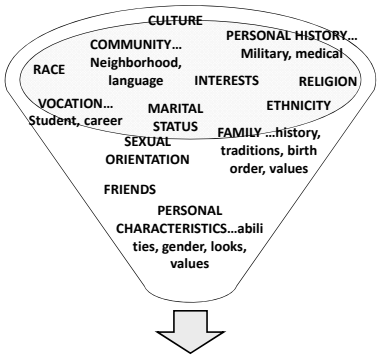
Identity Development for Adoption Triad Members

May 12, 2017

mdolfi@nycap.rr.com
(518) 281-8884
www.adoptioncounselingny.com

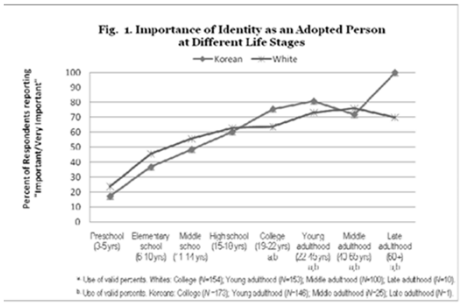
Marie Dolfi
LCSW

Who Are You



IDENTITY

Donaldson Adoption Institute
Beyond Culture Camp: Promoting Healthy Identity in Adoption

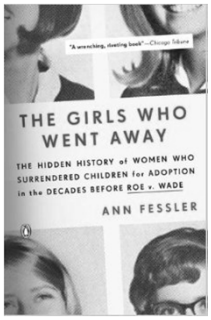


Where You Are?

Home, Community, Online,
Extended Family, Employment,
With Individuals of Your Race/Culture, History,
House of Workshop

Foster Care & Adoption Communities

- **Foster Care**
- **Family Court**
- **Residential Treatment Center**
- **Special Education**



Time in History

Baby Scoop Era- 1945- early 1970s

1951 33,800 infant adoptions -peak of 89,200 infant adoption in 1970

Options Counseling

Individualized assessment and information sharing process where women and men who are experiencing an untimely pregnancy are assisted in objectively evaluation their options for parenting, relinquishing their child for adoption, pregnancy termination, or temporarily having their child in foster care or with a relative

Extended Family

Kinship Adoption

New Family Roles

School Assignments

OR

Race & Current Events

Community that Reflects the Person

Foster Child

ADHD

Waiting Child

RAD

Hard to Place

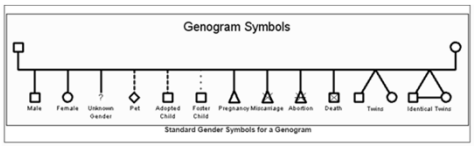
Special Needs

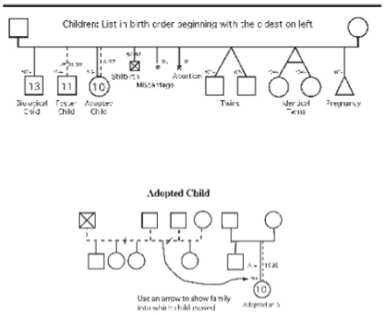
Microaggressions

Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative…slights and insults towards [the marginalized group - Derald Sue 2007

Racial Microaggressions

Society's Message Adoption is Second Rate vs. Second Choice





Birth/First Parent Labels

- Labels placed on first/birth parents by society & family:
  - Irresponsible, Unfit
  - You're selfish for wanting to raise your child when there are parents who can't have a child out there
- Children need help to understand the labels placed on their birth parents

Identify as a Parent?

Society's labels for adoptive parents

- Damaged for not being able to procreate
- Not "real" parents
- "Too bad you couldn't have your own children"

Sealed Records Interfere with Identity Formation

Birth Certificates with Adoptive Parents Names

Adoption/Foster care records sealed or limited

No Photos of Birth Relatives

Fragmented Personal Narrative

- Reasons relinquishment happened
- Birth Relatives Interests
- Mannerisms
- Medical history
- Ethnicity
- Race

Why Am I Here?

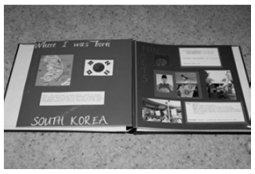
Relinquishment = Rejection

- **Children often think they are responsible for their relinquishment**
- **Children believe their poor coping skills & misbehaviors are because they are bad not that it is a result of the trauma they have experienced**

Promoting Positive Identity Formation

Access to records

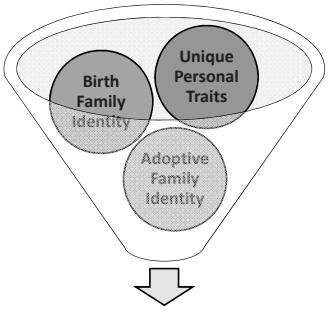
Life Books



Parenting that Promotes Positive Identity

Denial of Difference
Acknowledgment of Difference
David Kirk- Shared Fate 1964

Insistence of Difference
David Brodzinsky
Being Adopted: The Lifelong Search for Self



Adopted Individual's Identity

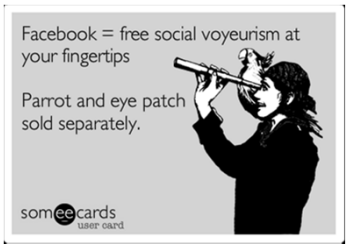
Teenagers & Identity

- **Identity issues become more of an issue for teenagers because:**
  - **A greater ability to think abstractly…how am I like my birth parents, my adoptive parents; more aware of how missing information impacts them**
  - **Increased time away from family provides opportunities to define identity**
  - **Time in life cycle to make decisions that help to define who they are…which group they associate with, which vocation they choose**

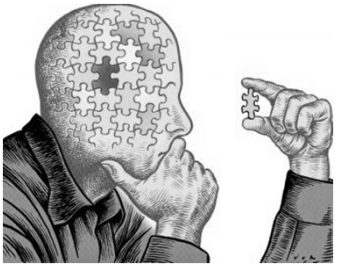
DNA Testing

FamilyTreeDNA

Internet Voyeurism



Search & Reunion



Identity Redefined
With New Information

Culture ≠ Race

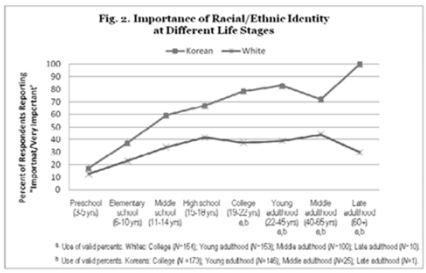
- Music
- Food
- History
- Culture Camp
- Holiday Celebration
- Homeland Tours

Children get message that Parents can't handle race

Racial Identity Development

- Children as young as 3 start to notice racial ethnic differences and will comment on their lack of "match" to their parents—does not mean they understand the concept of race
- Children as young as 4 will notice that minorities are treated differently and language that is used when talking about racial & ethnic issues
- Elementary school children will identify with the race and culture they are living
- Teenagers often will try to bridge the gap between their race/culture with their parents and their race---reculturation
- Adulthood- very common for minorities to live in more racial diverse neighborhoods than they were raised in

Importance of Racial Identity



Parenting Tasks that Promote Positive Racial Identity

- Race is something that is talked about
- <u>The family</u> has relationships with individuals of their child's race…at their home
- Learn values of child's race, culture…i.e. hair care
- Regular participation in community where child is in the majority
- Expose child to information about historical figures and context to why group is mistreated---misunderstood
- Minority individuals of accomplishment… not just in the media, sports, or service jobs

Parenting Tasks

- Teach children educational & economic opportunities often define a person's experience
- Talk to the teens about how life as a minority in the family's community will be different when going to college or outside of community
- Research shows children have a more positive racial identity when they live in diverse communities

Learning the Subtleties of Race in Society

- Learning there is a wide variety of identities and experiences within a race
- Code switching--- Using different language, rules for different settings

Most Influential with Positive Racial Identity in Transracial Adoption

Having relationships with people of their race / ethnicity

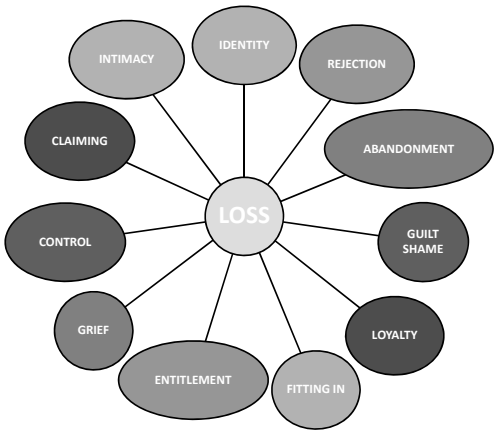
Transracizlized Family Identity

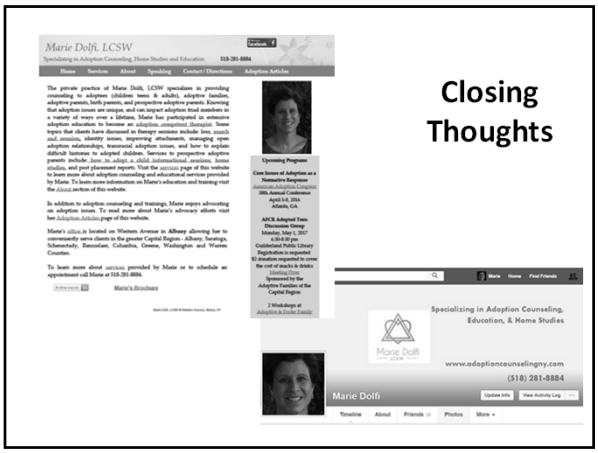
Concept developed by John Raible PhD.

- By loving, caring for and becoming part of the native community of a person of another race/culture for an extended period of time…develop a sophisticated appreciation of the differences of people of color and the issues of being a minority

When Families are not Transracialized

- Poor self-esteem and a lack of tools for handling racism and being a minority becomes a burden
- Internalized Racism-Minority individuals then believe negative stereotypes and want the white privilege
- Research 2/3rds or more of transracially adopted individuals did not identify with their racial status as children





Closing Thoughts