Ethnic Racial Socialization Among Inracial International Adptive Placements

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Abstract

Parents of international adoptees are encouraged to provide ethnic socialization for their children. Retrospective evidence from adult adoptees suggests this is important for identity development, particularly among transracially adopted persons. However little is known about ethnic identity development among children placed internationally in in-racial placements. It is unknown whether a focus on ethnic socialization by the adoptive family might further distinguish an adopted child as different, or relate to an adoptee’s increased perception of adoption visibility. The current study examined the ethnic identity development of 31 adoptees ages 11-18 in in-racial international adoptive placements. Adoption visibility, perceived self-competence, and affiliation with the adoptee’s country-of-origin ethnic group and the adoptive family’s ethnic group were assessed using an online questionnaire. The survey was completed by both the adoptee and the adoptive parent. Analyses of responses indicates that the majority of adoptees do not feel highly visible with respect to physical dissimilarity and have positive feelings about adoption and their birth countries. The vast majority of parents indicate that they have provided the right amount of exposure to the adoptee’s culture of origin. However, adoptees who affiliate more strongly with the ethnicity and culture of their birth countries have higher perceived self-competence than those who affiliate more strongly with the culture of their adoptive families. This suggests that ethnic socialization is important for all adoptive families regardless of racial identification. Further analysis will explore parental exposure to birth country culture as related to geographic area, as well as other relational factors like parent-child relationship closeness. Implications for policy and practice for families in in-racial placements will be discussed.

Key Concepts and Definitions

- Hague requirements in the U.S. require ICA parents to have 10 hours of training on international adoption, which often includes information on ethnic-racial socialization and occasionally country-specific information
- Ethnic-racial socialization (E-RS) – the process by which parents raise a child who may not share their race, ethnicity or culture
- We know from retrospective accounts from adult adoptees that E-RS is important, especially for transracial adoptees (McGinnis et al., 2009)
- Adoption visibility refers to the extent to which an adoptive family is immediately recognizable by an outside observer – i.e. how obvious is it that the family was formed by adoption (Brodzinsky, 2011; Grotevant et al., 2000)
- Adoption visibility deals with not only physical differences, but also perceived differences – in temperament, personality, talent, skill, etc.
- So many children adopted within race, might “pass” as non-adopted, but may still feel very visible in their adoptions

Results

On Visibility:
- 100% knew other adoptees; 81% had adopted friends; 70% wish they had more adoptee friends
- 86% said they never or rarely got comments about being adopted
- On standing out from other kids: 36% said never, 20% rarely, 30% sometimes; 15% most of the time; 3% always
- On feeling different due to adoption: 24% said no; 14% in a good way; 52% in a neutral way; 10% in a negative way
- 81% said they don’t ever or rarely talk about being adopted with their peers
- 77% said they look a lot or a little like their adoptive family

On Self-Competence/ Self-Worth & Ethnic Identity:

All Score Ranges [1.0-4.0]
- Harter Scale of Perceived Self-Competence: Mean score of 2.77, range [1.82-3.54], SD=0.44
- Birth Culture Multi-Ethnic Identity Measure: Mean score of 2.86, range [2.22-4.0], SD=0.43
- Adoptive Family Multi-Ethnic Identity Measure: Mean score of 2.89 [range: 2.11-4.0], SD=0.50

References:

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