

AN ANALYSIS OF ADOPTEE NARRATIVES: EMOTIONAL
EFFECTS OF TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION FROM
ASIAN COUNTRIES

by

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This thesis works to analyze personal adoptee narratives and the way they portray the system of adoption as a discourse that can construct hard to dissect multiracial identities in the lives of adoptees. The Holt International monthly subscription magazines *Hi Families*, stored in the University of Oregon's Special Archives Collection, published a column titled 'Adoptees Today' that allowed adoptees, who had been adopted through their agency, to submit personal narratives to update Holt families and magazine consumers on what was going on in their lives since they had been brought to the U.S. The story of Holt International is explored to detail the history of international Asian adoption into the United States because of the stakes they had in it as the first family and program in Oregon to pioneer the system. Kim Park Nelson's book *Invisible Asians: Korean American Adoptees, Asian American Experiences, and Racial Exceptionalism* (2025) was also analyzed because of her perspective of the system independently from Holt International. A conversation of Critical Adoption Studies (CAS) is implemented to give context to the importance of this research. This growing field is multidisciplinary and always advancing because adoptees are beginning to start their own scholarship and create this unique field. This thesis aims to create a greater understanding about the social and emotional experiences of an adoptee who grow up in White families and communities, which can create multiracial identity confusion due to demographical differences.

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Introduction

The ‘happy’ baby of adoption is a commonly seen image and symbol when discussing the wholesome event of adoption. Adoption agencies, while not completely in the wrong, broadcast an image of smiling happy babies during and post adoption. While adoption is not a wholly bad system, the smiling happy baby does not tell the full story of what trauma the infant has gone through and will continue to experience throughout their life.

The goal of my thesis project is to describe the emotional events and trauma that occur during infant adoptions and explore how adoption agencies present the image of a ‘happy’ baby to the public. Nancy Verrier, author of *The Primal Wound: Understanding the Adopted Child* and licensed therapist, argues the importance of a person’s early experiences in life, starting from conception. Verrier says that “when it comes to adoption, there seems to be a black-out in awareness” (Verrier 12) concerning the impacts on infants of being separated from their biological mothers after 10 months of connection in utero. Kit Myers, author of *The Violence of Love: Race, Family, and Adoption in the United States* (2025), similarly argues that the love associated with adoption has a layer of violence to it that is not often enough considered during the process. The *Hi Families* magazines, a monthly subscription magazine published and sent out by Holt International, gave a way for adoptees to be able to share their own narratives on their adoptions and experiences growing up. Some of these stories have evidence of violent love that Myers details around adoption because of the adoptee perspective that is being written from.

Post infancy, some Asian adoptees grow up in White communities where they feel misunderstood among peers with a skewed sense of identity, because what they see in the mirror is different than what they feel inside. I am focusing on this specific demographic because of its personal importance, but also because adoption permits from Asian countries, primarily China,

began to peak in the early 2000s (Travel.State.Gov). This peak is important to consider because of how the field of adoption studies and critical adoption stories is growing. The analysis in this thesis is being done on magazine columns that were written just before the 2000s in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Reading and analyzing adoptee narratives from just before the peak of adoption permits can help to create understanding around the system of adoption as a whole. These generations of adoptees are who have begun to create and develop the ideas around adoption studies.

The field of adoption studies, in recent years, has significantly grown, and there has been a focus on talking about adoptees' personal experiences since they have grown up and are able to better articulate their thoughts, feelings, and stories (Laybourn). By focusing specifically on this demographic, larger patterns of trauma surrounding infant adoption can be addressed encompassing the field of interracial adoption.

Growing up I knew I was adopted, and my sister was too it was never a secret, and I loved my family just the way we were. But I never understood why people ever asked me if I would want to travel back to China or do DNA tests to try to find my biological mother. I was content with my mom who had raised me and never felt the pull to find the one who had given birth to me. My little sister was adopted 3 years after me, also from China, and growing up had an opposite sentiment. As a young girl, she was curious about her birth mother and why she was given up and maybe one day wanted to find her. Now, more than two decades after being adopted, I still am not interested in diving into my own familial history, but I want to explore more about how infant adoption has unconsciously affected so many children in the U.S.

Methodology and Research

My thesis begins with a literature review on international interracial adoption of children from Asian countries being adopted into the United States by predominantly White families. The second part is an analysis of the 'happy' baby narrative, emotional and social effects of this narrative. An expansion of this analysis is done to be able to apply it to older adoptees' self-narratives, ages 13 through adults. The primary research question I am focusing on for my paper is: how the image of the 'happy' adoptee is presented by adoptees during the process of adoption through personal narratives, and how it influences the perception around adoption being a complete and wholly positive process. An analysis of multiracial identity is also considered because of the influence and experiences that being of a different race, other than a person's family and community, has on the adoptee.

The caveat in addressing adoptee narratives from the magazines is that the magazines are published by the same company that processed the adoptions. This poses the question of what Holt International decided to publish and not publish because it can be reasonably assumed that they wouldn't want to publish stories that were too critical or negative towards adoption. The main focus of the analysis is, however, on the adoptee narratives that were published and how they present different perspectives around adoption and how being a person of color in a White family or community has had impacts on their lives, and the implications this has on the whole system of adoption.

I chose this subject to write about because of the personal attachment I have to it. Being an adoptee from China at the age of 11 months and then growing up in a predominantly White family in a predominantly White town, after coming to college, it has come to my attention that

my experiences are slightly unique but also have been felt by more than hundreds of other children around the nation.

The approach to my research started around finding out about the history of Holt International Children Services, since they pioneered adoption into the U.S. from Asian countries as an Oregon-based organization and then learning more about Critical Adoption Studies, to have a guiding factor to what information is being collected. Starting with the history of Holt International their website provided a detailed timeline starting in 1954 when Henry and Bertha Holt were first inspired to start humanitarian efforts in Korea. This was directly following the end of the Korean War in 1953. The timeline details all their efforts up to present day (Holt). In addition to the history of Holt International, author Kim Park Nelson, an adoptee herself, wrote *Invisible Asians: Korean American Adoptees, Asian American Experiences, and Racial Exceptionalism* which I use to give context to the rise of international transracial adoption from Korea to the United States. Park Nelson focuses on how “certain tropes [were] used to explain and normalize the practice of Korean adoption” (Park Nelson 1). In their book they also dive into the conflict that adoptees have concerning their identity and racial visibility. In Chapter 5, “Adoptees as White Koreans: Identity, Racial Visibility, and the Politics of Passing among Korean American Adoptees,” Park Nelson overviews the interviews she had with adoptees about the way they felt growing up as a multicultural person with potentially split racial identities. Park Nelson’s arguments and findings are applicable to the analysis and coding done from the *Hi Families* magazine column ‘Adoptees Today.’

Critical Adoption Studies (CAS) is a fairly newly coined term and field of study that is still being developed, but it asks regarding adoption “how do we know what we know, and are there alternative forms of knowledge and practice?” and examines how “various socially

constructed categories (e.g., race, gender, sexuality, class) do not exist and operate independently but interact to shape multiple and simultaneous dimensions of experience, identity, and systematic inequality” (Homans et al. 18). It builds on the field of adoption studies by “placing it within a long line of disciplinary theoretical and methodological ‘turns’ in academic fields such as anthropology, literature, legal studies, and even ethnic studies” (Homans et al. 17).

Understanding this field and new forms of studies is useful because it creates a framework for understanding the intersectionality of how race and social policy function together and are constructed.

A law paper that detailed the history of the Holt Bill written by Rachel Winslow discussed how it changed the trajectory of immigration and refugee status of orphan immigrants being able to be adopted by families in the U.S. without those statuses. The Holt Bill was passed in the mid 1950s, a time when immigration into the United States was being heavily watched due to refugees and war (Winslow). This gives context as to why children of color began to be adopted into the U.S. and discusses the legal implications of adoption as well. At first adoption through the 1948 Displaced Persons Act was intended for only European orphans, and Asian orphans were considered refugees because of the Refugee Relief Act (Winslow 319). The formalization of the adoption process was important because it changed policies from being informal and emergency based, to being true social policy to create families. The Holt’s managed to pioneer international Asian adoption into the U.S. from their home in Oregon, which changed the trajectory of Asian immigration and adoption for years to come. Because of the origin on international Asian adoption starting with the Holt family and their programs, the analysis of the *Hi Families* magazine they published in later years creates a strong foundation to this thesis.

My main focus when researching was to find research and work done by people who had been personally impacted by adoption in any facet of life, whether that be they are an adoptee themselves, they were/are parent(s) of adoptees or have been involved in other aspects of the adoption process. This is important because of the unique perspective it gives people to be around such a life changing decision and process. From personal experience, this system is not easily understood from an outsider perspective.

I employ research and writing done by mothers, scholars, academics, and scientists to contextualize where international Asian adoption has come from in the United States. Mother and psychologist Nancy Verrier and adoptee and scholar Kit Myers write similarly on preverbal trauma and the violence of love within the process of adoption that leaves a lasting mark on all adoptees. Adoptee and professor Kim Park Nelson wrote about the history of Korean adoptions into America, as well as how being an Asian adoptee pushes the boundaries of racial identity and multiculturalism.

The next stage of my analysis is reading adoptees stories of their racial experiences in social settings that had an impact on them and their self-identity. Using the University of Oregon's Special Archives Collection, I was able to find the *Hi Families* magazine that Holt International would send to families every two months that has an 'Adoptees Today' section that published stories written by adoptees. These archives span from the early 1980s to the early 2000s. I do not overview all of them, but I do analyze select and relevant stories as examples for adoptees' personal experiences growing up in America in interracial families and towns. The examples I use are from their late 1980s and early 1990s collection, as this is when adoptees who were part of the first wave of adoption were beginning to come out with their own stories; it also aligns with some of the literature chosen to use in this research. Using these archives, I will be

able to address the image of the ‘happy’ adoptee and the realities that being a young person of color in White America has on adolescence.

Once the ‘Adoptees Today’ columns were collected, I started with a basic thematic coding analysis of them. Reading through each published story, I first determined if it was written from an adoptee, their parent, or one of the employees of Holt. Any articles written by an employee were taken out of the collection process. After that, I read the rest of the column and used a simple coding method of labelling them with a 0 or 1; 0 = not related to thesis, 1 = thesis relation. While this seems very broad, the 0 would apply to articles that were about adoptees competing in sporting events, people they fell in love with, continuation of past published stories, etc. There were some stories about birth parents that weren’t included because they lacked the content and theme to connect back to my thesis. Stories that were coded with a 1 had a direct relation to the research questions and analysis of this thesis. Examples of these stories include adoptees writing about being bullied because they look different physically, stories of what it was like growing up in a multicultural family, etc. Following the coding process, the stories were annotated and summarized to be used for analysis and discussion.

Research Questions

Primary: How does being adopted into interracial families as an infant affect a child emotionally and socially (self-identity) as they grow up into their multiracial identity?

Secondary: How does the image of the ‘happy’ baby or adoptee presented by adoption agencies skew the public’s perception of the systems surrounding adoption?

Literature Review

History of Holt International Children Services

Holt International was founded in the 1950s by Oregon couple Henry and Bertha Holt when they wanted to adopt children into their family from South Korea after the war, and officially became a licensed social agency in 1964 (Winslow 340). It started with a video they watched from World Vision in 1954 that showed the devastation in Korea and the orphans of war. While the adoption system had been in place since the 19th century, it was established with the main focus of rehoming White, European children to the U.S. The 1948 Displaced Persons Act was put in place to get European war orphans to America and any Asian orphans were considered refugees under the Refugee Relief Act (Winslow). Throughout 1948-1961, international adoption was considered a humanitarian effort and an emergency system of social policy because of its direct connection with post war effects. The majority of orphaned babies were GI babies because American soldiers would father children with Korean women, and after the war the babies were considered 'unclean' because of their mixed race and were therefore orphaned. After the Korean War (1950-53) in 1955, after already starting to give monthly sponsorships, Henry Holt travelled to South Korea as part of a humanitarian effort to help care for Korean War orphans. During his time there he found eight infants whom he wanted to adopt, all mixed-race GI babies. In June 1955 he managed to get help from newly elected Oregon Senator Richard Newberg to introduce 'A Bill for Relief of Certain Korean War Orphans' with the goal of allowing families to adopt more than two children per family (not including siblings) (Winslow 331). Henry and Bertha were able to collect letters from the community to vouch for their character and cause, and they believed that God would move Congress to make the right decision (Winslow 332). In August of that same year President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the

Holt Bill into law which allowed American families to adopt children internationally without the label of refugee. The Holt Bill was one of the quickest bills they had seen passed because it usually takes months and sometimes years to pass a bill, and they got theirs through in less than two months (June 24, 1955- August, 12, 1955). Later that fall in October, Henry arrived back to the states with eight young Korean babies, and the Holt family grew from six to 14. Henry continued to work for World Vision when he returned to Oregon, but was not able to forget the babies he left behind in Korea. Returning to Korea, he instructed his wife to sell stocks and open a bank account and thus the Holt Adoption Program (HAP) was born.

The Holt family name grew to international proportions after they brought home their eight new babies. People from all over the country began to reach out to them to get their help in adopting orphans from other international countries too. In 1956 Holt International Children's Services, then known as Holt Adoption Program and not formally legalized until after 1964 and Henry's passing, was officially open.

After this Holt International went to set up in Korea. David Kim, a "selfless and humble man" (Hi Families, 1990), was recruited by Henry Holt as his personal assistant for his work ethic and language skills in Korean and English; in 1956 they travelled to Korea to set up the HAP because he saw that the World Vision Reception Center was not big enough to serve the ongoing needs in Korea. Henry saw a need for not just an adoption program, but for a care facility for the orphans who were not being adopted and had significant health issues and disabilities. In 1962 he set up the Ilsan Center in Ilsan, South Korea; it is still open today and now functions as a residential care facility for people with disabilities (*Holt Children's Services, Inc. Holt Ilsan Center*). Unfortunately, Henry Holt passed away in Korea in 1964 due to a heart attack, but his legacy still lives on through Holt International. Shortly after, they started work in

Vietnam post-war, finding homes for more than 25,000 children. Since the mid 1950s the Holt family has dedicated their time and energy to a cause close to their heart in support of others. Bertha Holt passed away at the age of 96 in 2000 in her home in Creswell, Oregon and David Kim passed away in 2018 at the age of 86 in Eugene, Oregon after holding titles of Associate Director, Executive Director (1980), President (1990) at Holt International. Throughout the years they have done work in Thailand, the Philippines, Guatemala, Romania, China, Mongolia, Uganda, Haiti, and so many more places. Holt International provides adoption services, foster services, care facilities, and health centers to care for orphans across the world. A simple evangelical, Oregonian couple from a small town changed the course of history and how the system of adoption functions today.

The majority of the initial analysis of Holt International came from their own website and published sources, which are assumed to be written to keep Holt in a positive light. So, while the Holt family's mission seemed wholesome on the surface, there is a lot to consider when the details of how and why they made these decisions come to light. As Evangelical religious people, their mission was based out of White saviorism and held a certain violence with it. They also made very race based and discriminatory choices when they would match orphans with families in the states. The GI babies that were White presenting (blonde hair, blue eyes) were the easiest to place, but Black and Korean babies were not easily placed because the Holt's wanted them to be placed into families that were racially similar. The Holts' mission became a fast-track business (proxy adoptions) because they were able to avoid the traditional social welfare check on family homes before parents could be approved for a child, this raised questions for the safety of the child once they reached the states. The Holt Adoption Project (HAP) became a threat to the International Social Service- American Branch (ISS) and the Child Welfare League of

America (CWLA). Workers in the ISS and CWLA put together a study and report against the Holt's to argue the dangers of "proxy adoptions' effect on a child's development, health, and welfare" (Winslow 339). The CWLA argues that the Holts' mission was an example of "misguided humanitarians" (Winslow 339). In 1961 ISS and their allies were able to change policy against the Holt's, who were backed by Senator Neuberger, and their policy of proxy adoptions. A bill was passed that required parents to meet the child they were adopting before the adoption could be finalized. This bill forced the Holt's to conform to "professional social welfare standards" (Winslow 340) after skirting around them for years because of the apparent and emergent need to save the war orphans and GI babies in Korea.

While the Holt's started something that was seemingly good, the core reason as to why and how they did it holds violence and racist implications. The company has evolved into something more than where they came from, but adoption is a complicated system that is constantly under scrutiny and judgement as to whether it is a good practice or a business that is taking advantage of infants and children who have little to no control of their own autonomy.

The Holt Bill and the Early History of Adoption

The Holt Bill is important because it started to change policies surrounding adoption to form a more traditional structure rather than an untraditional structure: "traditional policy was worked out through official channels, untraditional policies provided structure in the interim, sometimes evolving into more formalized structures, as was the case with international adoption in 1961" (Winslow 321).

Starting in 1948 with the Displaced Persons Act (DPA), its goal was to create visas for the millions of refugees in Europe, primarily from Germany, Austria, and Italy. The DPA offered 205,000 visas for the refugees. During this time R- New York Senator Irving Ives introduced an

orphan provision under the DPA to help one of his constituents who wanted to adopt an orphan from Poland. He said that he wanted to “help the ‘innocent victims of war... this is not an immigration bill but an expression of the great heart of the United States which always went out to children... [this is] separate and distinct from the overall problem of the refugee, the persecuted, and the displaced person’” (Winslow 323). His goal was to have this be a humanitarian relief bill and urged the government not to discriminate based on race or nationality, unlike past bills like the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act that would exclude Asian immigrants and the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. The first act that even allowed Asians into the country legally was the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act, which allowed immigrants to become U.S. citizens, established a quota for Asians, and provided services for family reunification (Winslow 322). The final version of the DPA included 2,000 visas for orphans, whom they defined as children under the age of sixteen from Italy, Britain, France, or American sectors of Germany and Austria who were missing both parents. In the end, Sen. Ives' plea for a nondiscriminatory act failed, but it did bring attention to the fact that there were also orphans in other countries outside of Europe. Despite its discriminatory processes the DPA did lay the groundwork for international adoption; from 1948 to 1953 4,052 European babies were adopted and 466 Asian babies were adopted (mostly Japanese and into military families).

Going into the 1950s the DPA was slowly morphed into the 1953 Refugee Relief Act (RRA). The RRA, in combination with the 1952 McCarren-Walter Act, made it possible for adopted babies to be citizens. Before the RRA was passed there were two moments that created precedent for it to happen. Firstly, Congress allowed citizenship to foreign wives and children of military men, and secondly, because the DPA was allowing non quota visas for orphans the House initiated adoption by proxy and the State Department and Congress were granted power to

be able to approve adoptive families therefore bypassing the social welfare step (Winslow 324). These decisions created such a shift that the DPA was revised and the RRA was passed with new orphan provisions that lasted for three years. The RRA created 4,000 non quota visas for eligible orphans overseas that wouldn't take race, nationality, or ethnicity into account (Winslow 325). This revision to the RRA is what made proxy adoption an option for states, making social welfare agencies and departments an unnecessary step in adoption: this put a lot of power into adoption agencies and projects like HAP because they could now create their own policies (Winslow 325). The policies that the Holt's used were questionable because of their racist implications due to religion. The choices that were made were not in the best interest of the orphans' welfare and safety.

“the Holts' claim that all people were “equal” in the eyes of God was misleading. Even though they espoused “colorblind” views, the Holts did not embrace all cultures as equal. As Harry Holt asserted. “I will bring my eight up as Americans in America.” Since the Holts identified their adopted children as Americans rather than Korean-Americans, they celebrated American holidays, served American food, and dressed their children in American clothes. They did not encourage their children to be bilingual or practice Korean traditions because they did not consider them valuable. This Western notion of cultural supremacy has a long tradition in Protestant mission communities” (Winslow 329).

The Holts were also recorded saying that they “believed that Korean orphans could “become white” and assimilate, but black-Korean children would always be marked by their

racial difference” (Winslow 330). The religious undercutting to their mission meant that their mission was incredibly race based and was based in American nationality and patriotism. These practices were noticed by the International Social Service- American Branch and they fought back against the Holt’s to end the proxy adoptions. This would keep the process safe with welfare checks before an adoption could be finalized, and therefore babies could be placed with any family no matter what their race, nationality, or ethnicity.

The evolution of this system is an important variable to this thesis because it explains where Holt International Children Services comes from. It shows how they used to function and their beliefs behind why they started their project. The analysis of their magazines occurs after Holt International became an official licensed social agency in 1964, but Bertha Holt was still alive and a member of the agency. There was evidence in the magazines about the saviorism of adoption that was written by adoptees and in other columns authored by the organization, with a lot of talk about faith in God and thankfulness for what he had done for them.

Critical Adoption Studies

Critical adoption studies (CAS) is an area of study with flexible attributes that can be applied to multiple fields of study as a form of analysis that considers things from a new perspective. In Margaret Homans “Critical Adoption Studies: Conversation in Progress” (2018) she organized short essays from 14 different authors and scholars. This article was pulled from a journal called *Adoption & Culture*, whose goal is to collect essays “on any aspect of adoption’s intersection with culture, including but not limited to scholarly examinations of adoption practice, law, art, literature, ethics, science, life experiences, film, or any other popular or academic representation of adoption” (The Ohio State Press). Each scholar authored a short

essay where they defined their perspective of CAS from a multidisciplinary view and the construction of the field of adoption with a critical lens and its applications.

The scholars called upon were historians, feminists, writers, poets, adoptive and birth mothers, adoptees, and ethnic studies scholars. The system of adoption has been evolving since the “middle of the fourteenth century” (Perreau 34) and is a political and social system that has shaped notions between foreign entities for centuries. Scholars Cynthia Callahan and Rosemarie Peña both wrote about the post-World War II outcome of mixed race Black and German babies that became “the first organized transnational adoptions to the US under the Displaced Persons Act as amended June 16, 1951” (Peña 26). Callahan notes that Whiteness lies at the center of the adoption system because of the “prevalence of white adoptive parents” and the “racialized dynamics of people of color raised in white families, or framed by an uneven systems of exchange that frequently make children of color the most readily available for adoption” (24). The existence of CAS in Black studies creates a way for the invisible to be visible by recognizing African American adoption traditions. After this recognition, one can begin to understand another important aspect of history where Black babies were being adopted into the U.S., but typically into families with Black adoptive parents because of the racialized construct of families needing to look the same. These families were not looked down upon though for the racialization of the system, but rather praised for following as the “first wave of post war international adoption, they were pioneers, motivated by the stories of children suffering in war zones... these adopters also wanted to confront German racism while demonstrating civic responsibility for the children fathered by black GIs in the occupation army” (Callahan 25). Peña continues by arguing the importance of adoptee testimonies and the importance of their lived experience. Adoptees become producers and creators of knowledge: “The voices of the post

World War II generation of Black Germans, inclusive of now middle-aged adoptees, are just beginning to emerge in the contemporary public discourse concerned with the history of race and racism and as a topic of interest in the growing interdisciplinary fields of adoption, migration, Black German, and childhood studies” (Peña 27-28). CAS builds up a foundation for transnational adoption, diasporic communities, and knowledge producers to be included in academia.

CAS seeks change in the production of thoughts and questions surrounding family, adoption, kinship, etc. It spans all fields of thought which means that there is “no single or unified critical adoption studies methodology” (Nelson 20). Adoptee and ethnic studies scholar Kit Myers argues that there are four components to CAS that may not all need to be included all the time, but for critical scholarship, should try to be engaged in: “interdisciplinarity, intersectionality, comparative-relational, and multifaceted stakes” (Myers 17). These frameworks create an “informed field, [where] CAS signals an important shift in adoption inquiry, experience, knowledge, and practice” (Myers 19). Applying CAS through Myers components examines the adoption practices through social work and psychological lenses (interdisciplinarity) that creates understanding of things like emotions that would have an effect on personal or public adoption, to be able to further develop ways to help the people involved. Intersectionality examines socially constructed categories and how they interact with each other to create a person’s identity: “Integrating intersectional analysis into CAS disrupts these social categories as assumed givens” (Myers 18). CAS also challenges traditional comparative work and creates a critical research lens that “seeks to understand the formation of the normative and disrupt aspirations to emulate it” (Myers 18). There is a more relational aspect to this growing field that is working to decenter Whiteness and what is already known. Myers is calling people

to ask, “how do we know what we know, and are there alternative forms of knowledge and practice” (Myers 18) and to consider the epistemology surrounding research.

Birthmother Janet Mason Ellerby writes about her experience as a young mother who lived in a society that told her to hide her teen pregnancy by sending her away to a single mothers home. Here she was told that her only option after the birth was to relinquish her child to give them their best chance at life (Ellerby 10). In her experience she felt powerless in determining her own future and shares the harmful lasting effects in her own life. She advocates for choice, family, and kinship for young, unwed mothers. In CAS Ellerby says that “a critical agenda is not possible without a self-reflective scrutiny of responsibility. [Ellerby] urges those who are thinking critically about adoption to include birthmothers in their projects” (11).

Historian Karen Balcom and literary scholar Eric Walker approach CAS with the recognition that there is a risk of absence in literary and historical work: absence of emotional clarity, understanding, and parts of stories. For Balcom, she says that CAS “reframed [her] work and [she] saw the possibilities of writing critical adoption history with social policy examples” (15), she addresses “thinking with the people of adoption” rather than or over, “thinking with adoption” (15). Through this perspective she was able to not just explore public policy and social construction, but instead put herself into the shoes of the people who have been adopted to be able to understand their lived experiences. As an historian she puts the past into words and deals with gaps in the academia, using critical research scholarship she is able to “uncover, to narrate, to bring forward the story of those most silenced and pushed to the side in adoption’s past” (Balcom 16). Walker is also considering how different forms of literary media, specifically poetry, are able to communicate the emotions of grief, loss, and separation in adoption writing. These writings create a space for people of adoption (birth parents, adoptees, adoptive parents,

etc.) to become knowledge producers as well. Walker focuses on the way poetry offers people closure after loss and the use of an elegy, but then also argues that “elegy risks the closure of comfort or the perils of despair” (Walker 14), whereas critic Diana Fuss says that an aubade provides a better poetic structure for mourning because it “waits out in suspension what she terms the foundational challenge of mourning” (Walker 14). In history and English, CAS is applicable to the analysis of filling in the blanks, it builds up understanding to not just what happened to people, but understanding as the person: their stories, emotions, and experiences. The analysis of this thesis seeks to create similar understandings with the exploration of adoptee narratives and close reading analysis to fill in the blanks of adoptee experiences.

Peggy Phelan, a feminist scholar, addresses the implications of the word *critical* in CAS. By including it, it separates the idea that adoption studies is only for advocating for adoption as a practice (Phelan 6), but that it is instead a field that can produce excellent scholarship and is something to be “revered rather than tolerated” (Phelan 6). Phelan compares it to fields such as feminist studies or Chicana studies that have been “viewed as surrogates for political advocacy; while both fields have produced exceptional scholarship, the academy as a whole has tended to view fields of this sort as somewhat marginal to their larger enterprise, a kind of “special interest” rather than a central source of respected expertise” (6), therefore including *critical* in Critical Adoption Studies is a form of resistance to marginalization and oppression. Phelan provides a criterial list of ten items that she considers CAS to embody. The 12 other scholars who wrote and sent essays to Homans embody Phelan’s list in its considerations for the emerging field.

Lastly, Margaret Homans, feminist scholar and adoptive parent, offers her own thoughts on the conversation of CAS. She writes that it draws upon already established theoretical frameworks, while also provoking sources of new perspectives that alter said frameworks (Homans 2). Adoption is a site for a range of emotions, positive and negative, because of its power to destroy while simultaneously creating. A child entering the adoption system means that it has been separated from their birth mother, a person they have spent, thus far, their whole life with: listening to their voice and heart. In certain cases, it can also mean a more harsh, violent life of kidnapping or slavery. But, on the other side of the spectrum adoption is the creation of a new family. For many, adoption is the only way their family may have a child (i.e. gay or queer relationships, people with fertility problems, etc.): it “de-biologizes the family, fulfilling an old dream of radical feminism” (Homans 3). Implementing CAS into studies surrounding adoption practices opens the door to queer/gay studies, criminal justice, feminism studies, Black studies, etc. because of its ability to draw upon previously foundational fields and use them as a foundation to construct further ways to understand adoption.

Critical Adoption Studies is not a rigid box that can only be applied to certain fields through one lens, but instead is able to look at multiple perspectives and frameworks to create understanding around a continuously evolving system of practice. In this thesis, CAS is important because of its ability to draw from multiple scholarships (i.e. feminism studies, ethnic studies, psychology, sociology, history, etc.), use, and build upon previous theories and frameworks to create new ways of understanding transracial adoption practices in the U.S. A study conducted in 2019 on the advertisement strategies of ‘happy’ children during the 1960s until 1980s is an example of CAS because of the analysis of media from a political and social standpoint.

The Happy Baby Narrative in Indigenous Adoptions 1964-82

As settler colonialism continued to spread through North America, Indigenous peoples' lives continued to be ravished by White settlers in Canada. Known as the 'Sixties Scoop,' Indigenous children were taken from their families and placed in residential boarding schools and entered into the adoption system. Focused in Canada, from 1964-82, researchers put together a quantitative and qualitative case study detailing the adoption columns being printed in newspapers that detailed 'happy' children for adoption.

Bendo et al. provides a look into how keywords and phrases were written to boost adoption of children, both White and Indigenous. There is ample comparing and contrasting that happens between the two demographics because of the racialization within the adoption systems and between how families are created. This case study provides evidence and examples that are applicable to this thesis because of their analysis of adoption agencies, social workers, and journalists working together to advertise infants and adolescents, whereas my research analyzes the narrative straight from adoptees own personal experiences. Creating a sympathetic picture surrounding orphans is not new, because it pulls on people's heart strings to see children and siblings without parents and families.

Indigenous adoption centers around settler colonialism and the forced removal of children from their families and homes because of the belief that they are malleable and will assimilate better (i.e. kill the Indian, save the man myth). Removing children from their homes also became a form of governmental control because "Forced removal of Indigenous children established children as the site of biopolitical intervention, managing their land and lives through the imperial settler notion of happiness" (Bendo et al. 401). The Sixties Scoop "was predicated on child welfare that presented a positive façade" (Bendo et al. 400) that created rhetoric around

White saviorism and bringing children from the unevolved cultures they were growing up in, to a more sophisticated and evolved one. The want for children to assimilate was so strong that over 20,000 Indigenous children were forced into the adoption program in Canada by social workers whose jobs were to erase children's Indigeneity in social history (Bendo et al. 401).

Bendo et al. aimed to “demonstrate how Indigenous children are described with a specific form of happiness that is conjoined with colonial conceptions of the family and nation” (399). To do this, they make connections between the media representations of the children and settler colonialism and the way that happiness discourse is applied to them. Happiness is studied as an emotion that can get attached to objects, in this case, the orphaned children. Emotions are generally observed as originating from inside the body to then be displayed externally, but Bendo et al. explains them to be something that is related to an object that then subjects (people) become attached to (Bendo et al. 402). Applying these ideas of intentionally applying happiness to the practice of adoption, the media began to attach emotions to the children that they displayed in the newspapers to entice families and parents to adopt children, both White and Indigenous. It was Helen Allen, the writer of the *Today's Child* column in multiple newspapers, that used this method to write about and advertise “hard-to-adopt” children under the direction of The Deputy Minister of Welfare in Ontario. The Deputy, Dr. James Band, determined that ‘hard-to-adopt’ children were the ones who had “physical or mental disabilities, racialized children and children older than two years” (Bendo et al. 402). Under Dr. Band's determination and Allen's writing, the *Today's Child* column ran for over 10 years in Canada in 23 daily newspapers, 150 weekly ones, and various ‘racial and ethnic presses’ (Bendo et al. 403) with the goal of getting racialized and ‘hard-to-adopt’ children out of the system. Similarly, in the *Hi Families* magazines, they ran columns on children who were ‘available’ to be adopted. In this project there will be an analysis

of a different column, 'Adoptees Today,' where adoptees could send in their stories about life post adoption. This column ran in the *Hi Families* magazine for over a decade as well.

Bendo and colleagues analyzed the columns from 1964-1982. There were 4300 columns and children featured in 3299 of them and each column portrayed anywhere from one to seven children, multiples were found most often with sibling groups, but it was most often one child per column. The columns would also include pictures of the children being advertised. During their analysis Bendo et al. used both quantitative measures and qualitative ones to build their study on the use of happiness as an emotion being attached to children. The University of Oregon Special Archives Collections contains *Hi Families* magazines spanning from 1983-2000. Not all magazines were used for analysis and not every magazine was guaranteed to have the 'Adoptees Today' column.

Quantitatively, Bendo et al. made a coding system that classified different attributes into categories depending on the descriptions of the children: "'race and ethnicity' we coded the child according to stated origins and descent (1 = Not Stated, 2 = Anglo Saxon, etc.)" and "for a variable like happiness, we coded for the presence or absence of discussion of happiness (not directionality of happiness) in the advertisement... (0 = no mention of happiness, 1 = mention of happiness)" (Bendo et al. 404). The quantitative data for a child's origin and descent was broken up into four groups: Not Stated, European, Indigenous, and Non-European/Non-Indigenous other. They followed up their data collection with a crosstabulation method to analyze the data and association between Indigeneity and happiness. I use a similar system of coding for the analysis of the 'Adoptees Today' column. I will be looking for instances and mentions of happiness in the columns, and secondarily, for stories of adoptees being insecure with their identity as an Asian American within a White/Caucasian family and community. Because the

magazine's focus was mostly on Asian adoptees, and the focus for this thesis is on Asian adoptees, I won't be collecting data on race.

Qualitatively, they conducted a thematic analysis to determine the directionality/intention of happiness in the columns. This allowed them to understand how it was being applied to objects (children) who then became associated with happiness. They considered the implications of emotions with Indigenous children and non-Indigenous children and found that happiness tended to have a strong connection to the family, the child, location and Indigeneity and race. In the coding process of the 'Adoptees Today' columns, themes were noted as the stories were being read. After the coding, each story was examined using close reading methods to further dissect them. There were multiple themes that were not directly linked to the research scope of this thesis but will still be included in the analysis as part of the findings.

In their results, Bendo et al. found that happiness was mentioned (quantitative) in over one-third of the columns, indicating a dominant theme on language in describing "childhood attributes and their relationship to families" (Bendo et al. 405). They also found that there was a disproportionate amount of Indigenous children representation in the columns compared to the other three categories being considered. In the crosstabulation analysis they found that happiness "was found amongst all subgroups within the columns over the course of the *Today's Child*" (Bendo et al 405). They found that it wasn't just being used as a descriptor for children but used to describe specific types of relationships related to children.

In their qualitative results, they found four main themes: family as a basis of happiness, a child as a basis of happiness, location as a basis of happiness, and Indigeneity and race. They first describe the relation of a family unit and the theme of importance written into the columns. Happiness became objectified to a nuclear family: "The space of happiness is within a family for

the children and the adults to whom the column appeals” (Bendo et al. 405). The columns became suggestive to the fact that a child could find happiness once they were engulfed into family life, but would never find it otherwise, while also targeting adults’ desire for a happy family, Bendo et al. stating that “The would-be parents’ ultimate happiness lies in growing a family which accepts an adopted child” (405-406). The column treats it like a win-win situation for parent and adoptee. The second theme they identified, a child as a basis of happiness, was idealized in the columns because Allen would write as if the child’s ability to reach happiness and therefore meet parental expectations was dependent on the conceptualization of the child. Their cultural background and qualities (i.e. Indigenous or other racialized children (Bendo et al. 406)) would be called into question and how it would affect the child’s ability to reach a state of happiness. A child’s race became an idealized topic. For example, “The idealised, white, blue-eyed, blonde hair child evokes feelings of happiness, whereas this imagined notion of happiness is not attached to other types of children (i.e. racialised/Indigenous children)” (Bendo et al. 406). This construction of the ‘ideal’ child centers Whiteness as happy and racialized babies as not capable of the same type of happiness. The columns would be written to attract sympathetic parents to racialized children’s sad story about their association of bad experiences with their background and how a new family could ‘save’ the child: “The child may be ‘saved’ by parents who are willing to accept their ‘Indian’ culture” and “The boys are considered *healthy enough* in spite of their Indigeneity” (Bendo et al. 407). A similar connection can be made to the Holt family’s original mission regarding their White, Evangelical religious beliefs and thoughts that assimilating Asian adoptees into White families and Christianity could save them and give them better lives.

Children looking to be adopted were presented in the media as objects that will be able to provide a specific experience to parents that they would never be able to have otherwise; they were seen as a tool to provide fulfillment and adult happiness. The third theme of location looked at how children in the system were stuck in a type of purgatory, where their past was unhappy, and they were looking forward to a happy future. These were only three spaces they existed in. By creating a location-based system of happiness, media consumers are fed the idea that “location-based happiness develops the child and family as happy objects” (Bendo et al. 407). The second idea of location-based happiness revolves around Indigenous children and reservations. Reservations were a racialized space where it felt impossible for Indigenous children to be happy, so by adopting an Indigenous child, parents were ‘saving’ them from the unhappiness that is connotated to life on a reservation, “This reflects the Enlightenment era depiction of the child as happy and innocent and any child that does not embody that happy innocence needs to be ‘saved’ and placed in a happy space” (Bendo et al. 407). In the columns, Allen solidifies the need to strip a child of their cultural background and replace it with settler colonial ideology and lifestyle because it will create a better and more happy life for the child to be assimilated into the new culture and leave their own behind. (Bendo et al 408).

This case study demonstrates the use of media to create a certain discourse around transracial adoption within one nation revolving around the themes of directional happiness and family, child, location, and Indigeneity and race. Children become a racialized object that is to be used for adult’s personal fulfillment. The data “highlights that happiness is conjoined with colonial conceptions of family and nation” (Bendo et al. 409). The consideration of happiness as something that gets applied to objects in the case study makes it clear the directionality and intentions of Allen’s writing to operationalize it through the idea of a family with a child that

once adopted will finally reach their full happiness. There is a cycle of happiness that starts with adopting a child that will create a family for parents which will lead to their own happiness and fulfillment therefore creating happiness for the adopted child. The racialized children in the column were not presented in the same bright light that the White children were, Allen wrote about them as being less able to fulfill parental expectations, therefore adopting an Indigenous child was something you did more for their happiness than one's own. The Sixties Scoop saw the purpose of happiness in several different types: “It augments the justification for the removal of Indigenous children from their unhappy origins. Potential adoptive parents are enticed to adopt unhappy children who will, through their benevolence, become happy” (Bendo et al. 409). Bendo et al. also says that “This study also hints that the inscribing conceptions of happiness on to children may have implications for their lives” (Bendo et al. 409). This thesis uses the analysis of the ‘happy’ baby narrative from Bendo et al.’s. work to analyze magazine columns from the Holt International’s *Hi Families* ‘Adoptees Today’ column. By coding and close reading these columns, I investigate how adoptees present their own happiness while growing up in transracial families (typically White parents and siblings and the adoptee being of Asian descent) and the influence this would have on the consumers of the magazine. Another analysis took place that considered how being a person of color growing up in a White family and community may have affected the adoptee's social and emotional experiences.

Methods of Analysis

All the articles from the magazines that were written by adoptees were scanned and organized by the month, year, and the magazine volume and number. Once all the narratives were filed, I read through each one. I used a simple system to organize them into two categories: stories that were in relation to the research questions and not (i.e mentions of transracial family

experiences, stories relating to how their racial identity effected their social life, etc.). I started with 22 magazines and 45 stories in total. After reading through each one I ended up with 11 narratives that had mentions of racial identity and perspectives as what it was like to grow up as an Asian American in a racially structured society that viewed that difference as something more negative or prejudice. This is relevant because it is what connects back to my research questions for analyzing how being a person of color may or may not have affected their lives socially or emotionally.

Each story was annotated, and a qualitative analysis was implemented. In vivo coding was used to summarize each adoptee's narrative so there was a simple summary of each narrative to keep close to the original intent and meaning of their words. From this point, I was able to identify themes to organize each article in to, to create a system for a close reading analysis to be able to analyze the articles from a more holistic perspective. This analysis is what will lead back to the primary research question about what themes can be observed in international adoption that contradict the myth of adoption being a wholly positive system, the 'happy' baby narrative.

Stories that were not included in the analysis were ones written by Holt employees, stories written by parents on athletic successes, and personal narratives that did not relate back to the research questions. There were multiple instances of stories being written by Holt's Director of Development, at the time, with content advertising how great the Heritage Camp experience was for adoptees, these were taken out from the file collection completely. Stories with relevant themes though, included ones with content relating to adoptees thankfulness towards God and the Holt family for giving them a better opportunity at life in America with their adoptive

families. The stories that were collected and not close read, general themes around the adoption system were recognized and included in the discussion of the narratives.

Analysis

The full collection of narratives, including ones that were not analyzed using close reading, held several themes, the most prominent one throughout being how adoptee identity as an Asian person in America was creating tension in their everyday life, out of 11 narratives that received a close reading analysis, 10 clearly had strong connections with these tensions. This theme will be the main focus of my analysis, while sub themes throughout all the narratives included: 1) God, religion, and faith; 2) the draw to solve a mystery about their [adoptee] past; 3) praise for the Holt family and their mission (Henry, Bertha, and their daughter Molly); and 4) adoptees using their own experiences to advertise adoption to consumers of the magazine. My research focused on 11 narratives collected from the *Hi Families* magazines spanning from 1987-1992. They presented multiple themes around adoptee multiracial identity, social, and emotional experiences contextualized through transracial family environments, school, friends, and the difference in feeling like being a part of a minority and majority.

Transracial families were not common to see in America because there were “structures that emphasize sameness to reinforce family unity” (Park Nelson 14). These structures created a discourse that minimized adoptees experiences with discrimination and created a negative connotation surrounding Asian American racial identity (Park Nelson 14). For example, in Angela T.’s story ‘The Truly Special Ones’ she writes that “People stare at us... But I must admit that these people may have a legitimate reason—I mean, I am certain that nowhere in Emily Post or in Tiffany’s Table Manners for Teens is there a reference under the category “Proper Responses to Multicultural/Multiracial Families Seated at the Next Table”” (T., Angela

24). People in Angela's town didn't know how to 'deal' with a multiracial family, and this is something that adoptees like Angela grew up feeling, causing her to question her and her family's differences: "I guess I always knew my family was different. However, I didn't know in what way I was different—a good different, a bad different, a weird different?" (T., Angela 24).

Adoptee Kimberly A. who authored 'Two Different Kinds of Love' also wrote about growing in a multiracial family, but her brother was also adopted but was White. Kimberly was aware of the fact that her brother looked like their parents (they were all White) and she wasn't, so he wouldn't get asked question regarding his adoption because he didn't look it: "I am a Korean adoptee. My older brother is adopted as well, but he doesn't have the problem of looking different like I do" (A., Kimberly 25). Akin found it "extremely difficult and painful" (A., Kimberly 25) to be completely open about her adoption story and looking different. Kimberly's struggle towards determining her 'real' identity weighed on her heavily, so she went searching for older adoptees who she could talk to to be able to understand more about the nuances of an adoptee identity. She was eventually introduced to Beth S., a 24-year-old adoptee from Los Angeles, California. Beth helped Kimberly understand that her identity as an adoptee was not something that was or should be easily grasped and that it was "very difficult for her [Beth] to know how to develop and be who she was" (A., Kimberly 25). Kimberly immediately felt a connection to this. Park Nelson argues that because many Korean adoptees are being raised in non-Asian homes and communities, they are isolated and can have a difficult time considering themselves to be a member of Asian American communities (130). Isolation away from other adoptees and/or Asian American communities has detrimental effects on adoptees and their ability to form, what Kimberly describes it as, a real identity. Kimberly struggled to determine her real identity until she was able to talk to another person who had already lived through

similar experiences. It even brought her to question her parents' decisions saying she would think about whether her parents thought about the fact that she and the family would get stared at after adopting her (A., Kimberly 25).

Asian American adoptees experience an accelerated type of White racialization compared to first generation Asian immigrants because it isn't only through an assimilation process of moving to a new country but being immediately integrated into a White family that sometimes have "process[es] that include colorblindness as a common parenting strategy" (Park Nelson 130). The narratives that were coded showed evidence of the consequences to colorblind parenting strategies. There were seven narratives that talked about the negatives of looking different around friends and family, but there were also two stories that held positive stories from adoptees that were proud of their Asian American identity. There were three narratives that included negative self-talk about the way they looked: "I always hated the fact that I was Korean and that I looked different from so many people in my life" (S., Keli 10), "I hate being Korean, I don't belong here. If I'm so special, then why do other kids make fun of me?" (S., David 14), "I was semi-ashamed of being 'different'... I just wanted to be like my friends and not get teased" (R., Leslie 21). Julianne S., a 13-year-old Korean adoptee, wrote about how growing up she was always teased because she looked different: "I've been made fun of many times—about my eyes, where I came from, my face and my birth parents" (S., Julianna 21). In each of these narratives the adoptee understood that they were different than their peers, but it didn't make the teasing, bullying, and internalized hate hurt any less. Colorblind parenting effects an adoptees sense of self because it can unintentionally apply a White racial identity to them. In her piece, 'Looking in a Mirror', Rebecca P. starts off by remembering a story from when she was five years-old with her mother when she said "Mommy, don't you think we look alike" (P., Rebecca 21)? It was an

innocent remark, but it made her mom start laughing because Rebecca's parents are Polish and German, and she was adopted from Korea. Park Nelson says that "the assimilationist ideology that prevails in White American society, and the colorblind mindset within which many [adoptees] were raised" has created a discourse around adoptees identifying as White or wishing they were White while they were growing up (Park Nelson 133). Given the racial makeup of most adoptive families, this was not a surprising result in Park Nelson's research. Another example of adoptive parents using colorblind parenting processes can be seen in a narrative written by Kim F., she says that "My parents have never made me feel that I am different from them or anyone else. They've taught me that people may look different but inside everyone is much the same. I live in a community where very few Oriental children live, that doesn't affect me. I feel all the more special" (F., Kim 14). From previous narratives there was evidence that aligned with opposite feeling surrounding looking different and being uncomfortable with it and getting bullied for it. For example, Kimberly H. wrote a poem titled 'Who Am I?' where she shares her feelings on looking different from the other girls. She understands why she is different, but wants to be confident in herself, whereas, at the time she was incredibly insecure: "I wonder what people think of me... I see other girls' features are different from mine./ I want to be like everyone else... I touch my eyes and I know I'm different... I understand that being different is me.../I dream someday that I will be proud for who I am" (H., Kimberly 19). Adoptees internally identify themselves with the majority demographics they are surrounded by and therefore distance themselves from their physical differences. Multiracial identities are hard to navigate for adoptees when they are constantly surrounded by a specific demographic of people that don't look like them or share a culture that people expect them to value. There are three specific stories from the *Hi Families* magazines where the adoptees shared their

experiences of going on the Holt Motherland Tour and Heritage Camp that changed their perspective on their Asian American identity.

Keli S., David S., and Leslie R.'s narratives about hate and shame were followed with their story about how they went on the Holt Motherland Tour or to the Holt Heritage Camp where they were able to (re)connect with their identities and become more confident in their Asian identity. Keli and David both went on the Motherland Tour back to Korea and Leslie went to the Heritage Camp through Holt where she was surrounded by other adoptees and people with similar life experiences to hers. Each of these adoptees described their thoughts around these experiences as feeling like they were finally apart of a majority after being the minority for so long in their communities. For Keli, she said it was the first time she was around Korean people who looked the same as her, on David's tour he felt a sense of belonging and it gave him more confidence in his Korean American identity saying that "I am no longer an American who was born in Korea, but rather a Korean-American. And I'm proud" (S., David 14). Leslie said that "It felt strange at first, but it was nice to be in the majority instead of the minority" (21). Similarly, but not related to a Holt experience, Julianne S. said that when she was in elementary school it was only her and one other student of color and they "went through a lot of hard times, but in the long run it's helped us decide who our real friends are" and "Now that I [Julianne] go to a school that has more colored kids, I don't feel so different" (S., Julianna 21). All these stories share a theme about the importance of communities and where people think they feel comfortable and where they actually feel comfort. All four adoptees talked about how after being around more people of color, they gained more confidence and didn't feel so different because of how they looked. For adoptees, like Julianna, they understand that they do look different but couldn't ever figure out why people would make fun of others based on their appearances. Her racial identity

was such an important factor during her school days because it would determine who her friends were and weren't. Being Asian American was something that, for her and many others, caused social dilemmas in her everyday life.

Three different narratives presented an opposite perspective on their physical differences and adoptions. For Connie Jo R., she was proud to be an adoptee: "When people ask me if I'm adopted, I know that I can hold my head high and say proudly, "Yes. I'm adopted"" (R. Connie Jo 23). Growing up the topic of adoption was an open subject between her and her parents, and she was always grateful to her adoptive family. Lieutenant Commander Kim Houk shared that although being adopted makes a person different that it doesn't mean that it is bad to be different. Houk's narrative was on theme with Kit Myers idea of the violence of love, voicing that "Adoption is an act of love and sharing. Adopting you was a conscious decision on your parents' part. Regardless of how you feel sometimes, adoption was meant for the good of you both" (H., Kim 19). In his statement, Cmdr. Lt. Houk minimalizes the negative effects that adoption has on adoptees from the moment they are separated from their birth mother. For the adoptive family adoption is an act of love because they are giving orphans a home and opportunity, but from an adoptee standpoint there are much more complicated emotions attached to it than that. Myers says that "The prominent love through attachment frameworks erases emotional ambivalence, doubt, and anger by replacing them with certainty and "true love"" (Myers 4). Nancy Verrier reminds us that there is preverbal trauma imprinted on adoptees because once they are taken away from their birth mothers, they are taken away from the one person they had spent 10 months with and were comfortable with.

The close reading analysis revealed that within the 11 collected narratives, there was evidence that pointed to adoptees being grateful and happy within their families, but being in a

transracial family was not always easy. Growing up as a person of color in White communities lead to bullying, racist remarks, and judgmental looks from onlookers.

Discussion

The primary research question analyzed how being adopted into an interracial family as an infant and then growing up in multiracial homes and towns effected an adoptees' self-identity and their emotional and social experiences. This analysis revealed details about the tension and hardship adoptees faced in their everyday lives because they looked different from their peers and community members. From adolescence into their teenage years, and for some into adulthood, many adoptees who shared their narratives had to navigate a life of racist remarks and bullying that lead to an internal struggle of self-identity. Being assimilated into a White home from a young age led to colorblindness for many surrounding their multiracial identities, and it was hard for each adoptee to figure out their 'real'-identity because of this. Adoptees are raised in a Westernized culture with few people of color around, meaning they are isolated where they are and feel trapped in an identity that doesn't quite feel like their true self. The Holt Heritage Camp and Motherland Tour is what brought closure for many adoptees from the collection of narratives. It made them feel a part of something where they didn't stick out because their skin color or eye shape was different. The U.S. is an extremely nationalistic country that strives for homogeneity of Whiteness (White Supremacy), and Asian adoptees feel this pressure when they are raised in multiracial families and get stared at and teased for looking and being different.

The secondary research question was exploring how an image of a 'happy' baby/adoptee was being presented by adoption agencies, like Holt International, that could possibly affect perceptions on the adoption system. Bendo et al.'s 2019 study provided a foundation to this analysis through the study of adults writing to advertise infants and young children to the public

and how that presentation of a ‘happy’ baby was intentionally created to process more adoptions. The focus of this thesis shifted this concept to personal narratives of adoptees and how they portrayed their own thoughts and feeling towards their adoption. In vivo coding and close reading analysis revealed patterns of a type of self-advertisement. There were multiple instances of adoptee written narratives that urged consumers to adopt or sponsor children in developing countries. For example, 13-year-old Carla F., wrote ‘Don’t let them Starve’ in the March/April 1988 edition of *Hi Families* sharing her feelings on the starving children in Ethiopia that she read about in the *Times* magazine. Carla wrote about how she felt so bad about it because the pictures of the starving children made her sad, but that she was thankful to God for all that he had given her (F., Carla 13). Carla’s feelings towards thanking God for her opportunities in life were not alone, there were six other narratives from the whole collection of scanned files that had mentions of God and gratefulness towards the Holt family for all they had done to build a system that gave them a chance at life in America. These observations align back to the Holt’s original mission from the 1950s and 60s of being a White saviorism family that believe that God would lead people to make the right decisions. When adoptee’s present these stories through their own experiences and feelings it is sustaining a culture of adoption as being a practice of White saviorism. But, on the flip side, being pro-adoption as an adoptee and adoptive parent isn’t a bad thing, because it is a way for parents to create a family in a ‘non-traditional’ way (i.e. LGBTQ+ families, infertility, single parents, etc.). There are many reasons to support why adoption is a possibly exploitative system, but there are just as many positive ones to counter back.

Conclusion

This thesis explores the way that adoption agencies presented adoptee narratives as a form of the ‘happy’ baby myth and how growing up in a transracial family effects an adoptees social and emotional experiences. Bendo et al’s. study focused on the way that social workers and journalists advertised infants and young children to the public for adoption, but this thesis analyzes how the adoptees themselves shared their own lived experiences post adoption, giving a new perspective to study. The *Hi Families* magazines (1987-1992) provide narratives that show themes of Asian adoptees being grateful and happy in their adoptive families, while at the same time having negative experiences because they were adopted. Nancy Verrier, Kit Myers, and Kim Park Nelson all provided a foundation to explore how the negative emotions connotated with adoption are minimalized when adoptees are told they should be grateful for the opportunity at life they were given. The qualitative study showed that being a person of color in White-dominated communities did influence adoptees social lives and experiences. Many were bullied and their families were given weird looks when out and about. The caveat to this research was the assumption the Holt International wouldn’t want to publish narratives in the ‘Adoptees Today’ column that would bring a negative outlook to the system of adoption, this seemed to be countered by the stories including mentions of how the Holt Motherland Tour and Heritage Camp brought a sense closure to the adoptees about their racial identity. So, while the narratives did portray an honest perspective on how racial discrimination effected adoptees, there was a solution that was also presented that put Holt International back in a positive light.

Overall, this thesis creates a discussion about international transracial adoption from Asian countries into America that takes into consideration adoptee’s multiracial identities. It posed questions about how adoptee’s multiracial identities are formed and sustained in a Western

culture. It also studies how the origins of international adoption from Asian countries has affected the system today, but also how the system has evolved from being based in White supremacy and saviorism to a system that creates family.

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