

developmental tasks. Typically, when children are about eleven, their brains begin to develop abstract thinking, and children do well with a check-in. At thirteen or fourteen, before teens are entering romantic relationships, another check-in is good. Prior to leaving home, around seventeen, is another good check-in time. Many children become skillful at knowing when they should come in. They will tell their parents that it is time to make an appointment. This is typical of a successful working relationship with a therapist.

Researchers are showing decided improvements for children who receive therapy for trauma when compared to children who do not (Foa, Keane, Friedman, 2000). Because of the clarity and consistency of these studies, I recommend counseling for all traumatized children even if children do not remember trauma.

CHAPTER 6

The Impact of Cultural Change

How do parents communicate their love to children who are frightened of them and who cannot understand parents' soothing messages? How do children bridge the distance between the cultures of two families in open adoptions? How do parents and children ease the beginning stages of sharing their lives, becoming close families after coming from opposite sides of the world and speaking different languages? What steps should be planned to assist families in forging strong cultural identities when they come from culturally and racially dissimilar backgrounds? These good questions are addressed in this chapter on the impact of cultural change. Sensitive parents must assist the developmental progress of children not just through their transition into the family, but through their identity work as they enter the larger community. In open adoptions parents are assisting the identity work of their children as they negotiate their ties to a different family system with different rules.

Open Adoption

Since the early 1980's there has been an increasing trend toward more openness in all kinds of adoption. The spectrum of openness in adoption today is a wide one, ranging from occasional contact by letters sent back and forth through a mediating agency to the establishment of close, extended-family relationships involving regular visits. Most open adoptions, however, fall somewhere in the middle of this spectrum. In domestic infant adoption, more and more expectant parents are being given the option of selecting specific prospective parents from profiles prepared for an agency or private adoption facilitator. Often, these matches are made several weeks or even months before the child is born, and relationships between expectant parents and would-be adopters begin to build over that time and are expected to continue throughout the child's growing up years. Where once children placed out of abusive or neglectful homes were separated completely and permanently from contact with birthrelatives, today, more and more professionals are supporting the value for children of some level of careful, supervised contact with their families of origin. Even in international adoption, once a bastion of permanent secrecy, there is a growing trend toward some level of contact with birthfamilies for children adopted from some countries. Most mental health and adoption professionals conclude that, in the long run, openness in adoption is healthier for all members of the adoption triad—birthparents, adopting parents, and children who were adopted. Openness in adoption is hardly a panacea, however. It brings to adoption its own set of challenges.

Issues Affecting Children

Adoptions permitting children and their birthfamilies information about the other's wellbeing are sensitive. While listening to children and birthparents and other members of birthfamilies, it is abundantly obvious that they never forget each other. They often have strong needs to know information about one another, either through direct contact or an exchange of information, particularly when the adoption occurs not right

after birth, but following a period of time when the child has actually been parented by a member of his birthfamily. Sometimes this means an open adoption is the best arrangement. But given this standard, there are mitigating considerations that can dictate a different course. Parents who are readers of this book are likely to be parenting children with challenges. Some adoptive parents will also have experienced situations which may challenge their attachments.

Children who have had attachments to previous caregivers will need some information or contact with them after placement. They are not able to complete their grieving without this information. However, when children are forming new attachments, sometimes the openness rocks the child's attachment processes. The problems fall into four major categories.

Sometimes the child feels that the current placement is not permanent when exposed to previous caregivers.

Josh, a five-year-old, who had been with his birthparents for the first eight months and then with grandparents for two years, showed anger, sleep problems, and cruelty to other children when visiting with his grandparents. He needed to have a holiday from the visits for a while. He could not sustain the gains that he was making with his parents. Instead, he began to make cruel comments to his parents like, "You cannot make a baby inside of you. You had to steal me. I do not want to live with you." Some of the damage from moves and neglect in his first home showed in his contempt and disregard for others' feelings. A break in the visits with grandparents helped him to stabilize. "I am doing great," Josh said. "I am ready for kindergarten. I am a great son, and I love my parents. I get confused sometimes. Why do I act like that? I get a feeling like I don't need parents, and I am not going to do what they say!" While the visits in this case did resume at a slower pace, a holiday was needed so that Josh had the energy for other developmental demands. On a deep level, his basic security in his family was jeopardized with contact that reactivated issues of neglect and grief.

Sometimes there are safety issues that involve trauma that the child has not shared with anyone.

One sexual predator, who was a birth grandfather, walked into the child's foster-adopt home without knocking and sat down. Though the parents appropriately set boundaries, the child still had doubts that his parents could protect him. He did not disclose sexual abuse for four years after placement. When the therapist helped him feel safe from the grandfather, he disclosed sexual abuse.

Sadly, this is not an isolated case. Some children have erotic, sexualized trauma bonds with former caregivers or relatives. They test by asking to see these people. They miss them, but are terrified of them. I have seen no benefit for children in visiting people with whom they have trauma bonds. Asking to see them is often a form of re-enactment. Should visits take place, inevitably the child blames the adopting parents for not keeping her safe.

Children may have been raised in role-reversing families, in which children meet the needs of adults if they want to get their own needs met. Even after children develop healthier relationships, they are prone to move back into earlier patterns.

One girl, who was four, visited with her birthmother regularly. It was a relative placement prompted by the birthmother's drug and alcohol problems. The girl had nightmares, masturbated constantly, and was oppositional after visits. The little girl cried, saying that her birthmother needed her. "She is lonely. I have to go help her," she said. Her own needs for safety and love were forgotten as she contemplated her birthmother's needs. After a discussion about what children need, she said, "I do not know why I think that I have to take care of her. When I am with her, I feel like I have to do it." Visits were decreased, and the mother began to monitor the discussions between her daughter and her

birthmother. She interrupted comments like, "You will never forget who your real momma is, will you? I will get a job, get into treatment, and come back for you."

When children are expected to take care of adults' emotional needs, emotional damage to children occurs. Visitations should not include a leeching of emotional energy from children.

Children who are not safe in the custody of parents can benefit from continued contact when carefully guided.

One girl, age ten, had been her birthfamily scapegoat. She received little love from her birthmother, and she wondered why. She wrote to her birthmother, asking about this, and also requested some baby pictures. The adoptive mother got her the address, using my office as the return address. The birthmother wrote a loving letter back, affirming the child, but saying that she had been too much under the influence of alcohol to explain why she acted this way. In her letters she included some baby pictures, and promises of a gift and a letter from a birth sibling, which never came. This helped the girl to process some of the information about her relationship with her birthmother. She felt less guilt and shame. She also was able to determine through the letter that her birthmother was intelligent and a good writer. She noted the lack of follow-through on promises. This type of reality-based contact was very healthy for this child. As she said to her mother, "I know that she just can't parent, but I care about her and want to make sure that she is still alive."

In continuing contact, parents can often pick out the loyalty bonds that children have.

For example, in the above scenario, the child did not know how to address her birthmother. Just write, "Dear Mom," her

mother said. The daughter had a hard time when reading the letter aloud to her mother. She read, "Dear mmmmm," slurring the word.

Her mother just laughed, saying, "I know that she is going to say, 'What?' if you write, 'Dear Birthmother.' I do not care. I know that I am your mom." The letters comforted this girl when she missed her "first mom," the term that felt most comfortable for her.

When children are placed away from their siblings, continued contact is necessary. Sometimes families who are compatible spend day trips together. Other times, shorter events work. If a child has disrupted out of one family, planning to have contact with siblings must include these rejection issues.

One foster mother went over-the-edge with her foster son. She screamed at the boy constantly, and placed his belongings in garbage bags for the move. The pre-adoptive mother had asked that she help her son pack. Several days before, she described for the foster mother the damage to self-esteem of moving belongings in garbage bags, so she brought suitcases for the move. The transfer of the boy was accompanied by a ranting chorus of his damage to their family. Rather predictably, the trade moved on to the pre-adoptive mother, after she defended her son. In spite of the intense feelings of the adults, visits with the siblings proceeded, because all children needed the contact. After some trial and error, they found it best to meet at places like roller skating rinks and parks. Meeting in homes seemed to accent the rejection themes for the children.

Openness in adoption, even in challenging situations, can be extremely helpful in assisting children with their grief, giving them information about loved ones, and in helping them with identity formation. Safety and developmental issues must be considered, so that the contact builds, rather than dismantles, a stable sense of family. It has the advantage of giving

children information that is reality-based, rather than wishful. It gives children a framework, so that they are not looking for fantasy birthparents into the future. Instead, they have facts and events that shape a realistic view of all their relatives.

Issues for Adoptive Parents

Parents sometimes note that their initially welcoming feelings about the benefits of open adoption are altered through painful experiences in the adoption process.

One family, in describing their slow start in attachment, said that they were numb by the time that they had successfully adopted. Four times they had endured being selected by expectant parents considering an adoption. After faithfully following the pregnancies and coming to view the birthparents as extended family, the birthparents chose to parent their children rather than follow through with an adoption plan. In the most heart-wrenching situation, they had acquiesced to the birthmother's wish for them to take "their" son home from the hospital even though necessary papers were not yet filed because of a holiday. They returned "her" son after the long weekend. Open adoption seemed ethically correct to them, but emotionally dangerous. It threatened their sense of entitlement. They were anxious about another devastating loss.

Both parents were slow to warm to their daughter, and noted that they were holding back emotionally. Comments from a wise grandparent, who mentioned that their infant daughter seemed sad and that they seemed afraid to love her, helped these parents to examine their attitudes. In retrospect, they say that they missed the joy of the first months. The openness in their adoption scared them. "I hate that I am saying this," the adoptive mother said, "but I feel that I am going to do all the work of raising my daughter for someone else. I did not start out this way. I used to be a proponent for open adoption, but I am not dealing with the emotions well. I am afraid of the birthfamily."

In this situation, the adoptive family had some work to do. They did write a letter in which they described their own pain-filled journey. They did not renegotiate the open adoption agreement, but they let the birthparents know how difficult a time they had been having. They were careful not to blame these birthparents for their own issues of entitlement, but they were honest about their struggles in this area. This resulted in a letter of reassurance from the birthmother, who also spoke to the birthfather, sending along his confidence in them as parents. By not needing to present themselves as completely strong, mature, and flawless, they allowed for a natural process in a relationship. They allowed the birthmother to meet some of their needs.

In another situation, a birthparent in an open adoption went swimming with the adoptive parent, who was a single mother, and her daughter. While it went well, the adoptive mother later sat in my office and wept. "I felt that I was so old. April deserved a young, fit mother. I did not look like any of the other parents in the pool. I looked like her grandmother. April thought that this visit was great! She can hardly wait to do more things with her energetic birthmother. Maybe I am the wrong parent for her!"

In fact, the mother was a great match for her daughter's needs. But she did need to do some honest rearranging of her attitudes. Her poor body image had been a factor long before she adopted. She criticized herself physically, applying it to her adoptive parent status in the same self-deprecating way she applied it to career and other life situations.

When she could think more clearly, she knew that she was not comfortable with trips every week with the birthmother. She needed to be clear about her own limits. The birthmother did not have good boundaries, so the adoptive mother needed to think reasonably about the type of contact that was in April's best interests. Her solution included doing more fun things with April, like the outings that she craved, while maintaining the normal contact in the open adoption agreement.

Language and Country

Parents adopting internationally should learn some basics of normal child development and some language from their child's original culture. They should also get honest feedback about themselves from someone from that culture. Parents who do so avoid major problems like those in the next vignette. When children tell the story of coming into their new country, they all tell me that they were afraid on the airplane or train. The comfort and competence that children feel in their own culture is lost as they enter a new surrounding. Li Fu-tze described the following, after she had English command.

At age four, Li Fu-tze had learned to behave herself around adults. She averted her eyes and tucked her chin when addressed. She was a polite and respectful girl. She was too old to be adopted, she thought, so was surprised when called in by the orphanage director, who told her a confusing tale about a father who was in China to adopt a sister. It took Li Fu-tze a few minutes to realize that the man in the room was the "father" being referred to. Through the translator, he said that he was her new father, and that her mother would be back to get her. She was attempting to understand this, when the translation included the request that she look up at him. She politely refused. The translator began to prompt her in a wheedling tone. She looked at the man, as she was told. He gave her an intense look of longing. She wanted to ask what was wrong with the man. She was quiet, as a good child should be, and she was confused. Was it some kind of a test?

Long after the event had faded from her memory, she was told that she would be adopted. She had always called an orphanage worker Momma. She expected that her new momma would be the worker, or at least Chinese. She had wished hard. When she met her mother, she knew that she was doomed. Her mother had blond hair. In China, only witches had blond hair. She was being tricked! Back at the hotel, no one understood her as she yelled, bit, and fought. Her mother attempted to calm and subdue her. Li Fu-tze

glared at her. She had no problem with full eye contact. Her chin was high. She would not go down without a fight!

Li Fu-tze was renamed Kelly. In therapy, she wondered whether her poor adjustment to her parents had started with this unfortunate beginning. Her mother said, "I bleached my hair to look younger and more appealing to a small child! It had the opposite effect. When I finally got the translator to come to the hotel to find out what she was repeating, it was, 'Don't hurt me! Don't eat me!'"

In transcultural adoption, the meaning of things changes. Children are not able to exert control over their lives through language, which frustrates and confuses them. In the situation above, the parent got off to a poor start with an extremely frightened child. New parents formed an opinion of the child as a hard child who needed heavy control. Actually, she needed reassurance and a tender touch. Once home, her father conveyed much of his information with looks—loving, warning, angry, inviting—and all lost on Kelly. She continued to look down when addressed by her father.

Learning normal child development in a particular culture is important not only for parents in the initial adjustment period, but over the course of years. Transculturally adopted children have to be able to feel at ease with two cultural groups.

One girl adopted from Korea as a small child said, "My new boyfriend is Korean. When I am with his relatives I know how to act. All of the culture camps and language lessons paid off. I am comfortable with my Korean identity, even though I left Korea when I was a baby. My parents also took me back to Korea. Now I am grateful that they made the effort."

In another situation, a woman had her nails manicured and painted a bright red before she left to adopt two children in Tashkent. Her new daughters had never seen red nails before, and

conjectured that she must have gotten them from the blood of children she ate. In their folklore, orphans were eaten by witches. Many children report being warned in the Russian or former Soviet bloc orphanages to close their eyes at night or the witches would come and peck them out. Within two days of placement, one daughter had attempted to run away in an enormous outdoor market. The mother told her husband that it was obvious that the other daughter hated her.

Children being raised without parents are particularly prone to common childhood fears of being eaten by monsters or witches. With just a few props like nails and hair, new parents can embody a child's nightmares.

Sometimes parents find themselves in situations that seem incredible from the point of view of their own culture. Some children are told that the birthparents have finally arrived to get their child. I have heard this explanation a number of times about preparation for children in countries in the former Soviet Union, in which there is no tradition of adoption. One orphanage worker advised parents, "Never tell this child that she was adopted. It will kill her Russian soul." She answered their logical question about language by explaining that because their daughter was largely nonverbal, she would not question why they were talking a different language. Some children have come into the country angry with parents. Working with a translator, children have wondered, "Where were you? Why did you leave me in the orphanage?" It makes for a confusing beginning for parents and children.

Older children usually do not want to be adopted out of their culture. In children's stories, it is usually the adults who are describing North America as the great place to be. Their part tends to be one of hearing the adults' excitement, and being confused and afraid. Children who are old enough to remember their wait for adoption tell me that foremost they yearned for their birthparents to come back for them. After that, they hoped for someone who looked similar to them and who spoke their language. Often they hoped for a caregiver who was a relative, especially if they have been visited by relatives. Leaving the country brings these childhood dreams to an end. In some cases, attitudes that children formed to fit into their culture are not adaptable to this culture.

One mother said that she expected that her daughter would need to be placed into an adult group home in the future. The mother said, "If somehow she could have gotten medical and mental health care in her own country, she could have lived independently. By adding the challenges of language and the differences in attitudes and life skills, it is too far of a stretch for her to succeed outside her country of origin. She was too old for us to bring into the country given the other issues that she had to face. In spite of severe sexual abuse, she often wishes that she could have stayed in the country in which she was born. But she does not speak the language now. She has no friends here, and does not have current prospects to make any. After eight years, she cannot accept American societal rules. She argues with them, and refers to the Russian way in the institutions as the correct way. She does not believe that she has to make a living for herself.

"Our son, adopted to America at the same age, had a family background, and thus brought with him fewer emotional issues. He has adapted. At the time of adoption, he understood the concept of family, and he had had less abuse. He had enough energy left to make the adjustments to a new culture. He is still learning though, and seems a couple of years behind boys his own age."

When children are learning a language, the language represents not just a code, but a conceptual map with cultural meaning. As the language is learned, it forms a conceptual map for sorting incoming information. That map is not erased as children learn the concepts and language of a new culture. Instead, the second language becomes a map on top of a map. These children never really perceive an absolute reality being spoken. Instead, their perceptions alter how they hear and interpret what is said to them. Children adopted internationally will have some of the shaping from the first language map in their concepts. It is important for parents to understand this as a quality not only of language development, but conceptual development.

Many children are detailed in wanting to know why their country did not want them. Frequent comments from children adopted from Eastern Europe are, "Do the people in that country know what is happening in the

orphanages? Why do the people treat children so badly in the orphanages? Don't they care about us? They treated us like garbage!" It helps children to hear that most people do not know about the orphanage abuses. Or that often parents are so poor that the only way for them to feed their children is "abandonment," which is the only form of placement available to parents. Some older children appreciate seeing the report from the Human Rights Watch on Russian orphanages, which validates their beliefs that a great injustice was done to them (Human Rights Watch, 1998).

The attitudes toward institutionalizing children with disabilities or allowing the State to raise a child can be discussed in terms of the culture. In Eastern Europe, the attitude that the State can do it as well as the family still prevails. The attitude towards disability issues in other countries can be discussed, and how that affected the child. Discussing the economic realities of countries, as well as the tradition of adoption in the countries, are both topics that give facts and bring resolution to children. Most children want to know why their country did not want to keep them. These are loss issues that need to be processed like any other grief. Children expend emotional energy and require longer learning spans when moved from culture to culture. Confusion and loss are normal parts of the experience. When parents foster children's positive ties to both cultures, it is a way to mitigate these losses. It also helps their children to forge strong identities.

Religion

Some children shift religion easily, taking it as part of adjustment to their family and culture. Other young children already have deep spiritual beliefs, and they struggle with their changing religious identity. Even when children are not moving between countries, there is a movement between subcultures when moving between devoutly observant and casually religious families.

Questions that children express include, "Was my adoption meant to be?" "How could God care about me after what I have been through?" "Is God mad at me?" "Would I worship the same God if I were in another country?" "Are my birthparents going to heaven?" "Is it my fault if they do not?" "Should I be two religions?"

John, a boy born in Colombia, was adopted by a Jewish family. He began to resist going to his Hebrew classes and asked to go to Catholic Youth activities. John's older brother and mother talked at length, wondering whether John was meant to follow a Catholic religious faith because of his birth culture. In a therapy session, the mother asked if I could explore the issue with John. John matter-of-factly told me that the three most fun kids in third grade were Catholic. He wanted to be a Catholic because they played baseball at CYC. He would be just as happy if the group was named Jewish Youth, as long as baseball was part of the religious program!

It does help to ask for the obvious in these matters! Nevertheless, children may want to explore how their identities would be different if they followed their cultural faith.

Very painful occurrences can happen in moving between families.

One girl was sexually predatory and felt a deep disgust for herself. While in her foster family, she gained a sense of God treating and forgiving her. This was something precious that she referred to regularly. It was her strength when she felt lonely, angry, and sexually predatory. When the foster family decided not to adopt her, she moved into a treatment home, which was also quite religious, although it was jarring, since she had two mothers in that family. Her previous denomination had precluded this. However, she did adapt, and went from being Catholic to Protestant. It was a change, but after some confusion and distress, she again found herself stable spiritually.

When she was placed for adoption, she was placed in an atheist family. It had been difficult to find a family, so her beliefs could not be honored. In order to please the family, she was quiet about her beliefs. In the first therapy session, her new parents made fun of religion of all types as well as of the former caregivers. This girl lost one of the mainstays of her life. She was put in the position of gaining a family at the expense of loving and feeling loved by God.

Because of the necessary separation between religious belief and government, government placement professionals tend to avoid talking to children about their spirituality. The tendency to stay away from religious topics makes it difficult to advocate for children who have strong beliefs. It also makes it difficult to help children whose trauma has caused them deep spiritual questions. For children who believe in a loving God, loss of faith in a loving God is part of the classic damage from trauma. They describe being confused between life and God. Parents should be aware that children with broken attachments have difficulty believing that God could find them lovable and acceptable.

One teen, who had developed multiple personalities from severe abuse, could not memorize a Bible verse at her Christian school. The verse content was that God would not test a person beyond what they were able to bear. She described her crisis of faith, "Deborah, you know that it was more than I could bear. I did not bear it and broke under the strain! I am going to flunk Bible. I cannot write the verses."

As we talked, we discussed that suffering was not necessarily "a test," but what happens in this life. For example, people in America who suffered from high rates of tuberculosis did not finally "pass the test," or learn the lesson, thus giving us a lower tuberculosis rate today. Looking at the verses, it was clear that the teacher had interpreted the verses in an optimistic way that led students to believe that they had a magic ticket for safety in this life. Our discussion led to this young woman's re-examination of texts, and her restored belief. (She did not flunk Bible.) While it certainly was not my choice to make her believe or doubt, it does help to sort through beliefs affected by trauma, or others' denial.

Often children feel outside of normal religious beliefs, since their life experience requires deeper answers to questions of faith, suffering, and trust. Further discussion of this topic is contained in Judith Hermann's book *Trauma and Recovery*, on the Resource List.

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Parents without belief in God or an afterlife sometimes find themselves wanting to preserve their child's beliefs. They ask, "How do I assess or discuss the beliefs?" In talking with their children, a few concepts are particularly important. Children often feel that they have a relationship with God. Parents can ask how children talk with God. What kind of a feeling does God give them? When do they talk with God or feel that God is close to them? Children talk about God as they might talk to parents about a close friend whom the parents have never met. Parents can go on to ask what helps sustain that relationship. Does going to a religious service keep the relationship growing? What about speaking to an adult with strong faith? Has the child been reading through spiritually instructive books with an adult? Night prayers, or morning prayers, and readings from children's versions of scriptures are woven into the fabric of daily life in families of faith. Parents whose children have a faith can help to build these experiences into the life of their child, continuing the development of their spirituality. Parents without religious beliefs can talk with adults with religious beliefs, in order to identify spiritual developmental processes that can be nurtured. Parents can talk through this type of information with clergy, who tend to be approachable and helpful.

Race

The African-American community continues its tradition of fostering and adopting at a disproportionately high rate. The Hispanic communities and Pacific Islanders have used extended family placements to care for children within their communities until relatively recently. In spite of these efforts there are African-American, Hispanic, Pacific Islander, and multiracial children who are waiting for placements in the U.S., and who need parents more than they need to be race-matched. The result has been a widely debated, but upward trend towards transracial adoption in the U.S. A large percentage—in fact, the majority—of international adoptions have always been, and continue to be, transracial.

Transracial adoptions have been successful, as studies have shown. The children adjust well. Yet people who grew up in transracial adoption give valuable information about what went well, and what did not go

well. Adults raised transracially offer several suggestions for parents adopting transracially:

- They want to be raised in a community that has others of their same race.
- They want to feel comfortable with traditions, attitudes, and people of their own race.
- They experienced love and acceptance, but were sometimes hurt by "color-blind" attitudes of their parents.
- People of the same race can expose and transmit attitudes and traditions from within a family context.
- Instead of talking about racial issues, children see them modeled. When parents cannot model, they have to find other ways to help their children to feel competent and esteemed as a minority person in the culture.

One African-American family adopted a baby whose birth parents were also African-American. After the baby was born, they noted that the baby was especially light-skinned. Since the birthmother was light, and often newborns are light, their questions about parentage were met with some reassurance by their agency. By a year, the family was looking for connections to the Hispanic community, since it was clear that the baby's father had been an Hispanic man. As the mother told me, "My daughter will be viewed as an Hispanic or mixed race person in our society. I know little about the Hispanic community. My husband is a pastor and much of our life is centered in the African-American church. We have started monthly potlucks in our home in order to bridge to other Hispanic and African-American families."

There is a comfortable anonymity to blending into one's surroundings. Children and adults feel a constant, low level of stress by being the only person of a particular race in their school, on their street, or in the grocery store. Even if they are "accepted," the word itself points out the difference factor. Someone else has the choice of accepting or not accepting. In their

making the choice, often the naturalness of an everyday interaction is changed. People in the grocery store often feel the need to stress their acceptance through extra attention, when the family just wants to pick up a gallon of milk.

Parents often select homes and social circles that seem personally comfortable, sometimes at the expense of their transracially adopted child's comfort. Parents who decide that it does not matter if their child will be the only one of their race in the community should spend days in a part of a city in which the parents are racially different. They will find that race does matter.

Parents who are part of the Caucasian majority in North America cease being a Caucasian family when they foster or adopt a minority child. Children feel most comfortable in a multiethnic surrounding because their family is multiethnic.

Parents need to have advice from minority adults in order to perceive the implications of certain experiences on their children. Parents' blind spots make identity formation harder.

One African-American woman who had been raised by white parents mentioned that in her rural, nearly all-Caucasian college, leaving young men at parties referred to her as "exotic." She translated that term, accurately, into a sexualized one. Her reasons for selecting her college reflected the standards of her rural, Caucasian parents, who gave her no guidance around the racial prejudice she could experience when meeting certain Caucasian, male students. Her parents had never been exposed to the sexual implications for young, African-American women. They had no in-depth relationships with other African-American women in order to learn how to prepare their daughter. In their rural, white community there were no other African-American women.

Having difficulties in finding one's identity is common both to ethnic minorities in North America and adoptive families. Both groups have identities attributed to them by the majority culture that can be distorting and confusing. Finding one's own identity is a more difficult process when teens or young adults are members of both groups. Parents enhance ways

to help young people find who they are, as they define themselves, by exposure to information, discussion, and experience with members of the same race or ethnicity.

Parents do best to live, worship, and educate their children in communities that are as diverse as their families. Even if the parents feel stretched, children can develop identity more naturally. So many identity clues are modeled instead of spoken that children and teens need close contact with other minority adults. Some children who come into the country through international adoption find themselves perceived in a way that does not reflect their identity.

One girl complained, "My teacher keeps calling me African-American. I am an American from Colombia. I have told her, but she wants to argue with me, saying that my ancestors were from Africa. She is missing the point. I am from South America. People think differently about race there. I know, since we have been back to Colombia several times. Why does she suggest report topics like civil rights, when she never asks the other kids to do them?"

Other children from Brazil, Marshall Islands, or India have a complicated sorting task, finding that they are perceived in a manner different from their self-perception. Parents and children often have to work on ways to word corrections, and times to ignore or speak up. The tempting notion for white parents is to say that it does not matter. But it does matter in terms of being authentic in one's identity. Children have already lost some information about themselves, just through the process of adoption. It becomes important for them and for their parents to retain accurate information that allows the full potential of growth in identity.

For more guidance on this topic, parents may wish to read Gail Steinberg and Beth Hall's *Inside Transracial Adoption* (Perspectives Press, 2000).