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IDENTITY ISSUES OF PARENTS WHO ADOPT CHILDREN INTERNATIONALLY

by

DOLORES E. MC CARTHY

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Psychology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Psychology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

IDENTITY ISSUES OF PARENTS WHO ADOPT CHILDREN INTERNATIONALLY

by

Dolores E. McCarthy

Adviser: Professor Susan Saegert

This dissertation investigated how parents who adopt children internationally construct their identities in relation to the adoption. Theories of Urie Bronfenbrenner, D.W. Winnicott, Erik Erikson and Stuart Hall frame the research. Within the ecological perspective of environmental psychology, the experience of these parents is seen at multiple levels and the interpretation of the results draws on object relations approaches of psychoanalysis and social constructionist approaches of cultural studies. Intensive case studies were conducted with 26 parents who adopted children internationally, using multiple research methods including a series of in-depth interviews, home visits, behavioral observations, participant observation, reporting of critical incidents and photographing of cultural objects that represented the birth culture of the child. This research found that parents constructed multiple identities, including the identity of parent, the identity of adoptive parent and the identity of internationally adoptive parent. For some parents, these identities also interacted with other identities, including gender, ethnic/national identity, religious affiliation, sexual preference, national origin, family-of-origin relationships, and urban vs. rural identification. Respondents exhibited a range of identifications with the child's birth culture, from mild to strong. Parents used a variety of

"transitional objects" to relate to the child's birth culture, including physical objects, people, places and cultural phenomena. Some parents were already identified with certain birth cultures and chose to adopt children from those birthplaces that reflected these identifications; other parents adopted for more "practical reasons" and constructed their identities during and after the adoption. In general, parents whose children most resembled them in appearance were less likely to identify with the birth culture; those parents who had identified with the birth culture prior to adoption and/or whose children were most different from them in appearance were more likely to identify with the birth culture and use more cultural practices that connected them to the birth culture. The results of this research highlighted the social construction of perceived racial differences between adoptive parent, adopted child and US culture. It also explored the influence of "consumerism" on identity development. The research further demonstrated the use of an ecological model to understand identity issues in person-environment transactions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Most dissertations begin with a personal interest in a topic. Therefore, my first and most important acknowledgement is to my daughter, Carla, who was born in San Antonio, Texas on January 23, 1993, and brought to me in New York City, on February 2, 1993. Perhaps she doesn't yet know that she has "inspired" me to write this dissertation, although I think she does wonder why her mother's hands seemed attached to a computer for so many years! Thank you, Carla for the energy that you may not even know you have given!

Thank you to Susan Saegert, my adviser, for her patience and guidance through numerous considerations of topics, and for her encouragement to include Winnicott's work throughout. No doubt that she provided a "transitional space!" Lee Ann Rivlin and Cindi Katz gave me further critical perspective and contributed both academically and personally to provide a broader context in which to understand my work. Thank you also to my readers, Barbara Katz Rothman and Mary Helen Evans, who both contributed a practical as well as academic view on issues of adoption.

Throughout these years I have been fortunate to have such a loyal and generous support group in my personal life, most of whom are also professionals in the social and psychological sciences. The short list includes (in alphabetical order): Margarita Bailey, Cheryl Dolinger Brown, Carol Cordes, Neil Elson,

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Finally, I wish to acknowledge the respondents in my research, who welcomed me into their homes and shared the intimate experiences of their adoption with me. It was always a wonder that we, both interviewer and respondent, were so emotionally touched by talking about the very special personal experiences of adopting a child.

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INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

> Could there be a journey more fateful than the overseas odyssey to adopt a foreign child? ... In the 1990's, what I think of as an adoption excursion has become a more common, and surreal, experience. Every day, hopeful adoptive parents fly off to Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America on journeys that will forever change their lives...It was seven years ago that I traveled to Romania to adopt an infant girl. While initially I was startled by the sightseeing aspects - interpreters and guides will insist you visit the local attractions - I came to value these experiences. When might I ever see my baby's native land again? Would I ever view a country and a culture with more curiosity? I carry with me not just photographs and videotapes, but clues to the mysteries of my child's life.
>
> from *Mother in a Strange Land*, by Laura Cunningham,
> Travel Section, The New York Times, Aug. 17, 1997, p. 29.

Like the comments of Ms.Cunningham quoted above, this dissertation is conceived of and developed from a personal perspective. I am a White, middle-class woman who adopted a child from a Latino background. While my own daughter was born in the United States, in southern Texas, and is technically considered a "domestic" adoption, she shows typical "Hispanic" features, such as being "of color" in her skin tone, having dark hair and eyes. I knew from the records given to me from the adoption agency, that my daughter's birth parents were both "Hispanic", and that she was born in a city in Texas that is known for its rich Hispanic history. However, she came to me in New York when she was two weeks old, before she was "influenced" by her supposedly Hispanic birth culture. I became intrigued by many questions of cultural identity raised by this situation. Thus, my experience, while technically not an international adoption, has many elements of international adoption with its tensions between my daughter's "birth culture" and my own.

This dissertation developed with my interest in understanding parents who had had similar adoption experiences. I chose to study international adoption in general, both to broaden the data I could collect, and to introduce the aspects of "place" as they may apply in an international adoption. I wished to focus on the "transnational" as well as the racial/ethnic aspects of international adoption.

As the data emerged, it was clear that I was taking one specific vantage point, that of my White, middle-class position. I came from a reasonably privileged background, culturally and financially capable of managing the adoption process and subsequent single parenthood. As a doctoral student, my unspoken views and assumptions reflected my position as someone educated within the dominant academic system. My understanding of many concepts, including race, culture, parenthood, family, support systems and community further reflected my "White, middle-class-ness." My ways of interviewing, my ways of selecting "probes" in the interview, my selection, analysis and categorization of the data further reflected, however unwittingly, this position. I will never know, and can never know, how a parent from another background, such as one who identifies as Black, or as economically poor, or of less "formal" education, might understand (or even wish to "study") the experiences of internationally adoptive parents.

Nevertheless, this research was undertaken with a genuine interest in others' experiences and a concern for the future development of identity issues for my daughter and myself over time. As this dissertation will show, each of the respondents, themselves White, middle-class adoptive parents also experienced

tensions between themselves, their children, and the larger society as at certain times, and in certain places, as a result of the child's supposed "differences."

While the parents of these transracial/transnational families remain White, middle-class, most of them at times experience the "differences" between themselves and "other" White, middle-class families who have biological children. Certainly, we had the privilege to "return" to our status as White, middle-class citizens in ways that others, including perhaps our children, cannot.

This dissertation therefore reflects the interest that emerges from personal experience, but seeks to understand the experiences of others. It points out pervasive and often unspoken assumptions about identity and experience when seen from a particular viewpoint. Hopefully this dissertation, from its conception to its final written form, exposes the tensions as well as rewards involved in the processes of identity construction, but recognizes that it is never fixed "once and for all."

CHAPTER 2: OVERVIEW

Environmental psychology as an academic discipline is distinctive in that it takes an ecological view of person-environment processes. Concepts of personhood, self and identity are central to these concerns. Some theorists (Proshansky, Kaminoff & Fabian, 1987; Altman & Low, 1992; Brown & Perkins, 1992) have specifically developed the concept of "place identity" as an area of identity studies that focuses on the relationship of "place" to the construction of "self." This dissertation will focus on such identity issues in a specific case, that of parents who adopt children internationally; it will focus on identity in its broader sense as well as in its relationship to "place." It will also see how "place" and "race" effect each other.

Traditionally, questions of self or identity have been seen as either primarily psychological questions or social role questions. A psychoanalytic perspective views identity as primarily an "internal" process. Alternatively, cultural studies theorists view identity as primarily socially constructed. The area leaves much more to be explored, especially regarding the dynamics of the process of how person and environment interact when identity is constructed. The question is not an "either/or" about whether to use psychoanalytic "or" social constructionist approaches. As Hall (1996), preferring the term "identification" rather than "identity," states:

> Identification turns out to be one of the least well understood concepts - almost as tricky as, though preferable to, 'identity' itself; and certainly no guarantee against the conceptual difficulties which have beset the latter. It is drawing meanings from both the discursive and the psychoanalytic repertoire, without being limited to either... In common sense language, identification is constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation.
>
> [This] approach sees identification as a construction, a process never completed - always 'in process.'... including the material and symbolic resources required to sustain it; identification is in the end conditional, lodged in contingency. Once secured, it does not obliterate difference. The total merging it suggests is, in fact, a fantasy of incorporation (Freud always spoke of it in relation to 'consuming the other')...Like all signifying practices, it is subject to the 'play', or *differance*. (1966, 2-3).

Using Hall's perspective, this dissertation will explore a specific case example of identity construction. Identity is seen as "process" and "contingency," as interplay between person and environment. The study will be viewed as both discursive and psychoanalytic in taking an ecological view of identity.

Environmental psychology also considers various contexts and levels of phenomena. Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1995) offers his ecological model of human development that addressed how the person and environment interact at various levels. He proposes that human development should be viewed as an interaction and progressive accommodation of four nested structures: microsystems, mesosystems, ecosystems and macrosystems that are to be viewed through a developmental (life span) perspective. His perspective will frame the overall approach to this dissertation.

As mentioned, in order to explore these ideas in environmental psychology, a concrete application was chosen to investigate the phenomena and

dynamics of identity development; specifically, this study will focus on "identity issues of parents who adopt children internationally." Besides being of personal interest to the author, this topic was chosen because it presents a unique opportunity to study identity development within both psychodynamic and social constructionist frameworks. Along the lines of environmental psychology, these phenomena will be explored in relation to time (1) the micro/mesosystems in the parents daily life during the process of international adoption as well as (2) eco/macrosystems of time in the sense of the "historical moment." Spatial issues will be considered within the framework of "place identity" concepts.

This research, based on case studies of 26 parents who adopted internationally, will explore the issue of identity in detail. Although it is recognized that identity is primarily (socially) constructed, the term "development" will be used to underline that, even construction itself is not a "fixed" process with a "fixed" outcome. Identity construction varies throughout the life span as identity is constructed, deconstructed, reconfigured, and reconstructed continuously. Thus, the term identity "development" will be used, although it is used in the interactive sense of person/environment constructions rather than some internal trajectory of "development."

Along the way, this dissertation explored the complex nature of racial and ethnic identity. It addressed the importance of "the self" and "the other," and the influence of the social and historical context in identity construction. Although focused on individual case studies, it takes a broader view of its subject. The research is ultimately concerned with processes rather than outcomes. It views the

interactive and dynamic processes of identity construction through interaction with the environment. Further, this study offers a framework for understanding other person/environment transactions that also involve identity construction.

Theoretically, this dissertation attempts to integrate the somewhat disparate approaches by using Winnicott's dynamic concepts of "transitional space" and "transitional objects" (including physical objects, people, places and cultural phenomena). Although Winnicott's work can be criticized on many levels, he does nevertheless, provide a rich and dynamic framework for understanding processes of person/environment interaction regarding identity development. It is expected that his perspective will serve as a bridge between the psychodynamic and social constructionist points of view.

The conceptual model for this study, based on Winnicott's view, is presented in Figure (1).

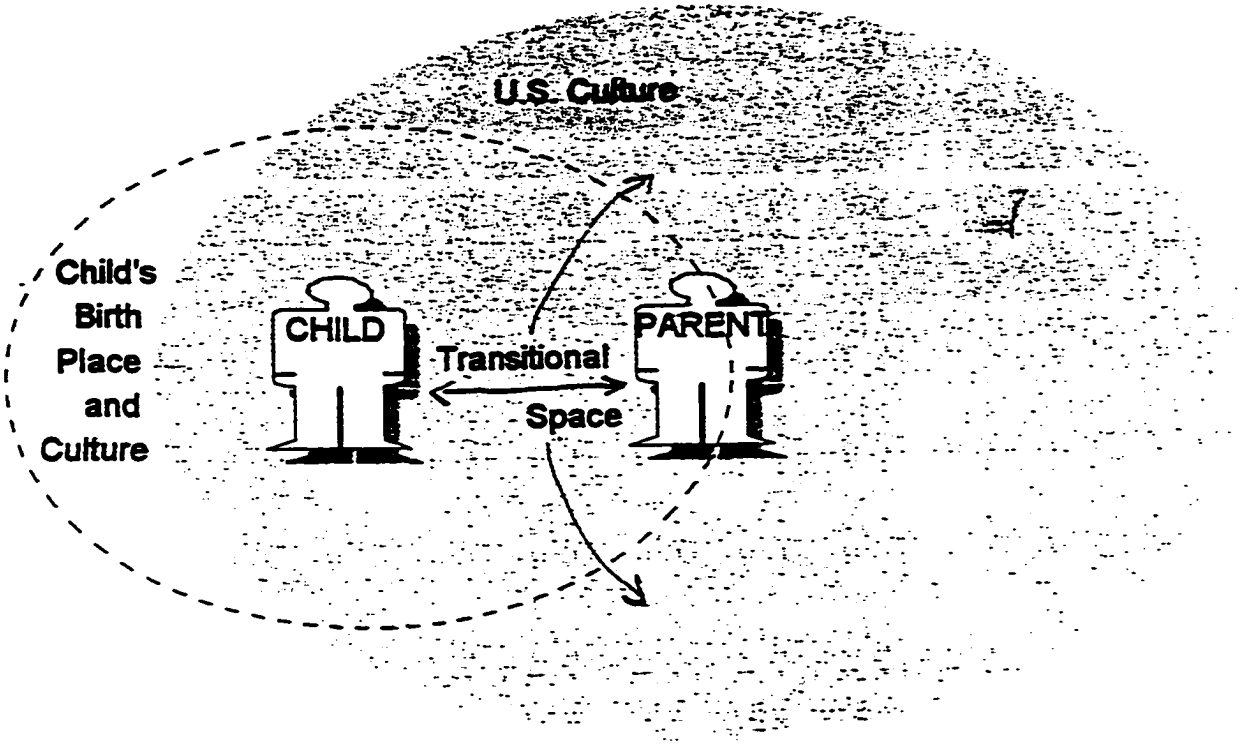

Figure 1: model of parent-child and place in international adoption

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL DISCUSSION

This section discusses various views on identity and will outline the case focus of identity issues for parents who adopt children internationally.

Identity in environmental psychology

Discussions of "identity" tend to proceed along either psychological lines, viewing "identity" as an internal experience of an individual person, or along sociological lines, viewing "identity" as perceived membership in and/or identification with a group. Environmental psychology, being interdisciplinary, has straddled both perspectives, while, at the same time, locating identity as at least to some extent, rooted in time and space.

Some environmental psychologists have studied specific cases of person-environment interactions related to identity. Bih (1992) investigated how Taiwanese students used material objects in the environment to help them mediate their relocation from Taiwan to the United States and the various means they used to maintain themselves during transition. Rechavi (1997) addresses a similar process with Israeli immigrants, although she focuses specifically on the home and interior design and decoration as extensions of the immigrants' changing identity. McCarthy (1993) compared place identity between geographically mobile and geographically stable individuals, focusing on the use of transitional objects and mobility. Manzo (1994) studied people's relationships and attachments to nonresidential places. Cooper-Marcus (1970, 1997) also considers various facets of "self" in relation to the environment, concentrating primarily on the "house" as symbol of the self.

Place Identity

Proshansky, Kaminoff and Fabian, (1987) developed the concept of "place identity," a specific subset of identity. The concept is defined as:

> ... a sub-structure of the self-identity of the person consisting of, broadly conceived cognitions about the physical world in which the individual lives. These cognitions represent memories, feelings, attitudes, values, preferences, meanings and conceptions of behavior and experience, which relate to the variety and complexity of physical settings that define the day-to-day existence of every human being. At the core of such physical environment-related cognitions is the 'environmental past' of the person; a past consisting of places, spaces and their properties which have served instrumentally in the satisfaction of the person's biological, psychological, social and cultural needs. (p.59)

Altman and Low (1992), in their concept of "place attachment" and Stokols and Schumaker (1981), in their concept of "place dependence," provide related ideas. While not specifically addressing "identity," these concepts involve affective ties to place, which is an aspect of (place) identity. In an applied case, Stokols, Schumaker and Martinez (1983) provide "contextual analysis" of relocation. They are credited with understanding that events, such as relocation, depend not only on the immediate circumstances; their study stresses the broader social and biological context (in their case, including individual residential history, current life situation and aspirations for the future).

In spite of the literature cited above, there has been no in depth discussion of the actual processes and more specifically of the internal processes that ease the person through the construction and reconstruction of his or her identity in relation to the environment. The present study proposes to do so in answering the question "In what ways is a parent's identity affected when he or she adopts a child internationally?"

Bronfenbrenner's (1971, 1977) work provides the overarching approach of this study. His ecological model of nested interactive structures fits well with the case of international adoptions, where individual parents interact with the environment on numerous levels, from their own individual psychological life space to broad economic and political factors in the world at large.

Psychodynamic concepts of identity

On the more internal or micro level, Erik Erikson and D.W. Winnicott, both psychoanalysts who placed heavy emphasis on environmental factors in human development, provide a framework for addressing these depth processes involved in identity construction. This dissertation argues that the complexity of identity construction, especially when focusing on the more internal level is best understood by using psychodynamic theory, particularly the theories of Erik Erikson (1963; 1968; 1985; 1992) and D.W. Winnicott. (1971; 1986; 1987; 1988; 1992; Davis and Wallbridge, 1990). Erikson's work has been used by researchers in social psychology for many years (Proshansky, Kaminoff and Fabian, 1987, Deaux, 1993). Recently, geographers and related social scientists, as well as psychologists, have begun to apply psychoanalytic thinking, including Winnicott's ideas, to their work (Aitken and Hall, 1997; Frosh, 1995; Pile, 1996; Sibley, 1995).

Erik Erikson, one of the major pioneers in the concept of identity, sees the concept from a personal perspective. Erikson himself was partially adopted internationally. His birth mother and birth father were Danish; his father abandoned his mother during her pregnancy; his mother later married a German

man who adopted Erik. He was raised then in Karlsruhe in Southern Germany. Erikson migrated to Vienna, then to the United States; he lived in various places in the United States, and traveled extensively through the world. Much of his work was prompted by his own autobiographical experience, which was grounded in "place" awareness.

Erikson (1975) states that he believes that psychosocial identity is situated in three areas at all times: the somatic, the personal and the social. He says that methods to study these orders are complementary to each other in revealing the complex nature of human identity. Erikson's further views on identity (1985) are based on the epigenetic concept of life stages. His work provides a framework for understanding both child and adult development in terms of ages, stages and psychological/psychosocial tasks. Although his work can be criticized because of its somewhat prescriptive nature, he does provide a viewpoint that is valuable in understanding development. Erikson believes that development continues throughout life, from birth to death, and that, during a lifespan people are confronted with certain predictable crises. He identifies seven life stages: infancy, early childhood, later childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, later adulthood and old age. He believes that each stage has its own conflicts and outcomes depending on how well one can navigate the transition between stages. Erikson's work will be modified somewhat in this study because his most intensive work has been with adolescent identity development, while this dissertation focuses on adult development. This study will focus on the stage of adulthood. Erikson states the major conflict of adult life is that of "generativity vs. stagnation".

> "...for this term [generativity] encompasses the evolutionary development which has made man the teaching and instituting as well as the learning animal...Generativity, then, is primarily the concern in establishing and guiding the next generation, although there are individuals who, through misfortune or because of special and genuine gifts in other directions, do not apply this drive to their own offspring. And indeed, the concept generativity is meant to include such more popular synonyms as *productivity* and *creativity* which however, cannot replace it." (1963, p. 266-267).

Erikson (1980) views transitions between life stages as "crises of identity." Thus, the "generativity" stage presents the conflict between creativity/ productivity/ generativity vs. stagnation/self-absorption. As he states, most adults navigate this stage by bearing and raising children, usually their biological offspring. Adoption is an alternative way of becoming a parent. For some, especially for married couples, the decision to adopt is usually based on the misfortune of infertility or repeated miscarriage, although a few couples who are capable of bearing children adopt for ideological or other reasons. Singles who adopt have a variety of situations, usually based on the wish to be a parent even without a life partner. In instances of gay couples who adopt, adoption is chosen because of the physical inability to produce a child with the partner. In all these cases, adoption is a somewhat creative endeavor, usually undertaken after one has coped with numerous frustrations surrounding fertility and procreation. While it is possible to conceive and bear a child with little foresight, this is not the case in adoption. In adoption, the decision to become a parent is consciously and intentionally chosen, usually after some strife. For those who choose international rather than domestic adoption, there is also a conscious decision to choose the birth country of the child. Further, although there is no "pregnancy," there is a

period prior to accepting the child when the parents "prepare" for the adoption. Thus, Erikson's work on identity crises, conflicts and tasks provides a theoretical frame for understanding a parent's development of identity in general as well as in the case of adoption.

Social construction of identity

A second perspective on identity is informed by an understanding of contemporary views in "cultural studies," which view individuals as embedded in social and cultural systems. It understands human processes and phenomena through the lens of social constructions by which a culture forms dominant ideologies and beliefs. It recognizes, places and situates the individual within the cultural matrix.

One of the main concerns of cultural studies is "identity," and specifically "cultural identity." Weeks (1990), a cultural studies theorist, writes:

> Identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others. At its most basic, it gives you a sense of personal location, the stable core to your individuality. But it is also about your social relationships, your complex involvement with others, and in the modern world these have become ever more complex and confusing...These are not new questions, but they are likely, nevertheless, to loom ever-larger as we engage with the certainty of *un*certainty that characterizes 'new times'. (p. 89).

This dissertation will draw also on the work of Stuart Hall, a prominent theorist in the field of cultural studies, especially in the areas of race and ethnicity. Like many theorists, including Erikson, his work stems out of autobiographical influences. Hall is Black, has lived in many places, including Jamaica and England, and is interested in the diaspora of culture. Interestingly, his own mother was adopted. (Morley and Chen, 1996). Hall (1990) says:

> There are at least two different ways of thinking about "cultural identity". The first position defines 'cultural identity' in terms of one

> shared culture a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves,' which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experience and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people,' with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual histories ... The second position recognizes that, as well as points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant *difference* which constitute 'what we really are' - or rather, since history has intervened - 'what we have become' ... Cultural identity is, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as 'being.' (p. 222-225).

Hall views ethnic identity as complex and drawing on many influences.

> The term ethnicity acknowledges the place of history, language and culture in the construction of subjectivity and identity, as well as the fact that all discourse is placed, positioned, situated and all knowledge is contextual. Representation is possible only because enunciation is always produced within codes that have a history, a position within the discursive formation of a particular space and time. (1990, p.446)

Along with Hall, this dissertation will include contributions of many other theorists, such as Pile and Thrift (1995), Rutherford (1990), Chambers (1994), Weeks (1990), and Katz Rothman (1989, 1998) who have used a cultural studies perspective in understanding person/environment interaction as applied to a specific case.

Processes of identity construction: The case of international adoptive families

Identity is created and recreated within a context that includes social, cultural and political forces. The adoption of children internationally provides a case example to understand complex factors that influence identity development. One example of this is the growing phenomenon of international adoption of children. Many children are being and have been adopted by US parents from such places as Korea, China, Latin America, India, Eastern Europe, Russia and

others. In these cases, family-making is an ongoing process of identity construction. The adopted child must develop an identity including both sameness and difference from parents and community; while the parents and any siblings in the family also transform in their own identities by the adoption of a child from another country. In fact, the parent's response to the birth culture of the child will be the initial and perhaps the primary way that the child will construct his/her own cultural identity.

International adoptions/processes and contexts

International adoption has existed for many years. In fact, one of the earlier known international adoptions may be Moses, who according to Biblical interpretation was a Hebrew baby adopted by Egyptian parents. In current times, international adoption is becoming increasingly common and formalized, due to issues such as infertility and later age childbearing decisions, diverse family structures, including single parents and older parents. (Cole and Donley, 1990). For example, foreign children accounted for more than one out of every six children adopted in the United States, and that number continues to grow. (National Committee for Adoption, 1989). More recently, as political situations have changed, much fewer children come from Korea (since most of these were Korean "war orphans), but newer countries include China, Russia, Eastern Europe, including Romania, Hungary and Bulgaria. Countries that permit international adoptions vary frequently due to various political factors. As each nation has independent criteria and processes, there may be more flexibility about accepting families, such as older parents, single parents, and others that may have

difficulty with U.S. adoptions. However, the drawbacks include possibly more bureaucratic red tape, corruption and children with hidden physical, mental or emotional problems than are typical in domestic adoptions. (McKelvey and Stevens, 1994).

In continuing with an ecological framework, international adoption must be understood within an historical and political framework. As such forms of family-making grow, however, they may also be understood by drawing on postmodern concepts of diversity and boundary fluidity. Especially intriguing is the mix of cultures and heritages that potentially exist in the families of international adoptions.

Understanding identity issues in relation to the adoption of children from other countries includes consideration of a number of topics. These include general theory of identity formation, parenting identity and ideology, identity development in adoptions, processes and contexts of international adoptions, children's development of ethnic/racial/national identity, the role of place in international adoption, and current issues in cultural and multicultural identity construction. Studying adoptive parents and adoptive children focuses on many facets of self-identity, or of many identities. Does the identity of a parent change in some way as he/she adopts a child internationally? How do they interpret their role of parent in relation to the existence of the child's birth culture? How do they choose to deny or include this culture in their approach to raising the child?

Concepts of the social construction of identity (as well as most other psychological concepts) have expanded in the last decade. The social

constructionists are more concerned with social and political influences on identity development than in "internal" psychological processes. Many recent writings by psychologists and sociologists who are also adoptive parents and have reexamined adoptive parenting through the lens of their professional culture (Katz Rothman, 1989, 1998; Yngvesson, 1997; Smith, Surrey and Watkins, 1998). All have used autobiographical experiences to develop their interest in more general cultural themes.

Katz Rothman (1989) stresses that adoption is a triangle and points out that the major discrepancy in domestic adoption is that of social class; most children placed for adoption are from situations of relative poverty and lower socioeconomic class placed with middle class adoptive parents. Ironically, adoptive parents in domestic adoption never seek to raise the child in the birth "culture" of poverty, but in fact often feel "proud" to "help" a child raise above a lower social class. Rothman contrasts the "question" of genetics (supposedly biologically set) with the social realities adopted children, particularly those of biracial families, face, as they grow into society at large. She acknowledges that, in spite of the attempts of adoptive parents to work with and accept differences in their children, the dominant culture may challenge this, and may further obscure the results of social constructions, including that of "genetics" itself.

> As our children grow, they grow out of our homes, out of our carefully selected, edited, manufactured world into America. (1998, p. 82).

Smith, Surrey and Watkins (1998) provide a critical review of negative and marginalizing attitudes towards adoptive parents, especially mothers, as not "real" parents and discuss dominant cultural ideologies and beliefs regarding adoption.

> We believe that deconstructing the underlying dominant ideologies that construct adoption in mainstream American culture will liberate new visions of mothering, family and human connectedness. ... adoptive mothers offer much in helping all people consider the social construction of family, the concept of 'ownership' of children, the dangers of mother-blaming that occur for all kinds of mothers, and mythologies regarding blood ties (p. 210-211).

> There are ways in which, by challenging the biological paradigm of building families, the adoptive mother's perspectives on parenting yields insight into how families are constructed in our culture...Is there a way, particularly in cross-racial adoptive families, in which children may become better equipped for the increasingly multicultural world they are being raised in? (p.202).

> If circumstances permit, however, there is the potential for exploring new parts of oneself in becoming an adoptive mother. There is often a parallel growth of mother and child as mutual relationship develops that acknowledges and respects differences. When a White mother adopts a child of another race, the way she understands herself, the world and the experiences of people of color begins to change. No longer is she able to see the world only as a White person without having a perception of how people view her and her child as somehow different... Just as biracial or bicultural intimate relationships for adults can be a catalyst for change in how each person experiences her or his identity, multiracial families provide a parent with new opportunities for forging a more complex and multifaceted sense of self. (p. 207-8)

Yngvesson (1997), also an adoptive parent, examines the dynamics of "motherhood" in the relationship of birth and adoptive parent in "open" (domestic) adoption. She stressed the importance of the "other" in this triangle, and draws on Winnicott's concept of "potential space" as found between both "mothers."

> Open adoption constitutes a 'potential space' where two familiar truths about motherhood – as an experience of identity and of connection – converge in powerful ways. Focusing on the double vision of mothers who feel both "real" and "not real" at the same time, [this discussion] explores the tendency of open adoption to resolve into familiar dichotomies of nature and law and its potential to produce new subjectivities that defy legal categories. (p. 31.)

Race, genetics and biology

There is a growing acceptance in the social sciences of the social construction of race (Katz Rothman, 1998; Gates, 1997; Barkan, 1992; Gregory and Sanjek, 1994; Ferrante and Brown, 1998). Sanjek (1994), an anthropologist, states:

> The labels used in race ranking - "Negro", "Indian", "White", "mulatto", "half-caste", "Oriental", "Alpine", "aborigine" - have varied in number, currency, assumed precision, and acceptability over time. The underlying scales of imputed racial quanta of intelligence, attractiveness, cultural potential and worth have varied hardly at all. To contemporary anthropologists, none of this scaling is "real," though it has been real enough in its effects. Race has become all too real in its social ordering of perceptions and policies, in the pervasive racism that has plagued the globe following the 1400's. For worse, not better, today we all live in a racialized world...It is essential that we historicize race and racism if we are to understand and struggle against their continuing significance in the present and the future. We need to understand how and why a ranked hierarchy of races has been put to such destructive uses, been affirmed "scientifically," been challenged repeatedly, and yet dies so hard. Its toll in terms of human worth, dignity and personhood has been tremendous. (p.1)

Sanjek later identifies various scenarios related to intermarriage and the future of races, predicting the role of international adoption:

> Growing numbers of racially mixed persons, and complex kinship networks that cross these racial lines will be more apparent. Another factor moving kinship ties in this direction is the adoption of children across racial and international lines by White Americans as their own birthrate declines. (p. 121).

Fine, Weis, Powell and Mun Wong, (1997) as psychologists, challenge the positioning of certain ideas of multiculturalism, critical gender and race theory. As a counterpoint, they investigate various meanings of "Whiteness."

> We place 'Whiteness' front and center of the analysis in order to subject it to the kind of scrutiny that rouses it off of unmarked space...Our contributors were selected, primarily, from the two fields of psychology and education. Both fields have harvested vexing and debilitating internal contradictions within race studies. Each has a long history of scholarship on topics of race, racism, and ethnicity, and each has contributed to...the 'racial ordering of society.' (p.viii)

Cornell and Hartmann (1998) propose two distinctions in ethnic and racial identity construction: one comparing "thick" vs. "thin" identity, another comparing "assigned" vs. "asserted" identity. "Members" of ethnic/racial groups may be strongly or weakly identified, and the identification may be assigned by others and/or chosen by themselves. Cornell and Hartmann mention three bonds that hold group members together: shared interests, shared institutions and shared culture. They then go on describe three primary issues in identity construction: boundary, perceived position and meaning.

> Identity construction involves the establishment of a set of criteria for distinguishing between group members and nonmembers. These criteria might include skin color, ancestry, a place of origin, a cultural practice, or something else. The point is not the specific criteria used as boundary markers but the categorical boundary they signify – the line between "us" and "them." (p.50).

The challenge for internationally adoptive parents is to bridge the perceived gap between the "us" and "them" with their child, and further, to locate themselves in a newly created identity. Children who are adopted internationally are adopted in a complex socially constructed context. They are potentially seen as culturally and racially "different" from the dominant culture into which they are adopted, and yet, as the theorists suggest, these very differences are themselves social constructions. The struggles of parents, and most likely of the children themselves, test the boundaries of ethnic and racial "identity." Most significant from the point of view of environmental psychology is the role of <u>place</u> as a potential variable in identity construction.

International adoptions: the role of place

As well as culture and race, aspects of place identity (Proshansky, Kaminoff and Fabian, 1987) are relevant to the question of international adoption. Their original definition of place identity specifically refers to "environmental past" and "place where the person lives." In reference to Proshansky's definition, parents of international adoptions may have "memories, feelings, attitudes, values, preferences, meanings and conceptions of behavior" about the child's birthplace, and do, at least in some way, relates to these in their developing self-identity as a parent.

Obviously, international adoption involves at least two different places (nations): that of the adoptive parents and that of the adopted child. Interestingly, some writers in the field of geography actually list adoption as a form of international migration in their studies of population and population change, and in a macro- view of demography, adoption of children is a considered factor in migration change. (Shelly and Clarke, 1994). This reinforces the position that, while this dissertation will focus on individual aspects of identity construction, adoption of children itself is a global phenomenon that can be studied in many other sites apart from the United States.

The role of place in the adoption process begins when the parents select the country from which they will eventually adopt the child. From the individual perspective, parents, in choosing a specific country in which to pursue adoption, must (at the very least) become familiar with legalities, policies and procedures for adoptions in those countries. They must deal with formal and informal child

care systems in that country, and must usually arrange one or more trips there (Kim, 1987; Melina, 1989; Trolley, 1995). Further, international adoption may also elicit fantasies, both positive and negative, towards certain places, countries or cultures that become part of the adoption decision. The parents place identity can be then extended by their actions of travel, reading and other behaviors related to the new place. As the child develops, the parents, as well as the child, may be engaged on an on-going basis with objects, activities and other phenomena related to the child's birthplace. Yet the extent to which and the manner in which this is done varies from parent to parent.

In this sense, "place identity" becomes relevant. The parent, as well as the child, will be influenced by at least three interpretations of place identity: (1) the "place" of their daily lives, (2) parents' experiences in and with the birth place/country, including travel to the birthplace, media such as books and videos about the birthplace and material objects from the birthplace, (3) the "imagined" birthplace of the child.

International adoption and identity

There is considerable literature on the tasks of identity formation for adoptees; however, very little has been explored about the identity tasks of the parents of adoptees. Much of the literature on adoption is covered in the field of social work, which, while taking a contextual approach, is fairly clearly rooted in traditional psychodynamic thought. Hoffman-Reins (1990), in studying identity development of adoptive families, identifies three aspects of the "construction of biography and identity" which reveal parental behavior in forming the identity: (1) the symbolic structuring of the turning point between the pre-history and the period of shared family life (giving the child a name), (2) the reconstruction of the

past to illuminate the present, and (3) the construction of resemblance - sameness - difference - in accordance with the shared family (present/adoptive family) or the family's pre-history (past, birth family). Parents who adopt internationally generally face many "differences" between themselves and their child. Evans (1997, personal communication), a social worker who specializes in interviewing families for international adoption, points out that most adoption agencies, when selecting appropriate parents for international adoption, are evaluating the applicant's ability to relate to and accept the "other" culture.

Identity issues are common for all adoptees (Hoopes, 1990; Kaye, 1990; Lifton, 1994). When parents decide to adopt any child, whether domestically or internationally, the identity of parenting is expanded, at least to some degree, by including multiple "others"; the child brings with him/herself another (perhaps unknown) genealogical identity. In what is termed "open adoption," the adoptive parent will have contact with the birth mother and perhaps the birth father and other members of the child's birth family; in a "closed" adoption, the adoptive parents will not know who the birthparents are, but may have varying degrees of information about the birth parents.

For all adoptive parents and their children, there are usually many unanswered questions about birth parents, heredity, and genetics, (Lifton, 1994), although the parents may have access to some records. Hartman and Laird (1990) stress the importance of the repeated construction of the "adoption story" to the family's identity. The situation is more complex when the child is adopted from another nation. (Kim, 1987; Melina, 1989; Trolley, 1995). In almost all cases, international adoptions are "closed" adoptions. It falls on the adoptive parents to help "construct" the cultural identity of the child. This will depend on factors such as the adoptive parents' experience with, knowledge of, attitude towards the birthplace and culture, as well as ideology as a parent about the degree to which

they want the child to know about and identify with the birth culture.

Hoopes (1990) extends Erikson's model of the continuing process of identity development for adoptees. She states that each stage represents an encounter between the individual and environment that must be resolved for the individual to achieve continued growth; it is a developmental consequence of multiple life experiences. While she focuses primarily on the child's development, her research establishes three factors that are important in healthy adaptation to adoption: family "individuation" (strong sense of individuals within the family group), acknowledgment of differences, and open communication. Since there are so many place and culture issues, adoption workers suggest that adoptive parents make "life books" - written or pictorial descriptions of important events, people and experiences of the child. (Cole and Donley, 1990):

> Adoption workers use life books - written and pictorial descriptions of important events, people and experiences of the child - and other similar techniques to clarify the child's situation by addressing a number of issues ("Who am I?"; "How did I get separated from my family?"; "What will happen to me?"). The interest is in helping the child develop the capacity to form attachments to a new family. (p.288).

Relatively little academic research has been done on the general area of identity processes in families of international adoption. Much of the work is somewhat dated, having been done from 10 to 20 years ago. Most of the existing work is either generalized and not formally researched (Melina, 1989) or based on outcomes of "adjustment" or "mental health" (Kim, 1978; Joe, 1978; Gill and Jackson, 1983). While research focuses on the relative "success" of such transcultural families (Silverman and Feigelman, 1990; Griffith and Silverman, 1995) little research has been done on how such "identity" is constructed for the child, or especially, for the parent. McRoy, Zurcher, Lauderdale and Anderson (1982) found that, in their case, interracial adoptions (Black/White) were

successful in terms of adjustment and mental health indicators if the adoptive family nurtured the child's Black identity, exposed the child to Black role models and peers in school and the community and paid attention to the child's Black heritage. Kim (1978), studying Korean-American adoptees, recommends specific activities, including family visits to ethnic areas, restaurants, gift shops, churches, gyms, dancing schools, and others. She believes that introducing Korean adoptees to these experiences will increase their self-acceptance and self-esteem. Melina (1989) deals at great length with helping internationally adopted children understand their birth heritage, recommending various ways for parents to expose their children to the birth culture; however, her book is written primarily for parents of adoptees rather than for an exclusively professional audience.

The most recent and significant work is that of Trolley, Wallin & Hansen (1995) which specifically studies international adoptions from the point of view of acknowledgment of adoption and birth culture, but is quite limited in its methodology. The authors surveyed 35 families who adopted from one agency regarding the relevance and frequency of acknowledging the adoption of birth culture, as well as suggesting some means of acknowledging the birth culture (reading materials, culturally related social events, interpersonal relationships). In this research, the parents were surveyed, but not the children. The researchers found that 90% of parents felt it was beneficial to expose their children to their birth culture while 68% felt it was important to do so. However, this study was a standardized quantitative survey and did not examine individual experiences or processes of identity development. The authors admit the limitations of the project and recommend replication of their study in terms of:

- incorporation of wider age range of children

- broader sample of parents (demographic characteristics and means of recruitment.)

- standardization of an instrument which included both the acknowledgment of adoption and birth culture, and in which terms are further operationalized.

- differentiation of parental responses towards each child who is adopted

- further assessment of the denying-acknowledging-stressing the difference continuum as it applies to families who have adopted children internationally.

- application of the acknowledgment of adoption and birth culture across various developmental stages. (p. 472).

Much research has studied identity issues from the position of the child relating to the parent (and the general environment) as "other" (Aitken & Hall, 1997); however, it can be argued that the reciprocal process occurs for the parent in relation to the child. The construction of the parent's identity is influenced by the child. In fact, Winnicott (1971), whose ideas will be focused on in this dissertation, states: "there is no parent without a child/no child without a parent."

Multiple identities

Much of the work in the adoption literature stresses the importance for the child of understanding the birth culture. However, it appears that this literature, mostly out of the social work tradition, extends the importance of "openness" in adoption, but does not address the parent's own position regarding the "other-ness" of the culture. In domestic adoption, this would be done by exploring the parent's attitudes and feelings regarding the birth mother (parent) and the expectations of the role of the birth parent in the on-going life of the child. As noted, since in international adoption, the birth parent is often unknown, the birth country takes on this role.

While using Erikson's concept of self-identity (1968, 1977, 1980, 1982), we must consider the alternative concept of multiple "identities" such as used by Deaux (1993). In the context of this dissertation, in addition to gender, age,

religion, sexual preference, religious and other forms of identity, parents of adopted children may wrestle with the "adopted" identity. They may also consider themselves as "adoptive parents," implying the "other" parent(s) in their identity. As part of this task, adoptive parents may internalize what is known, and what can be known, about their birth families (and birthplace). In international adoptions, the parent may struggle with different ethnic, cultural and perhaps racial identity between themselves and their child. They must consider the role of the hybrid and the possible hyphenated "American- " identity.

Becoming a parent is an experience that can alter one's identity. As already mentioned, Erikson was one of the first psychologists to address the concept of parental (generative) identity. In writing about parenthood, he says:

> The fashionable insistence on dramatizing the dependence of children on adults often blinds us to the dependence of the older generation on the younger one. Mature man needs to be needed, and maturity needs guidance as well as encouragement from what has been produced and must be taken care of. (1985, p. 266-267).

Thus, Erikson sees parenting (or some form of generativity) as a natural, evolutionary, transactional and interdependent stage of adulthood. In fact he says that when the task of generativity fails, regression to a state of stagnation and personal impoverishment occurs; these individuals often indulge themselves as if they were one's one and only child, with excessive self- preoccupation.

Wapner (1993, 1981), using his transactional view, reviews the nature and course of general parental development. He identifies nine approaches: the transition to parenthood, pathological developments in becoming a parent (for example, post-partum depression), the impact of parenthood on the marital system, personality and attitude change in the transition to parenthood, determinants of parenting (stresses and supports), parent's concepts of child development, the timing of parenthood, stages in parent-child development and

psychoanalytic literature on the role of parenting in women's psychology. He states that there is no "one" way of seeing parenting, but outlines these different viewing points in considering the parenting identity. Palus (1993) identifies parenting as a "transformative experience of adulthood," which he defines as:

> A transformative experience consists of a life event and its outcomes, such that the event is given a central role within a self-narrative in causing, catalyzing or symbolizing substantial, lasting personality change... experiences flow together to comprise forms of self -narrative, the memories and stories about oneself that, in a very powerful way are one's self. (p. 40-41).

His view helps us consider that centrality of "narrative construction," and sees parenting, as well as other significant life events, as processes central to identity.

Some researchers specifically study adoptive families. Demick and Wapner (1988) suggest four self-world relationships that categorize adoptive families: (1) total separation between adoptive child and his/her family of origin, which is termed "dedifferentiated" (all members consciously or unconsciously deny that the child has been adopted), (2) those who shelter the adoptee (differentiated and isolated), (3) the family - and especially the adoptee who may fantasize that the birth parents would treat him/her differently and who threatens to leave the adoptive family (differentiated and in conflict), (4) and the adoptive family who rejects an absolute separation between the adoptee and the family of origin. Because of the usual physical (racial) differences between parents and internationally adopted children, it is usually impossible to totally deny that the child is adopted, but adoptive parents can range between the other three types of parenting noted by Demick and Wapner.

Hybridity

A concept that is similar to that of the "rainbow family" of international adoption is the phenomenon of "hybridity." Writers in the field of cultural studies propose the concept of "hybrid" identity. Oyserman, Sakmoto and Lauffer (1998), social psychologists, offer this definition:

> Cultural hybridization is related to but distinct from acculturation/ assimilation - the adaptations individuals make when they move to a new culture or between cultural contexts. Hybridization involves the melding of cultural lenses or frames such that values and goals that were focused on one context are transposed to a new context. Hybridization has the potential of allowing individuals to express cultural values even when the original contexts no longer exist, and they may also create a bond or connection between individuals and their new contexts by allowing a socially approved forum to express their identities. (p. 1606-7)

Research on hybridity also borders on theoretical work on migration, travel, place attachment/disruption. Cultural studies theorists such as Rutherford (1990) and Chambers (1994) use metaphors of travel, "uprooting", diaspora, displacement and so on to refer to theory as well as practice. Pile and Thrift (1995) frame their work *"Mapping the subject: Geographies of cultural transformation,"* by noting "geographies of the subject," and "territories of the subject" identify. They note the contribution of "object relations theorists" in psychoanalysis, especially Winnicott, showing how the "object relations" approach can help in understanding more in-depth aspects of identity construction. Further, they develop six themes to present a geographical perspective of cultural transformation, including "position," "movement," "practices" and "encounters." Many of these themes, to some extent or another, also relate to this study of international adoption. As Pile and Thrift state:

> Of these different metaphors, some of the most fertile tend to cluster around the ideas of movement and mobility, journeying and traveling. ...there is a concern for capturing "being" as a process of provisional and open-ended movement... [another] concern with metaphors of movement is with the possibilities of mutable sharing. Whether we are talking of new, more open forms...the meeting of people in global cities...or the various outcomes of imperial and postimperial contact zones... the outcome tends to appeal to ideas of hybridity, as a description of new cultures and subjects formed by the juxtaposition and co-presence of different cultural forces and discourses and their effects. (p. 21).

When most parents adopt internationally, their own hybrid identity is in motion over time. As their child ages, constructs his/her own identity and faces the realities of the social construction of culture and race, this journey of identity will continue. International adoptive parents, if they accept the invitation, are themselves the travelers, the migrants. They can attempt to adopt "citizenship" in their child's birth world, as does the child in the parent's world. The parent must at some way (even at the most concrete level of dealing with administrative bureaucracies in the child's birth country) acknowledge the expanding borders of their experience in becoming internationally adoptive parents.

However, hybridity should be viewed within a social and political context. Parents who adopt children internationally do so within the context of the relative power and privilege of the White middle class environment. At the same time, the other hand, the adopted child may, at least visually, represent the non-White condition. The concept of hybridity reflects the tension for parents who, on the one hand, represent the dominant culture while, on the other hand, are faced with the realities and meanings of supposed racial and cultural differences and hierarchies represented in the broader US culture.

Winnicott: a bridge

The work of D.W. Winnicott provides a connection between the psychoanalytic and social constructionist positions in identity construction. His work offers the possibility of a "space" (which he calls "transitional space) that can hold tensions of the parent's changing identity as he/she adopts a child. Flax (1991) makes particular note of Winnicott's thinking in a postmodern framework, using a concept of "self" similar to Erikson's concept of "self-identity":

> Object relations theory [Winnicott] is more compatible with postmodernism than Freudian or Lacanian analysis because it does not require a fixed or essentialist view of 'human nature.' The logic of object relations theory suggests that human nature may have many forms. As social relations and family structure change, so would human nature. As the kinds of objects and relations between them a child internalizes change, so too would 'the child' and the nature of 'childhood' itself. But contrary to the views of many postmodernists, object relations theorists offer strong arguments for the importance of a stable, 'core self'. (p. 110)

Winnicott's concepts of transitional space and transitional object have been used to explain processes of "becoming." Environmental psychology argues that identity is constructed through interaction with the environment and the people within. This reflects the thinking of Erikson, of Winnicott and other object relations theorists, and of feminist psychologists/psychoanalysts (Gilligan, 1982; Chodorow, 1987; Flax, 1991) who see the "self-in-relation." Again, Flax (1991) comments:

> Winnicott's notion of the 'transitional space' is one of his most important contributions to (possible) post-Enlightenment thinking. He further undermines the distinction Freud and Lacan try to maintain between primary process (id) and secondary process (ego). He breaks decisively with Enlightenment values in identifying the capacities to play and 'make use of' and 'relate to' objects, rather than reason, as the qualities most characteristic of human 'being'...Furthermore, because Winnicott locates the development of the capacity to reason within the unfolding relationship of mother and child, his account is more compatible with and useful to feminist theorizing. (p. 116-7).

Winnicott's work deals extensively with the process of identity development. While his work mainly emphasizes the infant's development of identity in relation to the mother, he also discusses that a similar process occurs throughout the life span. For this reason, Winnicott's ideas are important in understanding the development of a "parent" identity. Thus, while Winnicott concentrates mainly on the child developing in relation to the (m)other, this can also be viewed reciprocally as the mother (parent) developing in relation to the other (child). Aitken and Hall (1997) interpret: "According to Winnicott, the process of creation of a *self* different from but in relation (rather than in opposition) to an *other*."(p. 73). In their exploration of Winnicott's work, we can see a relationship between environment and "place."

> If we are to extend Lefebvre's arguments [on *trial by space*] to individuals, the children (and adults) may be unable to constitute themselves, or recognize one another, as 'subjects' unless they generate or produce space. Now, we suggests further that space may always be transitional and place may always be potential (never 'actual' in the Cartesian formulation adopted by Piaget) because they can be filled in with a state of mind that embodies Winnicott's paradox: the child and the care-giver are one, and the child and the care-giver are two...By extension, the child, the care-giver and the environment are one, and the child, the caregiver and the environment are three. Given this unity, it may be possible to recognize more fully the importance of the cultural and societal codes and rules that saturate care-givers and environments." (p. 80).

Aitken and Hall's view is significant because parents (especially in the role of parent-as-socializing agent) transmit those "codes and rules". For example, some parents may expand their knowledge of the child's birth place and culture by such practices as reading books and other literature about the country, studying photos and maps of the country, learning the language, going to restaurants, and attending dance performances or other cultural aspects of the child's heritage. Other parents may minimize or even deny the birthplace of the child, and then, in another way, attempt to construct that child's cultural identity as "American." In

considering how they will view their child, parents incorporate their own national, ethnic and cultural identity, as well as their social and political ideology about in what ways, if at all, they wish to inform the adopted child of the birth country. This reflects the parent's cognitions, beliefs and emotions about the child's birth place, as well as their own identities as parents and as "Americans."

"Space" and "Objects"

People construct identity in their transactions with the environment. Some of the most important terms of Winnicott, such as boundaries, (transitional) space and (transitional) object are also keywords in environmental psychology. And, even though "object relations" in psychoanalysis usually pertains to human relationships, this study discusses how the concepts relate to inanimate objects as well. While the focus of this dissertation has been on the use of objects, objects exist in space. Winnicott's concept of transitional space is crucial to understanding how people interact with objects in the environment. In fact, Winnicott's work is significantly "spatial," as well as transactional and contextual. His very terms, such as "space," "boundaries," "external/outer" and "internal/inner," "location" (of cultural experience), "place" (where we live), or further:

> By the language we use we show our natural interest in this matter ["the place where we live"]. I may be in a muddle, and then I either crawl out of the muddle or else try to put things in order so that I may, at least for a time, know where I am. Or I may feel at sea, and I take my bearings so that I may come to port...and when I am on dry land I look for a house built on a rock rather than on sand; and in my home, which ...is my castle, I am in seventh heaven...I may talk of my behavior in the world of external (or shared) reality, or I may be having an inner or mystical experience...If we look at our lives we shall probably find that we spend most of our time neither in behaviour, nor in contemplation, but somewhere else. I ask: where? And I try to suggest an answer [leading to his discussion of "an intermediate zone/potential space] (1991, p. 104-5).

> ...Nevertheless, playing and cultural experience are things that we do value in a special way; these link past, present and future; they take up time and space. (1991, p. 109).

When parents adopt children internationally, they do so in "time" and "space." Winnicott's language conveys an interest in spatiality. Because of this emphasis in his writing, many of his concepts lend themselves to being used to explain many human-environment transactions. The term "transitionality" locates this phenomenon and addresses the processes that occur both within individuals and in ranges of human variation within psychosocial space. "Transitional space" will be defined as the area "between" the person and the environment, subject and object, where interpretive, adaptive and growth processes are employed to enhance person-environment relations and transactions.

Both political and humanistic geographers and philosophers (Bachelard, 1969; Tuan, 1977; and Lefebvre, 1974) explored various concepts of both objective and subjective space, prior to and parallel with Winnicott. Lefebvre defines three types of "space": spatial practice/physical space/perceived space, representation of space/mental space/conceptualized space, and representation of space/lived space. He defines his category as:

> Space as directly lived, through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users,' but also of some artists and perhaps of those of philosophers...space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. It overlays physical space making symbolic use of its objects. Thus, representational spaces may be said, though again with certain exceptions, to tend towards more or less coherent systems of non-verbal symbols and signs. (p. 39)

Current theorists in geography are exploring the relationship of object relations theory to their own work. Frosh (1995), in his article "Time, space and otherness," focuses on psychoanalytic views in geography, and cites Kristeva and Winnicott as both alluding to gender issues, boundaries and spatiality. Sibley

(1995), in his article "Families and domestic routines: constructing the boundaries of childhood" draws on object-relations theory (of which Winnicott is a major theorist):

> Object relations theory provides us with a map of the self in place, an integration of the spaces of the body, the space of the self and the other, and the mediating material environments of the home, the locality, and the world beyond. (p. 125).

Pile and Thrift (1995) refer specifically to Winnicott and suggest how his ideas can be used.

> Winnicott's reworking of the process of self and other is clearly very significant because of its emphasis on the other. But again, it has echoes in social constructionism, especially in the equation of Winnicott's 'space of play' and the constructionist 'third' space of joint action. (p.13).

This dissertation will explore, using Winnicott's ideas, how parents use a "space of play" to construct a "third space of joint action" with the adopted child. This "space" will be available to construct and reconstruct the identity of the parent (as well as, most likely, the identity of the child, although that is not the focus of this research.)

Such "place/identity" issues occur at many points during the adoption experience. There is the choice of birth country, interactions with representatives of the birth country, probable travel to the birth country to pick up the child, early experiences with physical and perhaps racial difference in physical appearance with the newly adopted child, the content of what is communicated to family, friends and others about the child's birth country, what is communicated to the child and in what ways is it communicated, and ongoing relations with the birth place during the child's development.

Culture and tradition provide a vehicle for organizing this evolving self. Winnicott's concepts focus on individuality and creativity in this self-making process. Flax's (1991) interpretation of Winnicott identifies the importance of culture, which is central in this study of international adoption:

> Culture, like play, exists in this third area [transitional space], the potential space between the individual's inner life and objective reality. Without something to make use of (tradition out there), no creativity or culture is possible. The individual's creative transformation of what exists independently in shared reality is what distinguishes art from dreams or individual delusion. But the individual can creatively transform what is given in part by bringing something of inner reality into the process. The subject is not only 'signified' but can also disrupt or transform the pre-given chain. (p.119)

Thus, Winnicott believes that identity is formed by interaction between the individual and the environment. Winnicott states that, for the infant, the mother is the primary "environmental object"; however, he believes that it is through interaction with a multitude of objects that we become a person.

It is interesting to note that Erikson and Winnicott both use the term "creativity;" Erikson seeing creativity related to generativity, the task of the parent-identity crisis, while Winnicott using creativity as vital to all identity processes. This reflects the position of this research that all identity, including parent identity and cultural identity is actively created/constructed rather than "given." How this process operates in parents of international adoptions is the essence of this research.

The role of culture

Winnicott (1971) offers a bridge between psychoanalysis and cultural studies when he focuses on the importance of "culture" in human development. He proposes that the eventual outcome of transitional relationships between infant and mother is the infant/child/adult's ability to bridge the self and society in a transitional relationship with "cultural experience."

> I have used the term 'cultural experience' as an extension of the idea of transitional phenomena and of play without being certain that I can define the word 'culture.' The accent is on indeed experience. In using the word culture I am thinking of the inherited tradition. I am thinking of something that is in the common pool of humanity, into which individuals and groups of people may contribute, and from which we may all draw if we have somewhere to put what we find....It interests me, however, as a side issue, that in any cultural field, it is not possible to be original except on a basis of tradition... The interplay between originality and the acceptance of tradition as the basis for inventiveness seems to me to be just one more example, and a very exciting one, of the interplay between separateness and union. (p. 99).

> The place where cultural experience is located is in the potential space between the individual and the environment (originally the object). The same can be said of playing. Cultural experience begins with creative living first manifested in play. (p.100)

> There is a direct development from transitional phenomena to playing, and from playing to shared experience, and from this to cultural experiences. (p.51)

Winnicott stresses that culture is "shared experience" and this dissertation will review how parents construct what they would "share" with the child. Parents vary in the degree to which they plan to include aspects of the birth culture into the child's everyday life. Some will draw on "Culture-at-large" (shared socio-historical experience or "tradition") to construct the everyday culture of their existence with their child. Others will incorporate "new" elements to the picture. Parents will "play" with material objects, places, people and general cultural phenomena as they construct identities. These "transitional objects" may include, for example, music, foods, clothing, and home decorations that the parent chooses to represent the birth culture of the child.

Transitional objects and phenomena

Given Winnicott's interest in both person and environment, his theories frame an understanding of how people form identity. Winnicott's work has been a major influence in contemporary psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic criticism.

His work has provided significant contributions expanding far beyond Freudian theory. Davis and Wallbridge (1990) identify many of Winnicott's important concepts including: early psychic functioning, integration/ unintegration, personalization, primitive object relating/experience of omnipotence, impingement and trauma, adapting to shared reality, growth of the inner world, area of illusion, transitional objects and transitional phenomena, playing, the potential space, use of the object/roots of aggression, innate morality/capacity for concern, mirroring, and holding.

Although Winnicott's overall contributions are numerous and broad, his work specifically applies to environmental psychology in four areas: (1) the transactional, intersubjective and dynamic approach of his overall theory, (2) entities/phenomena (including "me/not-me", "transitional objects"/ "transitional phenomena", "transitional space"), (3) processes (unintegration/integration, illusion/disillusion, play/creativity, mental representation/symbolization, fate of object) and (4) adult equivalents of infantile transitional objects and phenomena. Ideas such as these are crucial in environmental psychology, but previously underdeveloped.

> There is no such thing as a baby!...if you show me a baby you certainly show me also someone caring for the baby, or at least a pram with someone's eyes and ears glued to it. One sees a 'nursing couple.'...the unit is an environment-individual set-up. The centre of gravity of the being does not start off in the individual. It is the total set-up. (1992, p. 99).

The hallmark concepts of Winnicott that relate to environmental psychology are those of "transitional object," "transitional phenomena" and "transitional space." In each instance, Winnicott uses the phrase "transition" to mean the transition from the "me" to the "not-me" or the "other" (encompassing all aspects of the environment). In some sense, transitional objects are ambiguous

and paradoxical. They belong to the infant and are chosen and used by the infant, yet they are part of the environment. As a result, the object is simultaneously both of the individual and of the environment.

> The essential feature in the concept of transitional objects and phenomena ...is the *paradox, and the acceptance of the paradox:* the baby creates the object, but the object was there waiting to be created and to become a cathected object. (1989, p. 221).

A transitional object is part of the environment, the "not-me", but it is accepted as an "internal object" or a mental representation. The infant, during the process of development, gains the ability to hold the mental representation of the object (which may also symbolize the mother or the breast.) Through this growing ability to "internalize" the object, to personalize, "play" with, and transform the object, the infant grows in the capacity to soothe the self and move towards identity and independence. Thus, the transitional object is as an object chosen from the environment and used by the infant to bridge the space between the individual and the larger environment. These phenomena will be shown in how internationally adoptive parents "play" with the environment before, during and after the child is adopted.

Transitional space

Winnicott developed the idea of a "space" that exists between the infant and the mother/environment, or as it is also called, between the "me" and "not me." This space is also known as the "intermediate zone." It is in this area that transitional objects operate. It is a place of "play" where illusion can modify reality and where identity is constructed.

> This intermediate area of experience, unchallenged in respect of its belongings to inner or external (shared) reality, constitutes the greater part of infant experience and throughout life is retained in the intense experiencing that belongs to the arts and to religion and to imaginative living, and to creative scientific work."(1971, p. 25).

Winnicott goes so far to say that transitional space is "The place where we live...where we most of the time are when we are experiencing life." (1971, p. 104); he also calls it the "location of cultural experience" (1971, p. 95). However, he also says there is a high degree of variability from individual to individual, according to the quality and quantity of actual experience.

Transitional space is a zone of freedom, of creativity, a place to "play" with the environment, to personalize it. Thus, transitional can mean the state "between the me and not-me, and, paradoxically, the state of the "emerging-me," the developing, growing, transacting me. It is a state of "potential" or, more truly, of potentials, of possibilities not yet formed, but of coming-to-be-formed. It is an area of plasticity, of ambiguity and of an implied future. As such, it is not static, but is fluid and dynamic.

An (internationally) adoptive child can be seen as "not-me" by the parents prior to adoption; the attitude, emotions and behavior of the parents with, for and about this child create the "me-ness." In this way, the child becomes "one's own."

Transitional processes

Winnicott elaborates on many processes and sub-processes that contribute to identity formation. Winnicott's work is "action-oriented" in that processes are essential to his constructions. His work focuses on the active use and "play" between person and object. Significantly, Winnicott states his primary orientation in developing his thought as: "It is not so much the object used as the use of the object." (1971, p.xii) Thus, the exact object chosen is less important than why and how it is made special. Thus, the parent makes a journey from "not-me" to "me" in terms of their relationship with the child; the "international" ("place") aspects may amplify the "not-me/me" journey.

a) unintegration/integration

In the earliest state, the individual is "unintegrated" which he means as a collection of disparate experiences. The making of a human being hinges on the task of becoming integrated. As Winnicott states, parallel to the process of negotiating the me/not-me, the infant works from "unintegration" to "integration":

> In adult life, integration is enjoyed along with the ever-extending meaning of the term right up to and including integrity. Disintegration, in resting and in relaxation and in dreaming, can be allowed by the healthy person...so that it is out of the *unintegrated* state that the creative impulse appears and reappears. Organized defense against disintegration robs the individual of the precondition for the creative impulse and therefore prevents creative living. (1986a, p. 29)

In many ways, this process of unintegration/integration is repeated throughout the life cycle, particularly during environmental changes and disruptions, including life stage transitions.

b) personalization

An important step in development occurs when a selected special object is made personal by the child. After the object is selected and first "held," it is then repeatedly "handled" in this process of being made personal. According to Winnicott (1986b), this is also equivalent to the child being held and handled by the mothering figure in the child's growth and development.

> Ego development is characterized by various trends: (1) ..*integration*. Integration in time becomes added to (what might be called) integration in space. (2) The ego is based on a body ego, but it is only when all goes well that the person of the baby starts to be linked with the body and the body functions, with the skin as the limiting membrane. I have used the term *personalization* to identify this process...(3) the ego initiates *object relating*....
>
> It would seem possible to match these three phenomena with of ego growth with three aspects of infant and child-care:
>
> -Integration matches with holding.
> -Personalization matches with handling.
> -Object-relating matches with object-presenting. (p. 59)

After *personalisation,* the object can be "used" by the infant to continue the task of separation and self-definition.

c) the process of transitional object use

Winnicott's view on adult transition can be extrapolated from this infant/environment position. The representational object is "used" in some active way. Gradually, as identity and security are solidified, the object is "forgotten" or loses its intensity as the individual assumes the "shared reality/culture" of the new state. Thus, the use of an object waxes and wanes through different periods.

> An infant's transitional object ordinarily becomes gradually decathected, especially as cultural interests develop. (1971, p. 25).

Although Winnicott believes childhood transitional objects may be "forgotten," the process of transitional object/phenomena use occurs throughout the life span. However, as the individual is slowly enculturated into "shared reality," he/she may incorporate "cultural" objects/phenomena rather than exclusively concrete physical objects.

d) play

The child "uses" the object by means of the process of "play." The word "play" means not only "play" in the sense of action, but also "play" in the sense of, for example, "play in a rope," some degree of looseness and freedom, yet with some bounds. During "play" the child is able to "create" alternate uses, meanings and functions of the object. Many objects may be valued because they provide a *"transitional space"* of their own. These objects, such as books, musical instruments, diaries, and so on, are generally considered "cultural objects/ phenomena" and call for active involvement from participants. This also suggests Neisser's (1976) view of memory, that is, that present experience is related to previous "schemas" (frameworks) that have been established in earlier states. Thus, current phenomena are viewed as calling on early "memory," as in the case

of "transitional experience" evoking specific memories of the past to aid in transition of identity stabilization and comfort in newer states and environments.

e) identity development, transitions and environmental coping styles

Those objects in the environment that allow for "transitional space," for play and, when necessary, for illusion, are apt to be effective in mediating change. Winnicott's views on culture show that transitional objects and phenomena are used throughout life to provide relaxation, enhance identity formation and to offer nurturing and comfort during times of stress, loss and change. A transitional object is used repeatedly over time, sometimes changing in use, meaning and function as anxiety lessens and identity gradually is integrated. Transitional objects are found/created by the person and often eventually surrendered by the person as identity is established and diffused across culture. The area of creativity and play deserves attention to highlight positive interactions between person and environment

When an individual leaves one environment for another, there is a transition through a sort of dis-integration and then, back to an eventual integration in the new environment. Transitions can be external (relocation, migration, going to college, entering a hospital, shopping in a new location, etc.) or internal (life span changes: childhood to adolescence, adolescence to adulthood, adulthood to older age). During this phase the individual chooses or "cathects"/creates an object or objects from the environment often resembling the original soothing objects of infancy. The object(s) take over the properties to as outlined by Winnicott; that is, they are on the 'boundary," both me and not-me. The individual actively and repeatedly "uses" the object to serve the nurturing function of the former environment. Thus, the individual maintains 'control" over the object(s) in absence of control over the new environment. As environmental

skills increase, the individual generally withdraws the psychic energy from the object and reinvests it in the culture of the new environment.

f) creativity in response to the environment

Of special interest in Winnicott's work is his attention to creativity, in both the infant and the adult, in mediating the individual's interactions with the environment. Creativity serves as a bridge from personal, idiosyncratic, "me" experience to a particular engagement with the environment. It also provides for diversity in response to the environment.

> The creative impulse is therefore something that can be looked at as a thing in itself, something that of course is necessary if an artist is to produce a work of art, but also as something that is present when *anyone* - baby, child, adolescent, adult, old man or woman - looks in a healthy way at anything or does anything deliberately, such as making a mess...or prolonging the act of crying to enjoy a musical sound. It is present as much in the moment-to-moment living of a child who is enjoying breathing as it is in the inspiration of an architect who suddenly knows what he wishes to construct...(1991, p. 69).

Within environmental psychology, it will be especially enlightening to further explore and understand the nuances of the "creative" act as it makes contact with the changing environment. Winnicott highlights the fact that creativity is a natural process, available to all people, not just those specifically identified as "creative" individuals. During change and adaptation, the child (as well as the adult) is able to "play" with multiple identities and coping strategies. Through these repeated "experiments," rehearsals, and modifications, the individual becomes integrated, personalized and "object-related." Such creative acts are continued until equilibrium and resolution are reached. The child (and adult) must have the possibility to play and create various uses, meanings, interpretations and presentations of both the object and the self. The infant repeatedly searches for various ways to have the (transitional) object personalized, while also at the same time, seeing it as a representative of the

environment. In play, the child bridges inner and outer reality. In this way, the capacity for play and creativity is linked to positive adaptation and coping.

> In the experience of the more fortunate baby (and small child and adolescent and adult) the question of separation in separating does not arise, because the potential space between the baby and the mother there appears the creative playing that arises naturally out of the relaxed state: it is here that there develops a use of symbols that stand at one and the same time for external world phenomena and for phenomena of the individual person who is being looked at...The other two areas do not lose significance because of this that I am putting forward a third area... Nevertheless, playing and cultural experience are things that we do value in a special way; these link past, present and future; they take up time and space. (1971, p. 109)

It should be noted that Winnicott is suggesting that the capacity for play is crucial for all human beings, adults as well as children.

Winnicott's work must also be taken to be somewhat metaphorical. It is not necessarily a concrete or reductionistic model as it sometimes interpreted, it would be limited if it is used in a strict sense, for example that "objects" always unconsciously equal the mother's breast. Further, his writing is somewhat impressionistic rather than highly precise; therefore, a comprehensive theory is not presented. His work must be "played with" itself in a sort of transitional space of its own. This allows a certain freedom of interpretation and opportunity of creative response which, while not at all rigid, may lead to some inconsistencies in understanding and application. Further, his overall orientation is fairly open-ended, even "playful." He intends to counteract any overly-serious interpretation of his ideas.

In conclusion, various theorists, both psychoanalysts and social constructionists, contribute to studies on identity. Winnicott, although a psychoanalyst, is the most "environmentally-oriented." His work on unintegration/integration, personalization, processes of transitional object use, play, environmental coping, and creativity, provide a bridge between internal

(psychoanalytic) and environmental (social constructionist) positions on identity. This study will draw on his work, as well as others, to understand how parents create their identities as they adopt children internationally. This process of adoption will highlight how parents make use of "here" (U.S.) and "there" (birth country of child), and how they "play " with the environment and environmental objects ("transitional objects" in Winnicott's terms) to construct their on-going "self" as an internationally adoptive parent.

Summary

In order to understand parents who adopt children internationally, it is important to draw on a range of theorists, each of whom may address a different aspect of identity development. Bronfenbrenner presents a broad framework by considering multiple levels of person-environment transactions. Winnicott, Erikson and other psychoanalytic theorists discuss dynamics of more "micro-level" experience, while Hall and other social constructionists such as Rutherford, Chambers, and Katz Rothman address issues at more "macro-level" experience. Between these levels, Bronfenbrenner defines the "mesosystem" (proximal relationships and communities, such as family, friends, school, etc.) and "exosystem" (specific social structures, as such larger neighborhood, mass media, government policies and agencies, etc.) which interact with and mediate between micro and macrosystems.

More specifically, Winnicott offers concepts of "transitionality" which explain how, through multiple experiences of "play" with objects in the environment, a person constructs identity. Hall in particular offers concepts of "hybridity" and "marginality" that address the impact of dominant social groups and power politics of the construction of identity. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model seeks to address human development at all these interacting levels as well as intervening levels and translation between person and social system.

For example, a parent who adopts a child internationally, may choose and use physical objects from the environment that they feel represents the child's birth culture, such as foods, toys and so on. This choice may seem to occur on a "micro-", "personal" level. The parent may also be influenced by family, friends or spouse and by mass media in choosing the object. Further, the choice, availability and use of the object is embedded in a social/cultural/political "macro-" context that supports "consumerism" (for example, the purchasing of "cultural" objects) and "privilege" (the parent's beliefs and economic condition that allows the purchase of "cultural objects"). None of the theorists necessarily contradict each other; rather, each has a different area of concern.

Bronfenbrenner (1995), in a recent revision of his ideas, points out interactions between person-"other"-belief systems and the socially-embedded nature of human development:

> How do environments influence development? In the first systematic exposition of the ecological paradigm, the environment was conceptualized as a set of nested structures at four successively more encompassing levels, ranging from the micro to the macro. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).... I focus [now] on the more important reconceptualizations ....
>
> Proximal processes...involve interaction with three features of the immediate environment: persons, objects and symbols...[As documented elsewhere], the belief systems of parents, teachers, mentors, spouses, close friends and associates may be especially important in this regard. Depending on their dynamic content, the belief systems of 'others' can function as instigators and maintainers of reciprocal interaction with the developing person. (p. 639-640.)

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The goal of this is to understand the relationship and dynamics between place and self-identity when parents adopt internationally. The research is exploratory rather than hypothesis-testing, and informed by "grounded theory" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory focuses on the process and nature of people's experience to understand how people develop identity through interaction with the environment. However, the research will also be located within the framework of the ecological theories of Bronfenbrenner (1977), psychoanalytic theories of Winnicott (1971, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989) and Erikson (1968, 1975, 1980, 1982) and social constructionist theories of Hall (1996) and others. Further, Gergen & Gergen (1987) and Sarbin (1986) suggest the importance of narratives in constituting identity. Since the research in this study was explorative and open-ended, interviews were designed to elicit the presentation of the parents' narratives of their adoption experiences, as well as other data sources, by the respondents.

The primary method was that of a case study approach, using ethnographic methods to gain an understanding of a broad range of experiences that affected the identity issues of the respondents. Intensive interviewing was supplemented by behavioral observation during home visits, photographing of cultural objects in the home and other methods as indicated below. Techniques were modified, as it became apparent that some were more effective and others less effective in eliciting data. Since the author has extensive clinical training and experience, it was felt that, although this was not a clinical study per-se, there would be some

degree of latitude in interviewing to explore a range of issues using open-ended, quasi-clinical interviews in addition to observations and photographing of objects.

As is typical in qualitative research, research alternated between literature review, data collection and data analysis providing progressive validation of ideas. As the research progressed, further literature review, sample development, data collection and/or data analysis was undertaken as needed until clarity emerged. Questions that developed from either theory or data proved the impetus for the next round of work. Each stage was planned in consultation between the author, her dissertation chair and, when appropriate, her dissertation committee.

Sample

All respondents have been given pseudonyms to protect confidentiality. A brief synopsis of each respondent is provided in the appendix. An overview of the full research sample is provided in Table (1). A total of 26 case studies were eventually incorporated into this study. Initially, four initial "key respondents" were selected for "intensive" case study that formed the basis of further interviews with other respondents. The full range of respondents included both singles and couples who have adopted children internationally within the past fifteen years.

Parents were selected on the basis of the age of the child, ranging from age 2 to age 16. The sample was limited to those children adopted before age 1 to minimize the difficulties of the child having had significant cultural experiences in the birthplace. Further, limiting children to this age minimized detrimental experiences in the birth country such as illness, malnutrition, emotional distress or institutional care for a prolonged period of time, which could create undue stress in the adoptive parent-child relationship. Respondents were recruited by a snowball method, using word-of-mouth and by referrals from organizations

Table 1: Overview/background information

Name	Marital status	Residence	Gender of child	Current age of child	Birth Country	Religious Identification
Alex	Single (gay)	New York	Son	2 years old	Guatemala	none
Annette	Married (Paul)	New York	Daughter	3 years old	Moldova	Jewish
Barbara	Divorced	New York	Daughter	16 years old	Korea	Prot. (interfaith marr.)
Bob	Married (Sandra)	Albuquerque	Daughter	5 years old	Korea	Prot.
Burt	Married (Candi)	Albuquerque	Son	5 years old	Korea	Catholic (interfaith marr.)
Candi	Married (Burt)	Albuquerque	Daughter	5 years old	Korea	Jewish (interfaith marr.)
Don	Married (Libby)	New York	Daughter	3 years old	Paraguay	Catholic (interfaith marr.)
Fran	Married (Stuart)	New York	Daughter	3 years old	China	Prot. (interfaith marr.)
Greg	Married (Joan)	Salt Lake City	Daughter	2 years old	China	Prot. (interfaith marr.)
Helen	Married	New York	Son Daughter	5 years old 2 years old	Paraguay Russia	none
Jesse	Single (gay)	New York	Son Son	5 years old 1 year old	(US) Mexico	Jewish
Joan	Married (Greg)	Salt Lake City	Daughter	2 years old	China	Jewish (interfaith marr.)

Jules	Married (Paula)	New York	Daughter	6 years old	Brazil	Jewish (interfaith marr.)
Karl	Divorced	New Jersey	Son	13 years old	Chile	Prot.
Kathy	Married (Shawn)	Albuquerque	Daughter Son	7 years old 4 years old	Nepal Korea	Universalist (interfaith marr.)
Kris	Single (Divorced)	New York	Daughter	3 years old	China	Prot. (former interfaith marr.)
Libby	Married (Don)	New York	Daughter	3 years old	Paraguay	Jewish (interfaith marr.)
Martha	Single	New York	Daughter	4 years old	Mexico	Catholic
Paul	Married (Annette)	New York	Daughter	2 years old	Moldova	Jewish
Paula	Married (Jules)	New York	Daughter	6 years old	Brazil	Jewish/Prot. (interfaith marr.)
Ron	Married (Sally)	New York	Daughter	4 years old	Colombia	Catholic (interfaith marr.)
Sally	Married (Ron)	New York	Daughter	4 years old	Colombia	Prot. (interfaith marr.)
Sandra	Married (Bob)	Albuquerque	Son	5 years old	Korea	Prot.
Shawn	Married (Kathy)	Albuquerque	Daughter Son	7 years old 4 years old	Nepal Korea	Catholic (interfaith marr.)
Stuart	Married (Fran)	New York	Daughter	3 years old	China	Catholic (interfaith marr.)
Veron-ica	Single	New York	Daughter	13 years old	Costa Rica	Jewish

for adoptive parents such as New York Singles Adopting Children (NYSAC), Adoptive Parents Committee (APC), Families Adopting from China (FAC), and Rainbow House. There was no restriction as to country of origin of the child in order to obtain diversity and breadth in the sample.

Initially, all respondents were chosen from the New York City metropolitan area. As the research progressed, it became evident that almost all respondents mentioned that they believed that living in New York City influenced their choice of and adaptation to international adoption. They mentioned this because of the strong multi-cultural aspects of the New York area. Therefore, as the study further developed, respondents were also drawn from other cities. Six respondents lived in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and two lived in Salt Lake City, Utah. Further, two of the six who lived in Albuquerque had also lived with their son in suburban Maryland and had moved back to New Mexico because of a perceived prejudice against them as a family in Maryland. One additional parent, who lived in a suburb of Philadelphia, was also interviewed although not formally included in the sample. Ten respondents were born in New York and remained in the general geographic area; sixteen were born in other cities (and one in another country) from where they were living at the time of the interview. Five respondents were raised in somewhat rural areas and then moved to urban areas as adults. Thus, there is a good degree of geographic diversity.

Twelve men and fourteen women participated as respondents. The ages of the respondents ranged from 34 to 53. Nine were married couples where both partners participated. One married woman also participated although her husband was not available to be part of the study. Two additional participants were currently divorced, but had been married when they adopted. Five single adoptive parents participated; two were gay, three straight. One single parent was divorced; the other four had never married.

Seven parents (representing four families) already had biological children when they adopted. Three respondents had two adopted children; in each case the second child was adopted within two years of the first. In two of the three cases, the second child was adopted from a different birthcountry and birth culture. Therefore, nineteen of the respondents were first-time parents, adjusting to becoming parents as well as adoptive parents at the same time.

Of the 26 respondents, eight identified themselves as Jewish, six as Catholic, eight as Protestant and two had no religious identification. It is interesting to note that of the nine married couples, seven were in interfaith marriages, and two of the divorced respondents had also been in interfaith marriages. Thus most respondents, or at least those who had married, were already open to "diversity" in their family by the choice of a marital partner of a different faith.

Parents had differing reasons for choosing adoption. Thirteen adopted as a result of infertility, most of whom had unsuccessful medical treatment for the infertility. Seven more had previous miscarriages or other medical problems. Five were singles choosing adoption and had not been pregnant before, although one of these single parents was also infertile. One respondent, who was married and able to become pregnant, specifically chose adoption for ideological reasons. Perhaps because most adoptive parents had had significant reproductive problems prior to adoption, they had especially complex relationships with their adoptive children. This will be further explored in this dissertation.

Of the total, nine children were adopted from Asian countries (three from China, five from Korea and one from Nepal). Two children were adopted from Eastern Europe (one from Russia and one from Moldova). Nine were adopted from Latin American (two from Paraguay, two from Mexico and one each from Guatemala, Costa Rica, Chile, Brazil and Colombia). Of the parents who adopted

more than one child, one adopted a first child from Paraguay and the second from Russia, the next adopted the first child from Nepal and the second from Korea, and the third adopted his first child from Texas (although the child was Hispanic) and the second child from Mexico. Twenty-one respondents visited the birth country of their child, while five did not. In those cases (all the children were from Korea) the child was brought to the United States by the adoption agency. The diversity of countries represented in this sample will provide a broad range of experiences to compare and contrast.

Methods

Research techniques were based on a series of in-depth interviews/ observations, which were fairly unstructured so as to obtain sufficient data to construct case studies of each respondent. Each respondent was interviewed a minimum of two times. At least one interview was held in the home. Four primary techniques were used: (1) Open-ended interviews (2) Behavioral observations (the author visited each parent at home and observed the home to see objects on display, if any, related to child's adoption and/or birth culture). Some respondents were also observed in other settings as well, including parks, school settings, adoption picnics, and other social events. (3) Parents were given a camera to photograph any objects owned by the family that were related to the child's birth culture and (4) Parents were asked if they had a scrapbook or "life book" for the child, and, if they agreed, they were asked for permission to photograph/ reproduce contents for analysis. If they did not have a life book and were willing to make one, the initial plan was to give the parents a binder to create a "life book" that would be lent to the researcher for analysis. (This last technique was dropped due to the unwillingness of respondents to participate in this task.)

Parents were told that they would be contacted for a series of interviews, rather than just one interview, and therefore data were obtained at a later point

when additional questions or modifications arose in the course of the research. As a result, data collection was reasonably fluid. With some parents, case studies were obtained over many interactions during the course of over a year data collection for this project.

The first interview was conducted in the respondent's home and usually took one to two hours. In addition to the interview itself, the author was given a tour of the house, specifically to identify and discuss any objects that represented the birth culture of the child. The parent photographed any objects they felt were significant, and reviewed the "life book" (if one existed) with the author. Follow-up interviews were generally held in the home again, although other locations were used if this was more convenient for the respondent. Thus, some follow-ups were conducted in the respondent's office, in a coffee shop, in a park, over the telephone or in other locations. In most cases, the adoptive child was present at the home visit. Since the research focused on the parent's identity, the child was not part of the formal interview. However, the child was greeted and usually in some way included in discussion with the interviewer for a few minutes. The child often accompanied the parent and author on the house "tour" and pointed out cultural objects. Since the interview structure was fluid and quasi-clinical, this material was also generally re-discussed with the parent in private.

In addition, the author conducted general research to become more familiar with the "culture of international adoption." To obtain a better perspective on the broader picture of international adoptions, the author attended a major conference for parents and prospective parents on adoption in New York, interviewed 3-4 adult adoptees who were born in other countries but raised by American parents in the United States, interviewed a number of social workers who specialize in the field of adoption, collected and read books, pamphlets and magazines for internationally adoptive parents, and attended a picnic for families

of international adoption in Albuquerque. The author also consulted informally throughout the research with a clinical child psychologist who herself was adopted and had given workshops on "Adoption and Identity."

As the research developed, the sample was enlarged and some methods and questions were modified. In the interview section, questions were added about religious backgrounds, methods of coping with family-of-origin and perceived effects of geographic residence. The use of "Life Books" was minimized as it was found that only one parent had kept a formal "Life Book" and all others stated they were "too busy" to do so. As busy parents, most in dual career families, they were unwilling to make a life book as part of the research study. Photographing was continued but did not contribute significantly to the data received. In most cases, parents were very comfortable in taking the author on a tour of the house and discussed objects spontaneously. Even though most parents were willing to and did take pictures of items they felt represented the child's birth culture, the photography, while interesting, was not especially rewarding. That is, the parents were already forthcoming with information and the photography technique did not appear to add additional information.

Areas of inquiry

Because the interview methodology was open-ended, there were no formally structured questions. New areas of inquiry were added or deleted as a result of the intensive pilot studies or ongoing data collection. However, a general guideline of areas initially covered, in whatever order, included:

- The parents' sense of themselves changing by becoming a parent.
- The parents' sense of themselves changing by becoming an adoptive parent.
- Parents' decision to adopt, decision to adopt internationally and choice of country.

- Parents' prior familiarity with child's birth country and experience with others of the same birth culture; parents' own ethnic background and identity.
- Parents' experiences with birth country during adoption process.
- Parents' (and children's) experiences with birth country following adoption.
- Fantasies of the how the child's life would have been if he/she remained in their birthplace.
- Parents' and children's acceptance/experiences in the with their community, including extended family, neighbors, school, interaction with others of same ethnicity, etc.
- Formal and informal attempts to familiarize educate and continue contact with birth culture: on part of parents for themselves, provided by parents to child, provided by others for child (family, friend, school, etc.), initiated by child.
- Methods and objects used to educate the child on the birth culture (toys, books, dolls, foods, restaurants, etc.).
- Reactions to above attempts, successes/failures and creative responses.

From these ongoing interviews, new questions developed and respondents, as agreed, were re-interviewed. Topics that emerged included:

- The importance of infertility/multiple miscarriages prior to adoption.
- How parent chose the name of the child and the significance of naming.
- If and how religion or religious identity and traditions affects the parent's construction of identity.
- The role of geographic location and the urban community.
- Racial/ethnic identifications.

Data collection and analysis

At each stage, interviews were reviewed by the researcher and by her dissertation chairperson. The research approach was then revised, as needed, based on analysis of the prior data. Methods of analysis include: analysis of narratives (Mischler, 1986; Wolcott, 1990), behavioral observation, analysis of photographs, analysis of "life books" and parents' comments during the interview when taking photographs and preparing "life books." Interviews/ narratives were recorded and coded for themes as further data emerged.

The research was conducted in stages. At each stage, interviews were taped and transcribed. The author and her dissertation chairperson then reviewed transcripts. This provided for corroboration of analysis and interpretation. These transcript reviews formed the basis for both enlarging the sample, and enlarging the scope of the interviews and observations. There was a continual interplay between interviewing the four "key respondents," revising interview questions, expanding the sample, re-interviewing, etc.

In the first stage, four respondents were selected as "key respondents" who were studied in depth over many interviews, interactions and observations. These four respondents were involved in more extensive interviews, observations and repeated contacts in a variety of settings throughout the research, serving as informal "advisors" for the on-going study. These respondents were seen a number of times in their homes, as well as in other settings, with and without their children, as well as involved in brief phone contacts.

Following the initial four respondents, an additional eight case studies were begun based on a combination of theory (for example, Bronfenbrenner, Winnicott, Erikson, Hall) and a review of themes presented by "key respondents." Again, during this phase and all subsequent phases, the "key respondents" were re-interviewed as needed. At the next review, it was decided that the sample

should be enlarged to include more men. At this stage, two gay men were included, and husbands of five existing respondents were included. The gay men were included to understand experiences of more marginalized parents, while the husbands were included to get further understanding of the dynamics between married couples. At another stage, the sample was again expanded to obtain more geographic diversity. Two respondents who lived in Salt Lake City and six respondents from Albuquerque, New Mexico were interviewed.

At a later stage, in review with the author's dissertation committee, it was felt that issues relating to the social construction of race and ethnicity had emerged and bore reanalysis. At that stage, the interviews were recoded to further understand the importance of social contexts, beliefs and attitudes that underlie racial and ethnic identifications.

- Respondents continued to be sought until it appeared that no new data were emerging, in spite of the diversity of the sample. Cases were reviewed after 24 parents participated. It was then felt by the author and her advisor that no new issues were emerging. However, two new interviews were held with spouses of existing respondents to complete the study of marital couples. An additional, more informal interview was also held in a suburb of Philadelphia with a father who adopted from China, but also yielded no additional information and was not pursued as a formal case for this project.

An "open-coding" approach (Corbin and Strauss, 1990) was used. An initial coding scheme was developed, then reconsidered and recoded in stages as the data collection /analysis continued. Since interviews were fairly unstructured and included the home tour, photography and life book review, as well as follow up phone calls, visits and other contact, the coding and analysis required an open format. The eventual coding themes evolved to analyze the following areas, as they related to the parent's changing identity:

1. "Me/not me"
   - Multiple identities: parenting, adoption, international adoption
   - Decision-making: motives for international adoption (precipitants, including infertility/miscarriage as well as motives coded as "emotional", "political/ideological" and "practical")
   - Interactions with other identities (ethnic/national identity, religious identity, gender, sexual preference, etc.)
   - Perceived role of genetics and "race"
   - Stages of identity construction (pre-adoption, adoption, post-adoption)
   - Physical appearance of the child
   - Role of "irrationality"
   - Direct references and noted changes in identity

2. Life span and socio-historic contexts
   - Life span tasks (especially generativity)
   - Reworking of earlier life tasks
   - Family-of-origin issues
   - Dynamics between couples
   - Broader social, cultural and political influences

3. Transitional objects: choice and use
   - Material objects
   - Space and place
   - People and community resources
   - Cultural phenomena
   - Naming of child
   - Transitional and creative processes

4. Construction of culture in everyday life
   - Fantasies of birth culture
   - Incorporation of birth culture in daily life
   - Critical incidents
   - Future plans
   - Child's social life
   - Role of religion
   - Role of place and community

While the interviews provided the primary data source, behavioral observations, photographs and life books were significant sources of data themes such as transitional objects (choice and use) as well as dynamics between couples. Photographs were used primarily as an interview approach to engage the

respondent further in the process, and to gather interview data in a more indirect way. This interview technique was seen as more important than the actual content of the photos. However, photographs taken by parents included: children's books, dolls, maps, paintings, life books, art projects, pottery, cookbooks and weaving that all represented and/or were obtained directly in the child's birth country. Only one respondent had done a formal "life book." One other was given a "life book" by her child's orphanage. Four other respondents showed the interview photos, papers and other material they had ready to put in a life book ("whenever I get the time!"). Lastly, a rating was developed of the level of each respondent's identification with the child's birth culture. This rating was determined by a combination of factors, including direct interview references, uses of transitional objects (both past and present), observations of cultural objects around the home and clinical impressions of the author during interviews and observations.

The next part of this study will discuss what themes and issues were developed as a result of the process of data gathering/data analysis/data gathering/ data analysis.

CHAPTER 5: Foundations of Identity: "Me/not-me"

In order to understand the process of parents relating to their children who were born in different countries, we must consider the issues of how they experience sameness and/or differences from the child. In terms of Winnicott's (1971) concepts, this is called "me/not-me."

For parents in this study, identity construction focuses on different aspects of these categories depending on the individual parent. For some, the major identity work focused on becoming a parent, for others it focused on becoming an adoptive parent, for some, it focused on the international aspect. In some cases identity development focused on a combination of categories.

Identities

This report will present some representative comments of parents in each category: (a) those that felt that being a parent was "Me" compared to those who felt being a parent (at some stage) was "Not-me", (b) those who felt that adoption was "Me" compared to those who felt adoption (at some stage) was "Not-me" and (c) finally parents who felt international adoption was "Me" compared to those who (at some stage) felt international adoption was "Not-me." A later section of the dissertation will discuss how respondents created these identities, using the theories of Bronfenbrenner, Erikson and Winnicott.

Parenting

For the most part, respondents felt very drawn to the identity of parent, since this is what motivated them to begin the adoption process. Barbara, Sally, Fran/Stuart, and Candi/Burt were already parents of a biological child when they decided to adopt a second child. Obviously, at least to some extent, they were already identified as parents. Sally/Ron, Helen, and Libby/Don had had several miscarriages during their attempts to bear a child. Fran/Stuart, Annette/Paul,

Candi/Burt, Kathy/Shawn, and Jesse had had extended experiences of infertility or other medical problems that made it difficult if not impossible to bear a child. Two respondents (Libby and Joan) both had wanted to be parents, but due to individual circumstances (Joan's divorce before her second marriage to Greg, Libby's husband Don's reluctance) both women had actually resigned themselves to being childless and sought other forms of "parenting" (for example, caring for nieces.) So, all of these respondents had made some serious attempts to become parents and had met with frustrations and disappointments. All these parents had already been through numerous attempts to have biological children before they decided to adopt.

> I felt comfortable with the idea of being a father. ...And I'll tell you what really did it: My younger brother, he's 3 years younger than me, his wife left him with 2 kids in diapers, so he had to raise them! And, he did a wonderful job! So I realized "I could do a good job! I don't have to be a genius to do it!" So, he inspired me, I would have to say. And he's not even that educated; he's a brickmason. And his kids were, and are, still delightful kids. (Alex)

Below is a sample of some parents' descriptions of their feelings about becoming parents:

> I was always very paternal, I knew that and I hadn't had a whole lot of experience with kids, but I do feel paternal, once I get to know them. I recently was cleaning out some files and I saw that, back until 1974, I had clipped something from the *New York Times* on adoption, I think it was, single adoptive parents or gay adoptive parents, so I was thinking about it at least that far back. I guess I always thought I was going to be a parent! (Jesse)

> When I reached a certain age and I realized it was becoming more difficult for me to have a biologicai child... I actually started going through an early menopause – very early – in my late thirties. And I went to the doctor to find out how things are, and he said that it's probably unlikely that I would have a biological child. Which propelled me to look... I wasn't really thinking at that point, when I heard that I thought, "I'm not going to let this throw me". Because I wanted a child all my life, and always thought I'd be married and have a child, and I decided I'd better do something because I'm getting older. (Veronica)

> After great difficulty and through gestational surrogacy, we had Harry, ... we wouldn't do that again. I personally couldn't bear the idea of an only child, because I have a sister, my parents died, my mother died when I was 13, and my father died a few years ago., and you know, its so easy to find yourself alone in this world..I think if you don't have a sibling, its just terrible. (Fran)

> I began thinking about adoption as I got older, into my forties, and the relationship I was involved with at a certain point before going back to medical school, had ended. So I was thinking about it, because I had always really wanted children. I had been married for a long time right out of college. And one of the issues why we got divorced was children. So, I wanted children, and then this relationship I was involved with, a serious long-term relationship, also ended. So I started thinking about it [adoption]. (Kris)

In spite of this, at least two respondents, Don and Karl, expressed difficulties seeing themselves as "parents" and in both cases their wives were more comfortable in the "parent" identity. For these respondents, the very concept of "being a parent" was seen as different, strange, "not-me." This is best described at length in the story of Don:

> Well I think it started from me – how I adopted E. When we got married I thought I wanted to have two kids. But I realized that although in my head I was saying that, emotionally I wasn't ready to have children. Libby had miscarriages and I felt relieved rather than sad about the miscarriages. So that was a signal for me. I shared that with Libby, and we decided to put that on hold..... at that point we decided that our lives were OK the way they were – having relationships with nieces and nephews and our lives – that was fine.
>
> But then about five years ago I started a job as a social worker. I was working with an adolescent girl, in counseling, and she was going through a lot of heavy-duty stuff. And as we developed a working

> relationship – I started getting these feelings of... or thoughts of like, myself and her or someone... and that's when these feelings of fatherhood just crept up, in there and all of a sudden I felt like I was ready to be a father. I mentioned it to Libby, and she was surprised at first because we had years ago said that we didn't feel that we needed children...and that here I am making a reversal. I felt mixed during the adoption process - I realize I kept a sort of distance. It was exciting, of course... we would be with this little human being, I had never really been with a baby. The thought of that baby being ours was real alien to me at the time. (Don).

Although a bit less ambivalent, Karl also expressed some reservations about becoming a father:

> We were just so focused with M. That was a new experience – I had never taken care of a baby... But before we got him, when I talked to another man who had adopted, I told him, I was worried about not loving him. Just seeing him and holding him...I had never felt love like that before. So we quickly bonded.

Adoptive parenting

Some respondents in this study expressed little concern about the adoption experience. For some, it was fairly easy to create the identity as adoptive parent because some respondents had already had adoptions in their family of origin. Sally's own mother was adopted. Stuart and Don both had brothers who had already adopted children with their wives, which were, incidentally, international adoption. So they felt quite comfortable accepting adoption.

Others had a general "feeling" that they wanted to be an adoptive parent.

> I started going to support groups, which I heard about through Single Mothers by Choice, and went to meetings of Latin American Parents Association, and Adoptive Parents Committee, and there might have been another group. So when I attended those meetings and saw the children, I really fell in love with the kids. They were adorable. I met other single parents. I just felt, "This was fine for me." (Veronica).

> I don't think it's changed me, it's more like it identifies me, like that's who I am. Yes, I'm the kind of person who would be the type to believe in adoption. I'm the ultimate, I'm very contemptuous of waste, I hate waste on every level and to waste a life, it would break your heart. I think, if you want a child and you can't have your own, there's so many children available. (Paula).

For some, the issue of adoption seems irrelevant; they neither desire it nor reject it. It's just "what you do." In addition, a number of parents said they didn't care about how they got a child, they "just wanted a child" (Candi, Burt, Kathy) or they "didn't need a child that looked like them" (Fran and Stuart).

> I wanted a child. I didn't care that it didn't come out of my body. Particularly if it was going to take all of that to get one. I just didn't understand the point. I still have trouble understanding the point when I watch the crazy things people go through [infertility treatment]. I have difficulty sympathizing. I really have trouble, because I don't understand really what all the fuss is about. I just wanted very much to have a child. (Joan).

Even though most respondents identified fairly easily as adoptive parents, a number of other respondents had to struggle to accept adoption. This included Annette, Karl, Bob, Greg and Helen's husband. Since the child would not be their biological child, they wondered if they could accept the child "as one's own." Further, although Paula verbalizes that she is quite in favor of adoption, some of her other statements seem to contradict this.

Interestingly, Shawn also came from a family who had adopted a child. His younger sister was adopted, and she was from a mixture of Native American and French-Canadian background. However, his sister had had considerable emotional problems, which made Shawn wary of and negative towards adoption. Given his sister's problems, his reluctance to adopt is understandable. Shawn did note, however, that as he and his wife considered adoption he did extensive research and learned of many unique complications in his sister's situation that would probably not occur in most adoptions. Therefore, Shawn had to go from a "Not-me" adoptive parent identity to see adoption as "Me."

Others also had some doubts about adoption:

> My fears at that point were that I wouldn't love the baby. Like it wasn't mine. So I wanted to talk to another man who had adopted his son. And he said 'Yeah, I remember having the same fears but it's nothing you

can imagine it will... It just will.' So that was very reassuring. That's really the main thing I wanted to know...

So at that point you would've adopted any child. It wouldn't matter what ethnic group?

No. Any adopted child – no matter what country. We went to a couple of support groups. That was very helpful. I was very anxious, uneasy through all this. It was so unfamiliar. ..Very foreign. I mean my images had all been my wife being pregnant and having a baby. So this was all different. Then I gradually found myself thinking of this process as a way of being pregnant – like an alternative. That helped me. (Karl).

Like 99% of the time, I didn't see it, he's just my boy - he's either a great kid, or he's a "Rugrat." But 1% of the time, I look down on him, when he's bad and I say "Is he really mine?"

I really was worried when I first started the process - that somehow maybe I'd never connect to the kid - and I heard someone who said, "Don't worry about it. The first night you stay up all night with that kid, something just happens.." And it's true..Like, shortly after we got K., we had to take him for blood-work, and I had to hold him down, I still feel traumatized by it! A few minutes later, K. was fine, and I was sitting in the car crying! (Bob).

Could you say a little bit more about in what way you were uncomfortable?

I think it was just something vague about wanting to see oneself in one's child.....Wanting to have a kind of sense of immortality through genetics or something.... I don't know really. It was an adjustment.... but I was pretty supportive. I was just kind of getting used to the idea. (Greg).

For me, those times I feel the separation and the difference - it's more like we usually have this link, this umbilical cord bond or whatever and at those moments when I feel, Oh, my God, we're different, it scares me, I say "What does that mean that we're not linked somehow...will he not love me, or whatever?" But it only lasts for a moment. (Sandra).

Paula indicates some ambivalence about adoption. She feels strongly that her daughter see her as the mother, and does not even want to use the term "birth mother." Her identity as mother is strong to her, and she does not want a "rival."

I didn't want to hear: I don't like you, mommy; I want to go to my real mother. So I say: "You were born in another lady's tummy".. I don't say another mother, don't want to use the word mother, I don't want her to get confused.

International adoptive parenting

The final identity issue that confronted respondents was that of an adoptive parent of a child born in a different country, namely, the international aspect of the adoption. This identity forms the core concept for study in this dissertation. And, although each parent had to address the international factor, the responses to this factor were quite diverse.

Barbara, Fran, and Kathy/Shawn and Alex purposely chose international adoption because they valued the "adventure" and "diversity" that international adoption allows. Fran, Alex and Kathy identified with the international concept in general although not necessarily the particular culture itself. Libby/Don, Joan, Veronica, and Martha chose the particular culture before they adopted the child because they had some reason to value that specific culture. On the other hand, some parents chose international adoption for "practical reasons" (age limitations, complications with domestic adoptions, because a close friend had and it was relatively straightforward) and then, to one degree or another, struggled with the international identity during the adoption process and/or after the child was born.

Candi was especially straightforward about her opinions on international adoptions:

> I think it makes people see that there's many different ways to have children - birthing is not the only way - especially for all those people who try so hard with the fertility stuff, when really its so easy to adopt - in fact when domestic adoptions are so hard - I would like to set them up with Rainbow House [the agency used by this family]. I've actually even called up some people I see in the newspapers who've put ads for adoption, asking to adopt an American child, and I say "Let me give you the phone number of an agency that will help you if you're interested in foreign adoption." I've done that twice. I mean, my heart breaks for them! Like they want this little White baby! And I want to say "Get off this 'little White baby,' and just get a baby!"

Decision-making: Motives for choosing international adoption

Three general types of issues emerged that influenced parents to choose international adoption. Of course, many parents had mixed motives, but one usually predominated. Some respondents, such as Libby, Don, Veronica, Shawn and Martha felt a strong connection to the culture of the child or to international aspects of culture in general before they even considered adoption. Others had no direct experiences but had either positive fantasies about the culture, such as Joan, Greg, Paula, Alex, Fran, Stuart. For another group (Joan, Greg, Fran, Stuart and Kathy), the decision was also political or ideological, that is, related to their valuing helping children in need in third world countries, objecting to anti-female policies in China, or similar ideas. A last group (Annette, Paul, Helen, Sally, Candi, Burt, Sandra, Bob, Karl) chose the country for more or less practical reasons, such as the ease of the process, the expense, the acceptance of older parents, or the fact that friends had recently adopted successfully from the country.

In the case of the first group, Libby had worked as a professional flamenco dancer, Don was a Peace Corps volunteer in Latin American, Veronica's father was a businessman in Latin America. Martha had traveled extensively in Latin America, and Shawn originally majored in International Relations. These parents had a positive emotional bond to the birth culture before they adopted.

The second group who mentioned political/ideological reasons included:

> Fran's sister works for BBC and got us some tape of a show they did in England about horrendous conditions in international adoption: corruption, bribes, poor care of the children, basically "Babyselling." We were very upset to see this, but were also very pleased to find an agency that really tried to help out the kids, even those that no one adopted. ...Even before, Fran and I really wanted a second child; we could never live with knowing that the way we went about it exploited children. We were fortunate to hear about this agency. (Stuart).

When you started looking into China, what would be the most important things that drew you to China?

There were a couple things. This isn't necessarily in order of importance. One was that we pretty consistently heard that health issues were not a problem there, as they were in some of the other countries. And for that matter in the U.S.. A very minor issue was that there was no question about the open adoption business. They're always completely abandoned, and even if a Chinese knew or had a suspicion about what village this child came from, they might peruse that – I don't know how that all happens because I know that they do try to discourage abandonment. Certainly with the one child policy, it's a big issue there. They were very protective of any information, so they wouldn't tell us anything. That wasn't exactly a plus, 'cause we wanted to know as much as we could, obviously. But it certainly meant there wasn't going to be any open adoption issue. I think the biggest issues were the health thing, and just the fact that because of the one child policy, there were so many little girls.. and at the time, there were all these stories about girls dying.... that a majority of kids were not surviving out of these orphanages. And to me that was sort of the clincher for doing this and using China. (Greg).

I wanted to adopt from a poor country, rather than like in this country where everyone's fighting for this White child. I wanted to have a child who was going to be, like, saved from an otherwise unfortunate fate. I would love this child because I know how much she needed me, and I like telling her the story of her adoption, this birth parent wasn't able to give her the life that she wanted, where in this country [USA] there usually is money, like my friend who adopted in this country, and the birth parents live nearby, and she gave up one child and kept another.

For me, I like that the birth parents are not close by, nobody's going to come and take away my baby because they changed their mind, or want to see how she's doing in a couple of years. I like that obscurity feeling. I also picked Brazil, to be honest, I think the Brazilians are a very attractive people and I like they way they look. I like their flair. There's a lot of love, it's a beautiful country..I'd never been there, but I knew a kind of the feeling of Brazil, or Rio. I had met Brazilian people, there were some Brazilian people out at the beach [Fire Island]. Also I worked with some people who went to LAPA [Latin American Parents Association] and who had adopted three kids from Brazil and she had a decent process. Also one of my best friends adopted from Brazil, too, which made it easier. Beautiful little girl. (Paula).

Some typical "practical" reasons included:

That was one of the pro's about choosing Korea – that we wouldn't have to travel there. There were a lot of pro's - the children were escorted. We really didn't have the funds for traveling...(Sandra).

> We're not the typical couple who wants to adopt. Our ages, for example I was, at the time... I was over forty, I think. Greg was six years younger. Second marriages for both of us. Different religious backgrounds...Lots of reasons that were not the kind of couple adoption agencies would want in the United States. And then of course the long waits, and the chance that it might not work out. So that was the practical side...(Joan).

Although each parent had or do some "identity work" to develop a relationship with their child, some found this relatively easy:

> So at that point, the other people were thinking about having their own child – biological child. And I was all set for adoption. So I started checking into countries and sources. That was the hard part. It was just hard to find a country that was open, and that was... you could be a single parent. And I didn't want a country that was too dangerous. Or that would be too difficult going there... At that time, in places like Guatemala, all kinds of scary things were happening. Yet there were children coming from there, but I think I was scared. So, I just kept, over the course of ... the whole thing took a year for me to make a definite decision. (Veronica).

> About 3 1/2 years ago we were at a party and I met an old friend. They got out of their car, and they had a Korean girl. I was flabbergasted - I knew this man had adopted a baby, but it never occurred to me that she was Korean. I was just stunned. So me and this guy started talking - we began talking about work, but we also began talking about the adoption process. I said, "Wow, this must be a terrible process - very expensive, very time-consuming." But he and his wife said "No no no." She looked at me and said, "You could do this, Bob." Myself and my wife were listening, we were listening intently. And we began talking about it when we left the party that night. So, the next day my wife called the other woman and in two days she got an appointment at Rainbow House and within two weeks we had an application in, and in three and a half months, we had our son! (Bob)

Interestingly, Joan, Candi, Annette, and Jesse struggled with the international aspect of the adoption specifically because they were Jewish and their parents had trouble accepting a child, who was "not Jewish." Along similar lines, Bob, Sandra, Martha, Karl and Kris mentioned that their parents had difficulty accepting an international child who, as a grandchild, would not be "like them" or "of their blood.". Some families were even overtly prejudiced; however,

these respondents themselves were not heavily influenced by their parents' disapproval. Joan, Candi, Annette, Jesse, and Martha felt that their own parents eventually accepted the adopted child, but Bob, Sandra, Karl and Kris still felt somewhat estranged from their families even a few years after the adoption.

These different motives suggest some relationship between the reason for international adoption and the reactions to the adoption. Some couples have developed an emotional relationship and have already "identified" with the culture before the adoption decisions, some have what will be termed an "ideological" relationship to the international aspects, that is, they see it as in line with their political values to adopt from third world nations, where other parents are "practical" and choose international adoptions for practical reasons. Others seem to have some struggle with the international aspects. The first three groups value the international aspects, although for different reasons: they form a deeper relationship with the child's birth culture over time. Other parents who are more conflicted, such as Burt, Candi, Annette and Paul, remain relatively uninterested in the child's birth country.

In some cases, parents chose international adoption because of their preference for the gender of the child. Kris, Joan and Fran adopted from China because they wanted a girl, and almost all children adopted from China are girls. Martha chose Mexico in part because the agency she used allowed her to choose the gender of the child and she also wanted a girl.

International adoption: Interactions with other identities

Four groups of parents were especially comfortable with international adoptions. One group came from families who already had adopted; both Don and Stuart had brothers who had adopted internationally, Sally's mother was adopted. A second group identified, for various reasons, with the "international aspects" of the adoptions in general, including Shawn, Kathy, and Paula. A third group

particularly identified with the country or cultural group from which they adopted. This includes Don, who was in the Peace Corps in Latin America, Libby who was a former flamenco dancer, Martha, who had traveled extensively in Mexico and Veronica, whose father was a business man in Latin America. The fourth group included those who already identified with a "marginalized group": Alex, who is gay, Fran, who is an immigrant, and Barbara, who had long-standing problems with her family.

> I was always interested in folk dancing from different countries. And when I look back as a child one of my favorite books was *Perez the Mouse*. It was about Perez and Martina. Martina was a Spanish cockroach and Perez was the mouse. And she (Martina) did flamenco dancing in the book! She was in a costume – the cockroach! And I loved that book! And I wound up doing Flamenco dancing later myself – studying in Spain. I studied here mostly, but I did go to Spain. I've always been interested in other cultures. I love folk dancing, especially flamenco dancing. When I was going up, even as a five-year-old I was singing these Spanish songs. I was very shy, but the only thing I did that wasn't shy was singing these Spanish songs! And my father taught E. the same songs "La Cucaracha" and all these songs! (Libby).

> Spanish was a part of my life. When my father and mother got married... This was in 1938 - they got a car and drove across country and to Mexico. Later, when I was born, we went through California to Mexico, and we spent a whole summer there. So, when I was growing up the house was filled with Mexican things. In my father's apartment in Florida, there are still all these Mexican things. (Veronica).

> For me, I guess since I'm British, I feel especially that it's important to have a cultural identity, and was very open to a child who's born elsewhere - I guess like I was! (Fran).

> I really looked to the adoption as an opportunity to really broaden my whole horizon... the world... Incorporate more into the family, and really grow in that way. China just seemed like such a fascinating place to me. It's such an ancient culture. ..I really wanted to adopt a girl. I really felt that I wanted to do something for one of these little girls. I felt good. (Joan).

> My sister was the youngest, after 6 biological children, and she didn't look too different from us, she always knew she was adopted but it wasn't something my parents took a long time talking about. We'd be more open. That's one reason I wanted a transnational adoption. It's more obvious about the adoption and I think that's better. The other thing was, if we're going to do this [adoption] it would be a really neat adventure, making ourselves more "citizens of the world", being able to travel and meet other cultures - part of that sounded good. (Shawn).

As noted, some parents already see themselves as having a somewhat marginalized identity and embrace international adoption as part of this. Already see themselves as "Other":

> When the social worker did the home study, she asked: "Why are you adopting from Guatemala? Why don't you adopt an American child?" I thought about it. So I said: "You know, I really don't want an American child - I grew up in a small town in America .As a gay person, I was very unhappy there. I don't like those 'entitled' Americans. I identify with the minorities in a way. That's what I like about New York. The entitlement that Americans have, I didn't like it. And, I have a lot of friends who are from South America and they seem warm and very friendly. I noticed on the streets, people would notice children in South America. In the United States, men don't notice children here. In Latin America, they're more family-oriented." So I said her that - I wondered what she was going to say! She said: "I know exactly what you mean. I adopted, and I'm an Upper-West Side Jewish Woman, and I didn't want a "little blond cheerleader" either!" (Alex).

> My husband and I really disagreed about that... It was really the only thing we disagreed on - whether or not to try to preserve O.'s Chinese heritage. I really think its important, but Stuart thinks we should just go the American way, after all, we live in America, he says. But he was born here, and I'm British - I know what it's like to come to this country and how you need to have some identity of where you come from. (Fran).

> I wanted to expand my family. I always had this sense that one of my kids would come from some other place, from some other part of the United States or internationally, again, I can't really explain it. We grew up in a fairly conservative, insulated family, with a mom who didn't even encourage us to have our friends sleep over, and I think I maybe did it [adoption] as a reaction [laugh], I think it was a kind of rebellious thing, I definitely distanced myself from my family of origin for a number of years, you know, made other choices, reached out to communities that were very different from mine, I was always drawn to people-of-color. I think I just never quite fit into my family. (Barbara).

Role of genetics and "race"

Many parents in the study addressed certain "genetic" and "racial" issues regarding the "differences" between themselves and their children. Bob, for example, expected his adopted Korean son to be good in math, as is a stereotype about Asian children, until he was corrected by a friend who also adopted a Korean child. Martha admitted, somewhat embarrassingly, that she secretly wondered when her 5 year old daughter dawdled maybe she was "taking it easy - a manana attitude" or when her daughter got angry, "maybe its her Latin temper!" Paula became very interested in genetic questions:

> Like I saw this geneticist on Channel 13 who said, it's probably 80% genetics. I asked about her background in Brazil, but all they told me was "Oh she's fine." But I really didn't believe them, I mean you get the feeling they really want you to take the baby, so they'll just say everything is fine. So I really have zero on her. And we know nothing at all about the birth father; I asked the interpreter to ask the mother about the birth father, and all they came back with was "He looked good." I mean, I'm quoting, "He looked good." What does that mean?
>
> Oh, yes, sure, it's sad, it's going to be a real problem trying to tell J. about her history, and here I'm saying it's 80% genetic, and I know nothing, I mean, thanks! I'm not happy about that...I'm not happy about what I'm about to say either, at least at this time, J. doesn't show much curiosity, either. (Paula).

> I think going into to this I had presuppositions about his abilities, his character, you know, genetic stereotypes. My friend who adopted really chewed me out at work and said "You've really got to erase those things... He's not going to be anything like that. He's going to be a little boy, period. the end. And all those things you're going to discover about him, his genetic characteristics from his parents, whatever you want to call the nature-nurture question, don't get caught up in all this stuff. " (Bob).

> The social worker showed me a picture of a child from Latin America, and it was a really peculiar moment because I looked at the picture and just somehow felt "No". So, I didn't take the child. And I didn't go further with that. And then she said, "Listen, let me tell you about China." This was about three months later, I finally went with China. (Kris).

> You know, I had an interesting idea, that Asian people are smarter than everyone else, because they "work harder." All we have to do in America is to work hard and then we get ahead....well, is that really all? I mean I only have to put in 80 hours a week and I'll be rich? I've never thought about that before. I guess a lot of it is processing it emotionally, saying "This is the way I feel" and also I've bounced a lot of stuff off my wife: "Do you think this is a racial stereotype, or this is a K. [son's name] stereotype, or Bob's old things coming up?" That little boys are simply little monsters and then we civilize them. .I have noticed the old stereotypes about boys and girls - boys do play rough and girls play more gently..(Bob).

Many respondents were acutely aware of racial issues and the meaning of "race" (and the "desirability" of different racial groups) to them. For example:

> I don't understand.. I mean, it's prejudice - you have to look at it that way, because I knew I couldn't do a Black baby, because of the problems with my family. (Candi).

> Anyway, I really didn't care. I have to admit, I would have had a problem with a Black child, which I'm not proud of or anything. (Kris).

> I told the adoption agency I wanted an infant, I wanted a girl, I didn't care about the color. .well, I didn't want a Black child but Hispanic would be fine. My husband didn't really want an interracial child, Black...but Hispanic would be fine, I mean I'm dark, I've always been taken for Hispanic myself...it's funny that she happens to be blond. (Paula).

> I think it was universally strong and positive reaction from everybody, except for my mother, at first. I think initially there was a little bit of discomfort with the inter-racial aspect of things. And I know my mother, and, unfortunately if we were adopting let's say a Black child, she would have much more trouble adjusting to it. And this [Chinese infant] somehow seemed OK. (Joan).

> My mother said, um.. "You know, he might have African in his ancestry. You might have a Black child." And I said "Mommy, if he has any African in his ancestry, its very far back, and its very little. And I'm not going to have a Black child. And, if I do have a Black child, then I don't care.' (Helen).

Stages of identity formation

Although identity development will be discussed on a more "micro" level in the sections on Winnicott and transitional objects, there is some degree of temporality involved in international adoption. As noted, some parents identified with the birth country prior even to considering adoption; at the other extreme, some parents only adopted internationally for fairly practical reasons, and had to do most of their "identity work" during the waiting process and/or after the child was brought to the United States. The international aspects of identity are an on-going issue for most parents throughout the child's life; the identity aspects do not come at once, or only in a relatively few instances, but are a more or less on-going issue for parents.

For some parents, usually those who adopted for emotional or ideological reasons, the process was relatively easy. For example, if the parent has already had experience with the birth culture of the child, and specifically chooses the culture of the child, then there is already a "me-ness" or "same-ness" about the child; the child is chosen to reflect or extend an already established facet of the parent's identity. This was also true about the seven respondents who already had biological children before adopting. However, for many, especially those who adopted for practical reasons, there were a number of transition points to address along the road to parenthood.

It appears that international adoption and parenting identity progress, to some degree, in stages, which may be equivalent to similar stages in developing a parent identity for biological parents. On one hand, the internationally adoptive parent may have control over some factors that the biological parent does not, such as the child's gender, the relative timing of the decision, and the "choice" of ethnicity. On the other hand, there may be experiences that correspond to biological pregnancy and birth. For example, the decision to adopt followed by

"Getting the photo" and/or choosing the child from a few children available is similar to "conception" in biological parenting. Later, the wait for the child resembles pregnancy, although for an indeterminate period of time.

> So we began in the winter of 1992, and our application went in February 1993. We were the second group to work with Nepal. We got a call June 2 that a girl was waiting and we left on June 28th. Two girls were available - they sent us pictures, so we tell people it's like our sonograms, like a Xerox and fax put together. (Shawn).

When parents discussed their experiences in traveling to the native country of the child to get their child, many described numerous "trials and tribulations," including illness (Stuart), bureaucratic complications (Shawn, Kathy, Libby, Don) terrible weather, cold and poor living conditions (Kris), which resembles "labor." Alex even had the unfortunate experience of the first adoption falling through while he was in Guatemala, similar to a stillborn child. In fact, every parent described in one way or another, some complication that arose while they were waiting to get their child.

However, to the respondents, the most significant and emotional moment was when the child was placed in the parent's arms. During the interview, as I was gathering data for case studies, I became aware of the growing emotional atmosphere while the parent was telling me "the adoption story." Many parents remarked on how much they enjoyed talking with me and telling "the story" but most memorable to me was the intensity and emotionality that emerged as each parent spoke of the moment their adoptive son or daughter was placed in their arms. Many were close to tears in telling me this. It was clearly similar to the emotions parents describe when they talk about the moment of giving birth to a biological child.

> It was an incredible experience. Well, first of all being a new parent, that was just an incredible thing. Then there was just a moment when they brought her in, and we just looked at her, and it was incredible! She was finally there, she looked like her picture, and she was our daughter! And that was, it just took a while to sink in. I remember distinctly I stayed for a few minutes about what was going to happen the next day at the adoption ceremony, then we filled out some paperwork, and then she left. I remember the door closing, and I thought, "Oh my God, she's going to leave us alone. What do we do now?!!" I didn't know what to do! But we got through it OK. (Joan).

As discussed in a following section of this study, other parents experience the difference or "not-me-ness" of the child's background and have to do a good deal of identity work to bond with the child. These parents are more distant at first, but, in the interview, seemed to do a "retrospective rationalization." That is, they searched their memory for any prior connections to the child's birth country or culture. However, this seemed true of most parents, to one extent or another. Some parents struggle with adoption and identity issues for many years, in concerns about the child's biological heritage (Kris, Paula), or thoughts about the birth parents (Kathy) or actually meeting birth siblings of the child (Veronica).

"Irrationality"

In spite of the somewhat pragmatic nature of international adoption, many parents commented that a part of the adoption seemed "irrational." This is another way of saying that something happened that was out-of-character or "not-me" but it acted as an important experience in the process.

> We came to international adoption very quickly. It's hard for me to explain the process because there's something that wasn't rational about it. There was just something that just felt really right about it. We knew we didn't want ... in part, it was that we were a little scared about some of the nightmare stories we had heard about domestic adoption, in part it was because we were not a typical couple that an adoption agency would want in the United States. (Helen).

> So that was the practical side. But then there was this irrational component that I cannot explain. I very much was drawn to China. (Joan)

The social worker showed me a child from Latin America, and it was a really peculiar moment because I looked at the picture and just somehow felt "No". I have no explanation for it. It was a very beautiful little girl, and it was really... I've never figured it out. I'm this kind of rational person or something... more on that end, was, just "You have to go with your feelings." But I can't explain it..(Kris)

We're very spiritual, it just felt like, "this was the flow", this was the way it was meant to be. (Sandra)

I mean you get a lot of documents that have been translated from Chinese so you don't really know what you're getting. So then the ball's in your court, you have to write an official letter saying you want the child. So you have to "pretend" you really think about it, although I knew I was going to say "yes" immediately. But we called our pediatrician, just to ask some questions about her medical history. We thought you should take it really seriously; you should have this rational response, but you know you have this emotional response which really takes over! (Fran).

I had a kind of "mystical experience".....During the wait... I had a dream one night [tells dream] When they told me her birthday, it was the night I had the dream - July 16Th. When I started to tell people, women particularly started to cry when I told the story. But the more I start to talk to adoptive parents.....the first time I did the "waiting workshop" at APC, I did a little lit review, and there was a little article that adoptive parents, because they don't have the physical pregnancy, kind of hook on to some mystical things, so that it's not uncommon. And I've talked to a couple of people who have had similar kinds of stories. (Sally).

I wanted to have a child and I wanted to expand my family. I always had this sense that one of my kids would come from some other place, from some other part of the United States or internationally, again, I can't really explain it. (Barbara).

The whole process from the time we started took about nine months – so it was kind of uncanny... it felt divinely arranged. (Karl).

So, most adoptive parents felt, at some level, that there was something "magical" about their experiences, something that could not be explained by reason alone. Perhaps because they each had a long, complex route to adoption, and were choosing an "alternative" form of family, they felt they were "other" perhaps even "spiritual" forces at work in the adoption.

Physical appearance of the child

One factor that emerged, and appears quite important, is the physical appearance of the child. Most internationally adopted children are from "Third World" countries, and most are racially different from American adoptive parents. Most Asian and Hispanic children look different from their adoptive parents, though some Hispanic children are lighter color and/or come from a country where are racial mixtures of natives and immigrants from Western Europe. Further, most children adopted from Russia are likely to resemble many American families, and for this reason, many parents who choose Russia do so because they want a child who looks like them. Further, whether or not a child looks like his/her parents is a significant factor in how others perceive the child and the family. Physical differences are a visible sign of some difference between parents and children and can be a major cue of how the parents perceive they will be perceived by others.

> Most people from Paraguay look Latin. I mean this is regular Latin. It's not Caribbean Latin, because there is very little if any African influence. But they look Latin.. Our lawyer had sandy colored hair. Your color skin and hazel eyes. However, A.came out Latin predominated! Isn't that interesting? He does have a fair complexion though. He's got pink like cheeks...What's really funny is that people who don't know, when they see the three of us together, my husband, me and A. they'd say, "Oh, he's the perfect combination of both of you!" So in any event, I guess I don't know how I feel about it, because I don't really see it. I mean, the only thing that would be an issue, and I don't know it would be an issue for me or not, would be if I had a child who... if I had adopted a Chinese child, or an African Child (Helen)

> Actually, my coworker who's from Puerto Rico thought she was Arabic. I have pictures of E. at my office. So many people have said, "Oh, she looks just like you"- not knowing she's adopted. And through the pictures, nobody has commented about she fact that she may look Latin or something. I don't know if they're holding back, you know don't want to say anything – whatever. But for me the issue has not come up. (Don)

If she looked very different from me - maybe that would have some effect because I would wonder about dating, and who she's going to marry. I'm hoping that she'll marry a Jewish person. Maybe I would have more adjustment problems if she really looked that much different from me. But I don't have that because she's so White looking...So that makes it a little easier. (Veronica)

The adoption per se has not come up much as an issue, but the fact that she looks different - as clearly adopted, I think that has been an issue for some people, for strangers...like, in the supermarket. Usually the comments are nice. She's just such a cute kid. Even here in New York on the subways people come up and smile and so it's generally a good thing. (Greg)

My father thought we should go to Eastern Europe, because my father really felt it was more important for a baby to look like us. But he was thinking Poland...

I'm curious to see how this turns out. In NYC, people are so accepting. You can be Chinese and have a Bat Mitzvah. You can have an Asian name and be American. It's such an accepting place in my mind. Sometimes I wonder if she and I are just with each other, if people wonder about us, because she does look different, and I am older. So, we'll see. There she is, Hispanic-looking to me, a little Black, with an Irish last name (Sally).

Did you have any feelings that your son would probably be Hispanic?

On the adoption application I had one preference that since I'm six feet tall, it would be nice if my sons were taller, so I didn't pursue Paraguay... I was thinking I think I did write "relatively light-skinned" on the application. I first wanted two boys, then after the first, a girl would be nice, then when a second child came, it was OK for me... So I had a preference about height. (Jesse).

I guess because she looks so White, I forget about her race. That has made a big difference for me. In other words if you had gotten a daughter with dark skin, you think it might have been different. Or different features. A lot of people throughout the years have said that we look alike so that makes me feel good. (Veronica).

And how do you see any way that you would...what's your feeling on your daughter having exposure to Asian culture.

As I said that's why we want her to go to this class, and why we started that. It's not only to learn the language, but it's to meet other Chinese kids, and see people who look like her. That's also why we pursued these relationships with these families to just get together, occasionally for parties, play time, that kind of thing. We haven't done as

> much of that as we like, but we probably see one of these adopted families, or maybe several of them at a time, maybe once every couple months (Joan).
>
> I used to go to support groups for parents of Latin American children, but I sort of stopped going. I should go to meetings...it might be good for J. but, if she looked more interracial, I guess, a little darker, if she looked a little more like "Who am I?" I'd go to more meetings; I'd want her to have more of that. On the other hand, I don't want to put her with a whole bunch of kids who don't look like her, for her to say, "This is who I am." It's better for her to say "I'll find my identity where I find it." (Paula)

One unfortunate aspect of the discussion about appearance was that five respondents actually remarked, as did Paula, above, that they were open to adopt an Asian or a Hispanic child, but would not adopt a Black child. They began to make some subtle distinctions between how far their acceptance of "other-ness" could go. As will be discussed in a later session, these parents said, perhaps with a degree of rationalization, that they were more concerned about how others would perceive them as a family, or the child him/herself, if the child was Black.

Noted changes in identity

The primary focus of this dissertation is whether adopting a child from another culture changes the identity of a parent. The purpose of the case study method was to understand the various and subtle ways that this may occur. A few parents at first felt only minor changes in identity until the interview proceeded. On reflection they realized that they had been affected more than they realized. However, most parents had a much more direct response to this issue. Jesse, Alex, Candi and Burt discussed ways that they have changed that are more the result of being parents in general, and nothing specific to international adoption. But many others are specific, some to do with international adoption in general, and others specific to the birth culture of the child:

Have you found in any way the adoption process or that she's from China has changed you?

Sometimes people, strangers stop us and ask: "Where is she from?" and want to hear the story about the adoption. It's kind of surprising that some people are so bold as to pry into your private life, but it hasn't been a problem. I don't mind talking to people about it. I think the thing that its done, is given me something to react to, is that it's kind of suddenly made us a minority family. We weren't before. And I never had that experience of being a minority. Except when I lived in Utah and I was a minority in terms of the religion.

I think that I was always very progressive when it came to racial and civil rights kind of issues. So I had this kind of intellectual and value based liberalism about politics and stuff, and politics and everything - in favor of affirmative action and that stuff. But it was always at that kind of cerebral plane.. Now it's more about, like if anybody did anything racist against my child, I would probably strangle them!! (Greg)

The guys at work - I work with a mixed crew - half Anglo, half Hispanic - and the guys who are Hispanic have all taken me aside and say "Boy, being a daddy sure has changed you!" I said, "I don't understand.." And they said: "Before, you gave lip service to differences in culture, but in effect, you were very racist. But now you really do have an understanding of what it's like to be on the bottom." I'll tell you what, the first time I heard a guy say the word "Gook" I wanted to take him outside and punch him! It just tore a chunk out of my heart. (Bob).

I find myself so much more aware of culture. Like, I've really gotten into music and art of other cultures and take my daughter to all sorts of concerts and shows, not just her own culture. And I'm more interested in international news, too. She's - or at least the experience of her differentness - has opened me up more! (Martha)

Well, it certainly makes me more conscious of Spanish language. Even though I don't listen to the radio like I did. I do say words to her and try to teach her some words. And it just brings me closer.... I feel much closer even than I did before to Latin everything. And when I see Latin people on the street I feel very warmly toward them. I feel like they're almost family. I could feel nothing in particular toward other people, but if I hear people speaking Spanish I really feel connected to them. They don't know it, but I do. (Libby)

In broad ways it's definitely made the world smaller to me. I feel connected to South America... My ears perk up...Last night I watched a program about the Andes – the Incas.... My son has a look that he has some kind of Indian heritage. It's just like corroborated my identity and my interest in indigenous peoples.... I felt that way before but this really

clearer to me... I think even before that I was biased.. I mean everybody's prejudiced and racist in some way, but I was pretty open about it. (Karl)

I don't think it's changed me, it's more like it identifies me, like that's who I am. Yes, I'm the kind of person who would be the type to believe in adoption. I'm the ultimate, I'm very contemptuous of waste, I hate waste on every level and to waste a life, it would break your heart. I think, if you want a child and you can't have your own, there's so many children available. Like a friend, she's trying to have children and she's trying but she's so uncertain about adoption, like asking, "Who are they? Whose genes are they anyway?" I don't feel that way. (Paula)

I was very interested in the Latin culture. Actually I felt her differentness gave me a tremendous amount about this new culture...it was enriching, energizing and fun! (Veronica)

When I work as a guidance counselor with Latino kids who are thinking about what to do, [when they graduate] I urge them to visit all the countries of Latin American. If I were Latin I'd like to see all the Latin countries, which is easier to do than for Arab kids, or Asian kids. I think it will come into play with myself and my sons. ..I've been to visit in Mexico, Puerto Rico, Colombia and Venezuela. I guess I've been to Latin America a little more than the typical person who doesn't care about it. (Jesse)

Also, I became a more Asian identity, I think that I started reaching out, and started being fascinated and interested in her. When things came on the news I would, you know, quickly tune into that, I would turn up the volume, I'm drawn to that, I became part of that too. (Barbara)

If we're going to do this [adoption] I think it would be a really neat adventure, making ourselves more "citizens of the world", being able to travel and meet other cultures - part of that sounded good. (Shawn)

As a result of the adoption process, most parents feel they have been changed. They feel more compassion, less prejudice, more identification with their child's culture, and more general "worldliness." The rest of this dissertation will explore the various ways these changes in identity have come about.

Summary

Parents who adopt children from other countries must, in one way or another, confront differences between their child and themselves. They cannot easily separate the "adoption" aspect of the identity work from the international

aspects because they are bound together. The international aspects of the adoption relate, in part, to the parent's experience with the birth culture, but also to other people's reactions to that culture, such as those parents who became intolerant of racial and cultural prejudice in others after the adoption. Some parents already are aware of these aspects of their identity before the adoption while others do so during and after.

Because there is extended identity work that is required of internationally adoptive parents, perhaps parents who adopt internationally are less conventional to begin with to begin with. Some people who cannot have children do not pursue adoption at all. Others who adopt domestically want an American child (perhaps who physically resembles them) and/or do not want the complications of the "other-ness" of international adoption. Those parents who go through the process of international adoption may be those individuals who are most "open" to "other-ness" in the first place.

CHAPTER 6: Life span and socio-historical context

Another way to understand the development of identity in international adoptive parents is to use the concept of life span or life cycle (Erikson, 1968). The work of Erikson will be adapted and interpreted for our frame, rather than used exactly as Erikson delineates in his writings.

Parents construct their identities and roles by, in some way, expressing a need to create something other than themselves, to be "generative," as Erikson terms it. The alternative, when the person is unable to fulfill generative tasks, becomes "stagnation."

Life span tasks/generativity

Respondents in this study, ranging in age from 36 to 54, were all at the stage of adulthood when the main task is to "generate." Since all respondents worked through many obstacles to become parents, it is true that they each responded to this life stage challenge. While some respondents addressed this indirectly, a few clearly presented their generative issues.

Alex and Martha directly express the conflict of "generativity vs. stagnation":

> I always wanted to adopt, but I thought, "You can't do it yourself. You have to have someone to do it with.." When I turned 50, I thought, well, my father, now 71, was retired and felt he had nothing to do; my grandfather died at 94, so I thought - it's going to be a lot of years ahead for me with nothing to do, too. In my 30's I was so work-oriented, I couldn't adopt then. Now, work is fairly simple, so now I felt I had the resources to do it, to adopt.
>
> I'd thought about adoption for a long time, but I never took it that seriously. I didn't know how possible it was, because I didn't know anyone else who had done it as a single man. And, then I ran into a friend at a party, and he had his two kids there, and I talked to him, and he told me about the Gay Community Center, that there were lots of people, gay men and women, who had adopted. So, I thought, "What am I going to

do?" My father, now that he's retired, is bored, and I realized, nowadays, people do things later. I talked to a few people who said, "Well, get a cat!" I was a little put off by that! (Alex).

The turning point in my decision to adopt came to me one day when I was on vacation in France. My career was going very well, my finances were in good shape, and I was taking these wonderful exotic vacations every few months. But it dawned on me: sure, I was going great being single, I could afford whatever I wanted (within reason) but was this to be the rest of my life - traveling alone to the best places, eating in great restaurants, buying beautiful clothes - but all for me? It suddenly seemed so selfish and so meaningless! I knew I'd done enough - I could make it for sure, but I wanted a life with more purpose, more "reality." I was thinking of adopting for two or three years now, but that day, I called the airlines, booked an early flight home, and called the adoption agency the day I landed! I've never regretted it - and, Rita and I still travel! (Martha).

Other parents also express similar generative needs. For example:

I wanted a large family, and I personally don't think people should have more than two children, I don't even know if they should have more than one by birth, there's just too many kids, too many people on the planet. It's one thing I had already decided...I really believe in the idea of adoption. (Kathy).

I had a wonderful relationship with my mother, and I think that has a lot to do with it. I feel like my mother taught me to like myself, and to be able to enjoy life. She was truly loving. She was a very considerate, loving person. She was a very down to earth, practical person. But I had the feeling that it was true love that she felt for me. Very unselfish, caring. And so I feel like she gave me so much for myself, and for me to give to my child. I wanted to pass on my mother's love. (Libby)

When we picked Brazil, I wanted to have the same feeling as when I adopted my doggies, you know, it's like "I'm saving a life." It felt good to me, it felt like who I was to take care of someone who needed it..(Paula)

I got divorced. After my first marriage ended... the hardest thing for me about the divorce was that I knew that I was giving up very likely giving up the chance to have children. I had decided that I didn't want to do it on my own, But I knew that that wasn't a reason to stay married. And I struggled with that for years. I was just really miserable about not having children. (Joan).

Two respondents (Libby and Joan) both had wanted to be parents, but due to individual circumstances (Joan's divorce before her second marriage to Greg,

Libby's husband Don's reluctance) both had actually resigned themselves to being childless and sought other forms of "parenting" (for example, caring for nieces.)

Most respondents had difficulties with infertility or miscarriage. They are all quite intentional parents; each had made serious attempts to become parents and had met with frustrations and disappointments. Yet each persisted and traveled to great lengths, literally and figuratively, to generate a family. During their confrontation with generativity, these parents had particular challenges, not only biological, but psychosocial, for example, coping with their own parents' wish for grandchildren. This pressure was mentioned by five respondents. Each of these parents significantly asserted themselves against their own parent's wishes for a biological child by proceeding with adoption.

As a result, the adopted child was often seen as "special" and the adoption process seen as a continuation of the "quest" for a child. Jesse specifically mentioned the "quest" aspect, while Shawn also alluded to this. Many other parents, such as Joan and Greg, Fran and Stuart, and Libby and Don also undertook adoption as a form of "journey" of "quest" following frustrations of infertility and related problems.

Reworking of earlier life tasks

We have already discussed some relatively appropriate identity work based on adult generativity. However, there is also evidence of some less successful attempts. Using Erikson's framework, certain respondents seem to be reworking earlier phases of their lives as they adopt. For example, Joan, Annette, Martha, Sandra and Candi all commented on difficulties with their own mothers in their choice of adoption. In each case, the respondents' mothers disapproved of the choice of adoption and, in many cases, of international adoption. These respondents spoke of considerable struggle to assert herself against her mother,

some feeling shame because she was unable to bear a child, others of doubt about taking steps towards adoption. Each woman, by standing separately from her own mother, was also reworking earlier issues of "autonomy" vs. "shame and doubt."

Both Karl and Don expressed some anxiety or "not-me" feelings about becoming fathers. They admitted to burying themselves in their careers when they were waiting for their child, and let their wives do most of the administrative aspects of the adoption.

> I think what I did, was I took the easy way out and I kind of gave Libby the primary responsibility of ...figuring out food and clothes and changing and things like that. I contributed, but I think I ...the fact that I was also studying gave me an "out". So to be honest with you I was not as involved emotionally, clearly. (Don)

> My wife and I, she wasn't able to get pregnant, so we spent a couple of years doing various types of things, to see if that would happen, and it didn't. So then we decided to adopt, and we had been talking about that even during the other procedures. She did a lot of the legwork in terms of adoption...I guess, with my studies and career growing and all, I guess I was more comfortable with her taking the lead and me more or less avoiding my fears.
>
> I didn't really look into it. Like I didn't read much about Chile or... I had finished the training program here in June of '83 - 'cause I didn't want to adopt a child until I was finished with my program. So I was still very busy with that and all. From June to January when we got him, I was out of training, but busy going through my own transitions. But if I had to do it all over again, all things being different, I would be more involved. (Karl)

Some others parents were also concerned in the context of their career:

> I was a little nervous when we started the process because I couldn't imagine how we would fit it into our lives. We were busy.... It's probably no different than any prospective parent. You just can't imagine how you would fit in this enormous thing into your life! So I was a little ambivalent but the process is really lengthy, so I started it anyway, and I got very swept up into it as we went along. So in a few months I was very ready. Certainly by the time we went I was more than ready. (Joan).

> And then, I had also problems at the hospital when I told them.... I knew a child was coming, and I was going to need time off. And they said, "You're joking." I was in training, in residency, and you know you

> have to be dead to even get one day off. So for me to say that I was going to need several weeks off. And this woman who had got pregnant with her own baby, she was a year behind me, they gave her a lot – she had to threaten lawyers. That was her own baby – she was walking around pregnant! But she warned me. She came to me and said, "Watch out – be ready to be tough from the very first second. They are going to give you a very hard time." That was very upsetting. (Kris)

> My husband and I decided: we were in our mid-40's, to get married...because I wanted a child so when we went to the social worker for adoption for the home study, and she asked if we committed to each other.. well, I'm committed to my husband because of my daughter. I have different issues with him...I wanted to adopt, he wanted to try to have our own children, but me, at 44, I wasn't too hopeful, and I didn't want to deal with the whole thing...I just felt more comfortable, maybe boys are a little rougher. I thought I was safer with a girl genetically, like they are calmer. And, maybe, I just wanted "my little girlfriend." (Paula).

Finally, Alex, one of the older respondents, framed his comments (cited earlier) as a precursor of later stage issues of "integrity vs. despair." Not only does he see his current needs for generativity, but he looks ahead to his father and grandfather, both of whom led long lives and both of whom struggled with finding "meaning" in life. Alex adopted an infant when he was over 50 but he saw it as a reason to give his later life, as well as his current life, a sense of integrity.

Family-of-origin influences

In order to understand the resolution of life stage issues, it is important to understand particular ways that a parent relates to his/her family of origin. For some, adoption was linked to current or past losses in the family and they more or less motivated a parent to adopt. Many adoptions were related to the death of a mother: Sally, Libby, Paula, Veronica, Joan (this may also be true because all respondents were in their 40's when it is common to lose a mother). Kris and Fran had lost mothers when they were adolescents. Most of these respondents specifically wanted a girl and adoption is one situation where it is possible to have a child of a specific gender. Libby also commented that she felt such love from

her own mother that she wanted to pass this onto her child.

On the other hand, many parents reported negative influences from their families. Kris, Fran, Barbara, Bob, and Sandra noted long-standing difficulties in their families of origin. Joan, Martha, Annette, and Jesse commented on negative reactions from their parents about the adoption, usually about international/ interracial aspects. Candi said she chose Korea because she thought it was the only foreign country her mother would accept. Others noted somewhat negative reactions from family after they adopted (Karl, Barbara, Bob). Most of these parents spoke about their own families making thinly veiled prejudiced statements about their child's racial background or country of origin. Coping with difficulties in the family-of-origin may signal reworking of earlier life tasks.

> When we adopted, my daughter was originally promised to another family who couldn't make up their mind, because she has a family history of schizophrenia. But we researched it, and chances were low that she'd inherit it - and anyway, my mother is a "loon," so for all I know, we could have mental illness in my own family! (Candi)

> I think it was universally strong and positive reaction from everybody, except for my mother, at first. But with her, it's hard to separate out exactly what it was that was bugging her. I think initially there was a little bit of discomfort with the inter-racial aspect of things. And I know my mother, and, unfortunately if we were adopting let's say a Black child, she would have much more trouble adjusting to it. And this somehow seemed OK. But, I don't think she had too much trouble with the adoption aspect. My mother and I had a very complicated and difficult relationship, it's hard to separate these things out ...my mother is also very difficult about change of any sort. Our residency in Utah was a real threat to her. That was part of it. And even now I talk to her sometimes about how we're thinking about adopting a second one, and she just says, "You're out of your mind. You're just crazy" Or, she's always telling me, "I'm worried about you. You look terrible. You look exhausted all the time. How could you possibly do this?" So I don't know how much is reacting to the international adoption or reacting to the other stuff. She's crazy about J. now. (Joan).

> My mother thought I was "completely out of my mind" when I decided to adopt, but she took to it and was into after a while. She was a

little upset with my second son, but it much milder. The first time she was vehemently against it, the second time she said: "Are you sure you know what you are doing?" And my brother and my cousins - I have 18 first cousins, and they're very into it. When E. had to have hernia surgery when he was 9 months old, she said, "See, R. had to have it, and L. had to have it, see it runs in the family! (Jesse)

It was really hard for us. I wanted so much to have my own children. Paul and I put thousands of dollars into fertility treatment. When he suggested adoption, I really didn't want to do it. But as we went on, I realized the big issue was, I wanted so much to please my mother. She wanted to have grandchildren and was very opposed to adoption. She wanted us have our own children - she really pressured us - and I was trying to go to any length to please her rather than think realistically (Annette)

Everyone in the family has accepted it with open arms except for my mother - Right from the very beginning, the thought of being a grandmother to an Asian child.. and she was also having a hard time being a grandmother - she had three girls and I'm the only one with a child -and it's like, "Mom, I'm in my 40's, you've had enough time to adjust to being a grandmother!" She's a funny person; she has quite a few other "strange-ities." And she hasn't seen him yet! Now, she hasn't been all "Well, I don't want to see him, I won't accept him and all" but she hasn't made an effort to come and visit. Like we traveled to my sister in Oklahoma, which is over 10 hours away, and my mother is less than 5 hours away from there, but she made no effort to see us. I said, "Mom won't you come and visit us?" and she just makes one excuse after another. Now that we're in New Mexico, she's beginning just to talk about getting together, but she's not even saying, "I'd like to come visit." (Sandra).

My family is very very liberal, much more liberal than I am. I think at first they thought "This is the greatest thing in the world" and I think K., the first grandson, and the only one to take the family name, and I think they feel weird that the only one who's going to carry on the family name is Korean. I think, for my Dad it bothered him in ways he would never discuss, because he is a "liberal." So he's supposed to have an educated point of view, so he won't admit it, but it bothers him anyway. (Bob).

> Originally, my family was pretty much against me adopting as a single parent - they're pretty narrow-minded - and my mom was even worse when she found out my daughter was going to be Hispanic. I had to more or less ignore her and do what I wanted. It's better now, but I still think she has her doubts. (Martha)

> My father was in the service, and we traveled a lot to Navy bases when I was growing up. I had no exposure to other cultures at all. So when I came to NY with my husband – I loved it. But this is also part of my story, but my father, which I didn't think about during any of this time, but I realized that he really had a prejudice against Asians. Because he was in WWII, and Vietnam, and the Korean War. For example, my first husband was Jewish, and my parents wouldn't come to the wedding. So, they're very prejudiced – against everybody. My mother died when I was younger and his second wife is maybe even worse. Anyway, I didn't really care. I think I would've had a problem with a Black child. Which I'm not proud of or anything like that.
>
> **It sounds like if you have to know the whole story, it's sort of part of the story. It's not about your own opinion, as another part of yourself, with your family.**
>
> Actually, the guy I was very involved with, we broke up, but we were still friends. He's from Latin America, and he was really upset that I was adopting a Chinese child. He said, "Don't get a child from another race – she'll have to live her whole life explaining it. Don't do it". He was really upset. But it didn't influence me. Well, because, I was like, "Either like it or lump it..." (Kris).

Dynamics between couples

Parents who adopt children (as well as most people who become parents), often find becoming a parent is a challenge to the dynamics and relationship of the marriage partnership. According to Erikson, challenges of generativity are preceded by the challenges of intimacy vs. isolation. Many singles choose adoption because of their frustrated intimacy needs, which may or may not play out in a healthy way with a child. However, with couples, where there is a presumed level of success with intimacy, the process of adoption can stress the marital relationship. Most adoptive couples have already been challenged by infertility and related conditions. Further, the decision to adopt poses more issues to be resolved by couples.

In most cases, there was some disagreement, and some resolution, between partners. For example, Fran and Stuart disagreed about the degree to which they would expose their daughter to Chinese culture. Annette and Paul initially disagreed about whether to adopt at all. Helen and her husband (who was not interviewed) disagreed on the same issue. Dan and Libby initially disagreed about the entire issue of becoming parents.

Helen discussed differences between herself and her husband about whether or not to adopt at all. Her husband was reluctant, but they sought couples' counseling to resolve the issue. Libby and Don sought couples counseling because Don wasn't sure he wanted to be a father at all. Annette, Candi and Joan were ambivalent about aspects of adoption because their mothers were critical of adoption. All resolved these issues with the support of their husbands. In fact, Annette commented:

> If it weren't for Paul's practical approach, reminding me of our wish to become parents, I'd probably still be trying more infertility treatment, just to satisfy my mother! And then, we would have missed the love with our daughter!

Both Sandra and Bob had issues with their own parents, but they noted that they each "more or less balanced each other out." Jesse, although single, began dating a new male partner in the period between adopting his first son and adopting his second. At the time of the case study, his new partner was committed to the relationship and also wanted to adopt the boys. They were in the process of doing so legally and Jesse's partner, William, was interviewed briefly for the study. As in the case of other couples, Jesse and William were able, for the most part, to adjust well to the needs of the boys and to continue a good working relationship between themselves.

Barbara and Karl became divorced over the years of raising their children. Although neither stated they felt the adoption was a cause of the divorce, they did note that there is some strain in their relationship with their children as a result of the divorce. Karl had increasing problems with his wife, who had become physically disabled a few years after the adoption. This placed increasing stress on his relationship with his son, who appeared to favor his mother. Although Karl was reluctant to discuss this, it later emerged that his son was having serious emotional problems. This is only conjecture, but perhaps Karl's earlier position of distancing himself from his son because of his own insecurities is a pattern that continued throughout the marriage and led to its eventual split. Barbara expressed some degree of competition with her ex-husband over decisions about their daughter, although she also was reluctant to discuss this in the interview. In addition, another parent, Paula, comments that she is somewhat estranged from her husband, although their difficulties have nothing to do with their daughter. It is unclear how these difficulties will resolve themselves over time.

As noted, most adoption comes as a result of infertility and/or miscarriages in marriages. Therefore, adoptive parents have usually been through a specific stress in their marriage. Although most couples are able to overcome these disappointments with the adoption of their child, some have not been able to do so and have had on-going marital problems.

Clinically-oriented perspective

As can be seen by the data, the parents gave a wide range of responses to the challenge of creating an identity as a parent of a child adopted from another country. For the most part, the adoption has served to expand the parent's view of him/herself and of the world. It has provided a venue for generativity and also for reworking earlier issues such as autonomy, shame, doubt, industry, identity diffusion and intimacy. For example, respondents who lost their own parent at an

early age, could not find a suitable life partner, or had had numerous tragic miscarriages, found adoption to be an opportunity to meet emotional needs and heal some earlier disappointments.

Through the adoption of a child from another nation, the parent may have fulfilled an earlier identification with that culture, or in other cases, may have expanded their self-image and self-awareness as "citizens of the world" as Shawn put it. In these cases, the adoption seems to have provided a positive coping response to life challenges. Most respondents have chosen creative ways to integrate their child's differences into their own identity.

However, in certain cases, some aspects of the adoption seem less than positive. In these cases, the parent is actually using the child as a transitional object for him/herself. For example, Annette and Paul, by adopting from Moldova, have a daughter quite similar in appearance to them. Annette especially remarked on her concern about her mother not approving of adoption. Although their daughter is "international," as a couple they showed the least interest in her background. They had nothing around the house that identified their daughter's Russian heritage.

On the other extreme is Barbara, who is somewhat obsessed with her daughter's Korean heritage, even while her daughter herself is not interested. Because Barbara mentioned problems with her own family of origin when she was an adolescent, it appears likely that she is recreating similar problems with her daughter. An extended quote will give some examples:

> **Now that your daughter's 16, how is it working for her and for you about her Korean background?**
>
> She's not Korean, in her mind! She's now 16 and in her teen years she's definitely distanced herself from any cultural concerns, considerations. Which has been hard for me. I get "*A*" Magazine, which is for Asians, and it's a terrific resource. It's all about Asians from different countries. It's a very nice magazine, but she doesn't look at it, you know!

She however will buy any magazine that has Prince William on the cover!

Here she is, distancing herself from her background, just the way I distanced myself from my WASP background at her age! She's doing it like crazy! And, Prince William, you can't get more WASP than that! Which was so funny to me when I realized that: Here I am, I get "*A*" Magazine coming, and I love to look at all the people and say "Hmm, are they from Hawaii, or Filipino or Chinese or Korea, so I'm fascinated with discerning the differences among the Asian cultures and she's reading fast and furious about Prince William!

...We had one great thing that happened: A Korean social worker was in town and doing a group with adopted Korean teens, and I said: "This thing is going to happen on a Friday night and I think it would be a great opportunity." And she said: "No. I'm going to the movies with one of my friends that night." And I said; "Well, can't you go to the movies with your friend the next night?" And she said: "No." So, I said, "Don't answer me now. I'm going to ask you again tomorrow, and maybe you can give some time to think it over." She obviously gave me a very clear answer, but I had made the decision not to hear it.

Then I went back the next day and asked; "Did you think any more about it?" And she said: "Yup. And I don't want to go." And I said: "Well, look, I'll give you $50 if you'll go to it." And she looked at me and said, "You should be ashamed of yourself." And I said: "Well, I'm not. And I'll give you $50 if you want to go." And so she went on, and went to school with her brother or something. Then later she came back and said, "Well, I guess I'll go." So I asked her what made the difference. And she said "Well, I told my brother and he said he thought it was outrageous what you were doing, to get me to go to this. And then S. said to me: 'You fool! How else are you going to make $25 an hour! Do it.' And I thought, well I do need the money, so I guess I'll go.' Then she went to the meeting and she was gracious enough to tell me that she did enjoy the evening. I bribed her to go to Korean Culture Camp, and I bribed her to go to this group. I'm getting "*A*" Magazine and at this point, I'm a little frustrated! I think in a way it was a power struggle between us and I think she needed to make it a negative experience so she could say "Aha! I'm not going back. You told me I didn't have to." And she wouldn't hear of going back again. I think it actually was a good experience for her, and recently she actually admitted it. But really I lost control. I really couldn't insist at a certain point. (Barbara).

Kris has shown some difficulties in her adoption. She mentions many disappointments with men and failed relationships which are unclear and may indicate some difficulty maintaining a bond with her daughter. This becomes of some concern because her daughter seems to have an ill-defined disability, referred to only as a "developmental delay." During the case study, Kris spoke

repeatedly about the poor medical conditions in China. Since she is a physician, these conditions are especially critical. Although she does not state it directly, she indicates that, as time goes on, her daughter may have been permanently damaged by her first few months in China. Since her daughter is only 2 years old, it is not clear if these problems will continue, but it is possible that Kris will experience on-going stress in her relationship with her daughter.

Karl has expressed some degree of distancing himself from his son and also did so early in the adoption process. He remained relatively uninterested in his son's birth culture. While much remains unclear about Karl's case because of his wish not to discuss his marital problems in the interview, it does appear that he is in distress about his son and feels, as he did even before the adoption, inadequate in his role as a father.

Paula also shows many inconsistencies in her discussion. While on the one hand she identifies herself as "The type who would adopt a child" because she sees herself being sympathetic to people from poor economic situations. On the other hand, she also expresses an interest in minimizing references to adoption. In my many contacts with her over the course of this study, she expressed repeated concern that her daughter was "behind" in intelligence, and made numerous references to heredity, genetics and so on. Further, she expressed marital difficulties and also saw her daughter as "my little girlfriend," indicating some difficulty with boundaries and appropriate family relationships. In discussing her choice of Brazil for adoption, she spoke about the beauty of the people as she imagines them, yet them discusses her disappointment with her own daughter's appearance. Paula seems to romanticize many aspects of international adoption while at the same time wants to downplay differences with her daughter. Paula also indicated a somewhat complex childhood identity where she was raised both Jewish and Lutheran (attending both services) and is ambivalent about how to

handle religion with her child. Given the fact that, during the course of this case study, Paula expressed repeated concerns about her daughter's intellectual capabilities, it seems likely that there will be some degree of conflict in her on-going relationship with her daughter and her approach to her daughter's cultural identity.

Summary

Internationally adoptive parents construct identity in the context of "time" within the life-span process. When these parents adopted, as Erikson suggests, they also reflected on and drew upon their prior life history as an opportunity to rework and expand prior identities. These processes must be viewed within larger social/economic/political contexts; however, as individuals the parents in this study saw the adoption experience within the context of their broader life projects and ongoing identity development.

CHAPTER 7: Transitional object: choice and use

In this study, we find parents using four types of "transitional objects": material objects, space/place, people/social/community groups and cultural phenomena. Although some parents used a wide variety of transitional objects from many categories, and some parents used very few, the following discussion will present the range of "objects" provided in the environment to be chosen/ created by the parents.

Material objects

The first type of transitional object used by parents was physical/material objects. Often, the photos of the child provided by the adoption agency/facilitator were significant material objects. During the adoption process, a key moment was receiving a photograph and being shown/choosing the child who would be theirs.

> We got a call June 2 that a girl was waiting and we left on June 28th. Two girls were available - they sent us pictures, so we tell people it's like our sonograms, like a Xerox and fax put together. (Shawn).

> And then they sent me J.'s picture ahead of time. I took one look at her and I thought she was so beautiful. I still have that picture. (Kris)

> So in June we got the picture, which is a little like you don't know what you're getting, ...You have to pretend you really thought about it, although I knew I was going to say "yes" immediately. (Fran).

> I kept my daughter's photo on my desk at work. That way, when anyone saw it, it helped remind me I was a Dad and helped me feel closer to her. (Don).

Many people bought objects as souvenirs when they traveled to pick up their children from their birth country.

> I bought a hair comb, a piece of silk, a little figurine. They're all put away. And I have a little box with the clothes she came in with on her. She was wrapped in like five layers – like I said there was no central heating. (Kris).

We got a large, six-paneled screen from China, which is really beautiful – which is a very traditional kind of thing. Some things we had long before we thought of adopting – we have a Chinese urn. Greg's mother had plates depicting Chinese scenes – more traditional.... One of my favorite things was when we had picked out J.'s name but not yet adopted her. We were somewhere where there was a calligrapher, and she made up a beautiful panel with J'.s name in Chinese. We have that framed on the wall. (Joan).

Well, we bought some toys and books when we were in Moldova. We were going to give them to E. when she got older. But her baby-sitter gave them to her one day to play with when she was about 2, and she ruined them. So now we just have a set of wooden dolls that I keep in a special place. (Annette)

I have some pictures here on our living room wall, some Japanese lanterns; we have Asian dishes that we eat off of most of the time. We planted flowers out back, we did "Rose of Sharon", that's the Korean national flower and we did that specifically, and we told K.: "That's what one flower in Korea looks like." Then we try to have other things, like at Christmas time, we have this catalog that's just trinkets and we have decorations we order every year. Like he has a little drum from Korea. And his foster grandmother from Korea sent a little outfit called a 'humbog' - it's baggy pants and a shirt...And at different times she's sent photos of him from her house - I wonder if that's her way of letting go of him. (Sandra)

I bought a coffee table book on Korea that I put out, a Korean pillow sham that I put on a couch, we had some Korean dolls, they're still actually up on her shelf, and whenever I could I would introduce cultural things. She also had gotten some recipes from a Korean friend that she'd make sometimes. And I think that was interesting and I think that she was comfortable during her younger years, and going to the Korean Culture Days was very helpful because she would see other families that were like our families, White with Korean kids. I think that really helped her feel being part of a root and included something that was bigger. But at a certain point, she lost interest, which I think was developmental. When it was developmentally appropriate to belong to a peer group. In early adolescence she really started being less interested. (Barbara).

Libby remarked that her daughter chose to be a "Flamenco dancer" for her Halloween costume. While this was a choice of her daughter, it was clearly influenced and encouraged by Libby. Libby also enjoyed displaying their

Christmas tree which was decorated with Stars of David, representing her interfaith marriage.

Some people mentioned food, recipes and cookbooks as transitional objects.

> We had tried Asian food, but that was about the extent of our knowledge of Asian culture. Now, still, we don't have Asian things because we don't like Asian things it's just, we don't have it - especially here in New Mexico - there aren't that many Asians. (Sandra).

> We have books about adoption, and books about their country. We have some art works from Nepal. In regard to food, at Thanksgiving we try to have one Nepal dish and one Korean dish. (Kathy).

> Well, we have a Caribbean baby-sitter, my daughter is from China, my wife is British, and I'm American, so, put it all together, and we have a real assortment of dinners in our place! We cook for everyone! (Stuart)

> My husband is a gourmet cook and he enjoys trying all kinds of foods. He's experimented a lot with Hispanic and South American dishes since we've adopted, and we really enjoy it!. (Sally)

Although most parents had some form of cultural memento available, certain parents had these fairly prominently displayed in the home. One part of this research consisted of observations of how the respondents used a combination of material objects and space, by observing objects they had on display around their homes that represented the birth culture. Fran/Stuart displayed Chinese artifacts in the living room, Sally/Ron had a large map of Colombia in their son's room and figurines in different rooms of the house, Sandra/Bob had Korean cookbooks on display in the kitchen, Kathy/Shawn had large flags of Nepal and Korea in their children's bedroom, Libby/Don and Martha had Hispanic books and Veronica had Latin American dolls on the shelf. These items are of note because they are conspicuously on display and are signs to both family members and visitors of the family identity as in some way "part" of a different culture.

Space and place

Most parents in some way actively used space and place (or attributes of place) to help them in their identity development. For each parent, the most obvious use of space and place is the child's birth country. Don, Martha, Veronica and Jesse had already traveled to the country (or a geographically close and culturally similar country) prior to even considering adoption. Most parents traveled to the birth country as part of the adoption experience. For example:

> I really was thrilled riding in the taxi...from the airport to the hotel in the taxi together the first time, along this big boulevard with palm trees...The buildings were kind of Latin-y, it looked like this small town kind of thing – broken up sidewalks, things like that. I had traveled, a long time before, not in recent years, and it was kind of thrilling just being in another environment where we spoke Spanish, and especially going to pick up my child. Don and I had been to Spain *before* we were married.... That was a wonderful trip. I think that was the only Spanish speaking country that we had gone to. And it just felt very exciting to be in another place, with a different situation. (Libby)

Many parents felt they made a major step in connecting to their child when they went to the birth country to get the child.

> It's funny, during the adoption process, or at least the paperwork, I didn't feel so connected to our daughter-to-be as much as I did to myself. I mean, all the paperwork was about me: my addresses to be checked for child abuse, my divorce papers from my first marriage, and so on. It was only when we were in China that things were about my daughter! What a nice change! (Fran).

> China was so exciting!! Because, I first of all love to travel and I love new things. But what was especially exciting for me aside from the whole adoption aspect which was enormously exciting – was the chance to use the language and to practice. It was fun for me to go into any place and see signs everywhere! You know its so crowded in China....Chinese characters... I had my dictionary out constantly- I took a lot of pictures – I was out there with my video camera. I was just really into it. It was a lot of fun for me. (Joan).

Most parents spontaneously mentioned specific locations during their stay such as the court, the hotel, the orphanage and some tourist sites. Most parents used at least part of their time in the country as an opportunity to "play" in "transitional space."

A second use of space/place was the awareness of the present location as important. Most people in New York mentioned that they felt that there were many opportunities provided by the environment (restaurants, festivals, others of similar ethnic background). Many parents attended picnics held in local parks for internationally adopted children. Barbara has participated in local "Culture Camps" provided for adopted Korean children in the New York area. In fact, Alex, Burt, and Karl mentioned they would not have chosen international adoption if they continued to live in the relatively rural and "White" areas of their childhood. Sandra and Bob moved from New Mexico to Maryland where they thought they would find community acceptance of their Korean son. However, they were very disappointed with the prejudice they experienced in Maryland, and after a year moved back to Albuquerque, where they felt there was more multi-cultural acceptance. More locally, Barbara and Kris mentioned purposely seeking out ethnic neighborhoods that represent people of the birth culture. Kris had a birthday party for her daughter, then age 2, in a Chinese restaurant, and distributed Chinese figurines as party favors to guests. Sally and Martha mentioned attending ethnic parades offered by their city.

Jesse, Joan, Martha, Joan, Ron, and Shawn enjoyed the somewhat "exotic" nature of international adoption. The adoption became a desired way to extend identity and "play" with the differentness of their child. Most parents also mentioned looking forward to a return trip to their child's birth country. Greg/Joan, Alex, and Veronica mentioned using the Internet to connect with others who had adopted. Karl, Sandra, Kathy, Annette, and Sally mentioned

keeping some sort of relationship continuing over distance with people they met while traveling to the birth country of their child. These relationships over time and space also provided an opportunity to "play."

For Jesse, Joan, and Martha, the experience of travel itself has been and continues to be a favorite form of "transitional experience" for them as a sense of "play" and "personal expression. In fact, Jesse mentioned that he conceived of the whole adoption process as a "quest," a sort of mythic heroic journey. One particularly memorable use of place was that of Alex, an architect. At the time of his trip to Guatemala, he had still not chosen a name for his son. He then purposely went to a local cemetery in Guatemala to read names of the deceased as a way to consider names for his son. This was a unique way to "play" with place!

People and community resources

A third kind of "transitional object" used by parents was that of other people: individuals and support groups. Helen, Libby/Don, and Karl reported using couples counseling/psychotherapy to help them resolve some issues about adoption. Almost all respondents (Kris, Martha, Karl, Paula, Annette, Paul, Joan, Greg, Fran, Stuart, Jesse, Alex, Veronica, Kathy, Shawn, Bob, Sandra, Candi, Burt, Barbara, Don, Libby) attended at least a few meetings of support groups (including Families of Children from China, The Adoptive Parents Committee, Latin American Parents Association, Spence-Chapin Agency, Center Kids/Group for Gay and Lesbian Adoptive Parents, Stars of David).

Veronica, Martha, Bob, Sandra, and Sally developed close friendships with others who were adopting or had recently adopted from the same country. Kris and Alex developed especially close relationships with the social worker who assisted them. Barbara, Sandra, and Burt found community members who were from the same ethnic group as their child. Jesse and Martha also purposely

tried to get baby-sitters who were of the same cultural background as their child. Martha and Fran have joined "Multicultural/Diversity" committees in their daughter's elementary school PTA's, now identifying themselves as interested in multicultural concerns at school.

In addition, Jesse and Karl formed lasting ties with native people they met while they were in the country adopting their child; Veronica, Shawn, and Kathy actually met the birth family and maintain contact. In fact, Shawn's father actually sends money to Nepal each year to pay for the education of his adopted daughter's siblings who live in Nepal. Veronica and her daughter have kept up contact with a brother of her daughter who still lives in Costa Rica. When Jesse had a birthday party for his son E., he invited the infant of a birth mother whom he met when he was arranging the adoption.

> When I picked up L., there was a pregnant teenager from Mexico there, and we met the mother who adopted in New York and we invited them to his first birthday party once the baby was born. (Jesse).

Sandra and Kathy tried to keep up relationships with parents who adopted siblings of their child, even though these families live in Colorado. Veronica has taken her daughter to visit her brother in Washington where he has been adopted by another family. Annette/Paul and Libby/ Don maintain contact with families they met in the birth country when they adopted. They have occasional "play dates" with the children of these families, since all the children were born in the same country. Sandra reports on a relationship with an Asian woman in the US whom she felt was important to helping her adjust to adopting an Asian child:

> One of the things that helped when K. arrived here, since he was almost a year old and had been living in Korea then almost a year, this man's wife [a Laotian co-worker] said "Now, you should know that Asian people always sleep together as a family, so when he comes, don't leave him alone in his room right away!" Now, that was something I really hadn't thought about - and I realized then he was probably sleeping in the same bed as his foster mother in Korea, so we took it to heart - she was very

> helpful in that regard - and we did find he didn't want to stay in his crib- I even thought, well, I'll put him in his crib and I'll sleep in the room with him, but he was totally not accepting like "This is not-OK!" (Sandra)

Kris, a physician, has sought out Asian doctors in Chinatown to care for her daughter. Barbara discusses her experiences of exposing her daughter to the Korean community in New York:

> Whenever I could I would, for example, sponsor a day trip visit to Flushing, Queens, to the Korean community. She was about 8 or 10 when we did that, and it was a great experience. Again, we'd go to a Korean restaurant sometimes...I did try to reach out and give her experiences, to make sure she could be in places where other Korean people would be. The down side was, within a half-hour we were in a local Korean shop and she was realizing that. although she looked like them, she couldn't really communicate with them, they didn't really speak English, they didn't "get" who we were. They were very pleasant, but it was different.

Libby/Don, Fran/Stuart, Sally/Ron, Candi/Burt, Kathy/Shawn, and Kris still attend support groups at least occasionally and Libby has formed her own support group of parents of children from Paraguay.

> In order to improve upon Spanish and work on Spanish, we listened to a program on natural medicine in Spanish, and the doctor would speak on the radio. ...He spoke of his origins of being Dominican, so we went to meet him with two intentions - I mean he didn't know this, but we went for health number one, which is why he's there – he prescribes alternate ways of dealing with health. But knowing that he was Dominican, I also said, "By the way, in case you know anybody from your country, we're interested in adopting a child. Could you help us?" And he tried to. His mother actually runs an orphanage in Dominican Republic, but there was just so much red tape and so much back and forth, we finally concluded that it just wasn't going to work.

Cultural phenomena

A fourth category of transitional objects is those that are more appropriately termed "cultural phenomena." These items, while serving transitionally, are not concrete, physical objects, nor are they people or places. This includes, for example, language, music, art, literature and religion.

Technically, it is also possible to consider many objects already noted, such as books and photos, music, photos, magazines and computer searches/Internet which evoke more cultural communications.

> I started taking Mandarin classes in Salt Lake. It was before we got the picture though, so I guess it was about a year before. That was a real turning point for me. I continued studying Mandarin – I'm fascinated by the language. For example, my Chinese teacher who I've become good friends with. She's from Beijing, and her husband, and her daughter, and they moved here when her daughter was twelve- so she's now a real American teenager, but native Chinese, and there's other families like that. And then there's another family I met through the Chinese classes - a White man who married a Cantonese woman and they adopted a Japanese girl and a Chinese girl. So they're an interesting mix too, because there's a White element in there but not only – the family is mixed in their heritage. So, I think that's been helpful. (Joan)

Libby and Don used Spanish-language radio and Spanish music, as did Veronica. Martha played Hispanic music for her daughter when she was an infant. Some parents used computers; Alex, Greg and Joan talked about doing searches and joining chat groups on the Internet. Veronica and her daughter have e-mailed her daughter's brother in Costa Rica. Libby and Don, Sandra and Bob, Martha, Karl, Barbara parents also used books and magazines with their children, at least trying to interest the child in his or her birth culture.

One of the most classic concepts of "transitional space" is that mentioned by Sally, of dreams:

> During the wait, I had a dream one night, that we were where we go on vacation to the Carolinas. It was one of those perfect Carolina skies where you look up and could see the entire constellations – every constellation in the world. And as I was looking up, all the stars were starting to move and went into the shape of a baby in the fetal position. So when I woke up, I thought, "OK, this means I'm going to get the phone call". Then we went on vacation, and on vacation got the phone call.

Bob, Alex, and Martha mentioned similar fantasizing about the birth culture before the adoption. In their imaginings they were in "transitional space" and "playing with" the birth culture.

Naming of child and choosing a religion

Two other areas emerged that formed a "transitional space" for most parents: That of selecting the name for the child, and that of religion. As part of the research, parents were asked how they chose the name of their child. It was felt that, in this area, the parents were free to respond to the child's culture by choosing, adapting or rejecting a name representative of that culture. Most parents in this study chose names that in one way reflected the birth culture and in other way reflected the U.S. culture. For example, some parents chose a first name of an American tradition and a middle name of the birth culture tradition, while others chose a favored American name translated into the language of the birth culture. For most parents, choosing the name of a child is a "transitional space" where many potential names are "played with," actually in both cultures, until one is chosen. This is an excellent example of "transitional phenomena."

> We were looking for something Latin-y and his middle name is E., which is my mother's maiden name and was what the nurses were calling him in the hospital, since his birthday is Dec. 29. E., my first son, has a name which is Hebrew but also sounds Mediterranean. L., after my father who was named L. I thought it would be nice to have some Spanish culture around here. (Jesse).

> So, I wanted my daughter's name to be "M." [A Hispanic name]. Libby didn't like that name – it was too religious for her. I'm Catholic, she's Jewish. So then I just wrote down different names... we may have had a book even...and my wife would bounce a name off me, and I'd say "no I don't like that name", back and forth and then finally, one name, and I don't know where I got it from, but "E." came to mind. To me it conjures up country – open spaces, and freedom, and that kind of thing...natural...healing... I think maybe partly that's what the name brings up for me. I didn't know anybody named "E." or anything like that. (Dan).

And, I went to the cemetery there [Guatemala] to look for a name. I didn't have a name for him. It was interesting to see a cemetery in a different country. So I looked at all the names and found "I. A." and I liked that, so I took it. "I." was an unusual Latin name, and since my name is Alex, that part seemed right. I didn't want to name it after my family, so I got that name from Guatemala. (Alex).

We named her "O." because the agency in China had given her an "assigned" birthdate in August, and that's the eighth month. (Fran).

Her name, actually, is "L.K." "K" is the surname she came with from Korea, so I kept it and "L" is my grandmother's name, and my grandmother really is the matriarch of the family, a very strong person. Naming her "L.K." was acknowledging her past, and her culture, but also, with her name cementing her in the family. (Barbara).

My husband put a lot of work into choosing her name. Like I said, we were studying Chinese... My grandmother's name was T. It was hard to think of anything close to T. and didn't want to name J. T. Her mother was J. So we thought, "Well, that's a way of linking to her. And Greg's grandmother who lives in Maine... Greg, he spent a lot of time for a while with a dictionary picking out words that had good meanings, that came close to J. and M. and then one day at work he called me and said, "I've got a great name" And then we started testing it out with our Chinese friends, and made sure it didn't sound like something with a terrible meaning...And we liked the characters...We like the character for M. Well the name means strong and beautiful, vigorous and graceful. And we liked that name. And the character for M. is the same as the character for America. So M. is the American aspect of the name. (Joan).

I put a lot of thought into R.'s name. First, I wanted something that would go well with my last name, which begins with "R" so "R." was good. And I also wanted a name that could sound somewhat Hispanic but also not necessarily Hispanic, like kinda flexible. I considered others, but that was "too Hispanic," and other "R" names, weren't Hispanic enough, so "R" sounded fine. And we're both happy with it. (Martha)

Bob's family is Scottish and Irish, and I just like Celtic names, so we were kind of looking for something Celtic - D. for a girl, or K. for a boy and we used his Korean name for his middle name. That way when he gets older, he can still claim his heritage or whatever. (Sandra).

Transitional and creative processes

Transitional objects are used in the *process* of developing an identity and are most effective when they are available over time and when they can be "played" with. There is a certain amount of "create-ivity" that is required in making/ finding/using transitional objects. Joan, Barbara and Don give good examples of "process":

> I was a little nervous when we started the adoption process too. Just because I couldn't imagine how we would fit it into our lives. We were busy - It's probably no different than any prospective parent. You just can't imagine how you would fit in this enormous thing into your life! I was a bit ambivalent but the process is really lengthy. I started it anyway, and got very swept up into it as we went along. So in a few months I was very ready. Certainly by the time we went I was more than ready.
>
> I gradually became more and more invested in it – I was also thinking about not just the paperwork, but what the paperwork was leading to. Then another thing we were doing, early on in the process - we started taking some classes through an adoption agency. Then another thing we were doing – we started pretty early on in the adoption process – we started taking Mandarin classes. That was a real turning point for me. I continued studying Mandarin And more than that, I see, it introduced us to a different community in Salt Lake. So that we've really hooked into the Chinese-American community in Salt Lake. Which makes me very happy. We've gotten involved first through the Internet, and then have gone in person to a couple of events where there are White parents adopting kids internationally. (Joan).

> I just started growing into the role. I started getting *Adoptive Families* magazine and going to the Korean Culture Day we had, and making connections to other families that adopted Asian kids, and identifying people in the community. When L. was fairly young, there was a Korean pharmacist nearby. I made sure that I went there, and I took L. with me whenever I could. So again, I think as she grew, I grew into these connections, and realizing that would be an important thing for her, and for me, so there was a great interest in me. (Barbara).

> I remember one thing that helped me - I kept a baby picture of E. on my desk in the office. And everyone would come in and ask about my daughter. And, for a long time, everytime they did I thought Who? My daughter? And then I would remember that I was really a father. And then, slowly, I got used to being a father! I know it sounds silly, but that photo really helped! (Don).

Sally, Libby and Veronica have been especially creative in their use of transitional objects. For the past three years, Sally has given a formal workshop at an annual adoption conference on "Waiting for the Adopted Child." In this way she uses the "me" (her role as a professional social worker) to offer others her experiences as an adoptive parent herself. This is particularly important because she describes her own waiting period as a "not-me" experience. Sally had had numerous miscarriages before adoption, and because of her fears of something also going wrong with the adoption, she kept the experience to herself while she was waiting and more or less pretended it wasn't happening. After her daughter finally arrived from South America, she regretted her secrecy because she denied herself the social support she could have gotten during the waiting period. Now, her annual workshop gives her the chance to "play" with getting support when there is less risk.

Libby also has created her own support group:

> And there's also a small group of us...I had heard that there was somebody who was interested in getting children from Paraguay together, who were adopted. So I encouraged that person to start doing it. And I said I'd call some people. So we started a group called "Guarani, New York." Because Guarani is the name of the indigenous people there – that's the name of the money that they use, instead of dollars they say Guarani. And so someone suggested we call it that. So it's called Guarani, New York - for people in the whole New York area.

This group provides the transitional space for her to "play" on a regular basis with various aspects of the Paraguay identity of her daughter.

Veronica presented particularly sensitive and creative ways she involved herself with her daughter's birth culture. Perhaps because she is a teacher, she has supported her daughter in many educational activities about Costa Rica:

> Her first grade teacher had this "multicultural time." She asked for parents to come up and do a lesson with the class about whatever culture they are from. So even though I was working, I picked Costa Rica. I took

the day off, and E. and I had done a lot of preparation, and we presented this wonderful lesson. Which I still remember in detail because we worked so hard preparing for it. We went to the Costa Rican consulate and we got all kinds of big beautiful posters, maps and books to show to the class. I told them all about the country. Even though this was first grade, they were very sharp. They were very receptive. Then I taught them some Spanish words. I read them a simple little kids story in Spanish with pictures... I taught them a Spanish song... I brought in all these artifacts that I had brought from Costa Rica that we still have in the house.

The biggest artistic thing they do in Costa Rica is that they make these oxcarts.. The teacher suggested that besides presenting the country, we also do some kind of an art project. So even though I'm not an art person, I figured out with E. that with these oxcarts they had these very colorful wheels... Very intricate designs. So I had the kids draw... they designed oxcart wheels. And then we got a thank you card, which I'll show you from the class. They had done a big one together. So anyway, it was such a positive thing. And E. helped me do the lesson; she was up there doing it with me. It was wonderful. And then later that year I did the same lesson with E. in my school for a fifth grade class. I think they were studying Central America... So E. came to my school and we repeated the lesson for the fifth grade class. So that was really the big thing that I did through the years. Otherwise, I've brought home books from time to time.... I even have one now that I found in my school library, with colorful pictures, about Costa Rica.

And I think, as she got older, she's done more things. We looked it up on the Internet...we got books and she drew it. and she got a news article....and she got involved ...This was exciting on the Internet because we hadn't done this before. She found that they had pen pals...Their email addresses.... Just a lot of stuff you could get about Costa Rica...It was very exciting. (Veronica).

One last example, that of Don, shows the process of becoming a father using a variety of transitional objects, places, people and phenomena:

When you became a father, you were already pretty familiar with the Hispanic culture. So I wonder if this went psychologically smoothly for you... it didn't seem so foreign?

The fact that I was into the culture or the language? I don't know if it helped...it certainly didn't help the process at all because that was limited by the politics at the time. But I think in terms of an excitement for or anticipation of what was coming...its interesting that you asked that cause I remember after making the decision and actually starting to move on it, not just making the decision, but acting upon it, I'd look around at all these little girls in school and, where I worked in Bushwick it was, it was probably 90% Hispanic. Many of the mothers didn't speak English. So there was a lot of bilingual. It drew me more, I think to the whole

> notion or idea of going Latin. Looking at these little girls, working with some of them in counseling, working with their mothers and all...it added an element of excitement I think...

Summary

All parents used transitional objects of one form or another to include concrete and cultural aspects of the environment to help them form a relationship with their child and to create their own identities. The most common "transitional object" was that of a community support group.

Almost all parents used support groups and the naming of their child as transitional experiences to help anchor them "in between" culture. Further, there were parents (Libby, Don, Martha, Kathy, Shawn, Barbara) who embraced the idea of "other-ness" and used a wide variety of transitional experiences. For many of them, the adoption of the child itself was a "transitional experience" in that it allowed them to "play" with the child's culture in a way that was in itself psychically rewarding.

Thus, while transitional objects were used in different ways, in different phases and to different degrees by parents, the actual process of their use gives a good model of how individuals and environment interact in constructing identity.

> I see no reason to make such a point out of a child's birth culture. I mean you should be honest with them, of course, but to make a big deal of it, even of adoption itself, it makes the child feel like a freak. (Annette)

Tables (2) and (3) present samples of choices and phases of use of transitional objects.

Table 2: Choices of transitional objects (Sample)

Material objects	Places	People	Cultural phenomena	Mixed
Dolls Toys Maps Dishes Pottery Flowers Plants Flags Life-books Calli-graphy Cookb'k Clothing Holiday decora-tion Photos Videos	Travel to bp Return travel to bp Culture Camp Ethnic neighborhoods Restaurants Parks	Support groups People met in bp Bp/bc natives in US Babysitters from bp/bc Other int'l adoptive parents Physicians from bc Diversity groups	Festivals Music Language Martial arts Religion Child's name Dance	Foods Internet Magazines Books Contributions of $$ Taking photos/ Videos

Note : "bp" = birth place, "bc" = birth culture

Table 3: Phases and uses of transitional objects (Sample)

	Pre-adoption	**Adoption decision**	**Trip to birth country**	**Post adoption**
Alex		Support gp. Internet	Cemetery	
Annette/ Paul		Support gp.	Dolls	Support gp.
Barbara			**No trip to bp**	Magazines Ethnic Culture camp
Bob/ Sandra	Asian religion	Support gp.	***No trip to bp.***	Support gp. Clothing Plants/flowers Martial arts
Burt/ Candi	Asian religion		***No trip to bp.***	Support gp. Martial arts
Don/ Libby	Peace corps Flamenco dance	Support gp. Language Radio	Photos	Support gp.
Fran/ Stuart		Support gp. Bookshops	Life book	Support gp.
Greg/ Joan		Language Internet	Photos	Support gp.
Helen		Support gp.		
Jesse		Support gp.	***No trip to bp.***	
Jules/ Paula		Support gp.		Support gp.
Karl		Support gp.		Novels
Kathy/ Shawn	Travel Asian religion			Support gp. Life book Flags Travel Religion
Kris		Support gp.	Photos Mementos	Support gp.

Martha	Travel	Support gp. Bookshop	Photos Toys	Support gp. Books Travel
Ron/ Sally		Support gp. Dreams	Dishes Photos Figurines	Maps Workshops
Veron-ica	Travel	Support gp.	Dolls	Internet School projects

CHAPTER 8: Construction of culture in everyday life

Each parent who adopts a child from a different country is posed with the challenge of how to recognize/define/address the "other-ness" of the child. Although this has been discussed to some extent in the topic of "me/not-me," however, the discussion was focused on the parent's concept of difference/ sameness. It is important also to focus on the outward manifestations of behavior in the environment - the expectations of the parent towards this "otherness." In daily life, do parents more or less deny or minimize differences, do they make some efforts to embrace differences or do they emphasize or even maximize differences? Parents provided a range of responses to this question. A sample is given below:

> Well I have great concerns about it, as I knew I would.. I try to keep a balance .... We don't want to shove it down her throat. But we want to keep it in front of her. And we also don't want her to be constantly reminded of Chinese things. We want to include that as part of the rest of the family. Because she's very much in our family... Her grandma is her grandma. And her other grandma is her grandma. It's not like "her American adoptive grandmother." It's her grandma. And that's good. I like that. We talk to her about adoption. We don't talk to her constantly, but we talk about it. I don't know how much of it really makes sense. I think it's too early. I think around second grade or so? (Joan)

> I hardly ever think of it, or think of her as Latin. We do have a few items from Colombia around the house: some dishes and some pictures. We don't really do a lot about it, although I'm very open to talk with her about anything she wants. We're certainly not planning to hide it from her, but we're not going to force it either. It'll depend on what she wants to know, then we'll foster it. (Ron)

> First of all, I mean, she's our daughter. She's just our daughter. That's what comes first. I really don't do that much that separates her. I mean, the interest in Korea is there. And yes, we've bought books on Korea for both her and for him (son). I've always been interested in Asian people, in Asian religion. I mean sometimes we have problems between the kids, but its due to the difference in age, not her background. Basically, her being from another culture has no effect on her or us, as far as I can see. It really doesn't matter how she came to us. "Sorry, kid, but

you gotta accept our house! This is who we are, and if she grows up and resents that, then that'll be issues that she's got to deal with. (mocking tone of voice): "My parents never taught me anything Korean I mean, when she's his age and she wants to learn that sort of thing starts happening, we'll encourage and help her. Like my biological son, he wants to study Japanese, and takes karate lessons -he's into Asian culture, too. (Burt).

I think the thing that is in my mind, I suppose but we've already talked about, but I just want to emphasize. I think it is very important when you're adopting a child from another culture, not to ignore that heritage. But also not to make that child feel like a freak. So that's the balance we try to strike all the time. And I do worry about the future, and I worry that she will feel outside of every community.

I don't think there are any adoptive kids-of-color who are growing up with White families who don't look at their parents and say: "I wish I would look like my mommy" and so I think it's our job to help our kids feel proud and interested. They're going to model after us, if we're interested, maybe they can become interested, usually it's not going to come from them, especially if you're a person-of-color in this society, the message you get from the dominant culture is self-loathing around color.,. We're changing, but it's hard for children of color to find good models, you have to do a little more work, I think.

I think as time's gone on, I've become more and more aware of the importance of families taking an interest in culture and doing something with that. Recently, someone said; "It's important not just to do the "tourist thing" which means, not just go to the Korean restaurants and neighborhoods for a visit, but that somehow you incorporate it at a different level, and I really do agree with that. I think that's it's really important that when you adopt a kid from another race, to go out of your way to make connections to that community. (Barbara)

When I was in China, I took lots of pictures for her, because I figured when she gets older, she'll want to know - even though I plan to raise her as an American. Some of the other women in the support group give them a lot of Chinese culture...they're teaching them the language, and all. I doubt we'll go that route. I still haven't made up my mind. She's too young for any of that right now. My gut reaction is to just raise her as an American. I know a zillion Chinese-Americans here. Their parents were born there but they came here and they consider themselves American. But of course it's a very strong culture, so they get a lot from their parents. So I have to figure out also about adoption. I don't know how she's going to feel about her identity – you know, it's separate from mine, and that kind of stuff. So I'm kind of a little bit going to go on what she indicates to me. Right now my feeling is not to immerse her in the Chinese culture. I think being in NY there's plenty of exposure. (Kris).

In my opinion, the agency made too much of a point about all these issues, always wanting to talk about our feelings. I think they should have been more practical, more business-like, Like, just get the job done. And now that we have our daughter, I don't think we should make any issue of it. She's our daughter; she's Jewish - that's all that matters. (Paul).

I should go to [support group] meetings...it might be good for J. but, if she looked more interracial, I guess, a little darker, if she looked a little more like "Who am I?", I'd go to more meetings, I'd want her to have more of that. But I don't want to put her with a whole bunch of kids who don't look like her, for her to say, "This is who I am." It's better for her to say "I'll find my identity where I find it."

I feel like J. is always going to know she was born in Brazil, but I want her to know she always was, and is, American. There's no way she's going to feel Brazilian. She's not going to speak Portuguese, she's not going to have a cultural identity that's Brazilian. She was born there, but she might, for example, have European background considering the way she looks, why make her try to feel Brazilian when maybe she's Polish or Russian or German, which happens to be what I am, she might be mostly related to my cultural heritage, it's possible. Especially the way she looks. Why teach her Brazilian history, considering that she's American? Actually legally, at 18, we'll have to choose what nationality she is; now she has dual citizenship. I think she's Brazilian, but I think she was born in a part of Brazil where there's Europeans...no, American. I think she's American. Both Brazilian and American. I think. But I never had to. Like Black people not born in Africa, don't like to be Black African, they were born in American, so...(Paula).

I would pay most attention to social environment of the child. Not only within the family, but beyond the immediate family. Our situation is probably tougher than most because of where we live but how do you do this business of trying to supply the home culture to the child when you live in a place that is so foreign to that culture. It's so hard to find. We're struggling... doing what we can, but it's a challenge. (Greg).

Fantasies of birth culture/birth parent

When parents choose a birth culture, or consider how others will react to that culture, most of the information is based on fantasy, both positive and negative. It is through these stereotypes that parents form their feelings and attitudes towards particular birth countries.

China made sense also, 'cause culturally it's an old civilization and kind of culturally a place that was interesting to us. We'd never, either of us, been there, but I think both had an interest in going there. (Greg).

> My daughter was born in a place in Colombia that I say is equivalent to Detroit. That you would never want to go there, but once you got there it's interesting, it's on a lake, it's near pretty things. It's the drug capital of the world. I think probably culturally what you hear about Columbia is not so wonderful. I think I feel the need to be protective of that, if people are disparaging around the drug ring that goes on. (Sally).

> I wanted to adopt from a poor country, rather than in this country where everyone's fighting for this White child. I wanted to have a child who was going to be, like, saved from an otherwise unfortunate fate. I would love this child because I know how much she needed me, and I like telling her the story of her adoption, this birth parent wasn't able to give her the life that she wanted, where in the USA there usually is money, like my friend who adopted in this country, and the birth parents live nearby, and she gave up one child and kept another. I picked Brazil, to be honest, I think the Brazilians are a very attractive people and I like they way they look. I like their flair. There's lots of love, it's a beautiful country..
>
> I'd never been there, but I knew kind of the feeling of Brazil, or Rio. I had met Brazilian people, there were some Brazilian people out at the beach [Fire Island]. Also I worked with some people who went to LAPA [Latin American Parents Association] and who had adopted three kids from Brazil and she had a decent process. Also one of my best friends adopted from Brazil, too, which made it easier. We met a Brazilian woman who had an adoption connection in the country, and she sent us to another woman. We went to her house, and saw an album, and most of the kids were dark-skinned, very cute. (Paula).

Although there are various relationships developed, either in reality or fantasy, with the birth country, the adopted child lives on a day-to-day basis in the United States. If a parent wishes to include aspects of the child's birth culture in daily life, there must be a special effort to do so.

Most internationally adoptive parents never meet the birth parents. In many cases, particularly in China, children are anonymously abandoned and brought to the orphanage, so parents are unknown. In a few cases in this research, such as Kathy/Shawn and Veronica there was some contact with the birth family directly and, for Kathy/Shawn and Sandra/Bob there was contact with birth siblings also adopted in the United States. However, these cases are exceptions. In fact, some adoptive parents (Candi/Burt, Annette/Paul, Paula/Jules) specifically

chose international adoption because they saw little risk of interference from birth families, as may be the case in domestic adoption. However, what remained, and formed the basis of this research, was the relationship with the birth country/culture rather than, with domestic adoption, when the birth country, and birth culture (to some extent) are shared between the child and adoptive parents.

In some ways, parents constructed their identity by imagining the birth culture in a negative way, seeing themselves as "rescuers." Paula, Fran and Steve directly spoke of "rescuing" a child from an oppressive situation in their birth country. Other parents, such as Shawn, Jesse, Veronica, Libby, Dan and Greg and Joan combined this, or even more closely identified with positive aspects of the birth culture and saw the adoption as their chance to "share" in the culture. The birth culture was an ambiguity that was interpreted and constructed by parents in different ways.

Incorporation of birth culture in daily life

Many parents tried to incorporate aspects of the birth culture in the day-to-day life of the family. There are three general ways that this can be found:

(1) General cultural opportunities (cultural diversity available in the community: restaurants, books, parades, festivals, language classes, museums, etc). These activities or "cultural phenomena" usually originate from a specific ethnic group already living in the community which is then available to the larger community. Increasingly, these cultural objects are being "marketed" (books, music tapes and videos, etc).

(2) Opportunities provided by the "adoption market" through adoption agencies, adoption support groups and other related organizations and include: Culture Camps, Culture Days, International Support Groups (often organized by countries), magazines, "Motherland Tours."

(3) Opportunities created by parents themselves, such as support groups, unorganized trips, friendships formed and fostered with other adoptive families (especially those who have adopted from the specific country) or others who live in the community from the culture/country (neighbors, schoolmates, baby-sitters, etc.)

Many of the ways that parents integrate aspects of the child's birth culture into their daily lives have already been discussed under the use of "transitional objects." In these cases, however, the transitional objects have an on-going function within the family, rather than having been used by the parents before and during the adoption process. Some parents (Sandra, Kathy, Sally, Stuart) try to include foods from their child's native country into their family menu at least on an occasional basis. Many parents (Martha, Fran, Libby, Karl, Sandra) keep books from or about the child's country around the home. Some families continue to study Asian martial arts (Candi/Burt, Bob/Sandra). Other parents, such as Libby and Don, and Joan and Greg discussed below, keep up their use of the child's native language, at least at some times:

> We've gone in person to a couple of events where there are White parents adopting kids internationally. I think that's great, but something seems a little missing to me about that. There's sort of an authenticity that's missing. Because people are trying very hard to find something, but they just don't always know what they're looking for. So they kind of create themselves. So for me it's been really good to be involved not only in that community but also this other community. There's been a mixture of things.
>
> For example, my Chinese teacher who I've become good friend with. She's from Beijing, and her husband, and her daughter, and they moved here when her daughter was twelve- so she's now a real American teenager, but native Chinese. There's other families like that. So, I think that's been helpful.
>
> We take Mandarin lessons. I see the language as a way into the culture because the characters are so interesting. When you learn language you learn a lot about culture because so much of culture is reflected in language and how people use language. And also, it introduced us to a different community. (Joan).

> And how do you see anyway that you would...what's your feeling on your daughter having exposure to Asian culture. That's why we want her to go to this class, and why we started that. It's not only to learn the language, but it's to meet other Chinese kids, and see people who look like her. That's also why we pursued these relationships with these families to just get together, occasionally for parties, play time, that kind of thing. We haven't done as much of that as we like, but we probably see one of these adopted families, or maybe several of them at a time, maybe once every couple months. (Greg).

Some parents try to consciously keep up connections with other families of the same national background as their children:

> Now we also have friends from Costa Rica...other adopted kids from Costa Rica. I haven't met any adults from Costa Rica, but my friend's daughter is also adopted. They feel like they're sisters. Not only are they both from Costa Rica, but they look alike. And they're very close. She's about a year and a half younger. They really feel like they're sisters. And they talk about how when they grow up someday they'll go live there together – maybe. I have one other friend who has a daughter from Costa Rica. She's about 2 ½ years younger, but we don't see them too often 'cause they live uptown. And then a third friend when she was little, and the little girl was little, they used to come over, and then she moved to Queens so we kind of lost touch with her.. (Veronica)

> I think you sort of weave in and out of wanting to recognize our sameness, and what we share as a family, and what joins us, I think that's what adoptive families do. L. and I are the same because we're the only two girls in the family, and we both have dark hair. And at the same time, we talk about what makes us unique. You don't want to be too far on one side or on the other side. "Oh, you're just like me, you're White? No!" (Barbara)

> E.'s name is Mediterranean. L. after my father. I thought it would be nice to have some Spanish culture around here, although I wound up with a Haitian baby-sitter. In a general way, we'll bandy around some Spanish and French words.. and hope that some multiculturalism takes! A lot of my old friends are teaching their kids Spanish from middle-class Jewish intellectual families, raising them to be bilingual. They're having child care workers who are Hispanic - these are their own children, not adopted...I think that's great, but I couldn't quite manage it..(Jesse)

Critical incidents

In the course of the interviews, many parents provided "critical incidents" that highlighted the child's "different-ness," and as a result, challenged the parent to respond in these incidents. These examples show how, in everyday life, others confront the parent in a way that identity issues are highlighted. For example:

> **At what stage did you feel, if at all, he got the impression that he was different or different looking.... Where did you start to see that?**
>
> The first time that I was aware of it, was when he was about two or three – We had gone out to my parent's home for Christmas. My parents are part of huge families. My father is one of twelve; my mother is one of ten, so there's tons of cousins. And the boys had a family Christmas get together, so there were about sixty-seventy people or more at these things. So we went to that. And one of the aunts there, I don't know if you'd call it prejudice, or just awareness, she said, " Oh, he sure does have Black hair, doesn't he?" And it hurt. It was like, "Well, fuck you lady". It pissed me off. It was her way of trying to deal with it. So I don't know how much M. felt that. I would guess he did. He's very intuitive – a very sensitive kid. It probably had an impact on him. But for me that was the first thing like that, that I had experienced to date. (Karl).
>
> Sometimes I wonder if she [daughter] and I are just with each other, if people wonder about us, because she does look different, and I am older. I noticed it more when we were on vacation in the Carolina's. One time we were in a restaurant there - it was at a time when it wasn't really lunch, and it wasn't really dinner. So it was very empty. And there was a multigenerational Black family in there. And there was Ron and me, and J. [biological son] and J. [adopted daughter]. And finally one of them said to me, "Is that your grandchild". I said "No". And I get more upset because they think I'm so old... And I said, "No, she's my daughter". And she said "Oh". So I was saying to Ron when I got in the car "She thought I was a grandmother!" and he said, "No, she just couldn't figure out how you had a Black daughter". So she was just thinking that my daughter married a Black man, and that was the result. So, I click in more to the age, and Ron clicked in more to the racial piece. (Sally).
>
> I think that as soon as she arrived, I realized that I was in for a very different kind of experience. Um, I think that it didn't take me long to realize that..um..she wasn't White [laugh]...one of the first experiences I remember was being out in the suburbs where my parents lived, and having her in the shopping cart in the supermarket and realizing she was the only person-of-color in the store. It was only when I landed in a White community with her that I realized, I felt a little self-conscious and I think that gave me a window to understand what her life would be like.

> One of the strongest experiences I remember was when we took that trip to Flushing, we had the directions, but I hadn't been there before, and we turned the corner and then, we might have been in Korea! All the signs were in Korean characters, all the people on the street were Korean, it looked remarkable and we parked the car in the parking lot and started walking down the street, it was sort of a self-guided tour. There were a number of us families walking on the street, looking in the stores, and then we would meet in a Korean church that was offering us dinner. As we got out from the car and started walking in the street, she looked at me and said: "Now, Mom, you're the odd one out!" It was the most powerful moment, and she suddenly had this wonderful feeling of being a majority. Actually, I was the only one who was different! And it was a wonderful experience for her to see it. (Barbara)

> I recall an incident when we went a cross-country trip. We landed in a little town in Pennsylvania and went into a restaurant. My daughter went to the bathroom, and when she came out of the bathroom she didn't see them and she said to the waitress "Where's my dad and my brother?" And the waitress said, "I don't know. The only family that's in here is White." She was shocked and said it was a very alienating experience, for someone else not to recognize that that was her family. And for someone to make that judgment based on her appearance, that she didn't "belong there." (Burt).

Future plans

Another indication of a parent's identification with the child's birthplace is their plans and fantasies of the future in relation to different aspects of the birth country and culture. Almost all respondents expressed some interest in visiting or re-visiting the birthplace of their child (children). In fact, Kathy and Shawn were actually taking their children to Nepal and Korea one month after I conducted the interview. This was a return trip to Nepal, but the first trip to Korea for the family.

Barbara and Jesse discuss wishes to go to their child's country in future:

> Last week I was looking through a brochure on a trip to Korea. A group of adoptive families were going to go over, and I'd love to do it, but it's $3000 a person! I just can't afford it. And I think she'd be interested, and this would be a great summer...I know some families go when the kids are younger, and I know there's nothing wrong with that, but I feel, now she could really appreciate it. She went to France with her dad last summer and had a wonderful time. In the past, when I said I'd like to go to Korea some day, she said, "Well, no, I'd rather go to France." But if I had the money, we'd go right away. I'm really very disappointed. (Barbara).

It's hard to say...I feel like I have a connection to Texas –although my son is from Mexico, an agency in Texas handled the adoption. I'm entertaining ideas of both of them going to college at the University of Texas in Austin. As they get older, it's not first on my list of places I'd like to travel with them but I do think about going both to Texas and Mexico with them. (Jesse).

Child's social life

Another aspect of the parent's integration of their child's culture is their fantasy of the child's future friendships and dating partners:

I don't care who she associates with, or ends up marrying... Black, White, yellow, brown, red – whatever. I guess I assumed that despite whatever we try to do in terms of introducing language and culture to her, that she's bound to be an American kid. Basically a kind of Anglo, Jewish cultured kid for the most part. (Greg)

As she gets older, do you have any imagination of whether she would want to find other Asian kids Do you think she'd want to date Asians or not....

I do, and who knows what she's gonna want to do? If we stay in Utah, and I'm not sure we will, because I haven't been very happy there professionally. I'm concerned if the population is not as diverse as it is in some areas, like here. But it's much more diverse than I thought it was when we got here. And it's also becoming more diverse all that time. But I have some concerns about that. I think that could be a problem. (Joan)

Do you have any fantasies about when he's older, if he'd have Hispanic friends or date Hispanic people?

I just think everybody mixes everybody up around here. I mean, you see every mixture. It really doesn't matter. In terms of friends, he doesn't really have any that are Latin. No. Well, that's not true. Now he does. He has this friend, a boy named Louis; they've been in the US for a long time. He's from Puerto Rico. Louis looks Puerto Rican, not really quite... he looks Hispanic. And that's been off and on with him, which is interesting. Part of him wants to be one of the WASPY types of kids, and another part of him is drawn toward Louis, and it kind of goes back and forth. ... Still then there's so much to do with how to fit in with your peers that preoccupies them. (Karl).

The only problem I foresee is if she tries to date a Jewish boy and the mother has a problem with it. I foresee dating as the problem - trying to fit in, as a high schooler, that's where I see the problems arising, but right now, they're cute, they're little...(Candi).

Role of religion

Many parents volunteered responses that indicate the importance of their religious backgrounds to their approach to raising their child. Joan/Greg, Libby/ Don, Candi/Burt and Jules/Paula are mixed faith marriages between Christians and Jews while Sally/Ron, Fran/Stuart are mixed Catholic/Protestant. Further, Shawn and Martha, both raised Catholic, have had serious conflicts and some degree of rejection of their religious heritage. Thus in all these families, there has been some negotiation about preserving, modifying or rejecting religious traditions. In fact, some parents (Annette/ Paul, Jules/Paula and Candi/Burt) felt religious identity issues were more important in relation to their children than cultural or ethnic identity issues.

Kathy and Shawn are Universalists and believe its faith can also encompass the backgrounds of their children who were born into other faiths:

> In terms of religion, we go to the Universalist Church, so they learn that whatever they believe in, wherever they come form, it's not "wrong." I just want them to have an open background about religion. She's from a Hindu religion and he's from a Buddhist. We go to the Universalist Church where they can learn about religion in general. (Kathy).

Some saw that they expected more of their religion than they got, while others saw adoption as a way of re-evaluating their own religious identity.

> [my daughter is]... basically a kind of Anglo, Jewish cultured kid for the most part. The thing that we've actually looked into, probably more in recent months, is the issue of religion. And we're really sorting that out as adults too. Because I was raised Presbyterian, and more recently have been a member of the Unitarian Church... but still a more liberal, Christian background for me. Joan was raised in Conservative Judaism but is no longer practicing as a Conservative Jew, but we found a community in Utah that is Reconstructionist Jewish. We both like that community, and we both like the congregation, so the aim at this point is to be as active members of both as we can. Although that may be difficult... (Greg).

> We're Christians, we're very spiritual, it just felt like, "this was the flow", this was the way it was meant to be...However, in Maryland, we were in church one day and we sat down, and we were facing front and K. was facing back, and he started acting strange, and upset, and I said "K., what's wrong?" and I looked back and saw this family just staring and staring, like their tongues were hanging out of their mouths! I was just stunned...so we moved to a different pew, - we didn't expect it in church of all places! (Sandra).

> I was born and raised as a Catholic, but over the years I've had many problems with that tradition. However, since I know my daughter R. comes from a Catholic family in Latin America I felt some obligation or something to preserve a part of that for her. When she was 2 I had her baptized as a Catholic. Although I don't plan to formally raise her Catholic at all, I did feel this was a small part of both of our identities and should be kept at least in a token way. As she gets older I'm sure we'll discuss it and the she can handle it how she wants. (Martha)

However, most parents who had Jewish backgrounds and were particularly strongly identified with this tradition in their family of origin (Candi, Annette, Paul, Joan) were especially concerned about religious/cultural identity issues. They themselves have strong Jewish identities and believe this Jewish identity will also be strong for their child.

> **Do you expect she'll have any problems when she's older because she's from Korea?**
>
> No, actually I think she'll have more problems because she's Jewish! She's going to have more than enough problems being Korean and Jewish! Going to synagogue.... Well I figure, when you're adopting, if the issues are out on the table, it's OK. And being Korean, the issues are right out there. She'll be facing it every day, just because she looks different from our family. (Candi)

> And now that we have our daughter, I don't think we should make any issue of it. She's our daughter; she's Jewish, that's all that matters. (Paul).

Questions about religion may be evidence of concerns about identification with others of that religious tradition, as well as cultural practices and inner belief systems. For many parents the questions about religious affiliation opened the parents to reconsideration of their own religious heritages and beliefs. Many

parents who expressed questions regarding religious identity (Candi, Joan, Martha, Paula, and Jesse) experienced negative reactions from their family-of-origin when they decided to adopt internationally. In each case they purposely raised the child within their own religious tradition and felt that it was important to do so. In other cases, however, such as Shawn and Kathy, they were drawn to a different religion (Unitarianism) to raise their children. It is interesting that so many couples in this study are from mixed religious backgrounds in the first place, and raised their children in a "mixed" religious tradition. Perhaps since they had already dealt with religious diversity in their marriages, they were more comfortable with international adoption as an extension of diversity.

Contexts: role of location and community

One significant finding was that, without being prompted in any way, almost all parents remarked upon the importance of diversity in the community where they lived. Almost all NewYorkers commented about that in New York, often remarking that they would not have adopted internationally if they remained in their own birthplaces in rural, largely White areas. Respondents from Western cities - Salt Lake City and Albuquerque made the same comments.

> I don't feel stressed that my son is Hispanic. Most of the people I know aren't that way [prejudiced]. In fact, one woman who worked for me said, "You know, Alex, New York is made up for families like you. You get things in the mail, and they're addressed to fit all kinds of families."
>
> New York is already so Spanish, that it'll be OK. If I were adopting in Pennsylvania, I probably wouldn't do it this way. But since New York is so Spanish, I figured he'd fit right in. (Alex).

> It's different than when you're in New York and, you know, I started in Brooklyn, and then I lived on Long Island, and her father lives in Greenwich Village and so my orientation has been to more diverse communities. It was only when I landed in all White community that I realized, I felt a little self-conscious. (Barbara).

Well, we are a couple, mixed American and British, though I have a generally Irish-American background, and our daughter is from China, and our baby-sitter is from Jamaica, so even the foods we eat are all mixed. Some nights Fran cooks, and we have English sausages and mashed potatoes, some nights Pam, our baby-sitter, cooks and we have "Caribbean night", some nights we order out Chinese food - but I guess so does everyone in New York! It's just the way we are. (Stuart)

It's funny - since New York is so Hispanic, I don't really think much of R.'s background. But I was telling a friend that I was thinking of moving to the suburbs someday, maybe near Princeton, New Jersey. My friend pointed out that R. might've a hard time in such a "WASP-y" community and I had to admit I never even thought about it! It's right - we're really not totally free to move anywhere and expect she'd be accepted no matter what. (Martha).

We lived in the Bronx, but it was an ethnically mixed neighborhood – mostly Italian...But the neighbors were wonderful. Some women there baby-sat for him – later. Within a month or so we had a baptism in the church. All my family came, friends... and there was no... well I guess being in NYC, there are so many ethnic groups... there was no mention of and I didn't feel any prejudice. In fact, I didn't even think about it really.

If you had done this when you were in Iowa, what do you think? Would it have been the same?

That would've been hard on M. For me 'cause I would've been angry. In the worst way. Because people would kind of do it sneakily. They know. They have enough sense not to be blatant about it, but.... (Karl).

I originally came from rural Pennsylvania, very "farm-y." Where I come from, adoption has a very negative connotation. They don't really consider adopted children "your own." But, my family was very supportive from the beginning. They really at first didn't know what to say, but they didn't say "No, no." In fact, my father helped me financially. (Alex).

Well, I come from a small town in the middle of Pennsylvania, near State College, and I'll tell you, it wouldn't be so easy for us to have a Korean child in our family there. (Burt).

One of the reasons I left England and came to the US was because of the provincialness at home for me. I wanted to live in a place where I could be free - and I'm glad to have adopted O. here in New York where there's no issue about her being Asian. (Fran)

I think its good for them, because there are so many races in Albuquerque. And it's been that way for so long. There's so many Hispanics here, and our kids look something like them. Where I grew up, in Wisconsin, there's no way. But it's just totally White. There are some Indian reservations nearby, but its totally "bad blood" between them. We get a lot of stares when we go back by people who don't know them. Here in Albuquerque, we've only heard positive things from others. (Shawn).

And I think that we are in the metropolitan area, that there are people-of-color around has helped her, because there's a lot of Asians in the neighborhood so she passes people on the street that look like her, and it just doesn't seem like such a big deal. Their school is mostly White, but there are enough children-of-color there that she doesn't feel particularly out-of-it. But I think when she was a younger person, she got enough of a sense of pride or comfort that her differentness.... I know that she told someone at some point that she liked being different, that it was sort of fun. (Barbara).

I think being in New York there's plenty of exposure to Chinese culture. I mean we go to Chinatown - she's going to see other people like herself. Its not like we're living in rural Illinois or something. (Kris).

You know Utah is a lot more heterogeneous than White. And the largest minority population is Latino. There's also a Polynesian community who have immigrated to Utah because of the Mormon Church, historically. Then there's also some Native Americans, but there's hardly any Blacks, and there is an Asian, growing Asian community, Vietnamese as well as Chinese, Korean, and Tibetan in fact. There's actually a reasonable size Tibetan community. But all of these are small compared to New York City. (Greg).

As far as Costa Rica – that's harder because there's so few things of Costa Rica around New York. I haven't found any Costa Rican stores or restaurants or people, besides the embassy. You just don't meet Costa Ricans. So Spanish, in general, is more a part of our lives than Costa Rica. But we've had "stuff" to do with Costa Rica through the years. E. and I have tried to remember what we've done. (Veronica).

We lived in Albuquerque for six years, then we moved back to Maryland for a year then last year we moved back to Albuquerque. We moved back East because we thought Maryland would be more liberal - but we found it more uncomfortable in Maryland. We encountered a lot more stares, a lot more questions - "Is that your child?" Like "No we were just at a garage sale a few hours ago and we just picked him up a few hours ago!" [sarcastically...] Actually, I expected that, but I expected that more here, in Albuquerque, than in Maryland! (Bob)

Home visits/tours/photography/life books

As part of this research, home visits were used to actually see what, if any cultural objects are on display in the homes of parents who adopted internationally. In addition, after an interview, the parent was asked to take photographs of objects related to the birth country on display around the home, which included maps (Sally), flags (Kathy and Shawn), dolls (Veronica), infant photos (Fran and Stuart, Kris, Helen), other pictures (Sally), Chinese scrolls/screens (Joan and Greg), children's books (Martha, Libby and Don), cookbooks and garden flowers (Sandra).

In some cases, the objects that were shown to the interviewer were purchased in the child's birth country (dolls, combs, clothing, books), other objects were purchased in the United States (books, maps) while others were created by the adoptive parent, sometimes with the help of the child (scrapbooks, art projects, foods). However, in most cases, this display of cultural objects in the home was not predominant. Some parents (Karl, Annette and Paul, Paula, Candi and Burt, Jesse, Alex) had no particular cultural objects of any sort on display or available.

As part of the research, each parent was asked if they had a "life book" for their child. Some parents, such as Karl, Alex, Jesse, and Martha made little use of the technique, claiming it was not a priority. Sally, Libby and Sandra had a partially done book or a general scrapbook/photo album. Kris and Martha had materials saved but had not made a book. Fran and Stuart had a book that was prepared for them by the orphanage of their daughter's early life in China. Only Kathy had an extensive and well-developed life book, which she did using material from a commercial service that markets life books for adoptive parents. She claimed she was able to do it because she does not now have a full-time job. However for the sake of this research, most parents talked about the contents or

expected contents of the book. Most claimed they were "too busy" to complete the book at this point.

Nevertheless, those that made some form of scrapbook, and especially Kathy who had a formal lifebook had created a classic "transitional object" using material that was both "found" and "created" could be "played" with in an on-going manner, either through making, viewing and sharing the contents.

Assessment of Identification

Based on overall responses, as well as an assessment of photographs and cultural objects on display in the home, a 6-point scale was developed, following that of Trolley (1995).

1. No involvement with birth culture/denial
2. Minimal involvement
3. Some involvement
4. Moderate involvement
5. High involvement
6. Very high involvement

Factors considered in rating were: parents' direct comments on the importance of the birth culture to them, observation of cultural items in the home, use of transitional objects, especially in the current day-to-day life, and discrepancies between the parent's direct comments and other observations. There were some differences in each parent in a couple. Because each partner was interviewed separately (not in the presence of the other), each was recorded individually. Often one parent would have more interest in and be more responsible for objects and activities related to the birth culture than the other parent.

The following factors were included in rating a parent's level of identification: direct statements in interview about identification, number of "transitional objects" used (and with couples, which partner initially chose the

object), displays of transitional objects in the home, use of transitional objects in daily life vs."special occasions", preparation/use of "life book", expectations of child's future in relation to birth culture, and subjective comments/emotions expressed in interview and/or behavioral observation.

No parent who participated in this study had absolutely no involvement, or total denial of the child's birth culture. Even Annette and Paul, who expressed the lowest level of involvement and identification with their daughter's birth country, had some evidence of interest (a doll brought from Moldova, occasional social events with couples they met in Moldova). Therefore no respondent was given a score of "1" (no involvement/denial). Overall, of the 26 respondents, 11 parents rated mild/some/minimized identification while 15 rated moderate/high/very high identification.

Proportionately, 7.6% (2) were rated "mild identification", 34.6% (9) rated "some identification", 23% (6) rated "moderate identification", 30% (8) rated "high identification" and 3.8% (1) rated "very high identification."

1. None - no parents
2. Mild - Annette, Paul
3. Some - Candi, Burt, Stuart, Karl, Helen, Jesse, Paula, Jules, Ron
4. Moderate - Sally, Martha, Kris, Sandra, Bob, and Alex
5. High - Fran, Libby, Don, Kathy, Shawn, Veronica, Joan, Greg
6. Very high – Barbara

The degree of identification was not the same for each parent in a couple. For example, Sally had a stronger identification (4-moderate) than her husband Ron (3-some), and Fran had an even stronger identification (5-high) than her husband Stuart (2-some). It can be speculated that this is because, in each case, the wife had another prior identification that may have strengthened the birth culture identification. Specifically, Sally's mother had herself been adopted and

Sally mentioned that she felt very comfortable and "at home" with adoption. Her husband Ron noted that, while he was quite open to adoption, the adoption was "more or less Sally's idea, Sally's project." Since they already had a biological son, it turned out that Sally was much more interested in enlarging the family and adopting than Ron. In the case of Fran and Stuart, Fran mentioned that, because she was a British immigrant, she felt more strongly about the importance of culture ties and cultural identification than Stuart; both couples, in fact, discussed that there were disagreements between them on this issue that still continue.

This assessment of the parent's acknowledgement of the child's birth culture is included to delineate more carefully the range of attachment to the child's birth culture, and for cross-references with quotes presented in this section of the study. The assessment indicated that parents differed in their identifications, and that these identifications are influenced by multiple factors, including: the child's physical appearance, the country of origin of the child, the parents' previous and conflicting identities, the parent's reasons for adopting the parents' relationship with their family of origin, and other issues discussed in this dissertation. One of the most interesting relationships was between the child's birth country/physical appearance and parent's identity. The more the child resembled the parent, the less interested the parent was in the birthculture. The exception was with those parents who were already identified with the birth culture prior to adoption. Thus, those parents whose children appeared physically different (Asian, light-skinned Hispanic) generally undertook the most identity-work with the birthculture.

Table (4) presents the ratings of the respondents' attachment to the birth culture; Table (5) shows the relationship between the child's country of origin, the child's appearance, and the parent's identification with the birthculture.

Table 4: Identification with birth culture

None N=0	Minimal N=2 7.6%	Some N=9 34.6%	Moderate N=6 23%	High N=8 30%	Very High N=1 3.8%
	Annette Paul	Burt Candi Helen Jesse Jules Karl Paula Ron Stuart	Alex Bob Kris Martha Sally Sandra	Don Fran Greg Joan Kathy Libby Shawn Veronica	Barbara

Table 5: Relationship between physical appearance of child and identification with birth culture

Similar appearance			Different appearance		
Name	**Country**	**Idntfication**	**Name**	**Country**	**Idntfication**
Annette Paul	Moldova	Minimal/ Minimal	Alex	Guatemala	Moderate
Helen	Paraguay Russia	Some	Barbara	Korea	Very high
Jules Paula	Brazil	Some/ Some	Bob Sandra	Korea	Moderate/ Moderate
Libby * Don *	Paraguay	High/ High	Burt Candi	Korea	Some/ Some
Veron-ica *	Costa Rica	High	Fran Stuart	China	High/ Some
* these parents had "high" identification with the birth culture prior to adoption			Greg Joan	China	High/ High
			Jesse	Mexico	Some
			Karl	Chile	Some
			Kathy Shawn	Nepal Korea	High/ High
			Kris	China	Moderate
			Martha	Mexico	Moderate
			Ron Sally	Colombia	Moderate/ Some

Summary

As well as noting the parent's verbal acknowledgement of their child's different birth culture, this dissertation also addresses if and how parents respond to these supposed and potential cultural differences in daily life. Parents showed a range of daily "cultural practices" that incorporated the birth culture in daily life activities. Some parents, such as Annette, Paul, Jules, and Rob rarely addressed the topic, while others, such as Libby, Don and Barbara included some objects and activities related to the birth culture on a regular, almost daily basis. All parents considered the birth culture in naming their child, which sets up a life long "transitional space" for the child on a daily basis.

A question that remains is whether these cultural practices (foods, books, etc) "really" reflect the birth culture as it is practiced within the birth culture, or are, more likely, the interpretation of White middle class US parents of the birth culture. For example, perhaps certain foods that are considered "typical" of a culture, actually represent foods that are eaten ritualistically only at funerals in that country. The adaptation is made unknowingly by the US family and falsely translated as "authentic" to the child. Further, within the US families, these practices may be used for "special occasions" and therefore perhaps not within the context of its use within the birth culture. This "specialness" may create a different, hybrid phenomena reflective of the tensions between the US and the birth culture rather than a direct representation of the actual birth culture.

The research methodology in dissertation study did not fully "get at" daily practices in depth or over an extended period of time. Further research is suggested, including the use on on-going participant observation, video-taping, uses of diaries, extended behavioral observation of the family outside as well as within the home, and longitudinal studies to better understand the daily life practices of the family regarding the birth culture. This could also be supported by

interviews with natives of the specific birth culture to understand the actual significance of these practices within the birth culture, rather than the adaptation of the practices by US families.

CHAPTER 9: DISCUSSION

Although there were certain similarities in the 26 parents who participated in this study, the results showed a high degree of diversity in how parents responded to the challenge of international adoption. The most important comment that bears repeating is that all parents felt they are parents first, adoptive and internationally adoptive parents second. The identity of "parent" was central. Many parents noted that, however conscious they may be of the child's birth culture, they felt major issues and changes in their identity were more related to their parent identity than to their adoptive or international identity.

However, when asked how the adoption has changed their sense of self, all parents remarked that it had, but comments fell in two groups. One group did relate to the international aspects (although this may have been influenced by the fact that respondents were aware that the theme of the interviews was to focus on international adoption). These respondents spoke spontaneously and at length about the international aspects of identity. The second group replied with comments related to parenting in general: "I don't have as much time as I used to," "It's harder than I thought," and "I don't see my single friends anymore." As a result, much of the research can also be used to understand adjustment to parent identity, although this was not the initial intent of the research.

To one extent or another, adopting a child internationally influenced the identity of each parent. For some parents, the influence was central to their identity, while others felt the influence was quite minimal. It appears that the main factors influencing the parent's connection to the birth culture included: the parents' prior experience with different cultures as well as the specific birth culture of the child, the parents' reasons for international adoption (emotional/

ideological vs. practical) and the physical appearance of the child (which was also related to parent's choice of birth country.)

The appearance of the child (and the presumed racial identity of the child) was important to the parents. In this study, the parents with the most interest in the birth culture (other than those who specifically chose the culture because of their prior identification with it) were parents of Asian children, where there was the greatest difference in appearance. The parents of the medium to darker skinned Hispanic children had a moderate degree of interest in the culture. Three parents mentioned they seriously considered the feelings of their own parents in choosing the birth country, rejecting darker skinned children because their parents would not easily accept the child. Also, seven respondents stated that they would not adopt a Black or biracial child. Thus a "hierarchy" of "desirable" backgrounds emerged for many parents.

International adoption interconnected with other aspects of the parent's identity. Either a parent already felt marginalized in some way and particularly identified with a foreign child or the parent was already identified with a certain culture and saw that adopting from this culture was an extension of their already constructed identity. Religion also emerged as an interconnected factor and at times even more important to parents than racial or other cultural issues.

In terms of identity development, it is useful to draw on Winnicott's ideas, although to a somewhat limited extent. Many of his concepts, such as unintegration/ integration, personalization, object relating, adaptation to shared reality, illusion, mirroring, holding, transitional objects/phenomena, potential space can be seen in this study. For example, the parents used many and varied transitional objects and phenomena to attempt to include the child's birth culture within the parent's identity ("unintegration/ integration" in Winnicott's terms). By co-constructing a personal and family identity that acknowledged the birth

culture, the parents were adapting to (actually creating) a "shared reality" with the child (or at least their interpretation of the child's "culture.") In responding to the birth culture, parents attempted to "mirror" (their interpretation of) the birth culture, by "personalizing" and "holding" the child through culture practices in (their interpretation of) the birth culture. In fact the parents were creating an "illusion" (in Winnicott's terms) of the birth culture, the hybrid "culture" of US/birth culture.

It is not so much that parents didn't use these processes, but rather that many of them either did not especially see their child as "not-me" or did not especially want to stress the child's birth culture. As a result, some parents experienced limited change in their own identity. Those who stated they felt changed in their identity felt the changes were (a) becoming a parent in general, (b) becoming more tolerant of differences and more "worldly," and (c) becoming more sensitive to and intolerant of prejudice in others.

During the adoption process, many, but not all parents saw their child at some point as "not me." Although the overall concepts of transitional space and transitional objects pertain in many cases, they were not universal phenomena. The only "transitional objects" that were used at one time or another by all parents was a support group and the naming of the child. Some parents used support groups only once or twice, some from time to time for an extended period of time, while a few parents actually formed their own support groups that still exist. In the case of naming, some parents used names directly from the birth culture, while others adapted the name to a US name and referring to the birth culture as a second or "middle" name. Again, there was flexibility in the ways that each parent addressed issues of the birth culture.

Environmental Psychology: Time, Space, and Materiality

As it developed, this study grew from a focus on individual subjects to an understanding of broader social issues. This direction grew from the contextualization of the data in the areas of time, space and materiality.

Time

Respondents are situated in two aspects of time: developmental time and historical time. Developmental time is represented by personal history. Erikson's work, especially in regard to life span tasks presents a good framework for this view. In another sense, the "journey" of the adoptive parent is also a time-structured experience: a process rather than an event. As noted by some respondents, the experience of adoption parallels the natural birth with equivalents of conception, pregnancy, labor, delivery and follows with similar unfolding in time of the identity of parent over the life span of the parent child relationship.

Regarding this issue, it is important to note that most parents who participated in this study were matched with children of pre-school ages. It would be of interest to continue longitudinally to appreciate the role of the unfolding of time as the child grows to maturity. Contextually this is important for two reasons; first, during the early years the parents have the greatest influence of the child. As Katz Rothman (1998) points out, in studies of adoption, parental influence weakens as the child grows in the increasingly enlarged social context.

Time can be seen using Bronfenbrenner's view of nested structures. The individual constructs identity in numerous levels of time: in the present of their individual psychological life space and psychosocial development, in the past of their own personal history, and in the present of the political moment. The respondents in this study thus placed within the historical context of late 20th century capitalist structure, but also seen as having a personal as well as social

and cultural past and future. Thus, international adoption itself must be understood with the cultural beliefs and politics of the time. This includes, for example, the existence of adoption policies and procedures both within the US and within the specific birth country, the "hierarchy" of racial preferences for adoptive parents, and the community's ambivalent response to transnational families. The individual parent is only "free" to construct identify within the given context of the historical moment, and what opportunities the cultural environment can provide.

Another factor that influenced parents, either consciously or unconsciously, was the imbedding of "consumerism" within our US culture. On the first level, the parent is a "consumer" of a child who was born in another nation. At times when children are "commodified," adoption is a form of a "purchase decision," in marketing terminology. At another level, the objects and experiences that serve "transitionally" (in Winnicott's sense) are also "consumed" from what is culturally provided. This "consumerist" perspective may differ from Winnicott's intent of finding/creating transitional objects in the environment, since the "objects/experiences" of identity are often "provided" by society. Winnicott implies this perspective when he refers to "shared reality." However, in the current US culture, the "marketplace" is often constructed by systems that operate beyond the involvement of "consumers."

For example, those parents who buy a tape of Spanish music, or send the child to a "Culture Camp" for Korean children, or who buy ready-made "Life Book Albums" or join ready-made, pre-structured "support groups, "participate in a broader and more impersonal level of culture in which the "marketplace" provides opportunities for "cultural experience." This sharply contrast to Winnicott's vision of the child who finds/creates a blanket or piece of cloth in the home to serve as a "transitional object." This level of consumerism reflects in

many ways the current and dominant "marketplace" values in US post-industrial culture. To the extent that consumer objects replace "found/created" objects opportunities for personal growth may be lost. These "ready-made" transitional objects do not fully free up the individual to facilitate the development of identity or provide for the creation of hybrid cultural experiences.

Space and place

Space and place are other central themes in this dissertation. Space and place are considered in two ways: first, in the literal way, the actual place of the birth country of the child in its tension with the country of the adoptive parents. Secondly, this study also considers the "space" ("potential space" in Winnicott's, Flax's, and Yngvesson's use of the term) between adoptive parent and child which is "triangulated," as noted by in Katz Rothman's (1989; 1998) and Yngvesson's (1998), with the "place" of the birth parents/country. Therefore, this dissertation is also about the mediation of metaphorical space between the US culture and the child's birth culture.

Place became important in two different ways. Parents were especially concerned about community acceptance of their child based on their perception of the diversity of the community. Many also felt that the diversity in the community would provide more opportunities (other people, restaurants, festivals, etc.) to expose their child to aspects of the birth culture in America. Place was also used "transitionally" to help with identity construction including: the child's birth place, communities with members of the same ethnic groups in the U.S., and specific places that could be used, including restaurants, cemeteries, "culture camps," parks for adoption picnics and so on. These places became imbued with meaning that connected them to international adoption.

Again, using Bronfenbrenner's scheme, space/place influences parents at different levels. At one level, the parent constructs identity in relation to their own

living place and the concrete birthplace of the child. At another level, identity is influenced by interactions with immediate social and community influences. Further, the parent responds to particular place relationships such as national and rural/suburban/urban identifications. At the broadest level, the parent engages with their own interpretation of the child's birth place, associations with other parents who have adopted internationally, and geo-political factors that impact the global aspects of the adoption.

Although not addressed in this dissertation, the research is situated in the place of the United States. Although there has been an attempt at some geographic diversity with both Eastern and Western US samples, this study was restricted to urban areas. Many respondents offered the comment that they may not have adopted internationally if they lived in smaller towns or rural areas where they were born themselves. It would also be interesting to sample non-Western countries to ascertain if international adoption occurs and how it is viewed. Of course, as Katz Rothman and others point out, most international adoption links third-world birth parents with Western European adoptive parents, so this may be a time/place limited sample. International adoption in other national contexts has not been considered at this stage. We do not know how European parents who adopt internationally, for example, experience their role.

Materiality

Another aspect of data collection focused on the role of material objects, which has previously been examined in the discussion of "transitional objects." As mentioned, most parents used some form of material "object" to mediate between the "me" and "not-me" of themselves and their internationally adopted child. This broke into four areas: physical objects, places, social groups and cultural phenomena. Parents found/created these objects (objects, people, places, phenomena) and "played" with them in transitional space. Material objects, such

as clothing, photos, cultural artifacts, foods, flowers and places such as gardens, cemeteries, restaurants, and ethnic neighborhoods were used repeatedly "as needed" to help parents bridge the gap (and "imagined gap") between themselves and their child. In this way, parents constructed, expanded, rearranged and reconstructed identity through materiality in daily life.

Parents used these objects before, during and after the adoption and continue to use them, to varying degrees, throughout life. Some objects are used in daily life, others on special occasions, and others (such as "culture camps" and "motherland tours") even intentionally created. The important point is that these "transitional objects" are found/created in the environment and then used in time and space to mediate identity construction, in the way that Winnicott proposes. The repeated "play" with the material object within the US environment allows the parent to participate in both the US culture and the birth culture simultaneously. For example, a English-speaking parent who listens to a Spanish language radio program while locating themselves within their living room in New York City "plays" in both "White US" and Hispanic cultures. A parent who visits Flushing, Queens to buy Korean groceries also "plays" with a hybrid of New York and Korea. Although some parents seek out these objects more so than others, each parent can tap into the representations of these cultures when and for how long they feel necessary to construct they identity they choose.

Social construction in identity of internationally adoptive parents

Unique to this research is that the respondents traveled through three "identities" to reach the status of parents: the "parent" identity itself, the "adoptive parent" identity and the "international" parent identity. Each identity involved confronting progressive levels of "otherness" each laden with social implications and social constructions.

This study noted the influences of "identity interaction." For example, some parents had already formed an identity relationship with the "other" (culture of the child) before even choosing to adopt. For them, the adoption of a child of a different culture was an expression of the parent's pre-established identity and identification with the specific culture and/or the concept of a "foreign" culture in general. Some parents identified with the concept of adoption before they decided to adopt. Some parents resonated with other aspects of identity, such as ethnicity; religion, sexual preference, national identity/immigrant status, or political ideology that they felt was related to the process of the adoption for them. Thus, identity development must be contextualized, not only in environmental variables presented to the person, but also within already existing identities that have been constructed by that individual. Some other parents came to international adoption for "practical" reasons (cost, availability of child, ease of process, age restriction, etc) and then had to confront the issue of identity and "other-ness" during and after the adoption. Some chose to minimize the international aspects of the adoption - which was in many ways related to their family-of-origin's attitudes towards the adoption, while some other parents reveled in the opportunities provided by the international aspects of the child's adoption.

Confrontation and response to "other-ness" included the interactions of numerous variables. "Becoming an internationally adoptive parent" is a highly contextualized experience. The outline provided below notes the multiple factors that emerged in this research as influencing the identity development of parents. This outline serves to contextualize the "identity" process, within the framework provided by Bronfenbrenner.

1. Prior identity of parent (microsystems):

a. General interest in other countries/cultures, travel, etc.

b. Specific identification with birth culture

c. Identification with political attitudes

d. Attitudes towards any "other-ness" in parent's own identity

e. Parent's "fantasies" of birth culture

f. Perception of "place" (both child's birth country, and current residential location of the family)

g. Motivation of adoption

h. Aspects of personal history (adoption in family, miscarriages/ infertility)

i. Prior identity as parent (birth child already in family)

j. Success/failure in earlier life span challenges

2. Aspects of the adopted child (mesosystems):

a. Country of origin

b. Physical appearance

c. Age

d. Gender

e. Health

f. Physical well-being

g. Orphanage/foster care

h. Access/lack of access to birth parents

3. Social influence (exosystems):

a. By family of origin

b. Within marital couples

c. By the community

d. By media/prejudices toward birth culture

4. Social constructions (macrosystems):

a. political and economic issues

b. beliefs about race, genetics and biology

Most internationally adoptive parents never meet the birth parents. In many cases, particularly in China, children are anonymously abandoned and brought to the orphanage, so parents are unknown. In a few cases in this research, some parents had met with the birth family directly and/or had contact with birth siblings also adopted in the United States. However, these cases are exceptions. In fact, some birth parents specifically chose international adoption because they saw little risk of interference from birth families, as may be the case in domestic adoption. What remained, and formed the basis of this research, was the relationship with the birth country/culture. This is in contrast with domestic adoption, when the birth country and possibly birth culture (to some extent) are shared between the child and adoptive parents.

Data provided through interviews revealed the influence of "political" issues in the adoption process. This influence usually involving bureaucratic intricacies of international adoption as well as the visit or visits to the native country of the child to finalize the adoption. Although not all parents traveled to the birth country, each parent seemed, at least in some way forever tied to the politics and history of the birth country of the child. All parents participated to some extent in the "official" and "unofficial" everyday life events in that country during the adoption process. Although this was welcomed by some parents and dreaded by others, each parent was to some extent "enculturated" by the process.

As noted by Cornell and Hartmann (1998), not only can the parent have a "thick/thin" identification with the birth culture, but they also can have an "assigned" identity (created by others viewing the parent/child as physically different) and an "asserted" identity (created by the parent him/herself). Some parents in this dissertation identified "thickly" with the birth culture, while others identified "thinly." Some parents "asserted" their identity while others (especially those with children who physically different appearances) were "assigned"

identity. That is, these parents discussed, often through "critical incidents," ways in which the community responded to the family differences in ways that were unexpected to the parents. For example, these experiences included receiving "stares" while at church and in supermarkets and unwelcomed questions about whether they were the "parents" of the child. These incidents point out to the parent that they are being viewed as "different" and assigned a marginalized identity by the community. These incidents therefore involve social constructions of the community that are then mediated to one extent or another by the individual parent.

Culture, genetics and race

Winnicott stresses that culture is "shared experience" and this dissertation discussed how parents constructed what they would "share" with the child. As we have seen, parents varied in the degree to which they planned to include aspects of the birth culture into the child's everyday life. Some parents "shared" (participated in) various aspects of the birth culture, prior to the adoption, and in some cases even before to decision to adopt. Many had traveled to, or even lived the birth culture or similar cultures. Some planned to impose culture in a way that removed it from "shared experience"; they insisted the child take a language class, or became angry and frustrated if the child wasn't interested in a magazine or book about their birth place. A few parents, almost as imperialists, imposed to the birth culture on the (resistant?) child. And, as noted, those parents whose children physically resembled them less often sought out opportunities to "play" in the potential space of the birth culture.

In a number of cases, the parents indicated that it was not so much an issue of how different they themselves felt from their child as much as how they expected others perceived them and the family, because of differences attributed

to the child. The different physical appearance was imbued with meaning by others. That is, parents were aware, or at least suspected that others were constructing implications about their child based on appearance.

The data were reexamined in light of the impact of the child's "racialized" difference. To review, three areas regarding race emerged. The first was the relevance of physical differences between parent and child. Most parents at least to some extent, commented upon the difference in appearance between themselves and their adopted child. A second concern was the confusion over the role of "race" and genetics. Many parents said they were very open to international adoption "but" would never adopt a Black child. Other parents sought "positive" aspects of what they interpreted as "genetic," such as beauty or mathematical abilities. For these parents, the actual unfolding of the adoption challenged their initial views. Thirdly, some parents continue to be concerned about possible negative abilities and traits that they at times attribute to "genetics." Particularly those parents whose children developed learning or emotional problems began to question genetic influences on their children, especially in ways that explain away any influences they may have had on their child's problems.

Many parents in this study had a high degree of sensitivity to the concept of race. Not only was race prevalent in their discussion of whether the adopted child physically resembled the parent, but parents in this study indicated a "hierarchy" of race. For those parents who do not pursue domestic adoption, a "White" "foreign" child (i.e. Eastern European) is acceptable to those parents who want children most "like them." Some others see Asian children as acceptable by those parents who imagine - at least initially – that these children have a supposed genetically-based "talent" in academics- a "math gene"). Other parents are not concerned with supposed "genetic" issues, but view a certain birth culture as

desirable for other subjective reasons. ("I find China fascinating," "I like Hispanic culture," "I'm interested in Eastern religion").

In the literature on adoption, there is much mention of "transracial adoption," at first meaning Korean/American, then meaning Black/White. The first transracial adoptions in the United States involved conceived by Korean birth mothers and American birth fathers stationed in Korea during the Korean War in the 1950's. In these instances, children adopted from Korea were seen as "Korean," even though they may come to the United States shortly after birth and never again visit Korea. The adoption literature during this time strongly recommended that the child be educated in various aspects of their cultural heritage. This also parallels historically the stress on "open adoption" where there is more honesty about the child's background. At the same time, in the literature there is an increasing understanding of the social construction of culture and, further, of the social construction of race.

Those parents who express more mutuality and discuss how the adoption has benefited them in their own "world citizenship," also welcome the (apparent) differences or see these differences as "cultural opportunities" and "play." These parents also engaged in this expansion of their sense of self as well as those parents who see themselves as relatively unchanged by the adoption or who see the child as a "transitional object" for them in their own identity.

As previously discussed, the internationally adopted child is raised in the daily life of White, middle-class American community. Even though parents were located in different places on a continuum of their inclusion of birth culture in the child's everyday life, all respondents included some aspects of culture. But it cannot be ignored that, no matter how strongly the parent wishes the child would connect with the birth culture, the dominant culture for the child is the late 20th century White, middle class culture of the family's daily life. This includes not

only the aspects of this culture that are practiced in daily life, but also the influence of the "other" (community) on the family. Unless the child physically resembles the parents (and adoptive siblings if there are siblings), the parent must face the "difference" of their family "in public," regardless of how cultural practices are performed in private.

Although not the focus of this study, many of the experiences and dynamics of the respondents would also be present in domestic interracial adoption. Because of environmental psychology's emphasis on "place", this research included attention to place ("foreign country") variables. However, especially because differences in appearance between parent and child were important, those (usually) White parents who adopt Black children face similar social issues about constructing themselves as multiracial families.

Distinctions between "race" and "genetics" became unclear and fluid. Some parents believed race and genetics were the same and that many traits of their child were due to a genetic (and unalterable) influence. Most parents did not directly view "race" as socially constructed, even though some were less concerned about perceived racialized differences between themselves and their children. Genetics influenced supposed inborn and unalterable traits or tendencies while race influenced physical differences such as skin color, which frequently influenced the reactions of others towards their family and or their child. Nevertheless, since many parents volunteered that they would not adopt a Black child, they were revealing a racial bias. They mentioned that they would be uncomfortable with a Black child because of the reactions of others and believed a child with a supposed "Asian" appearance to be more acceptable to their family and community. Some parents admitted their own racist positions in feeling they personally would feel too "different" with a Black child, and too much tension may emerge that would raise more racialized issues as the child grew older.

When parents are consciously or unconsciously expressing racial bias (either by "preferring" a certain "racial" group or refusing to adopt from a certain "racial" group), they are primarily reflecting attitudes of society at large which also expresses racial "preferences" and hierarchies. What this study identified is that some parents are well aware of, even critical of racial bias, but feel they personally operate within the traditional bounds of race and culture. At the same time, some parents actively seek a child who presents a "racial" difference, while some parents resist, minimize or deny addressing the racial experiences of international adoption. It is also important to note that, while this dissertation did not study any White families that did adopt a Black child, a comparison study in the future would be important to further understand the nature of adoptive parents' attitudes and beliefs about race.

Place identity and parenting in international adoption

Returning to the concept of "place identity," we find that most of the parents did expand their identity to include the birthplace of the child. As pointed out by Stokols, Schumaker and Martinez (1983), individuals who had high levels of environmental exploration in a new setting were likelier to have fewer health consequences than those who did not explore the new environment. This finding may also relate to parents who adopt, suggesting that, if they are willing to explore the "environment" of their child's birth country, they will experience a better overall outcome. This supports the importance of "place attachment" in the parents' ability to "attach" to the birthplace of the child. This attachment eventually enriched the parent's own sense of self and expanded their own place boundaries while also serving as a bridge to the child. Everyday life includes "place" in at least three ways: practices within the home and other private places, places sought out because they provide contact with similar people/families, and public places where there is little control over the reactions of others.

Using Winnicott's view, place identity was expanded in the transitional space between parent and child. This was even so in the case of parents who did not actually visit the birth of the child as part of the adoption process. Winnicott's concept of transitional "space," especially in its metaphorical sense, was a useful concept to appreciate the "distance" between parent and child. Some parents likened the "wait" to a pregnancy, others likened photos to sonograms. Some parents saw paperwork as a link to the child while others, interestingly, saw it as distancing and distracting them from the child. Since the child was not literally "present" in the family in the mother's uterus, transitional space and transitional objects may be especially important and, in fact, in this study, transitional objects and phenomena were used often during the "waiting" period. This transitional experience was a way of transforming "outer" to "inner" and did rely more on "play" and "creativity" than perhaps would be necessary for a physically pregnant woman.

Often, the use of transitional objects and phenomena declined somewhat after the child was in the U.S. Perhaps because there was no longer the physical distance between parent and child, and foreign "culture," it was less important at the time that the parents were working with the child in the everyday life of US culture. However, as the child got older, some parents then re-introduced aspects of the birth culture.

While parents recognized that they were participants in US culture, many sought out places in the United States that could present an aspect of the culture of their child. These places became transitional in the sense that they were also a place of "play," used when needed. Some parents, such as Sally and Libby, actually created their own transitional spaces though developing workshops and support groups for parents in international adoptions. Some respondents, such as Martha and Paula, struggled with providing "potential spaces" to be shared with

the child, but felt these were rejected by the child. Thus it became more "me" for these parents to bond with his/her child "where her child was at" rather than impose "culture." Barbara, on the other hand, seemed unable to do this and more or less forced the birth culture on her daughter.

Parents sought out places that, within the United States, had a "daily life culture" that accepted ethnic and racial diversity by moving to and staying in cities that accepted their child's birth heritage. For the most part, the children were being raised as "Americans" in the daily culture, but in some ways, through such objects as art or artifacts displayed around the home, toys, books and videos available, foods occasionally served and outings occasionally taken the child was at least exposed to the "other-ness" of his/her birth culture through the conscious effort of the parent.

Much of the work in the adoption literature stresses the importance for the child of understanding the birth culture. However, it appears that this literature (mostly out of the social work tradition) extends the importance of "openness" in adoption, but does not address the parent's own position regarding the "other-ness" of the culture. In domestic adoption, this would be done by exploring the parent's attitudes and feelings regarding the birth mother (parent) and the expectations of the role of the birth parent in the on-going life of the child. As noted, since in international adoption, the birth parent is often unknown, the birth country takes on this role. As the adoptive parent may have attitudes and feelings towards the birth mother, he/she has attitudes and feelings regarding the birth country/culture. In fact, it is probably less threatening for adoptive parents to relate to a birth "culture" than a birth mother. Although no respondents in this study stated so, it is possible that many parents choose international adoption because of the anonymity of the birth parents that is now less common in domestic adoptions within the United States.

Movement and process

Another aspect of this study bordered on theory of migration, travel, and place attachment/disruption. As noted, cultural studies theorists used metaphors of travel, "uprooting", diaspora, dis-placement and so on to refer to theory as well as practice. Pile and Thrift (1995) state:

> Six different pathways over the terrain of the subject, based on six different motifs: position, movement, practices, encounters, visuality and aesthetics/ethics. These mappings hardly exhaust the field...Here we only want to point out three omissions: [ethnogenic theory of the self - Mead], object relations theory of Winnicott and others (Winnicott 1974, 1975). Winnicott's reworking of the process of self and othering is clearly significant because of its emphasis on the other. But again, it has echoes in social constructionism, especially in the equation of Winnicott's 'space of play' and constructionist 'third' space of joint action. Third, [Elias, Foucault, Lacan..] (p. 13)

This research has included most of Pile and Thrift's motifs, including position, movement, practices, encounters, visuality, and, of course, their "omission," Winnicott. Pile and Thrift continue:

> Position and the politics of location, current emphasis on spatial metaphors as a way of comprehending the subject, metaphors that can reanimate the body, self, identity, person and subject. (p. 19) ...Of these different metaphors, some of the most fertile have tended to cluster around the ideas of movement and mobility, journeying and traveling...there is a concern for capturing being as a process of provisional and open-ended movement... [another] concern with metaphors of movement...is with the possibilities of mutable sharing. Whether we are talking of new, more open forms...the meeting of people in global cities...or the various outcomes of imperial and postimperial contact zones... the outcome tends to appeal to ideas of hybridity, as a description of new cultures and subjects formed by the juxtaposition and co-presence of different cultural forces and discourses and their effects. (p. 21)

This research itself is in "movement" in taking a dynamic position. While at first addressing individual issues of "identity," this research ultimately provided a unique lens to reexamine and redefine concepts such as cultural, racial and national identity in a broader postmodern context. For most parents who adopt

internationally, their own cultural identity is in motion over time, or at least over the life span of their parenting years. As their child ages, constructs his/her own identity, and increasingly faces the realities of the social construction of culture and race, this journey of identity will continue.

Hybridity and "culture"

Through the experiences of adopting children internationally (who are technically considered 'migrants'), most parents face racial and cultural stereotypes, based on any of their own preconceptions about race and culture as well as from those preconceptions of others. Through the "personalisation" process described by Winnicott, these parents constructed a new identity of both themselves and their view of their child. It is important to consider, in Winnicott's terms, that a parent "finds/creates" objects in the environment that they (personally) select to represent the child's birth culture. Whether these objects and phenomena "actually" represent the birth culture are not important to the parent as much as the fact that the parent "resonates" with the object/phenomena, "constructing" the belief that this object/phenomena is representational of the birth culture. Thus, the parents' eventual identity becomes a hybrid, constructed from progressive interactions with material objects, people, places, communities and cultures. Parents selected certain features of these transitional objects that they felt represented the birth culture and grafted these into their daily life within US culture.

However, identity for each parent, and each child, was unique. Therefore, each parent and each family remained unique, even though many of the processes they experienced were similar. The journey for each parent went from the stereotype to the personal, through "play" with culture. Not all parents did so, but those that do have an enriched view of themselves, their family and the world.

The child's very differences gave the parents the opportunity to expland their identity. As Hall (1990) states:

> How, then, to describe this play of 'difference' within identity? This sense of difference challenges the fixed binaries which stabilise meaning and representation and show how meaning is never finished or completed, but keeps on moving to encompass other, additional or supplementary meanings (p. 228-9.)

A case example will show how this process occurs. Martha, a blond, blue-eyed single parent, adopted her daughter from Mexico. Martha herself sought international adoption because she had traveled good deal in Latin America and wanted a child that would remind her of and perhaps further identify her with her (interpretation of) her daughter's birth culture. She looked forward to taking her daughter to travel in Mexico when her daughter was older, tried to teach her daughter a few words and songs in Spanish, bought her daughter books about Latin America, served Hispanic foods from time to time and hired a babysitter from Guatemala. At Bronfenbrenner's "microlevel," Martha used many persons, objects and symbols that represented her daughter's birth culture. In Winnicott's view, she used many "transitional objects" to "play" with her daughter and to expand the relationship between the "Not-me" and "Me."

At Bronfenbrenner's "mesolevel," Martha developed many other friends who were single adoptive parents and she also placed her daughter in a "racially" mixed school. She gave her daughter a name that could be either interpreted as Hispanic or German-American. She brought up her daughter in her own Catholic religion but found a church that also served many Hispanic families. Martha did all this in spite of the fact that her family-of-origin initially disapproved of the

adoption. The disapproval was, in part because she was single and in part because the baby she adopted would be of a "different race." She had to negotiate many "mesolevel" relationships as she adopted.

At the level of "exosystem," Martha knew that single parent adoptions were becoming more common; she read many books, bought government publications, investigated adoption policies in many different Latin American countries and sought out a good deal of support for her decision. As Bronfenbrenner states, Martha worked through her expanding identity on many interacting levels. Through her adoption process, that she was able to influence others in her family of origin and in broader support groups to reconsider their own beliefs about international adoption, thereby also having an effect on these systems.

At the same time, Martha was limited by certain social influences in constructing her identity. She was aware that she could probably not feel fully comfortable in the "WASP" community where she grew up nor place her daughter in an all-White school. She was also somewhat aware of her privilege as an educated White middle-class woman who had the financial resources and "savvy" to negotiate the adoption system fairly easily. She felt "free" to choose "transitional objects" from her daughter's culture, but knew her visits to Latin America gave her only one particular, tourist-infused view of what it meant for her daughter to be "Hispanic." She felt it was important to be "open" to new cultures but this belief itself may be particular to White, middle-class, well-educated individuals in its own right. Martha tried to do "all the right things," but

admitted she was still upset when she felt strangers stare at her and her daughter. Martha felt she was no longer the fully "White" person she once was, but she was open to the challenge of forming a hybrid identity.

Martha's identity constructions were not daily "consumer" choices of "White" vs. "Hispanic" foods, or "White" vs. "Hispanic" music; in an inalterable way, Martha would now "be" a parent who adopted a child internationally. Her identity now would be constructed by also interacting with a US dominant culture that had certain assumptions and beliefs about race, skin color, hierarchies and daily cultural experience. Martha felt attached to her daughter's birth culture even before the adoption. She felt little distance between the "not-me" and the "Me." However, as she raised her daughter in the US, she felt a contradiction between her former "White" self and her emerging "hybrid" self. In the space between the "Not-me" and the "Me," Martha used many environmental and cultural objects to express this transition, such as support groups, books, names, language and religion. She continues to examine and struggle with larger social systems and assumptions. Her identity development will be an on-going over many years and many social interactions. In this way "hybridity" unfolds as a process in and of itself, constantly interacting between social forces and individual interpretations.

Identity constructions: Inclusions, expansions and rejections

As noted, there was a continuum of parent positioning in relation to the "potential space" of their child's birth country; some parents accentuated perceived differences between themselves and their children while others minimized these differences. Many parents saw themselves as "citizens of the world" prior to the adoption, and the adoption became an extension of this self.

Others opened themselves to the potential in the process. Some parents remained confused and a few others, to some extent, walled themselves off from the global implications and opportunities in the adoption. These relative rejections of the child's birth culture were largely related to personal history or pressures from their family-of-origin to maintain ties to their own ethnic or religious groups.

Nevertheless, the international adoption posed challenges to identity when parents considered what they perceived of as "differences" between themselves and their adoptive child. Chambers (1994), in his work "Migrancy, Culture, Identity" states:

> Travel, migration and movement invariably brings us up against the limits of our inheritance. We may choose to withdraw from this impact and only select a confirmation of our initial views. In this case, whatever lies on the other side remains in the shadows, in obscurity. We could, however, opt to slacken control, to let ourselves go, and respond to the challenge of a world that is more extensive than the one we have been accustomed to inhabiting...To choose the second path involves undoing the ties and directions that once held us to a particular centre. It disturbs and interrupts our sense of place with a set of questions. A previous sense is revealed to be not necessarily common, its reasons not always universal. So critical intentions against the limits of our inherited rationalism, its frequently unproblematic understanding of reality and truth, invoke a language that 'bears within itself the necessity of its own critique'. (p. 115).

Those who choose travel, migration and movement, such as those parents who more fully become engaged in what they perceive of as their child's birth culture, inevitably face contradictions and questions. To adopt, within your family, "as your own," a child who was born in another nation, "bears within itself its own critique." This critique expands and reconstructs the identity of the parent.

CHAPTER 10: IMPLICATIONS

Although the preceding research explores the case of identity development in parents of international adoptions, it also suggests implications for the concepts of "identity" and "other-ness" in environmental psychology. Research findings can be reconsidered with an emphasis on the larger theoretical issues that emerge from the results. The findings suggest, at one level, some interesting implications for topics such as parenting and the nature of a parent identity, multiple motivations and choice in adoptions, and specific identity issues of parents who adopt children internationally.

The nature of "identity" in environmental psychology

As noted, historically, the concept of identity has struggled with two interpretations: the "individual" (psychodynamic) meaning and the "environmental" (social-psychological) meaning. It comprises both self-identity and social role identity. As proposed by Bronfenbrenner, identity is an aspect of human development and is composed of multiple nested levels and structures and of interrelated systems of influence. The use of psychodynamic theory (such as Erikson and Winnicott) combined with the perspective of the social constructionist aspects of identity give a fuller picture of what is actually entailed in identity development.

This research suggests that both psychosocial stage and transitional processes are more diffused and used in many different ways and to different degrees by individual people. This research project demonstrated how some respondents used multiple "transitional objects" (including music, language, books, support groups and many others) while some respondents used very few transitional objects, and in fact did not (or did not want to) even view their situation as one of incorporating "other-ness."

The overall implication is that when and if an individual perceives a situation that warrants "identity work" that individual searches the environment for opportunities (material objects, places/spaces, social/community and cultural phenomena) and forms a dialectic with the chosen/created transitional object/phenomena. Through ongoing, and self-directed "play" with this environmental (cultural) "object" (person, place, phenomena) the individual in relationship with the environmental object constructs identity.

Further research should be aimed towards understanding the variability in individual identity construction in relation to environmental opportunities. Why do some people embrace a broad, complex identity while others minimize or withdraw from the challenge? On a more practical level, a longitudinal study, preferably of the same parents, in this study, would be able to follow such processes over time and over the development of the child's own awareness and confrontation of his/her "otherness." It would further be of interest to study the dynamics of parent/child/social group interaction over time, perhaps at biennial points to understand the ongoing nature of identity construction and the developmental interplay of individual and environment.

The path to the identification with the role of international adoption is again, varied. In itself, the path unfolds again, by transactions between the person and environment over time, space and materiality. All parents are, of course, influenced by the predominant values of late 20th century urban, middle class experience regarding parenting, adoption and so on (the historical moment). They also respond, consciously or unconsciously, to US middle class cultural representations of privilege, hierarchy, racialization and consumerism. Many parents also search their own personal histories (familiarity with and/or travel to the child's birth country, prior experiences with adoption, family of origin issues, racial and cultural attitudes) to use in the identity construction process. Of course

these "internal" attitudes and experiences are also socially constructed over time through interaction with the physical and social environment. Some parents have already constructed an identity that includes some aspect of "international culture," "migration," "marginality," or a specific allusion to the birth culture. For these parents, the adopted child serves as a transitional object him/herself with which the parent "plays" within his/her own life space. The child then "extends" the already established ("me") identity of the parent.

In Hall's view, the family forms a hybrid identity, an amalgam of individual choice and socially constructed constraints. In Winnicott's view, this identity develops through "transitional process"; the family goes from "dis-integration" to "integration" by on-going play with transitional (environmental) objects and phenomena. In Winnicott's thought, the "object" serves as "other" (society) with which the person (parent) "plays." There is a progression from physical object to cultural phenomena. Winnicott implied that, as humans "play" with cultural phenomena, they also "create" cultural phenomena, in that culture itself may be seen as "people playing" over time and space. At another level, these parents "play" with socially constructed culture, and simultaneously create culture. That is, internationally adoptive parents are both constrained by and also challenge the meanings of culture and race in US society.

This process is on-going. Since most of the parents in this study were relatively new parents, it remains to be seen how these processes unfold over time. It is significant that according to the data, much of the construction is highly influenced by the appearance of the child. That is, generally, the more the child is different in appearance from the parents, the more "racially" different, the more likely the parent is to purposely engage in activities that identify with the birth culture. This process is discursive in that, the parents are responding to their own perceptions of difference, as well as "others'" (society's) perception of difference.

Viewed within Bronfenbrenner's schema, internationally adoptive parents are also creating a "micro-culture." Parents can participate in this "micro-culture" to varying degrees and at varying times. Some integrate in the daily life, some only at special times and circumstances, (such as travel and holidays), and some hardly at all. Transitional processes, used in an ongoing way, are the vehicles of such a hybrid identification and identity construction. Along the way, as parents consider personal ways to express what they see as their own identity, they must also confront dominant attitudes towards race, cultures and other-ness.

This research also addresses issues of "place identity." As this study shows, place identity is not necessarily a concrete concept. As this study shows, place can be an important aspect of identity even when the person has never lived in, or perhaps never even visited a place. This is especially true in regard to ethnic and national identities.

As the data were approached at the macrolevel, issues of social construction emerged. What is suggested, however, is that the initial perspectives of Erikson and Winnicott can be understood also at the macrolevel, while macrolevel theory of Hall can also inform the microlevel experience of parents. Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework supports this complexity. Identity is formed through (micro-level, psychodynamic and material) practices of everyday life; however these practices of everyday life are situated in a larger (macro-level, politically and socially constructed) context.

For example, when Winnicott discusses "culture" he is referring to processes at the exosystem and macrosystem level. In this case, the individual parent is participating in "transitional space" between him/her self as an individual and a broader social system. At the same time, while Hall's ideas relate to social constructions, they are only realized in the microsystem level of the individual person in his/her individual life space.

Conceptually, these levels of interactions form a matrix of complementary theories, as shown in Figure (2). Bronfenbrenner provides an overview of nested structures. Winnicott (as many psychoanalysts) goes from the microsystem outward while Hall (as many social constructionists) goes from the macrosystems inward. Each offers a different (and not necessarily competing) viewpoint in understanding identity development through person/environment transaction. This dissertation attempts to understand the experience of internationally adoptive parents from multiple points of view by using a combination of theories that speaking at different levels.

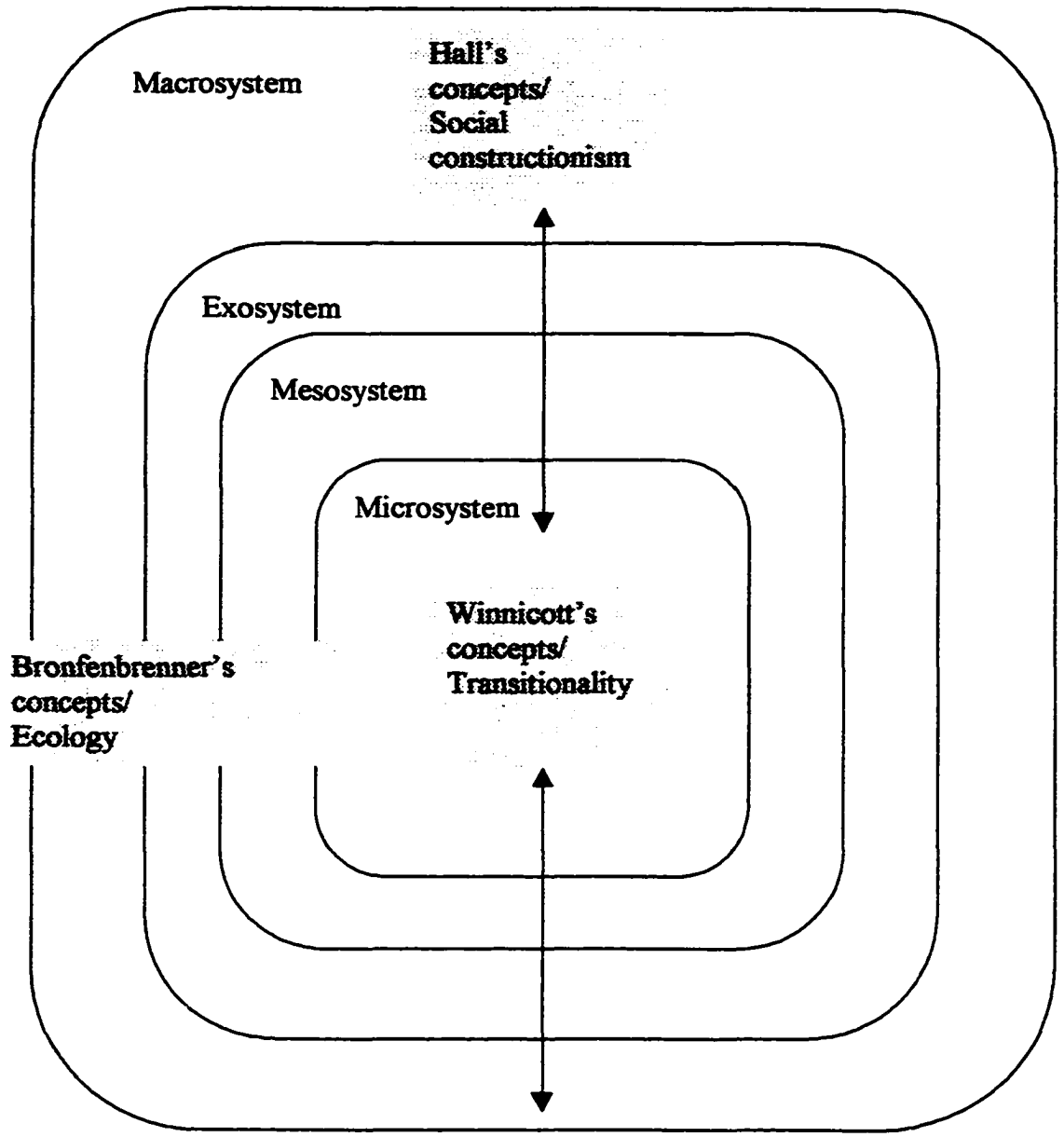

Figure (2) Relationship between theoretical models and person/environment transactions

The social construction of "other-ness" in environmental psychology

As this study focused on parents who adopted children from other countries, it became clear that responses to and interpretations of terms frequently blurred. It suggested that there is little "objective" understanding of concepts such as race, culture, country, heredity, biological, social and so on. What emerged from this study was the complex interpretation of "other-ness."

Before the study, it was assumed that each parent would, in some way, see their child as "other." However, the results varied regarding this variable. For some, "otherness" was related more to their role as parent and/or adoptive parent than to the international aspect of the child. Some parents, in fact, specifically chose the child because of their wish for "differentness." At the same time, some parents denied or minimized any differences, while a few exaggerated differences even more than the child him/herself might have felt. The primary tension arose around what was (essentially) "different" about the child versus the recognition that these "differences" are socially constructed.

While some parents felt they should educate their child about his/her "roots," others were less clear about what (other than historical facts) constituted "roots." It also appeared that many parents who were the most interested in the child's roots/culture were themselves, as parents, either already familiar with the culture or generally interested themselves in learning in general or experiencing another culture. Perhaps these parents enjoyed learning about the culture themselves, and more or less rationalizing the child's "need" as their own. That is, some parents expose the child to the birth culture for "the child's own good"; others (and there is some overlap) are genuinely interested in culture and diversity themselves prior to adoption and may even have adopted internationally because of this interest.

In many cases, parents felt it was not so much that they (or even the children themselves) saw their child as "other" as much as how others (their own parents, members of the community, or even strangers) would perceive the child, or even the whole family, as "other." The parents then felt that they would therefore have to respond to the attitudes of these others (rather than themselves) regarding the child's supposed "otherness" as part of the whole picture and in addition to their own personal reaction to their child.

The question that arises from this research involves the following: If a child, for example, has skin colored a certain tone in what way is it that he/she is "Asian?" What does it mean that he/she is, for example "Asian" at all? If they are raised from infancy by White parents, in a White neighborhood, involved in daily life activities in a British North American White family as US citizens, how are they "Asian?" Or "Latin?" Or "Russian?" If they are adopted by and raised, for example, in a Jewish household and in the Jewish faith in a community that is predominantly Jewish but they have a more yellow tint in their skin are they Asian? Jewish? Both? Neither? Such questions point out a basic finding of this study: that racial and ethnic identity is socially constructed, and not any essential truth of "race" or "ethnicity."

The complexity of identity is a combination of individual experiences, attitudes, life span challenges, family of origin, individual history, everyday life family and community dynamics and, finally, social perceptions of others, or more accurately, individuals' perceptions of others perceptions. Identity is constructed in all these ways in relation to what the environment provides. Places, material objects, people and cultural phenomena are available in and provided by the environment to be "used" by people in constructing identity. It is the interplay of these multiple factors that creates what the individual is while simultaneously creating what the environment is about.

Implications for further research

This dissertation studied a particular set of people in a particular time and in a few particular places. While the data is rich on its own, it suggests areas that should be studied on a broader basis.

The first recommendation is for a follow up study to understand the experiences of the respondents over time. On a technical note, most of the participants were parents of children under 6 years of age, and therefore were not yet influenced by the child's independent perceptions. Of those parents who did have children in pre-teen and teen years who themselves had their own reactions, interests and so on, there was no clear pattern of parent's identification with or interest in the culture. A longitudinal study and/or a study comparing different age groups of adopted children would be valuable to further understand this issue.

The adopted children themselves were not formally interviewed in this study. Subsequent research should consider interviewing the child (and birth children in the family) to understand their own constructions of racial and ethnic identity. It would also be important to understand how the parents who participated in this study constructed their identities as their children aged and became adolescents and adults. Tensions may arise involving issues such as their child's choice of life partner, and the parent's identity as grandparents of children who are not biologically or "genetically" their own. Grandparenting issues may be common for all adoptive parents, but "racialized" identity issues may re-emerge as the adoptive children have their own birth children.

Likewise, a longitudinal study should explore identity issues of the respondents' children themselves as they develop in their life course and as they confront identity issues. It will be important to understand if and how these children wish to search for their biological parents who will most likely be living in a different country than the US and may or may not be available for a "search."

Research should also follow the child's own interest in their birth country as well as their interest in the heritage of their adoptive parents over time.

More information is needed about the social contexts in which parents adopt children internationally. It would be important to compare parents who adopt internationally to those who adopt domestically, or to compare a larger sample of parents who adopt White children internationally (for example, from Eastern Europe) to those who adopt Asian or Black children. Further research should compare transracial and transnational adoptive parents of varying combinations, or from other countries besides the United States. It would also be important to study general attitudes in society towards transracial and transnational families, comparing those families who are "hybrid" as a result of adoption to those that are "hybrid" for other reasons, including intermarriage. Further study is needed to understand "daily life" and its relationship to identity construction. This would require more intensive participant observation methods and documentation, including videos, diaries and other research tools.

Lastly, policy research could also be undertaken to formulate guidelines for families who adopt internationally, as well as for schools, community groups and other social institutions that serve transracial and transnational families.

The questions raised by this dissertation focus on much broader issues about the social construction of "race," "culture" and identity. Further research such as that described above will not only help in understanding issues of parenting and of adoption, but also in understanding the ways in which we are imbedded in contexts that categorize, constrain and structure "reality." While as individuals we may be relatively "free" to construct identity, the constructions occur within broader social and political systems. Even those parents that felt "free" to choose how they would create identity were bounded, consciously of unconsciously, by social beliefs about "culture," "genetics" and "race."

CHAPTER 11: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Since this study takes place in time/space/materiality, I reflect on the process of my own awareness of identity/time/space/materiality as the research progressed. Not only did I assume the international adoption process takes one from the local to the global, but so did the research process itself. As a parent who adopted an American child (US citizen) from a Hispanic background, I visited parents, both in the New York area, and in New Mexico, who related stories about and showed me artifacts from China, Korea, Russia, Chile, Paraguay, Mexico, Colombia, Costa Rica and Nepal. With each story, my perspective grew, geographically as well as conceptually. My daughter and I became friends with some of the respondents, which enriched our perspective even further. And, in my later development of the research, I moved towards a cultural studies perspective, examining assumptions about race and culture that I had taken for granted at the beginning of the research.

As Rutherford (1990) says:

> Perhaps this explains my fascination with the metaphor of uncertainty. For those of us positioned within the privileged discourses and structures of power, who have crossed those demarcation zones through friendships, love affairs and marriage, or in our political activities and solidarities, that often intimate, unsettling and disruptive relation between centre and margin displaces us. In the complex conjectures of sex, race and class, and the multiple and micro-relations of discrimination and domination, most of us cross these boundaries both in our individual subjectivities and our personal relations. Whoever we are, difference threatens to decentre us. (p. 12-13).

This study was a study of "differences" and how we construct ourselves and our identities to creatively respond to differences. Our "centres" are challenges, dissembles and the reassembled. As I sit here, writing this study, I am

listening to a CD of Ethiopian music through my headset. I am thinking about my plans this afternoon to go with my daughter to a local class in Afro-Caribbean and West African dance where we often go to get some physical exercise. I am interrupted by a phone call from a parent who I befriended during this study, inviting me to an annual Christmas party sponsored by the Latin American Parents Association. The party will feature a "visit from Santa" and a performance by a group of folk dancers from Peru. The parent who invited me is from a Jewish family but has performed professionally as a Spanish Flamenco dancer on international cruise ships; her husband, who served in the Peace Corps in Mexico and Nicaragua, is of Irish Catholic heritage. They have a Christmas tree in their house decorated with Stars of David made by their daughter who is was born in South America.

Later in the day, I speak with another adoptive parent whose daughter was born in Colombia; she invites us to a Christmas party at her house in two weeks, where we will also meet with another family who adopted from Russia. Next week we will attend a Christmas party given by a parent of British North-American ("WASP") background, divorced from a Jewish husband, who adopted her daughter from China. At the party will be other families who also have as a significant life event their own trips to China to adopt.

As parents who have adopted internationally, we all have different personal heritages, different biologies and different genetics, as do our children. However, in this historical moment, we construct our hybrid identities as families and as individuals. These celebrations we share, these holiday parties, create transitional and social spaces where we all "play" with our identity. Cultural transactions occur with references to many cultures, through social exchange, through decorations hung, food served, gifts given and received, music sung, games played and experiences shared. We all may retreat to our own "private"

expressions of identity later, but at a certain place, in a certain time, we seem to be emerging, at least in our urban environment, as citizens of the world at large.

Personally, as time goes on, I may find that some families will prefer that their children not play with my daughter because she is "different." At times I may receive undo "admiration" for doing such a "special" thing to adopt this "poor" child, who would have a "terrible" experience if she remained with her birth family. There are times I must question "ethnicity" when I fill out some administrative form. I wonder if I am being a "tourist" when I want to visit an Hispanic neighborhood. I do not know yet if, as my daughter gets older, she will prefer Hispanic friends, White friends, Black friends, or if any of this will make any real difference.

At the same time, there will be tensions. Most parents in this study, as well as myself, found that international adoption challenged assumptions about our own prior identities, including gender, ethnicity, sexual preference, family-of-origin relationships and others. Since international adoptions often provide choices, such as gender and country of origin, we may much more consciously address preferences and identifications. After we adopt, we may then experience the biases and prejudices of others towards the family's differentness, and/or the child's racialized appearance. At this point, our identity as a White, middle-class person is challenged.

This dissertation provided me the experience of reflecting on my own identity as an adoptive parent. I recognize how my experiences, and those of others, change over time and place. As both my daughter and I age, and our contexts change, so does will our identity change. We will always be aware of the "differences" between us. As Rutherford, quoted above, remarks, these differences threaten to "decentre us." Yet, identity construction specifically involves these ongoing processes of being decentered, then claiming a position,

an identity, which may as time goes on, be again decentered.

While each experience is unique, Barbara perhaps represents the complexity of identity construction:

> [When we visit a predominantly Korean neighborhood]... Even there, my daughter didn't really belong. I think the sadness for me at that time was to realize she didn't belong in either world. Here she has this Korean body, but all her sensibilities are things that she's absorbed from me. I can do things and introduce things, but I'm not that [Korean]. It took me so long to grow up, to be the person I am in this culture. But, this is the next part of my life, to continue to try to work this it out, too...

APPENDIX A: Data Summary

Background information (all names have been changed to protect confidentiality).

Alex is a 53 year old architect who adopted his son I. from Guatemala. I. is now 13 months old. Alex is gay and adopted his son as a single parent. They live in Manhattan.

Annette and Paul are both 47 and have adopted their 3 year old daughter, E., from Moldava in Eastern Europe. Annette is an attorney, Paul is a web-site designer. They live in Brooklyn.

Barbara is a 48 year old social worker, currently divorced, who adopted her daughter, K., 16, from Korea. Her husband, who is a teacher, was not interviewed. They have joint custody. Barbara lives in Westchester.

Candi and Burt have a 13 year old son, K., and daughter, J., 4, adopted from Korea. Burt manages an appliance repair business; Candi is a homemaker who was formerly a special education teacher. They live in Albuquerque.

Fran and Stuart are married and adopted their 3 year old daughter, O., from China. They also have a biological son, H., 5, though he was born through gestational surrogacy. Fran is a graphic designer and Stuart is a photographer. Fran was born in England and migrated to the United States 15 years ago. Fran and Stuart live in Manhattan.

Greg and Joan are married and adopted their 2 year old daughter, J., from China. Greg is a college professor and Joan is an attorney. They live in Salt Lake City.

Jesse is a 48 year old high school guidance counselor who adopted his 3 year old, L., son from Mexico. Jesse also adopted another son, E., 5, who was born in Texas and is also Hispanic. Jesse is gay and adopted as a single parent, but currently has a partner, Andy, who is in the process of legally adopting both boys. They live in Brooklyn.

Jules, 52 and Paula, 54, adopted their daughter, J., , from Brazil. Paula has worked as a film editor and currently as a homemaker.; Jules, owns a jewelry business. They live in Manhattan.

Helen is a 45 year old woman who is married and has adopted two children, a son, A., 5, from Paraguay and E. , 2, from Russia. Her husband, who is an architect and has a Dominican background, was not interviewed. They live in Riverdale, Bronx.

Karl is a 48 year old minister, currently in the process of divorce, who has a 13 year old son, M., whom he and his wife adopted from Chile. They have joint custody. Karl lives in suburban Northern New Jersey.

Kathy, 36 and Shawn, 38 have two adopted children: L., 6, from Nepal and K., 4, from Korea. Shawn is a geologist and Kathy is a homemaker; formerly a high schoolteacher. They live in Albuquerque.

Kris is a single, 52 year old physician who adopted her daughter, J. 2, from China. They live in Manhattan.

Martha is a single, 50 year old writer who adopted her daughter, R., 4, from Mexico. They live in Manhattan.

Libby, 46 and Don, 43, adopted their daughter, E., 2, from Paraguay. Don is a social worker and Libby is a calligrapher. They live in Manhattan.

Ron, 47, and Sally, 46, adopted their daughter, J., 3, from Colombia. Sally is a college dean and, Ron, is a social service administrator. They have a 13 year old biological son, J. They live in Brooklyn.

Sandra, 48, and Bob, 48 adopted their son, K., 4, from Korea. Bob is a skilled machinist and Sandra is a social worker. They live in Albuquerque.

Veronica is a single 53 year old elementary school teacher who adopted her daughter, E., 13, from Costa Rica. They live in Manhattan.

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IMAGE EVALUATION
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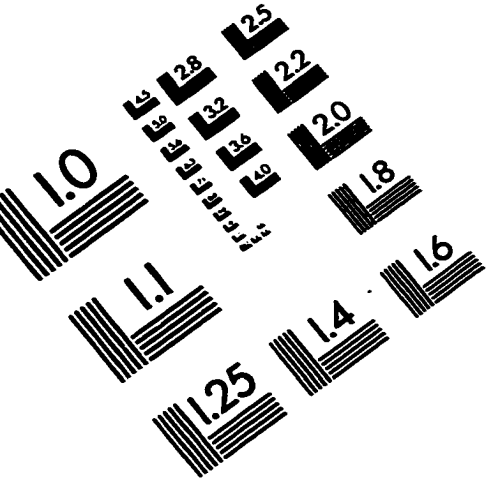

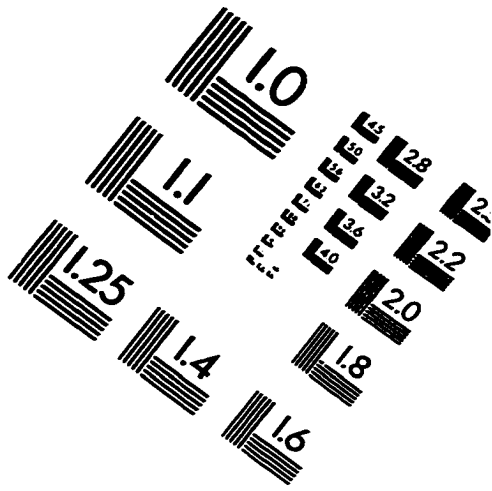

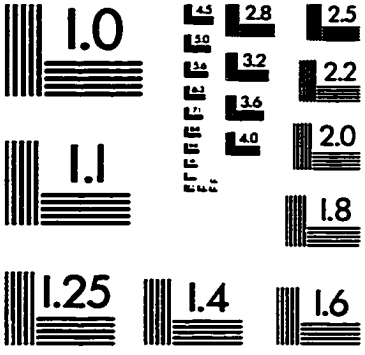

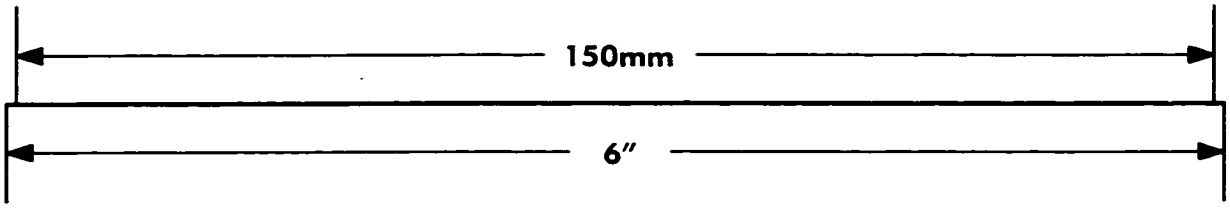

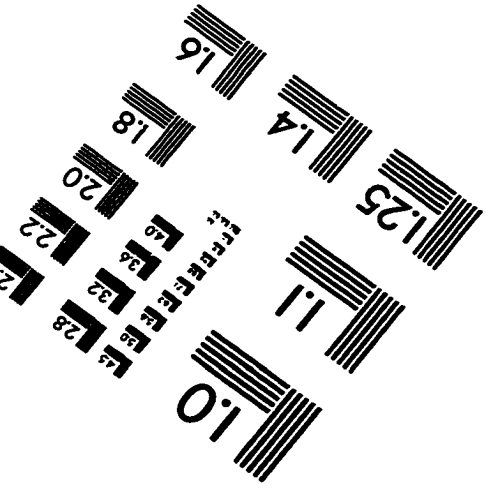

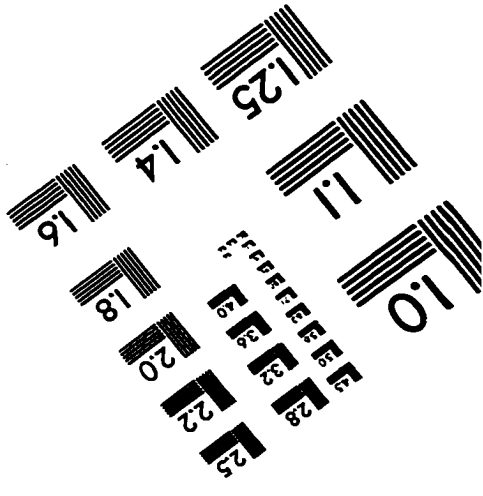

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