This mixed-method study explored transracial adoptees’ (TRA) interest in searching for and/or contact with their birth families. Participants, 109 TRAs (ages 18-37), completed an online survey, and 13 respondents were interviewed. Interest in searching/contact was related to ethnic identity and diversity of adoptive community, but not to social or psychological adjustment. Interviewees illustrated that the question of searching for birth parents is part of a broader decision about whether or not to metaphorically “search” for identity development. They talked about complexities of searching and identity and challenges connecting with both their adoptive and birth communities.

**ABSTRACT**

This mixed-method study explored transracial adoptees’ (TRA) interest in searching for and/or contact with their birth families. Participants, 109 TRAs (ages 18-37), completed an online survey, and 13 respondents were interviewed. Interest in searching/contact was related to ethnic identity and diversity of adoptive community, but not to social or psychological adjustment. Interviewees illustrated that the question of searching for birth parents is part of a broader decision about whether or not to metaphorically “search” for identity development. They talked about complexities of searching and identity and challenges connecting with both their adoptive and birth communities.

**METHOD**

**Participants** (n = 109)
- 82 female, 27 male
- 18 to 37 yrs (M = 26.2, SD = 5.8)
- Birth countries/regions:

**Survey** questions included:
- Demographics
- Birth family contact & search interest
- Birth group ethnic identity: Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM; Phinney, 1992)
- Rosenberg’s Self-Esteem Scale (RSE; Rosenberg, 1979)
- Successes and challenges in school and with their families, friends, and communities

**Interview Themes**
- Cultural and Adoptive Generativity: “…there’s definitely an urge for me to work in the [birth] community and get involved with adoptees... understanding their stories and sharing stories.” - Jay
- Gaps between birth and adoptive identities: “...no matter how Korean I am, I’m still adopted, and no matter how American I am, people still see me as Korean.” - Selma
- Mixed feelings about TRA status: “pioneer” and “best of both worlds” versus “bi-culturally deprived.”
- Complex search experiences: “[Searching] filled a gap, or a void... having a picture of her [birth mother]...being with her really, um, really healed up patches that were missing in my life.” – Jay

**RESULTS**

**Birth Group Ethnic Identity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search Interest</th>
<th>Levels of Ethnic Identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Interest &amp; Thinking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searching &amp; Contact</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diversity of Community</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(n = 118)</td>
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</table>

**Psychological Adjustment**

No significant differences between groups in: self-esteem; success in academics, social life, family relationships, or presence of emotional/behavioral problems

**REFERENCES**


