

Personal Identity: A Core Issue of Adoption

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The development of a positive personal identity is a common theme among transracially-adopted children. As a biracial transracial adoptee myself, I encountered several challenges growing up while developing my own identity. I would advise parents to be cognizant of two things as they endeavor to raise their transracially-adopted child to have a healthy sense of personal identity. Firstly, I think parents should join an adoption support group if there is one located in their area. Secondly, parents shouldn't negate the importance of a child's native language or frequent contact with other interracial families and people that share a similar culture/racial background as their child.

Adoption support groups provide numerous benefits for both adoptive parents and transracially-adopted children. Adults can share their experiences with other adoptive parents and any insights they have on raising transracially-adopted children with parents in the group who are seeking to adopt. Meanwhile, the parent's children benefit as well by interacting with other transracially-adopted youth/children. As a child begins to form his or her personal identity, I feel it is important that he/she is able to converse with other kids whom share the common bond of being a transracial adoptee. If there are not any adoption support groups within a reasonable traveling distance, the Internet can also be a valuable resource. Nearly everyone in America today has access to the Internet and there are a growing number of adoption support sites where adoptive parents and youth can communicate with each other despite the distance.

Language is a vital component in a person's identity as well as their culture. If a child is able to speak another language when they are adopted, I would suggest their parents advocate their child continue to speak it in addition to English. Obviously, if a child is from China and the parents do not speak Cantonese or Mandarin, this does present a challenge. However, if adoptive parents make an effort, they should be able to connect with people from their child's race and or culture. This has a greater importance and benefit than exposing their child to symbolic aspects of culture/race such as an occasional cultural event or museum. I feel events and places such as those are more artificial than having a solid understanding of one's native language and contact with people that share similar culture/racial background or with other interracial families.

For transracially-adopted children from other countries who are not already conversant in their native language, adoptive parents should encourage their child to take language classes. Some young children may initially resent speaking another language or taking classes because it may make them feel different and they will want to be like everyone else. My friends and I felt this way when we were younger. As the adopted son of Swiss and French parents, and the biological son of African American/American Indian and Lebanese parents, I was encouraged (destined, you might say) to learn French as a second language. As adults

now, my friends and I feel fortunate to be nearly bilingual and it has strengthened our connection to our respective cultures.

It is not likely that all parents raising transracially-adopted children will live in a diverse neighborhood. The inevitable question, "Who am I", will be asked by transracially-adopted children. However, the more informed adoptive parents are about the challenges facing transracially-adopted children, the better prepared they will be to assist their child to form a good racial identity.

About the Author:

Jeremy Robbi, M.A. is a biracial, transracial adoptee of African American, American Indian (Apache) and Lebanese descent. His adoptive parents are Swiss and French. He reunited with his birth mother in 1998. He currently resides in Maryland, and often speaks with adoption support groups about the experience of growing up in a multiracial family.