will join any new organizations or programs that support transracial adoptees?
2. Is there anybody you can go to multicultural events with?
3. Think about immersing yourself into your birth culture at some point in your life.

Session 7

Team Activity 1: Difference in Culture

Objective: To review and understand some of the different cultural dimensions according to Hofstede.

Time Frame: 30 minutes

Instructions: For this activity, participants must bring in their own laptops. They will use their time to split into groups and find Hofstede's indices is online. From there they will need to create a poster that clearly demonstrates each concept clearly by comparing the United States to a country of their choice. There will be various craft supplies that each group can use to create their poster. At the end of the time all groups will share what they created.

Session 8: My perspective

This week we work to achieve the following objectives:

1. Discuss how the lack of cultural discussions impairs transracial adoptees.
2. Brainstorm ways to make sure younger adoptees are being immersed in communities with their birth culture.
3. Talk about white privilege and the umbrella most transracial adoptees grow up under.

To achieve these objectives, please think about the following prior to attending our meeting:

1. Bring the “Umbrella” document from email completely filled out.
2. Journal about different times people questioned your white privilege and how that made you feel.
3. Think of role models you had when you were younger; be prepared to discuss who they were and why they were your role models.

Schedule of Session 8:

2:00 PM	Hello again! (Refresh and remember last week)
2:10 PM	Discuss white privilege and stories of adoptees who grew up in dominantly white communities
2:30 PM	Bring in the STAR mentors and mentees
2:40 PM	Team Activity 1 for all people present
3:00 PM	STAR mentees panel
3:30 PM	Start of the break (20 minutes) Mingle with food
3:50 PM	Team Activity 2
4:30 PM	Debrief from Team Bonding Activity 2
4:55 PM	Good byes and closing statements (surveys)
5:00 PM	End of session 8

Takeaways while you embrace the world:

1. When did I first feel I lost my white privilege umbrella?
2. Would I consider joining a mentorship of some sort?
3. Do I know of any younger adoptees?

Session 8

Team Activity 1: Jeopardy

Objective: Interact with the STAR mentors while learning about various cultures.

Time Frame: 20 minutes

Instructions: Divide into three teams that each have participants and mentees. The teams will be answering questions on the screen for points. The questions are targeting different cultural dimensions that the cohort learned about previous, along with other cultural questions.

Team Activity 2: Umbrella

Objective: Understand how each participant and mentee can empower themselves when they are outside their parent's "White Privilege Umbrella".

Time Frame: 40 minutes

Instructions: Look at the umbrellas that were made prior to the session. Each participant will evaluate their umbrella by addressing different emotions they feel they are covered and not covered by the "White Privilege Umbrella". After this discussion, the participants will partner up with a mentee(s) to demonstrate two scenarios: interacting with people when they have White Privilege and one where they do not.

Session 9: OMG No Way!

This week we work to achieve the following objectives:

1. Explore the impact that quick access to information from the internet provides.
2. Identify how positives and negatives of the internet and how that has shaped different experiences for adoptees.
3. Understand the impacts that social media has in our lives as adoptees.

To achieve these objectives, please think about the following prior to attending our meeting:

1. Have I heard of or joined any adoptee online communities? If so which ones and why?
2. Think and journal about ways adoptee online communities can be beneficial or not.
3. How do you think adoptee online communities impact different pieces of an adoptee's story?

Schedule of Session 9:

2:00 PM	Hello again! (Refresh and remember last week)
2:10 PM	Discuss the impacts of technology and social media within our adoptee communities
2:30 PM	Team Activity 1 instructions
2:40 PM	Team Activity 1
3:10 PM	Debrief from Team Bonding Activity 1
3:30 PM	Start of the break (20 minutes) Mingle with food
3:50 PM	Team Activity 2
4:15 PM	Debrief from Team Activity 2
4:25 PM	Review how technology and social media impact a few aspects of adoptee's stories
4:55 PM	Good byes and closing statements (surveys)
5:00 PM	End of session 9

Takeaways while you embrace the world:

4. Will I search out any/more online communities?
5. What do I think is the most positive and negative aspects of online communities?
6. What aspect of adoptee social media groups do I enjoy the most?

Session 9

Game 1: Two Truths and a Lie

Objective: Seeing that although the internet is resourceful, that there are many sites or information that can be misleading.

Time Frame: 30 minutes

Instructions: In the beginning, the participants will play two truths and a lie. This game entails each person writing on a piece of paper two true facts about them, and one lie. After all participants have decided written their information and name on a piece of paper, all papers will be collected. From there, each paper will be read aloud along with the name of the person. The group will have to determine which statement is the lie. After the participants complete this exercise they will each have an assignment to look up a story on the media. By doing minimum research they must determine if this source is true or false.

Game 2: The Hashtag Game

Objective: Seeing how social media can create community.

Time Frame: 30 minutes

Instructions: In groups the participants will look to their social media platforms to search for different adoptee media groups. Select a few hashtags, good or bad, that are found on those social media pages and see what they represent. After this, create each adoptee will create their own hashtag that represents a phrase, picture, emotion, or story that they have experienced in regards to their adoptee identity.

Session 10: Up, up, and away!

This week we work to achieve the following objectives:

1. Learn about different transracial communities that we can plug into aside from this program. (There will be tables with different organizations that support transracial adoptees in the area and outside of the area).
2. Understand the different areas of our story that can be addressed when processing over our lifetime.
3. Celebrate the personal growth participants have made throughout this 10-week program.

To achieve these objectives, please think about the following prior to attending our meeting:

1. How did I grow throughout this program?
2. Was there something I gained that I didn't expect to during this program?
3. Gather any of your most memorable memories during this program and bring them to the group to share.

Schedule of Session 2:

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|---------|---|
| 5:00 PM | Gather and mingle |
| 5:10 PM | Small speech from leader, and power point of memories |
| 5:30 PM | Meal of celebration (survey on table) |
| 6:15 PM | Group celebrations: what did I learn or how did I grow statements |
| 6:45 PM | Thank you and group photos |

Takeaways while you embrace the world:

1. You are empowered to create your story, to understand the history, and to design the future. What will you do next?
2. You are not alone in this life-long journey and now you have a team of adoptees who can stand by your side throughout your life.