

**“THE CONCEPT OF A FOREVER
FAMILY IS LIKE A MANUFACTURED
HALLMARK IDEA”**

**ADOPTION DISCONTINUITY
NARRATIVES OF
INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTEES**

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...how it is that people frame their stories in relation to the dominant cultural storylines which form the context of their lives, especially when those storylines don't seem to fit?

(Andrews, M., 2004, p.1)

Discontinuity

(Rolock & White, 2016)

The range of adoption relationships where the adoptee is not living with their adoptive parents

Disruption

Adoption ends
before
finalization

Displacement

Adoptee is placed
out of the home
-
adoptive parents
still have parental
rights

Dissolution

Adoption ends after
finalization

BACKGROUND

FOCUS ON CHILDREN &
ADOPTIVE PARENTS

FOCUS ON CHILDREN
ADOPTED FROM
STATE/PUBLIC CARE

- Most research on adoption discontinuity focus on children and adoptive parents
 - Festinger (1986, 2002), Berry & Barth (1990), Barth et al, (1988), Hannah et al (2017), Kim (2017)
- Most research on adoption discontinuity focus on children from state/public care
 - Barth & Berry (1988), Barth et al, (2001), Rolock (2015), White (2015)

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

NARRATIVE

What is said, what is left out
How story is told

PHENOMENOLOGY

The meanings that people
make of their experiences

METHOD

- Created a website and flyer
- Posted links to the website on social media
- Screened in potential participants
- Video or phone interviews with participants
- Qualitative interviews
- Transcribed interviews
- Thematic analysis, narrative analysis

Adoption Disruption/Displacement Experiences of Intercountry Adoptees



Are you an intercountry/international adoptee 18+ years or older?

- Did you spend time (30 days or more) in foster care, group home, residential treatment, wilderness treatment camp, treatment ranch, or long-term hospitalization program before you turned 18 years old?
- Or did your adoptive parents kick you out of the house, leading you to couch-surf, stay in shelters or live without secure housing?
- Were you “re-homed” or placed in a formal or informal adoptive home with someone other than the parents to whom you were originally adopted?

My name is JaeRan Kim, and I am an assistant professor at the University of Washington Tacoma. I am conducting a research study on intercountry adoptees who, after their adoption by U.S. parents, experienced an adoption disruption, dissolution or displacement. Participation in the study would include completing a survey and an interview.

If you would like more information about this study, or would like to participate, please contact me at kimjr@uw.edu for more information. This study has been approved by the University of Washington Institutional Review Board. Thank you for your consideration.



JaeRan Kim

Cautious, careful people, always casting about to preserve their reputation and social standing, never can bring about a reform. Those who are really in earnest must be willing to be anything or nothing in the world's estimation, and publicly and privately, in season and out, avow their sympathy with despised and persecuted ideas and their advocates, and bear the consequences. — Susan B. Anthony

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

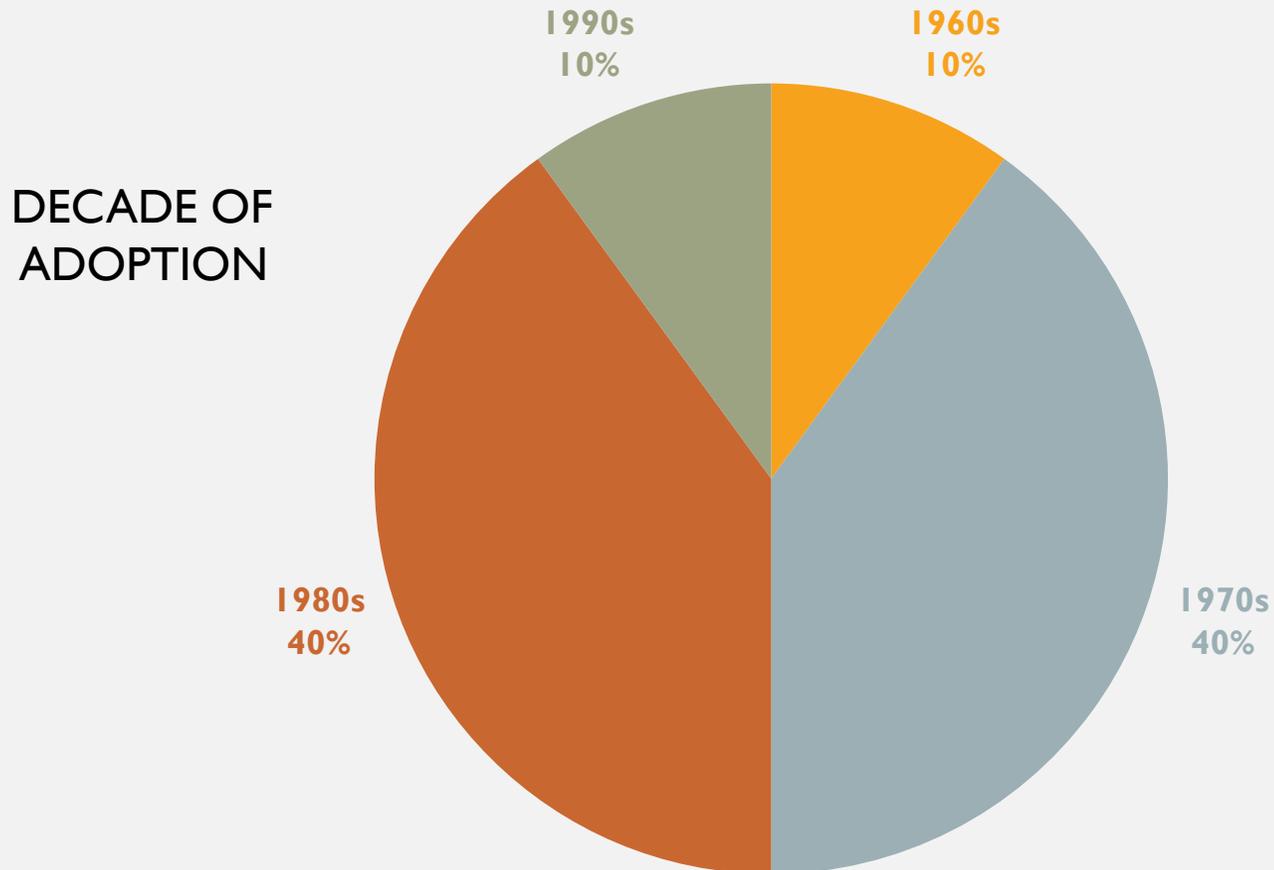
1. Tell me the story of how you came to be adopted

2. Tell me the story of how you came to be displaced from your adoptive family

3. How have your displacement experiences affected your life?

4. What would you like people to understand about intercountry adoption?

PARTICIPANTS (N=20)



GENDER: 18 female, 2 male

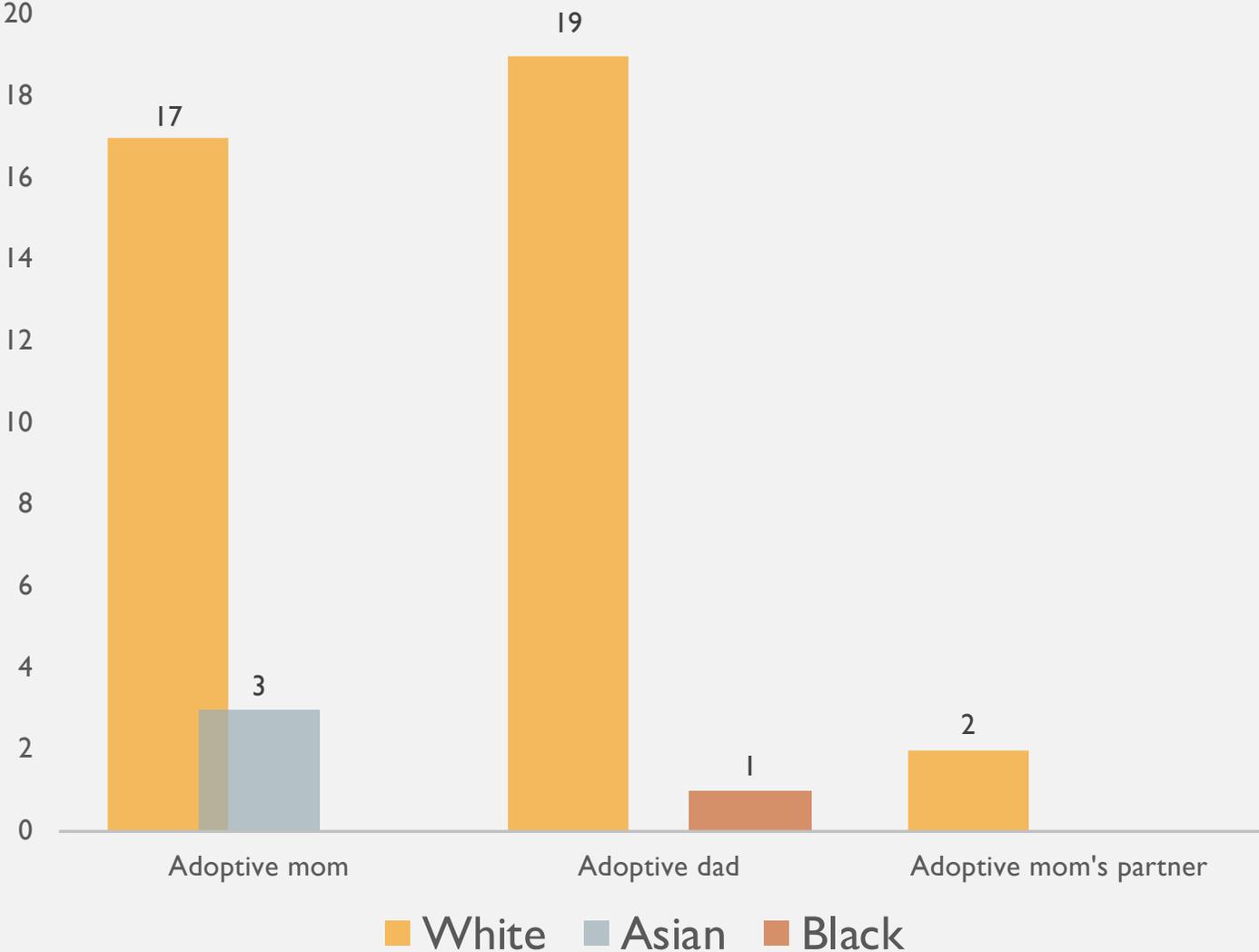
Identify as LGBTQIA = 5

AGE RANGE: 28-57 years

AGE @ ADOPTION: 4 mon-8 yrs

- infants (<1 yr) [6]
- 1-2 years [6]
- 3-4 years [4]
- 5+ years [4]

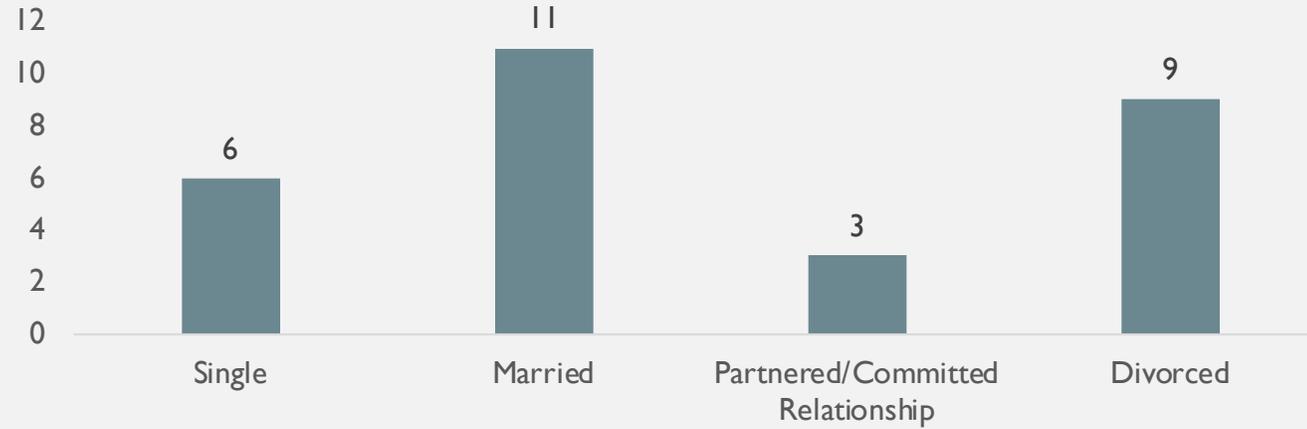
Participant's Adoptive Parents



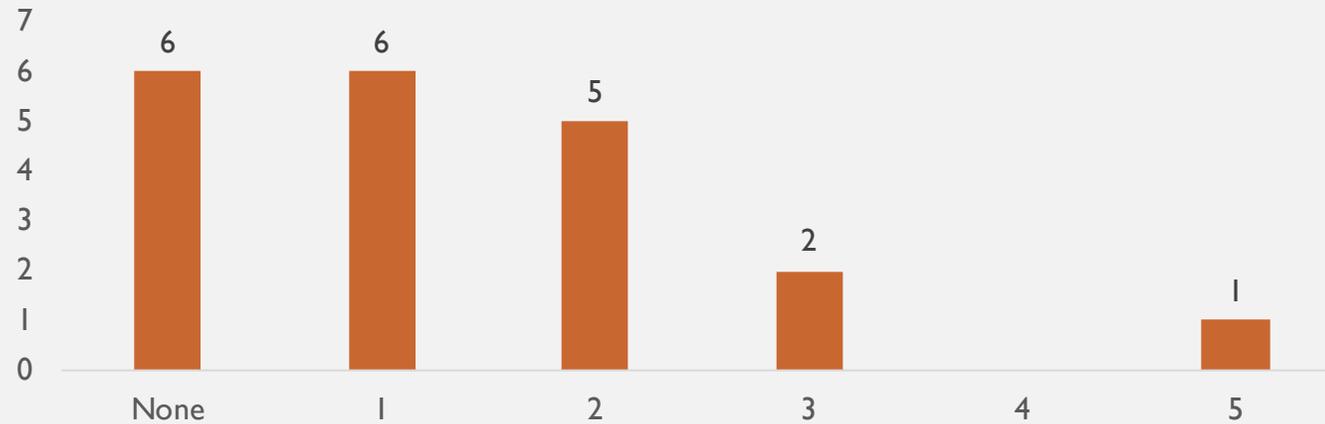
Participant country of origin

- 12 – South Korea
- 4 – Other Asian countries
- 2 – Latin America
- 2 – Other

Current Marital Status



Children



4 are stepparents, total of 6 stepchildren

TYPES OF
DISPLACEMENT
CATEGORIES

Foster home

Group home

Hospital in-patient psychiatric

Residential treatment facility

Camp

Juvenile detention

Homeless shelter

Couch-surfing

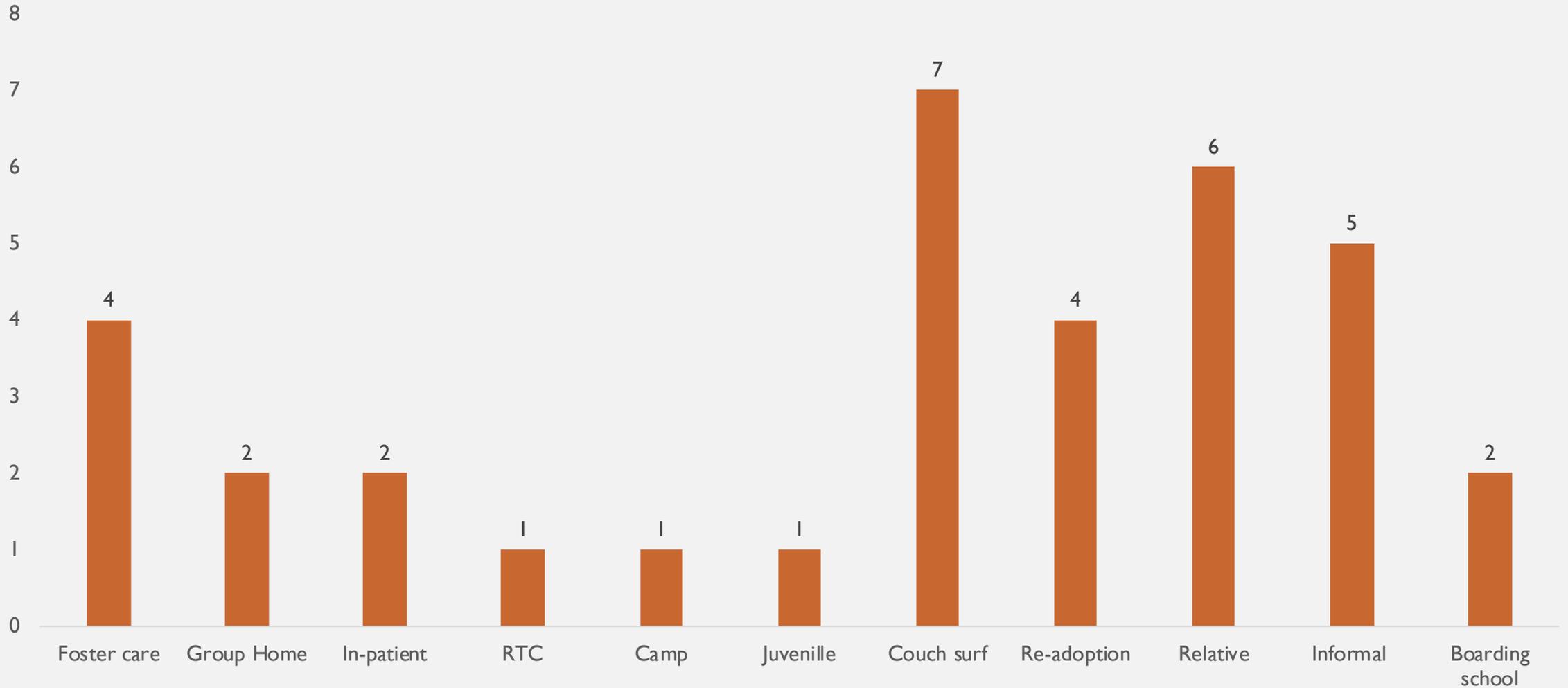
Another adoptive family (formal re-adoption)

Informal placement with relative

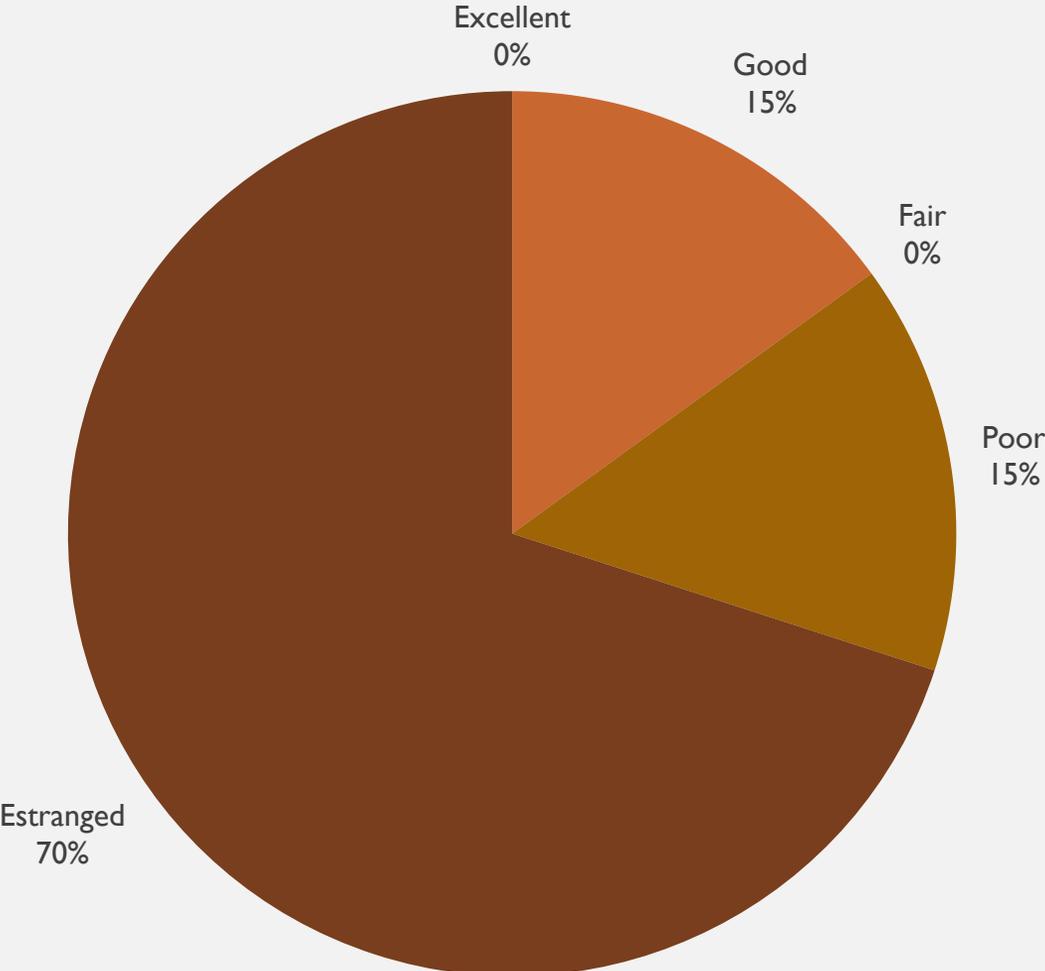
Informal placement with non-relative

Boarding school

NUMBER OF ADOPTEES THAT EXPERIENCED EACH TYPE OF DISPLACEMENT



CURRENT RELATIONSHIP WITH ADOPTIVE PARENTS



ADOPTION STORY

I. How participants tell their story

Story of relinquishment in birth country

Story of why adoptive parents adopted them

Story of learning about being adopted

II. Mislead and Misinformed

What they were told in conflict to what they remember or learned later during a search

So actually, I have two stories: the story that I grew up with and then when I met my biological mom, her side of the stories. ...And then when I would try to ask about my adoption, I really wouldn't get an answer or the answer would be, "Well, obviously, your mother didn't want you and your family didn't want you, so that's all you need to know."

Faith

DISPLACEMENT STORY

WHAT LED TO DISPLACEMENT

Adoptive parent divorce

Adoptive parent abandonment

Adoptee behavior

Abuse in the home

Prompted running away

Child protection intervention

I was with them probably around up till the age of four...I know that I had a lot of behavioral issues; I know that, I remember that.

[The second adoptive father] said that I never bonded with the [first adoptive family]. When they called the foster care agency the [first adoptive family] had said that I had just spent the last three days crying non-stop and they desperately needed a break and is there anybody that could take me?

Patty

I didn't feel so bad, for one, I was at least gonna be able to sleep and I wasn't gonna be under constant threat all the time. The relation I had with them actually was a lot more constructive and conducive than the one I had with my own family.

Dan

But yeah, I can remember the day I was kicked out. I can remember the weather. I remember she threw everything out on the back yard. She told me, "No, you are no longer a guest in my home."

Kim

IMPACT OF DISPLACEMENT ON LIFE

Feeling unloved/unwanted

Stability

Attachments/Relationships

Surviving – Being Resilient

Identity

I think it caused me to not feel settled in my life. Even if I live someplace, I don't call it my home because I don't know where my home is. It's the house I live at. It's where I'm staying – because I always feel like that could go away in an instant.

...I have to really be paying attention to what's going on in my surroundings... because it could all just change in an instant very quickly and I have to protect myself in the best way I possibly can.

Jennifer

When I was younger, in my late teens, and maybe even throughout the majority of my 20s I was pretty naïve and quite resentful of the experience that I had growing up. It wasn't until I was in my late 20s and afterward I realized I have to let that go if I'm gonna mature and grow up and be successful. I just made peace with it.

Isabelle

Maybe I would've felt it anyway but the constant sense of not belonging and still not really knowing – I struggle with it today.

Cindy

INTERSECTIONALITY

I would look in the mirror and I wouldn't see an Asian face, I still don't, even though that's what people see when they see me. I didn't see white face but I thought maybe it was close enough.... looking at the family photos and being absolutely horrified to discover that I look absolutely like nobody and I stuck out like a sore thumb everywhere I went.

...The [ethnic community] out here in [state] they call me Twinkie, the white community calls me [Asian], the black community calls me white. No one culture wants to claim me. So, I'm lost, I'm very lost.

Patty

WHAT I WANT OTHERS TO KNOW

More preparation for adoptive parents about an adoptee's trauma

People don't believe adoptive parents can be abusive

The system does not protect children

Children are not blank slates

The master narrative about adoption is oppressive

I think they need to truly understand that the system is not set up for the children. The system, it seems to be set up for families who want children. Everything is set from an adult's point of view.

...Adoption isn't about guaranteeing a family a child. Adoption should be about guaranteeing the child a family.

Mary

Some people are a lot more aware of the issues and are more prepared for the complex challenges that come with that sort of responsibility. I think that it also allows for people very minimally prepared. I don't think that I even received the worst of the abuse that I've heard of...

Yeah. I mean, if anything, I would like it to be a lot harder for intercountry adoption to happen. I think it should be harder. [My adoptive mother] also had foster children, so we had social workers coming in and out of the home. Just, their level of assessment was astonishingly bad.

Hannah

DISCUSSION

...how it is that people frame their stories in relation to the dominant cultural storylines which form the context of their lives, especially when those storylines don't seem to fit?

(Andrews, 2004)

- My positionality was important to the participants – provided benefits and challenges
- Difficulty with the act of telling their adoption and displacement narratives
- Importance of thinking intersectionally – race/disability/gender
- Limitations

The concept of a forever family is like a manufactured Hallmark idea. What defines family? Is it paper? Is it experiences? What's a forever family? Who came up with that concept?

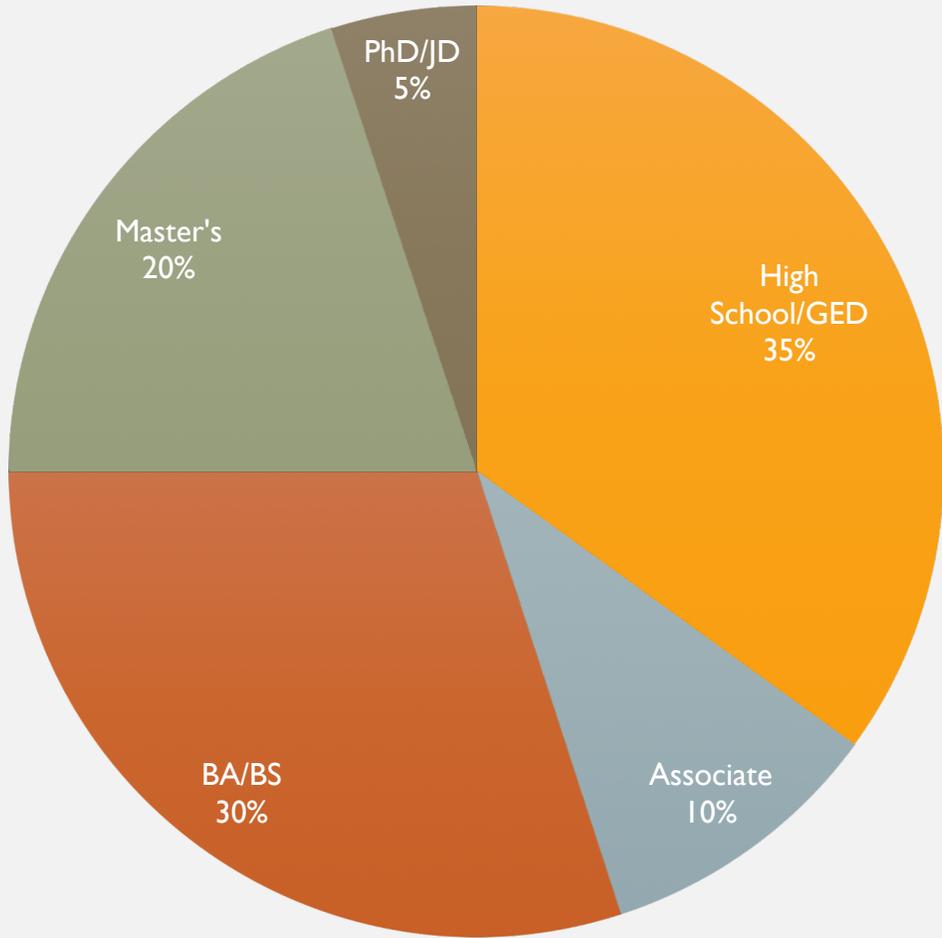
...It's just the idea that sounds like they're rescuing someone. Or that someone has an empty space in their lives that they're hoping to fill with adoption. I find that term very problematic. It's very condescending.

Laura

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EDUCATION



INCOME

