Spring 5-18-2024

The Archeology of Adoption: Tracing the Journey from Birth Through Adoption Using Pre-Adoptive Artifacts

Ellen Reeve
eweihenm@lesley.edu

The Archeology of Adoption: Tracing the Journey from Birth Through Adoption Using Pre-Adoptive Artifacts

A Dissertation Presented

by

Ellen Reeve

Submitted to the Graduate School of Education

Lesley University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2024

Ph.D. Educational Studies

Individually Designed Specialization

Lesley University

The Archeology of Adoption: Tracing the Journey from Birth Through Adoption Using Pre-Adoptive Artifacts

A Dissertation Presented

by

Ellen Reeve

Submitted to the Graduate School of Education

Lesley University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2024

Ph.D. Educational Studies

Individually Designed Specialization

Lesley University

The Archeology of Adoption: Tracing the Journey from Birth Through Adoption Using Pre-Adoptive Artifacts

Ellen Reeve

Graduate School of Education
Lesley University

Ph.D. Educational Studies
Individually Designed Specialization

Approvals

In the judgment of the following signatories, this Dissertation meets the academic standards that have been established for the Doctor of Philosophy degree.

Dr. Jo Ann Gammel _____ _____
Doctoral Committee Chair Date

Dr. Barbara Govendo _____ _____
Doctoral Committee Member Date

Dr. Jen Dolan _____ _____
Doctoral Committee Member Date

Dr. Val Shinas _____ _____
Associate Provost of Ph.D. in Educational Studies Date

Dr. Stephanie Spadorcia _____ _____
Vice Provost of Education Date

Dedication

For Emma, the animal whisperer and positive force of reason, and to Arjun the warrior, brave enough to drive his chariot to the edge of battle.

Acknowledgements

Throughout my doctoral journey, I was the recipient of an abundance of tenderness, love, and care. The nine participants in my study reached deeply to unearth their birth treasures containing complex and mysterious stories. Sharing such evocative and fragile artifacts with me required considerable trust and courage. I attend to this dissertation with complete devotion to their contributions.

I sincerely thank my senior advisor, Dr. Jo Ann Gammel. I never left an advisor session without an encouraging follow-up email containing resources on particular theories, management tools, and methodology. She always made time to offer guidance and remained steadfastly committed to the process. I also express thanks to my esteemed committee members, Dr. Jen Dolan, who oversees the Rudd Adoption Research Center at the University of Massachusetts and Dr. Barbara Govendo, who shares a personal connection as an adoptee.

Further gratitude extends to my beloved deviant outliers. This sassy Lesley University cohort allowed me to vent, gloat, laugh, and prematurely mark *doctor* on insignificant on-line forms. Every doctoral student needs a group like this.

Entering a doctoral program after age sixty required extra support – knees ache from inactivity, eyes failed with all the fine print, and all-night study sessions ended at 9pm. I am grateful for all those who led enduring cheers of encouragement: Annamarie, Cheryl, Cindy, Enid, Gail, Gretchen, Jack, Joe, Karen, Kim, Leigh, Lev, Linda, Nancy, Oliver, Sarah, Selma, Sue, Wendy, and Yazmin. In their own way, they all suggested this is not the time for me to whisper.

And finally, I thank my parents, Jackie and Sam Reeve. As wise as they were in life, they continue to guide me from the other side.

Abstract

Adults adopted in childhood often face a heightened susceptibility to psychological and behavioral challenges compared with their non-adopted peers. Scholars examining this phenomenon associate various factors, including an adoptee's sense of self as an individual within a complex adoption background. This qualitative study utilized a material engagement theory to explore birth through adoptive narratives among adults adopted in closed settings during childhood. Through participatory research, participants examined a range of artifacts related to maternal relinquishment, encompassing foster and adoption records, original birth certificates, letters, photographs, birthmarks, clothing, hair, scars, and DNA test results. The study focused on understanding these artifacts' societal and cultural influence in shaping adoptive identity. Data analysis contextualized the social, economic, cultural, and historic elements surrounding maternal relinquishment. Through their engagement with artifacts, participants gained crucial insights into their identities, uncovering adoption-related secrets while clarifying the complexities of their birth through adoption narratives. Findings accentuated the role of birth and adoption-related artifacts in facilitating an exploration of beliefs, values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions regarding adoption while providing a framework for understanding how these factors contribute to one's sense of self, relationships, family, and culture. This object-oriented approach to investigating adoptive identity offers valuable insights for future research in adoption studies.

Key Words: adoption, artifacts, identity

List of Tables

List of Figures

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction

All journeys have secret destinations of which the traveler is unaware. Martin Buber

Context and Background

Adoption solves social problems, allowing women to escape the stigma of unwanted pregnancies. Children find good homes, and parents find solutions to infertility (Carp, 2019; Palacios, J., & Brodzinsky, D., 2010). As an adopted person, I wondered what happened to other adopted children once they reached adulthood. In closed adoptions, adoptees have no connection with their birth families. Such a loss hides birth information, medical background, and genealogical insight (Lo et al., 2023). Additionally, adoptees in closed adoptions, such as the type of adoption I experienced, lack access to the cultural, economic, social, and political realities leading to the relinquishment. Often, misguided information fails to show the significance of obstacles birth mothers endured who may have lacked medical, financial, counseling, spousal, family, or housing support (Lewis & Brady, 2018; Madden et al., 2020).

My study included adoptees from closed adoptions. They described the consequences of losses permeating their identity. The most contentious loss discussed among participants surrounded secrets – facts known but not shared. The power and danger of secrets lie in their fragility. The secret event of maternal relinquishment leaves no material witnesses attesting to the circumstances surrounding the loss. Relinquishment involves a myriad of secrets shielding adoptees from intimate concepts such as poverty, abuse, neglect, abandonment, rape, trafficking, incest, age, and ethnicity (Glaser, 2021; Marr et al., 2020). The cloak of secrecy hanging over an adoptee's identity covers the fear-based knowledge that things went wrong before they were made right. Adoption was designed to correct it all. No one needed to know all the details.

The 2022 U.S. Census Bureau data reported 1.3 million adopted children under age 18. Roughly 12% of those children were foreign-born adoptees (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). An emerging trend, beginning in the 1980s, recognized a movement towards openness in adoption as a standard practice, encouraging some form of contact between birth and adoptive families (Carp, 2002; Grotevant, 2000). Today, most U.S. domestic adoptions engage in some degree of openness (Grotevant, 2020; Rizzo & Hosek, 2020). However, according to historian Carp (2019), the pace of adoption reform, which opens adoption records unconditionally, is slowed by the social systems affecting adoption policies. Jones (2013) reflected on the shift from secrecy to openness in adoption as a "state of enduring ambiguity regarding the nature of post-adoption relationships" (p. 85). To date, 36 states in the U.S. restrict an adoptee's right to obtain copies of their pre-adoption original birth certificate (Adoptee rights law.com). International adoptions offer few traces of birth families. Adoption agents managing the logistics of adoptions originating outside the U.S. encounter language barriers, false or missing records, and cultural differences in comprehending the permanence of adoption (Grotevant, 2020). According to Selman (2023), the high demands for reform in international adoptions coincide with a sharp 86% decline in adoptions from 2004-2019. As an adoptive parent to a son born outside the United States, I understand the consequences and complexity of international adoption.

While numerous obstacles impede progress towards open adoptions, adoptees, adoptive parents, and birth parents recognize the benefits of openness in communication and contact with birth families (Grotevant, 2020). In recent years, some birth mothers who initially participated in closed adoptions hope for a connection once the child enters adulthood (Rizzo & Hosek, 2020). Felnhofer et al. (2023) suggest adoptive parents may reduce stress in their parenting roles by adding birth knowledge that supports their child's developing adoptive identity. Accompanying

the open adoption theme, adoptees advocate the important supporting role “adoptive parents can play in an adoptee’s quest for knowledge about and contact with birth relatives” (Grotevant, 2020, p. 271).

In the early 2000s, adoptees started spitting into DNA test tubes to learn more about their genetic background. As of February 2024, Ancestry.com claimed over 22 million DNA samples contributing to their genetic database (DNAWeekly.com, 2024). Often without guidance from adoption counselors, adoptees can find genetic clues that, with a bit of detective work, result in discovering some birth relatives (Kay & Taverner, 2022). Through direct-to-consumer genetic testing, closed adoptions become open. Birth mothers may have kept their relinquished child a secret from the birth father, their parents, future partners, and their children. According to researchers, adoptees are finding birth families in record numbers (Lee et al., 2020; Williams, 2021).

As an adopted person, I turned to Ancestry.com to uncover information about my birth mother and birth father. While my discoveries were enlightening, they raised critical questions about the intricate interplay of adoption within the social constructs of family and kinship. I wondered from which family did I really belong. The most contentious reveal from my genetic discoveries came from my work constructing both biological and adoptive family trees. Secrets hung from the branches of both biological and adoptive family trees, leaving me alternating between wonder and shame as I unearthed long-guarded truths about my birth. However, having unraveled these mysteries, I now possessed ownership of these secrets. Latchford’s book, *Steeped in Blood* (2019) warns against a cultural obsession with biological family imagery. She explains, “DNA betrays the fact that a shift in identities is not causally related to their DNA at all

but is due precisely to the *knowledge* of their DNA (p. 309). For me, the absence of information regarding my birth carried more weight than the revelations themselves.

Adoptees in this study all initiated searches years prior to our sessions together. They often worked alone to liberate and emancipate their closed birth through adoption stories. Broadening the adoptive experience required all participants to ignore the fractured social, economic, political, legal, and health systems keeping adoption practices and policies in place. Adoptees often begin their search by tracing their history back to the moment of their adoption. In closed adoptions, history before adoption is partially buried, leaving adoptees standing as the sole, silent witness to the event of birth.

Luckily, artifacts survived. Adoptees participating in this study unearthed secrets using pre-adoptive artifacts to build a stronger counter-story to their adoption narrative. As an active participant in the study, I joined adoptees in their engagement with artifacts to gain access to thoughts and feelings surrounding adoption. We took ownership of our adoptive plot, characters, and setting. We learned how to excavate like archeologists, cataloging data while analyzing the culture in which we found our birth items. We detected small fissures in our background and assessed what that meant for our future selves. Authentic openness in adoption requires a critical view of all the players. Accordingly, we questioned the makers and keepers of birth certificates, orphan records, and adoption advertisements. We noticed baby photos showing a lack of engagement, eyes averted, and wondered who took the photo. We studied the dust that settled on our earliest birth documents and examined the culture of adoption that purposefully omits unmarried fathers from birth certificates. We wondered who held us in foster care or orphanages. We took limited birth-related information written by a social worker on a 3X5 index card and

imagined unfolding a small crease in the corner to reveal one more fact that might ease an adoptee from the longing and loss that is adoption.

I entered this qualitative research study as an adoptee and adoptive parent, offering an insider view of what it means to be an adopted person. The purpose of this study focused on adults adopted in childhood from closed adoption settings where much of the information surrounding one's birth is lacking. In this setting, adoption suspends a person from origin identities situated at birth and transfers this identity to a new time and space. I conducted an in-depth inquiry with adopted adults ages 25 and older to explore their understanding of adoptive identity using pre-adoptive artifacts carried from birth through adoption. Additionally, I examined how an adoptee's understanding of identity using artifacts may change over time. My research questions aimed to determine how pre-adoptive artifacts such as birth-related pictures, documents, DNA results, clothing, toys, jewelry, or cultural items may help describe, link, and process the historical gaps notably felt among adoptees in closed adoptions. Throughout the study, I remained a researcher and participant in a participatory-action guided study with adoptees interested in excavating concrete pieces of their past, exploring the essential details surrounding their birth.

All too often, the personal and historical artifacts associated with adoptees have been muted, sealed, and protected. In her book *Why Be Happy When You Can Be Normal,* Winterson (2012) wrote about an aura of secrecy surrounding an adoptee's past and its effect on identity. She explains,

> Adoption drops you into the story after it has started. It's like reading a book with the first few pages missing. It's like arriving after curtain up. The feeling that something is

> missing never ever leaves you – and it can't, and it shouldn't, because something *is* missing (p. 5).

While participants assessed their adoptive history, they discovered missing details and misinformation surrounding their story. Baden (2016) coined this common theme among adoption practices as a *microfiction*, "the mistruths and stories created about adoption that deny or misrepresent real, lived adoption experiences" (p. 6). An artifact like a photograph can adjust meaning at each viewing. Questions add a broader perspective of time, setting, character and plot. In our sessions together, we asked, "Who took the picture? From what angle? From what time of day or year? What is seen (a frown)? What is missing (shoes)?" Each setting took these photos, often kept deep in drawers, and established a new narrative. This fluid, evolving understanding of a birth-related artifact aided an adoptee's sense of identity. Sociologist Zuev (2022) believes this personal type of engagement with artifacts provides an emancipatory space for participants in research, such as adoptees, to visualize their world. At the end of our sessions, the story told by participants was more than just an adoption story, and the artifacts that helped achieve this transformation put a subtle twist on the kaleidoscopic history of adoption. If guided carefully, adoptees who choose to search can reconstruct and constitute their past, present, and future by recognizing the importance of artifacts acquired and viewed through different chronological horizons (Haug & Hielscher, 2021).

One of the challenges related to adoption and adoptive identity is set in the mentality that a child arrives in the adoptive family as a *blank slate*, ready to assimilate into an entirely new culture (McKee, 2019). Over the years, mainly through the voices of those who are adopted, researchers have learned to recognize these children's past before their adoption (Merritt, 2021). Using the lens of material culture will further challenge a blank slate mentality. Utilizing

artifacts in interviews afforded space for adoption research that is compatible and useful in exploring a more complete adoptive identity that seeks a relationship between people, objects, and the various layers of cultural meaning embedded within objects (Appadurai, 2017; Berger, 2016; Buchli, 2020; Kopytoff, 2014). This approach helped adoptees explore, evoke, release, and relieve emotions associated with their history (Doel, 2023).

Throughout my research, I considered how working with pre-adoptive artifacts address the often-secretive narrative surrounding an adoptee's birth and pre-adoptive history. I recognized my positionality as an adoptee and adoptive parent. I asked myself the ways my insider position colored my interest in adoption. In my lived experience, I have found adoptive identity to fluctuate between pre-adoptive history and the complex context of adoption. My identity formation, therefore, is not unidirectional. Instead, I shift my perspective between my knowing and unknowing parts. Winterson (2012) writes about this shift,

> Finding missing parts of a past can be an opening, not a void. It can be an entry as well as an exit. It is the fossil record, the imprint of another life, and although you can never have that life, your fingers trace the space where it might have been, and your fingers learn a kind of Braille (p. 5).

In closed adoptions, like mine, adoptees' original birth certificates remain sealed in most U.S. states to guarantee that the birth parents cannot disturb the adoptive family's well-being (Grotevant & Von Korff, 2011). Only fourteen states recognize an adult adoptee's unrestricted right to their original birth certificate (Luce, 2022). For some, the idea of sealed records marks a severe distinction between an erased birth and their documented adoption, creating an aura of secrecy (Grotevant & Von Korff, 2011). Losing something sacred – the narrative of my birth, made a mantra that loops over a lifetime. *Find it.* Find what? I am unsure. However, my

insatiable curiosity digs deeply within the seemingly ordinary yet evocative artifacts that I carry from birth, adoption, childhood, and adulthood.

Through an adoption journey, people can acquire and carry artifacts such as birthmarks, scars, photographs, documents, direct-to-consumer DNA reports, hair color/texture, names, and dimples. Ethnographic researchers such as LeCompte and Ludwig (2007) realize the value artifacts can have in evoking sensitive and curious conversations with participants about the objects, functions, and uses. My adopted son recently studied the artifacts he brought from Nepal. Feeling the dingy-colored and paper-thin clothes he wore in the orphanage before his adoption, he said, “They were the clothes you wear when you get adopted. Otherwise, the clothes weren’t as nice.” These artifacts had initiated reflection, strengthening the timeline between birth and adoption. This research traces this path backward, utilizing artifacts to pioneer new directions paved by nature and nurture’s collective landscape. I name this process the *archeology of adoption*, asking adoptees to excavate the past by studying the artifacts carried from birth through adoption. Like all excavations, the purpose is often not only to find answers but to ask better questions (Preston, 2007).

For decades, I have shuffled through an overstuffed cabinet of material culture laced with the resin of my ancestry. I wrestled with my adoptive history, marred with secrecy and shame. I found the exploration untamed and hostile; people wrote notes about me and hid them. I often wondered why these artifacts were withheld from me. I considered what meaning I could decipher from them now. I wanted to know if there was more of my story to tell.

Statement of the Problem

About seven million people in the U.S. are adopted, an experience felt throughout one’s lifetime (Herman, 2022). Most post-adoption resources and research are oriented toward

children, adolescents, and adoptive parents (Brodzinsky et al., 2021; Grotevant et al., 2007; Soares et al., 2018). According to Sánchez-Sandoval et al. (2020), few researchers have explored the challenges in identity development faced by adults adopted in childhood. A 2022 report from Ligier et al. (2022) in *Frontiers in Psychiatry* reveals significant mental health and well-being differences between adoptees and the non-adopted population. They report a higher rate of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, mental health comorbidity, and personality disorders among adopted individuals. In a separate study, researchers studying adolescents adopted before age two found the odds of reported suicide attempts almost four times higher (3.7) than that of non-adopted participants (Keyes et al., 2008).

Further, Melero and Sánchez-Sandoval (2017) report adults adopted in childhood have higher incidences of trust, attachment, depression, and anxiety issues. Understanding, accessing, and treating people with mental and emotional health issues has economic ramifications. In 2022, the Federal Government earmarked $315 million in mental health services. (The White House, 2022).

Today's most pressing concerns in adoption research stem from transnational/transracial adoptees who must, as adults, perceive themselves within the structure of international adoption (Cherot, 2009). For this study, the term *transnational adoptee* is someone adopted from another country. *Transracial* means someone adopted into a family whose race is different from theirs. The material culture these adoptees carry from their pre-adoptive history may reveal the grief and longing that occurs with relinquishment. One woman speaks of her double ear lobe. "If my mother were to search for me, this is what she'd look for," she explained. Another adoptee, my friend, was born in China and found on the steps of the police station, so newly born her umbilical cord was still attached. She uses her birth artifact, the connected parts belonging to

both her body and her mother's body, to explain much of her life's decisions. "That cord attached; I think of how I act, and it's decisive. I make up my mind, and it's like cutting the cord. I don't look back," she reflects (personal conversation, 2023). Cherot (2006) explains,

> For adoptees, revisiting the past is not about positioning themselves as simply victims of history. It is quite the opposite; it involves teaching one another, adoption agencies, and adoptive parents through rejecting commonly held adoption truths and reclaiming their history (Conclusion, para 1).

Theorists (Basten & Touyz, 2019; Grotevant & Von Korff, 2011) supporting Erikson's identity development (Erikson, 1968) believe identity formation relies on defining oneself within the world, feeling a sense of belonging, and feeling unique. Integrating these experiences results in a stronger sense of self, according to Grotevant and Von Korff (2011). As adoptees navigate identity throughout their lifetime, they face unique challenges reconciling their sense of continuity and coherence when much information is missing, altered, or ambiguous (Grotevant & Von Korff, 2011). A transracial adoptee wonders how to feel the uniqueness of identity as a person of color living with a White family. In international adoption, the practice of adoption abruptly removes adoptees from their cultures/countries of origin into adoptive homes on the other side of the world. Adoptees must somehow define themselves within their birth and adopted families. Basten and Touyz (2019) describe *self-continuity* as the sense of remaining the same person over time. Essentially, there is an absence of historical gaps. *Coherence* is a stable sense of the self as a single, coherent, bounded entity (p. 160). Researchers Basten and Touyz wonder what happens when these functions are disrupted at or near birth. I wondered what emotional and behavioral symptoms arise in people whose pre-adoptive history is partially formed or wholly erased. My study considered the multitude of factors contributing to the

difficulties many adults adopted in childhood face while attempting to unearth the events surrounding their birth and adoption.

Grotevant (2107), an adoption researcher who focused his career on adoptive identity, believes the shaping of adoptive identity, which forms over a lifetime, relies on a high degree of openness in communicating biographical and cultural knowledge (Grotevant et al., 2017) — knowing why and where the adoption took place are essential parts of identity formation (Henze-Pederson, 2019). Stated clearly, Miranda Samuels (2022), a transracial adoptee and adoption scholar, labels this type of concealment and denial of access to facts *epistemic injustice,* in which a person is undermined in one's authority to claim, make meaning, and heal from the trauma of one's birth. Miranda Samuels' (2022) work established a need and laid the groundwork for studying adoptive identity when a limited authority for knowing places adoptees in a "sub-class of knowers" (p. 3).

My inquiry on adoptive identity expanded work initiated by adoption researchers Grotevant (2020), Baden (2016) and Miranda Samuels' (2022) by addressing the possible effects of a population with disjointed histories, attributing perhaps to diminished or shifting positions in their sense of self. This research addressed the under-discussed information gap and disconnected stories between one's birth and their adoption. My friend uses an umbilical cord as an artifact to help narrate and interpret her deeply felt adoption story and adoptive identity. To my knowledge, no qualitative participatory study has investigated the link between the cultural material items carried from birth or pre-adoption through adoption and into adulthood.

Definition of Key Terms

Closed Adoption

Practices involving closed adoptions involve a form of adoption in which the biological parents have no direct contact with the adoptive family, and the adoptive parents often know little or nothing about the biological parents (Rizzo & Hosek, 2020).

Direct-to-consumer DNA reports

Direct-to-consumer genetic testing provides people access to their genetic information. The testing offers clues about a person's ancestry, including ethnicity and significant geographic areas that can detect a family's origin.

Funds of Identity

This term, described by Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014), refers to the "historically accumulated, culturally developed, and socially distributed resources that are essential for a person's self-definition, self-expression, and self-understanding" (p. 31). Adoptive funds of identity is a term used to describe the cultural factors, such as artifacts, that aid in constructing identity as an adult adopted in childhood. Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014) believe identity exploration requires actively internalizing family and community resources to gain knowledge, make meaning, define beliefs, and develop ideas to describe themselves.

Identity

The concept of identity, delineated through a series of developmental stages, was first articulated by Erik Erikson in 1959. Adoptive identity pertains to the "sense of who one is as an adopted person" (Grotevant et al., 2007, p. 379), encompassing memories, experiences, relationships, and values that form one's sense of self. Adoptees often feel compelled to "prove their right to exist" (Personal conversation, 2024), which challenges their adoptive sense of self.

The fluidity and ambiguity of identity are particularly evident in populations such as immigrants and adoptees who must swiftly adapt to their new cultural contexts (Grotevant, 2017;

Yasin, 2021). Identity, for all individuals, undergoes evolution over time. Researchers in adoption have focused on Erikson's stage of identity versus role confusion, typically encountered during adolescence and emerging adulthood (Erikson, 1968; Grotevant et al., 2007; Grotevant & Von Korff, 2011). This stage of identity development poses significant challenges for adoptees, often due to limited knowledge about birth relatives and the circumstances surrounding their conception, birth, and relinquishment before adoption. (Grotevant & Von Korff, 2011).

Material Culture

Material culture studies encourage a critical examination of how objects are created and circulated. Material culture studies seek a relationship between people, objects, and the various layers of cultural meaning embedded within objects (Appadurai, 2017; Berger, 2016; Buchli, 2020; Kopytoff, 2014). Findlen (2021) suggests researchers may capture an artifact at the intersection between its original creator, its afterlife, and all the stops in between. In essence, explains Findlen, one might take a seemingly stable object, such as an item worn in an orphanage, on the move by examining objects through an interdisciplinary lens.

Microaggressions

Miranda Samuels' (2022) adoption research illuminates the loosely defined microaggressions often applied to adoption. The subtle slights, injustices, or invalidations reiterate stigmas that devalue an adoptee, or the adoption experience itself. Miranda Samuels believes the impact of adoption-related microaggressions is othering, distancing, and discriminating against adoptees. She explains microaggressions can show up in language (are they your *real* parents?), beliefs about adoption (you should be grateful), and the invalidation of cultural heritage.

Microfictions

Coined by adoption scholar Baden (2016), *microfictions* are adoption stories grounded in secrets, misinformation, and missing details. They can include (false) amended birth certificates where birth and parent's names are left out, as well as fictionalized reports marking children orphans when they have parents.

Open Adoption

Open adoptions include participation at some level with birth parents after relinquishing legal and parental rights to the child. There are vast differences in the degree of openness, from a minimal exchange of genetic information to direct contact with biological family. Often, open adoption practices include exchanges of information such as letters and pictures sent annually through a third party (Grotevant et al., 2017). Today, while most U.S. domestic adoptions are open in some form, birth families aren't always informed of the type of contact they can have with their relinquished child (Tucker, 2020).

Original Birth Certificate

This government-issued, certified vital record contains basic facts surrounding a person's birth. Some facts include birth name, date of birth, city or county of birth, and any acknowledged birthparents' names. An amended birth certificate, created at the time of adoption, replaces birth names with adoptive names.

Participatory Research

Participatory research encompasses research designs, methods, and frameworks that use "systematic inquiry in direct collaboration with those affected by an issue being studied" (Vaughn & Jacquez, 2020, pg. 1). The process values an engagement on equal ground with the researcher and participants. Research may allow various degrees of participation by the

researcher. I collaborated with adoptees as a co-participant by sharing and discussing pre-adoptive artifacts.

Phantom Identity

The term phantom identity refers to the life adoptees would have lived had they not been adopted. Coined by Rizzo (2022), the concept explains "the unsolvable aspects of adoptive identity" (p. 280).

Race-based Code-Switching

Race-based code switching occurs among transracial or transnational adoptees adapting their behavior in response to a change in social context (Morton, 2013). Without guidance, the code switch masks or imitates in order to accommodate others. According to McCluney et al. (2019), code switching is often used to navigate a world that's not always safe or comfortable. According to McCluney et al., adoptees may adjust one's style of speech, appearance, behavior, and expression, assimilating in ways that optimize their ability to fit in.

Transnational Adoption

The relocation of a minor from one country and family to another is controversial (Oparah et al., 2021). International adoptees work through their identity marked by a field of historical, social, and cultural contingencies. According to Kim (2019), in her chapter, *My Folder is Not a Person: Kinship Knowledge, biopolitics, and the Adoption File*, an adoptee not only wonders what might have happened had they stayed in their birth country but also ponders the possibilities of having been raised in other host countries such as an elite family in France instead of a working-class family in Australia. They also imagine accessing their birth country's immigrant community in Los Angeles instead of living in Denmark's rural, homogeneously White racial setting. Kim's work emphasizes how often transnational adoptees consider how

their lives are shaped by sociocultural environments that differ significantly from their original host country.

Transracial Adoption

Transracial adoption is a term used to describe an adoptee who is from one race or ethnic group placed with adoptive parents of another race or ethnic group (Mariner, 2019). Transracial adoptees have challenges negotiating their identities. S. L. Perry (2024) discusses the potential for discriminatory practices often encouraging full assimilation into the adoptee's new cultural setting with little regard to the adoptee's biological race, ethnic culture, and socioeconomic class. Revisions to the standards for transracial adoption practices began in 1972 when the National Association of Black Social Workers contended that transracial adoptions were a form of race and cultural genocide. Later, in 1978, the Indian Child Welfare Act prohibits the adoption of Indian children by non-Indian parents (Simon & Altstein, 2000).

Approaching Adoptive Identity Through Artifacts

In my adoption research study, I used pre-adoptive artifacts to explore an adult adoptee's understanding of their adoptive identity. My research highlighted the absence of birth knowledge among adoptees. All life experiences collectively shape identity development, including a person's historical parts. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) discusses the value of such insight. In her TED talk, *Danger of a Single Story*. She advises:

> Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person but to make it the definitive story of that person. The Palestinian poet Mourid Barghouti writes that if you want to dispossess a people, the simplest way to do it is to tell their story and to start with "secondly." Start the story with the arrows of the Native Americans and not with the arrival of the British, and you have an entirely different story (10:04-10:32).

Zytaruk's (2015) research on birth tokens left by mothers relinquishing their children in the 18th century suggests that using artifacts to examine personal, historical, relational, and cultural identities may help adoptees gain insight, perceptions, values, and self-descriptions. Inspired by this approach, my study invited nine participants, all adoptees from closed settings, to explore pre-adoptive material culture, including birthmarks, documents, scars, photographs, people, places, and tokens related to one's birth, to help navigate the complex landscape of adoptive identity. In one-to-one interviews, I utilized these artifacts to a) explore beliefs, values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions about the phenomena of adoption, b) investigate the relationship among the elements that contribute to or inhibit the participant's perception of their adoptive identity, and c) provide a structure to understand better how these ideas fit into an understanding of self, relationships, family, and culture.

By exploring adoptive identity, my study contributed to filling the existing gap in knowledge about the lived experiences of adults adopted in childhood. Specifically, the study builds on limited current adoption research with adult adoptees (Miranda Samuels, 2022; Newton, 2022; Nordstrom, 2013; Rizzo, 2022; White & Baden, 2021) by analyzing how artifacts lend themselves to bridge the historical distance between an adoptee's birth and adoption. Accordingly, this study's research questions were: How do adoptees understand their adoptive identity using pre-adoptive artifacts? How might one's understanding of their adoptive identity change over time in relation to a specific artifact?

Guiding Framework

The structure of my study evolved through a need I observed among adults adopted in childhood. While many adults from closed adoption settings have found some information about their birth, guidance is limited. Adoptees often sit with their DNA results or original birth

certificates, unable to decipher a deep meaning surrounding the events of their birth and adoption. Assumptions formed long ago failed to match new information.

My study, seen through a vibrant tapestry of lenses, began not by any one conceptual framework but through an approach that tapped into the intersections of pre-adoptive and adoptive identities. Rather than applying specific conceptual considerations, *The Archeology of Adoption* found its roots through multiple thoughts and ideas that eventually formed a strong thread of reasoning surrounding adoptive identity.

A material culture theory underpins my research goals, approach, methods, research questions, and analysis. The physical remains of identity in the form of photos, letters, DNA samples, shoes, birthmarks, and orphan records became the focal point of interest. The selected material engagement theory (Malafouris, 2013), elaborately expounded upon in the subsequent chapter, centers on the ongoing engagement between people and objects. The dynamic co-constituted exchange of ideas and emotions was a fitting prism for reconciling diverse viewpoints within qualitative research.

Strengthening my interest in pre-adoptive artifacts, I considered complex interactions between physiological, emotional, and psychological factors affecting adoptive well-being. I analyzed findings through the lens of neuroplasticity and the mind-body connection that helps form memory and identity construction. I gained a comprehensive understanding of the core brain systems that work to perceive and experience thoughts, feelings, and emotions through a shared engagement with others in a social way, with cultural conditions and context, and through embodied cognition. Thus, using an integrated, interdisciplinary approach, my research allowed for a more encompassing view to highlight relevant sociocultural, biological, and structural issues surrounding adoption, giving rise to feelings, beliefs, and intentions among adoptees.

Significance and Rationale

My study contributes significantly to understanding the complexities of adoptive identity by exploring the hidden information of birth and adoptive histories. It represents a pioneering effort in examining the impact of pre-adoptive material on the development of adoptive identity among adults adopted in childhood. By forging connections between the separate realms of one's birth and adopted life, researchers (Horstman et al., 2016; Rizzo, 2022) propose that adoptees can reconstruct their narratives with greater coherence and continuity across past, present, and future identity versions.

In my experience, living with the phantom limb of adoption, where members of your biological family are cut off potentially forever, does little to acknowledge the residual pain of such a familial loss. Searching and finding my birth relatives helped me re-attach this *familial* limb. However, the biological pieces of my birth mother and father fit roughly, misaligned, and devoid of feeling. Martin (2021) explains the sense of *unbelonging* felt among some adoptees:

> *Being home* refers to the place where one lives within familiar, safe, protected boundaries; *not being home* is a matter of realizing that home was an illusion of coherence and safety based on the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance, the repression of differences even within one's self (p. 90).

By using pre-adoptive artifacts, this research explored an adult adoptee's understanding of elements contributing to or acting as barriers to the many faces of adoptive identity.

Expected Contributions to the Field

There is much to be learned about adoptees' experiences once they reach adulthood (Bork et al., 2022; Cashen and Grotevant, 2019; Neil et al., 2023). Findings from this research

may encourage professional counselors, educators, social workers, adoption agents, and adoptive parents to consider adoptees as diverse, multicultural citizens displaced by adoption.

Globally, this research has the potential to help others whose lives have experienced complex cultural transitions. While this research focused on adults adopted in childhood, the value of its findings may consider the lives of other adults missing crucial parts of their stories. There are roughly 153 million orphans worldwide (Selim, 2019). Many orphans lead invisible lives, unaccounted for and unprotected by their government. In some international cases, according to Selim, women may be unable to register their children for birth certificates if the father is unknown or refuses to acknowledge paternity – such as in cases of survivors of rape or incest.

Adoption researchers remain diligent in expanding knowledge concerning the factors influencing the identity and well-being of adoptees (Grotevant et al., 2007; Henze-Pedersen, 2019) Later, in Chapter Four, I provide explicit findings suggesting that materials associated with birth significantly help people attend to the noteworthy events of their lives, adding depth to their evolving biographies.

Chapter Two: Overview of the Literature

Introduction

Chapter One concluded with an imperative to expand the scope of research concerning the relationship between adoptees and their birth history. There is much to be gained in considering the needs of adopted individuals interested in understanding life before their adoption. According to all participants in this study, language cannot fully express the feeling of an unexplored existence. Such a loss knows no words. Tucker (2023), a transracial adoptee, explains, "I speak often about the circumstances of my birth and first year of life. Every time I do this, I feel a bit as if I'm outside myself, looking down on my history and cataloging it like a lepidopterist with pins" (p.8).

Maternal separation in early life dramatically impacts the psychological, emotional, and physical health development of the newborn baby and is directly related to adverse long-term health outcomes during adulthood (Gunnar & Reid, 2019; Hanson & Nacewicz, 2021; Montirosso & McGlone, 2020). This early life adversity impacts the developmental trajectories of the brain, leading to structural changes. These changes occur during a susceptible post-natal growth period, including reduced cortical and hippocampal volumes. In addition, adults who experience early life adversity are prone to functional impairment of critical neurocognitive circuits (Brook, 2021; Lipschutz & Bick, 2020; Hanson & Nacewicz, 2021). Many of these impairments stem from the earliest time of life when the body experienced such severe life-threatening circumstances that the young infant's stress response system went into shock, setting up a template pattern that future experiences organize around (Brook, 2021).

Understanding how early adversity influences neurodevelopmental processes is critical for identifying factors that may lead to poor mental, physical, and emotional health later in life.

Researchers studying the effects of early-life adversity ask how this adversity influences neural function in both positive and negative ways (Brodzinski et al., 2021). The topics covered in this literature review supporting object-based participatory research include understanding the factors influencing adoptees' identity and well-being. The review contains a section describing the unique features of adoptive identity. It concludes with a guiding theoretical framework setting the research on a particular adoptee-centered road map using a type of narration through evocative objects related to pre-adoptive history. The purpose of this literature review was to address the following research probes respectively: (a) evaluate the factors influencing the identity and well-being of adoptees; (b) determine if/how adoptees understand their adoptive identity using pre-adoptive artifacts (c) understand how one's understanding of adoptive identity changes over time in relation to a specific artifact.

Factors Influencing an Adoptee's Identity and Well-being

Trauma specialist Bessel van der Kolk (2014) describes traces of loss embedded into a child's mind and body from the beginning. He suggests a baby lives nine months inside the mother's womb, becoming used to her body and voice. Once separated, the baby experiences a void that disrupts development. Researchers advancing our understanding of early life adversity (ELA), such as maternal relinquishment, find disruption in the neurodevelopmental trajectories of cell types in the brain, affecting the brain's development (Hanson and Nacewicz, 2021). Researchers study what happens to this neural disruption years later.

Researchers van der Vegt et al. (2008) employed a longitudinal investigation of adoptees to determine the course of psychiatric problems from childhood to adulthood. An alarming statistic formed the following conclusion. "The effects of early adversities seem not to be transient or to decrease in strength, even if adversities are limited to an early period in life and

children are taken out of their problematic environments and raised in better circumstances" (van der Vegt et al., 2008, p. 248). In agreement, Mahoney and Markel (2016) conclude a complex form of trauma originating within the first three crucial development years poses challenges for adoptees decades after the event of relinquishment. One adoptee at age nine reflected in a mentorship group, "I guess being adopted is good, even if it means that I'm kinda like a guest in the family" (Tucker, 2023, p. 22).

Supporting this claim, researchers Mackes et al. (2022) analyzed the neurophysiological responses observed through MRI brain scans from a cohort of adults adopted in childhood. Their report provides further evidence of the harmful effects of early neglect on brain development and their persistence in adulthood despite many years of environmental enrichment associated with successful adoption. Further, many studies show evidence of deficient development, specifically in the limbic and cortex systems (Arnold, 2012). This area of the brain regulates emotional responses to events.

Neurologically, researchers studying ELA note reductions in cortical thickness, the volume of gray matter, total brain volume, and reduced volumes in the prefrontal cortex, hippocampal, and amygdala (Adedayo et al., 2023; Arnold, 2012; Kos et al., 2023). These highly connected areas of the brain function to process short and long-term memory while also processing emotional reactions. In particular, researchers reveal the impact of ELA on the amygdala, the region of the brain that automatically detects danger, plays a role in social and sexual behavior, and is central to emotional control and learning (Hanson & Nacewicz, 2021). Disorganized attachments show up in dissociated behaviors such as freezing or appearing inattentive. According to Hanson and Nacewicz (2021), this maladaptive behavior occurs when someone is unsure who signals safety and security. These decisions of danger or safety are likely

represented in the synapses, the small gap at the end of neurons allowing signals to pass, according to Hanson and Nacewicz (2021). For people with ELA, the signals communicate little to no distinction between what a threat may be and the experience of safety. Consequently, exhibiting no behavior at all is the default.

Psychologists Hanson and Nacewicz (2021) emphasize the destructive nature of chronic stress on a system. In cases of early life adversity exposure, expansion of the amygdala early in life, coupled with high-stress reactivity, eventually results in a breaking point where the amygdala shrinks in size. However, overwhelming stress remains as higher functional reactivity and excitatory tone remain. Offering little recourse, these authors view the effects of ELA as a disruptor of attachment and bonding.

Hanson and Nacewicz (2021), agreeing with adoption researchers Brodzinsky et al. (2021) suggest that regulating emotions and behaviors such as attachment and bonding are closely connected with cellular and neurotransmitter changes. These authors focus on two types of stress exposures in ELA that significantly impact the amygdala's structure and function. They are i*nescapability* and *unpredictability*, explain Hanson and Nacewicz (2021). Repeated inescapable stress, also called restraint stress or freeze, causes more significant dendritic loss versus unpredictable stress. In contrast, unpredictable stress leaves little room to prepare oneself for what comes next. In entrapment, immobility (perceived entrapment), inescapability, or restraint, safety is not achieved. According to Hanson and Nacewicz (2020), it may be possible that the amygdala churns away as no associations with safety are found. Hanson and Nacewicz (2021) believe continued fear responses may lead to amygdala overload in the first decades of life. Adopted children, in particular, may exhibit a range of symptoms, including nightmares and sleep disturbances, apathy and emotional numbing, fear, anxiety, depression, hypervigilance, and

extreme startle responses (Arnold, 2012, p. 12; Baltimore, 2009; Caspers et al., 2009; Côté & Lalumière, 2019).

In addition to the emotional impact of ELA, Brodzinsky et al. (2021) point out some of the long-term effects of childhood adversity that include cognitive functions such as executive function and decision-making, sensory perception and motoric responses, speech, memory impulse control, and emotion regulation. Furthermore, exposure to early life adversity can result in a range of psychological problems such as anxiety disorders, major depressive disorder, bipolar disorder, abnormal social behaviors, and personality disorders (Kos et al., 2023). Researchers are now investigating how early life adversity leaves epigenetic marks in brain regions related to stress, emotional processing, and reward, as well as how these changes may confer an increased risk for depression and anxiety later in life (Thomasy, 2023).

Recent studies (Mackes et al., 2022) provide evidence that ELA is associated with "widespread localized alterations in white matter volume in young adulthood, even in individuals whose exposure to deprivation ended over 20 years previously following their adoption into supportive and well-functioning households" (p. 6). Against a severe backdrop of difficulties represented among adoptees, a particular focus on adult adoptees may offer opportunities to analyze positive variables.

In hopeful ways, some researchers studying the psychological effects of trauma analyze the interchange between the body and mind. In this neurobiological dialogue, they look to the hippocampus for answers. The hippocampus is a tiny seahorse-shaped organ located deep in the medial temporal lobe. It forms the central apex of the limbic system, and its domain is learning, memory encoding, memory consolidation, spatial navigation, and decision-making. Its function regulates motivation, emotion, learning, and memory (Costandi, 2016). The vulnerability of this

highly malleable structure can result in damage from various adverse stimuli, such as early life adversity (Freire, 2023). A vast range of symptoms accompany such damage, including thought-related disorders such as long-term depression, weakened emotion regulation, and the type of memory loss seen in Alzheimer's patients (Adedayo et al., 2023).

Conversely, the same plasticity to be shaped or molded within the structure can strengthen synapses between neurons over time, depending on the information received (Morelli et al., 2023). Thus, the hippocampal region is highly subject to regenerating and restoring functionality (Bin Ibrahim et al., 2021). According to Costandi (2016), developmental plasticity begins early at birth with an overabundance of neurons – nearly 100 billion. Constandi's work reveals the brain does not need that many neurons, so it prunes back the misguided or exuberant neurons. Tissues (the body) provide a feedback signal required for neuronal survival. During the post-natal period, environmental factors influence this fine-tuning. Synapse formation in the spinal cord occurs when motor neuron terminals encounter skeletal muscle tissue. Synapses in the brain connect neural elements. Costandi (2016) explains the number of synapses formed in most regions peak during the first year of life, with each neuron estimated to create about 10,000 synaptic connections with other cells. The stabilization of these connections is experience-dependent. This growing evidence suggests that neurobiological systems can be recalibrated during adolescence, a period of heightened developmental growth, opening up the possibility that some effects of early exposure to adversity can be corrected by exposure to positive adolescent experiences (Gunnar, 2021; Gunnar & Reid, 2019; Hambrick et al., 2019; Perry et al., 2022). The malleability of neurodevelopmental structures in key brain regions can be studied to provide new insight into the long shadow of early life adversity.

Neuroplasticity is extensively studied with subjects who have had early life adversity. This neuroplasticity is called long-term potentiation and is believed to be the neural basis of most if not all, forms of learning and memory (Costandi, 2016). Psychologist Donald Hebb worked in a lab with rats. His children requested to play with some of the rats at home. The rats who interacted with the children outperformed other rats in every cognitive test involving problem-solving and memory weeks later. Hebb's *pet* rats show that "early experience can have dramatic and permanent effects on brain development and function" (Costandi, 2016, p. 55). Essentially, synapses are strengthened as the impulses between nerve cells pass messages. The pet rats had richer experiences and could profit from new experiences at maturity. Dr. Hebb coined "neurons that fire together, wire together"(Costandi, 2016, p. 55). Like a chameleon, the human brain survives in a changing world by changing itself (Doidge, 2008).

If our experiences and behaviors induce plastic changes in the brain (Costandi, 2016), adoption researchers wonder what happens when the experiences aren't rich. The deprivation of children abandoned in impoverished Romanian orphanages left many with severe learning difficulties, including attention, memory, and emotional regulation (Gunnar & Reid, 2019). Through the lens of adoption, we can see what happens to children when they begin life with maternal separation and are then removed from their adverse environments. In most cases, experiences become richer, with caregivers providing safe, consistent, and loving attention to their adopted children (Brodzinsky et al., 2021). Scientists wonder if changes in the quality of the environment make significant changes in the nervous system (neuroplasticity) to reverse the deficits associated with early life stress. However, as no two brains are alike, it is hard for scientists to make this claim.

In their article, *Dopamine in Fear Extinction* (2021*),* Hanson and Nacewicz examine the brain's reward circuitry. According to Hanson and Nacewicz, the amygdala remodels its structure and function, overriding any influence on other brain regions while favoring a state of heightened sensitivity to environmental stimuli. This transformation may result in cognitive and somatic anxiety-like behavior. Salinas-Hernàndez and Duvarci (2021) use a resilient lens to study fear-stress developmental domains. They ask how to extinguish fear memories when threats are no longer present.

Salinas-Hernàndez and Duvarci (2021) are interested in the brain's reward circuitry, which is found in the limbic system. They have found an unexpected release of dopamine during a rewarding stimulus. In agreement, Brodzinsky et al. (2021) emphasize the positive effects of dopamine and serotonin neurotransmitters. They suggest these neurotransmitters can increase responsiveness to psychological interventions when environmental conditions significantly improve.

Observing babies newly adopted into supportive homes, Salinas-Hernàndez and Duvarci (2021) found that their reward expectations for love and security are nearly zero. These authors surmise if the actual reward obtained is significantly higher, a signal stimulates the fronto-amygdala circuit about its feelings of safety. If this happens enough, there can be a reduction in fear responses. Salinas-Hernàndez and Duvarci (2021) notice a transformation in these cases. Rather than eliminating the fear, the fronto-amygdala circuit has adversarial choices between the original fear memory and the newer, safer memory.

One of the best markers for this adaptive neurological change is the formation of memories (Donato et al., 2021). Donato et al. describe recent advances in understanding memory formation. Scientists have shown that while the infant's brain is immature in its development of

memory cognition, the hippocampus can produce and store long-lasting, episodic memories. According to Donato et al., the hippocampus mediates these memories formed by rich experiences in infancy.

Learning from these experiences comes later, as cognitive function matures. For this reason, recalling experiences before the age of three is difficult. However, implicit memory involves an automatic habit of behavior that primarily responds not by circumstances but through the lens of unconscious memories (Hafetz, 2021). Implicit memory examples of behavior include undue attention-seeking, power struggles, withdrawal, anxiety, sadness, shame, low self-esteem, and feeling isolated or disconnected. These are emotional responses to current events filtered through past experiences (Hafetz, 2021). Coincidently, they are also behaviors commonly exhibited in people with early life adversity (Brodzinsky et al., 2021).

Seeking positive outcomes in people who have experienced ELA in childhood, researchers confirm that changes in the synaptic connections between neurons represent learning. Consequently, Salinas-Hernàndez and Duvarci (2021) explain how fear extinction represents new learning, resulting from finding unmatched outcomes. Those surprising, conflicting, intriguing, and perhaps shocking *aha moments* tend to cause the most significant learning leaps. This phenomenon is explained perfectly by Zhang et al. (2020): "Omission of expected punishment is reward" (p. 1091). Attachment and bonding are the surprising rewards. Accordingly, this necessary adaptation can positively affect emotion processing and social bonding if safety is achieved through secure attachment and bonding.

According to Bin Ibrahim et al. (2021), synaptic plasticity nuances propose new possibilities for the brain's role in learning through memory acquisition. Freire's 2023 newer work, in agreement with Hasselmo's 2011 research, establishes a clear connection between the

hippocampal function and the ability to form new memories while detecting mismatches, particularly when a familiar object is placed within a new spatial relationship. Often connected with relational memory, the hippocampus's role helps bind together multiple inputs to "create and allow for the storage of representations of the associates among the constituent elements of scenes and events" (Adedayo et al., 2023, p. 23). The integration of synaptic learning shows promise, allowing a fluid, unidirectional flow of information that can be rearranged and reconceptualized.

Adoptive Identity and Memory

When Smith (2021), in *Decolonizing Methodologies,* described a group of marginalized citizens as "the people whose bodies, territories, beliefs, and values have been traveled *through*" (p. 91), she may have considered people who were adopted. The missed layers of identity often found among adoptees complicate the construction of adoptive identity, resulting in "identity confusion" (Grotevant, 1997, p. 4). To fill the gaps, adoptive parents add partial truths to form some kind of assimilative new family narrative, such as the following: "You were chosen, your mother could not care for you – too young, too old, too poor, you grew in my heart." There is anger, hurt, confusion, and frustration among many adults adopted in childhood when asked to reflect on their adoption (Karanova, 2022). Mostly, there is a hunger for information (Rizzo, 2022). The loss of information, according to Grotevant and Von Korff (2011), impacts a sense of identity. Adoptees in closed setting spend a lifetime asking, "Who am I? Where do I come from?" And, "Where do I belong?" Even if adoptees manage to find their birth relatives, they can never fully grasp the "kind of life they would have lived had they not been adopted" (Rizzo, 2022, p. 276).

Carl Jung (2015; 2022) wrote about a tension where two exclusive views are held simultaneously. This kind of tension is often felt among adoptees: born to one person and raised by another. Adoptees must learn to stand in this polarizing paradox. Jung believed in "holding the tension between these opposing forces" such as experienced in pre- and post-adoption. He explained, "One must hold both sides of a paradox at the same time without choosing one or the other" (Cope, 2012, p. 174). "A third way emerges," Jung states, which can "transcend the two" (Cope, 2012, p. 174). This tenuous process will only grow if one nurtures and cares for both sides of the conflict. It requires tolerance for the unknown and, as Homans (2006) suggests accepting the "fictiveness, the artificiality of what represents or replaces those origin stories" (p. 23).

Consider the tension drawn out by an adoptee born in India and adopted by an Australian couple. Through his extensive search and ultimate reunion, his identity remained conflicted. On one side of the conflict lies his biological family's limited position of status and power "whilst we swam about in our privileged lives" (Timeless Clips, 2016). A multi-faceted psycho-social process of identity formation excels when adopted people understand themselves as 'self-same' persons, despite inevitable change" (Sokol et al., 2017, p. 241). When my Nepali-born adopted son arrived in Colorado at the age of four, he believed he had traveled to an entirely different planet. The change in setting was more than inexorable. Without an understanding of just how far he had traveled, the abrupt change shocked his system. Maps and globes failed to explain the distance. When I let a red balloon fly into the westward sky, I suggested it might fly its way back to Nepal. Looking back at that experience, I understand more fully the intense feeling of the losses that occur with adoption. Going back *home* is impossible if the distance feels unreachable. It was near impossible to be the same person with a distance so great.

Identity formation must include, therefore, an understanding of self in its varied self-locations. Thus, the information the adoptee from India collects about himself and commits or stores to memory for future safety uses (Adedayo et al., 2023) has less to do with procedural or implicit memory designed to help perform certain functions and more with spatial memory. When asking where this Indian-Australian adoptee situates himself in the world, spatial memory enables a person to see themselves through time. For instance, the adoptee from India must consider himself living first in India before his adoption. He must then regard himself as a person who now lives in Australia. In his future time and space, he has an opportunity for reinvention, providing further context to episodic events (Donato et al., 2021).

If novel, positive, and promising narratives can impact memory, an understanding of memory acquisition is required (Josselyn & Frankland, 2018). Memory acquisition begins with three phases of memory processing, originating in the brain's limbic system. This process requires (1) registration, (2) storage, and (3) retrieval of information (Adedayo et al., 2023). It is essential to recognize the challenges in identity construction when elements of the past may be unknown – unregistered, lacking a point of orientation. There is no pin on the GPS map marking *home* for adoptees from closed settings.

According to Siegel (2013), *registration* requires a core consciousness emerging from the brain's circuitry to create an embodied state of being. Registration begins with a reconceptualization of claims of identity. The adoptees participating in this study all chose to explore and expand the timeline between their birth and adoption. At first, nearly half of the those interested in the study doubted the journey. "I am not sure I have any artifacts from my life before being relinquished"(personal Conversation, 2023). For people left with minuscule vestiges of birth history, a period of renaissance or enlightenment bends these historical points of

rupture towards reinvention (Butler, 2013). After failing in her attempt to find relatives in her birth country, an adoptee explains, “The grandmother and grandfather who lived in a city in Ethiopia still live in my body. I see them when I look in the mirror. Every day” (Evans et al., 2022, p. 246).

Registration can be achieved in creative ways. Erik Erikson, the famed psychologist who developed an eight-stage development theory, did not know his biological father. He carried his stepfather’s last name, *Homburger*, until, at age 34, he reinvented himself as Erik Erikson. He became the “son of Erik” – or essentially, the son of himself (Maree, 2021). The ways that adoptees store episodic events and memories requires them to take responsibility for and ownership of their internal authority and establish their own sets of values and ideologies” (Kegan, 1994, p. 5). Mezirow (1991) explains the need for reinvention. He states, “It is not so much what happens to people but how they interpret and explain what happens to them that determines their actions, their contentment, and emotional well-being, and their performance” (p. xiii). This research explores what happens when adoptees explore their timeline, held taut with tension between their birth and their adoption.

Once registered as a vital memory aiding in identity, the brain decides what gets stored for later use. It is commonly held that *stored memory*, the second phase in memory acquisition, contributes to our sense of self (Hutto & McGivern, 2021; McCarroll, 2018; Prebble et al., 2013). Neuroscientists Donato et al. (2021) believe memory formed in infancy is not lost despite not being expressed at the behavioral level. Instead, suggest Donato et al., this implicit memory is stored as a long-term representation that can affect personality and cognitive abilities. Literary scholar Homans (2015) questions what happens when the unremembered, yet life-altering adoption event is irretrievable. Much like birth stories, adoption stories help fill the knowledge

gap. However, consider the kinds of stories shared with some transnational adoptees, told first by their adoptive parents. I wondered how many of these details, stored as a long-term representation, begin with someone's birth or adoption.

"I arrived on a South Korean flight, unaccompanied and in a cardboard box."

"I was found on the streets of Kathmandu, so malnourished I couldn't walk."

"I was left on the steps of the police station, so newly born my umbilical cord was still attached."

Adoption stories, often fear-based, get stored in the subconscious mind, waiting for a stimulus-response behavior - assisting with everyday decisions. Lipton (2015), in his book *The Biology of Belief*, explains, "Our lives are essentially a printout of our subconscious programs, behaviors that were fundamentally acquired from others (our parents, family, and community) before we were six years old" (p. 122). The ways adoptive parents describe details with their adopted children matters.

Many stories, like the narration listed above, are limiting and disempowering. O'Keane (2021), in her book *A Sense of Self*, explains, "The hippocampus will take whatever is presented from the cortical world of your sensation and convert it through the cortex into your human story" (p. 64). Suppose memory plays an integral role in narrative selfhood. It is possible to find access points for fear extinction, mentioned earlier, which induce new learning resulting from finding unmatched outcomes. Beyond the *found-in-a-box* story, participants in this research discovered surprising, conflicting, intriguing, and perhaps shocking *aha moments* in their exploration of pre-adoptive artifacts, enabling them to rewrite the disempowering programs stored in their minds. However, adoptees who initiate searches discover it is nearly impossible to unearth and recognize their past. The mothers, fathers, uncles, and siblings found through

searching are shadow figures, no longer carrying the magical, satiating birth story needed to frame identity. The witnesses have all moved on, had their lives, and written their history that does not include the adoptee. Instead, what is unearthed are objects holding narrative potential for future identity construction.

The third element in memory processing is *retrieval*. Many adoptees choose not to search for clues about their past. A feeling of gratitude for their adoption supersedes their need to know, and they decide to leave the mysteries of their past undisturbed. In Robin Wall Kimmerer's book *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013), the author highlights the reciprocal relationship between plants and people. She observed what happens to sweetgrass, a perennial plant, if left undisturbed. Kimmerer explains,

> The sweetgrass that had not been picked or disturbed in any way was choked with dead stems while the harvested plots were thriving. Even though half of all stems had been harvested each year, they quickly grew back, completely replacing everything that had been gathered. In fact producing more shoots than were present before harvest. Picking sweetgrass seemed to actually stimulate growth. (p. 162-163).

The same theory can be said about adoption. The invasive, severe, and profound event of relinquishment can remain unknowingly gridlocked for a lifetime. L. Miller (2021), a pediatric doctor and professor at Tufts University, focuses her career on this issue. She states, "Without early detection, the path of complex trauma can show up as type 2 diabetes, inflammation, obesity, thyroid disease, etc." Miller's work suggests adult adoptees are highly vulnerable to physical dysfunction. Miller reasons, "If we ignore some of the lived experiences of adoptees faced with complex trauma, we end up with a vulnerable population who feel detached from the world" (Miller, 2021).

Perry (2017) reminds us, “The nature and timing of our developmental experiences shape us. Like people who learn a foreign language late in life, some adoptees will never speak the language of love without an accent” (p. 106). The empowering and courageous act of retrieval, or gentle interventions, produces growth – possibly coordinating regulation in the hippocampal region to promote wellness (Provenzi et al., 2019). If picking sweetgrass can stimulate growth, as suggested by Kimmer (2013), the same might be true in harvesting new ideas supporting adoptive identity.

Uncovering pre-adoptive history asks a person to manufacture, visit, or imagine an embodied truth. Adoptees place themselves in the story of birth through adoption. The task is more memoir than a diary, recognizing reality while relating it to oneself. Erikson (Erikson, 1968) describes the identity development process as one of “simultaneous reflection and observation” (p. 22), in which an individual engages in critical judgments of themselves and society. Mezirow (1991) advances this thought, explaining how the acquisition of new knowledge and feelings surrounding identity must be accompanied by “an enhanced level of awareness of the context of one’s beliefs and feelings, a critique of one’s assumptions, and particularly premises, and an assessment of alternative perspectives” (p. 161). According to Kegan (1994), the transformational changes in identity begin to form shape when transformative learning happens. Someone changes “not just the way he behaves, not just the way he feels, but the way he knows—not just what he knows but the way he knows” (Kegan, 1994, p. 17). Through this time of critical reflection, adoptees may explore possible options for personal identity and subsequently commit to or reject the various options for defining the self.

My exploratory study on adoptive identity offered a way to reverse the idea of memories impacting the narrative self. Instead, the approach allowed the autobiographical narrative self to

lead the way, influencing, defining, reorganizing, and cognitively shifting the registration, storage, and acquisition of episodic memories, revealing a new point of orientation. The GPS pin can be moved according to time, location, associated emotions, and other contextual information. In time, adoptees may find themselves as people whose bodies, beliefs, and values (Smith, 2021) travel through their constructed identity with more freedom.

This next section draws on the integrative, collaborative approaches used in material culture studies to ease the lines of tension held between an adoptee's opposing and conflicted birth and adoption stories. By engaging with a collective culture of material – objects associated with everyday life and historical encounters, people may arrive at different conclusions about themselves, others, and life.

Material Culture as a Tool for Research

Material culture is, in its simplest terms, the types of objects found and used within a culture. According to the editors of Encyclopedia Britannica (Rafferty, 2022), material culture includes "tools, weapons, utensils, machines, ornaments, art, buildings, monuments, written records, religious images, clothing, and other ponderable objects produced or used by humans" (para 1).

Material culture often refers to artifacts, a body of material available for studying a particular community or society's beliefs, values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions at a given time (Gaskell & Carter, 2020). People define artifacts as any object that humans have found and selected, adapted, or fashioned for use to "survive, define social relationships, represent facets of identity, or benefit people's state of mind, social, or economic standing" (Buchli, 2020, p. 241). Material culture plays a central role in the structure of a society. Artifacts, as seen through the lens of an adoption researcher, can be used to explore histories and themes that shape and

reshape our understanding of people and their world. Artifacts are not simply props caught up in the world's events. Instead, according to Gerritsen and Riello (2021), they are "creating, constructing, materializing and mobilizing history, contacts, and entanglements" (p. 5). Thus, the term *artifact* can be applied when an object stops functioning as intended and transforms its use through an entangled engagement with humans. Once acquired, artifacts such as an original birth certificate, a document most everyone else has never questioned, can be viewed at face value and *against the grain* (Davis, 2013, as cited in Farge, 2017, p. xi**)**.

Scholars in material culture studies can research objects to inform historical and socio-cultural perspectives. They can draw meaning from things such as the function and purpose of Mongolian Shaman costumes (Liu & Kwon, 2020), pre-colonial sub-Saharan Africa technologies (Uwizeyimana, 2022), and the "power of needles, paintbrushes, scissors, and fabrics among women in consumer society" (Dyer, 2021, P. 1). Likewise, material culture studies can utilize objects to study people. For example, Stetz (2014) applies material culture studies to define femininity among women. She finds national, class, ethnic, or religious notions are almost always expressions of social identity made visible through the non-verbal material culture of clothing as ideological choices. Stetz (2014) suggests we can learn about people by studying individual and collective symbols of identity through artifacts such as jewelry, room décor, or shoes. Stetz suggests these studies advocate an interaction between the subject and object to interpret people's behaviors within their environment. As such, material culture studies seek a relationship between people, objects, and the various layers of cultural meaning embedded within objects (Appadurai, 2017; Berger, 2016; Buchli, 2020; Kopytoff, 2014).

Material culture studies cross many disciplinary boundaries, often drawing on theory and practice from archeology, anthropology, history, social sciences, museum studies, folklore, and

the humanities (Wynne-Jones, 2020). Following, are some noted disciplinary fields, each sharing a line of inquiry with material culture studies. Note how they may aid in the complex push and pull of adoptive identity.

The field of archeology is the genesis of material culture, having direct access to the material world. Archeology is a historical discipline that focuses on the ancient past and includes recovery and material analysis techniques, often including three-dimensional objects located from digs and excavations (Arponen et al., 2019; Gaskell & Carter, 2020). The object-invested academic discipline of archeology asserts that material objects can affect those who use them (Hussain & Will, 2020). Consequently, Berger (2016) explains that archeology is the study of humanity. Findings of material culture studies gain an "understanding of the daily lives of past cultures and the overarching trend of human history" (Berger, 2016, p. 93). As a conduit of meaning, some historical traces can reveal puzzling and contentious denotations. One recent entry into the field of archeology, summarized by Downes (2019), is genetic material derived from the remains of ancient people. Ancient DNA extracted from human remains aids in understanding human lineage, opening new and controversial knowledge about the ethnic and evolutionary origin of people.

Today, results from DNA tests often lead to discoveries that reveal or expose new knowledge about one's genetic history. Genomic testing appeals to adoptees looking to fill gaps in their family information (Kay & Taverner, 2022). In closed adoptions, the history of a person begins with the adoption story. Approaching human history through genetics expands the narrative. The archeology of adoption may add insight into adoption history, including its approaches, practices, and policies.

Anthropology studies past and present humans (Eriksen, 2017). The discipline helped develop the field of material culture studies by examining how a material object relates to a meaning or a variety of meanings. An anthropologist looks at the object itself, reflecting on its context, construction, and usefulness to understand the culture in which an object is featured. Anthropologists Gaskell and Carter (2020) describe material objects as prime sources of information about cultures, their evolutions, and their differences. The discipline of anthropological studies offers qualitative and quantitative methods, allowing researchers to make sense of the spatial and historical contexts within which materials take on meaning (Gaskell & Carter, 2020).

Ethnographers within anthropology recognize the complex and intertwined relationships with objects. Anthropologist Daniel Miller's (2008) methodological and analytical focus on objects addresses the capability of things, having different skills and purposes from humans, to generate novel questions that may re-frame events and perspectives. For example, Warsh (2019) posed more critical questions about a Caribbean pearl brought up from the sea in the 16th century. The inanimate object is a witness to the long-drawn history that defined nations. At the time, pearls were in such demand worldwide that the massive pearling industry required an increase in divers, giving rise to the slave trade from East Africa. The pearl becomes integral and inseparable to history as the object travels across time and space.

Likewise, by using a variety of pre-adoptive artifacts within the interview session in adoption studies, researchers may equally carry a fluidity of novel ideas rising through the passage of ever-changing events. An unobtained birth certificate may lose focus as DNA testing reveals an entire genealogical tree. According to Miller (2009), the discipline of anthropology

recognizes people's resiliency as they frame, orchestrate, and redefine their orientation to everyday objects.

Producing history using material culture studies is an effective analytic strategy for understanding culture (Woodward, 2007). However, Yalouri (2020) claims these studies are not exclusively dedicated to the work of archeologists and anthropologists. By studying objects and people's relationship with them (Woodward, 2007), scholars can explore the social life of things (Kopytoff, 2014). For example, to show how crucial things are in shaping our identities, Yalouri (2020) explains how biographies of things link intrinsically with people's biographies. Yalouri suggests one can study people by studying things.

This social dynamic between objects and people has encouraged the ability to convey memories and experiences. Hoskins (1998, as cited in Yalouri, 2020) found that asking people to talk about objects was the only way to do so. Miller (2008), an anthropologist, reasons, "Language is often defensive, restricted, and carefully constructed as a narrative. You can ask people about themselves, but the results are often much less informative than one would like" (p. 2). For instance, when asked to describe an adoptive narrative from an adoptee's perspective, Tucker (Tucker & Bartz, 2021) finds these adoptive voices underrepresented. She explains,

> The first and biggest, I think, is that I've seen many adoptees who don't even know their own narrative from their perspective. So, for example, when you ask an adult adoptee, "Tell me about your adoption," they almost sound rote in their response. They'll say things like, well, I was abandoned at an orphanage when I was one year old, and then my parents came and got me. They might tell you their adoption story, but it's not from their experience. It's just what they've heard other people say time and time and time again (p. 75).

The study of material culture offers value to qualitative researchers exploring the subordinate experiences of people holding conflicting voices, just as those adopted in childhood (Hodder, 2012). Adoptees can express their perspectives through their artifacts.

Social workers and educators working with children newly adopted or living in foster homes utilize objects to aid in the transition between settings (Doel, 2021). Just as fairy tales use the power of objects to tell a story (a glass slipper, a ring, a lamp, a wand), objects carried from one part of life to another can aid in human feelings and experience. Often, foster care children moving from one setting to another carry their belongings in trash bags; the contents fail to mark the significance of their past experiences. Recognizing evocative objects in this multi-disciplinary approach offers a novel yet challenging way to explore, evoke, release, and relieve emotions (Doel, 2021). The concept encouraged poet Mary Oliver (2018) to ask, “Do stones feel? Do they love their life? (p. 70).

The perspective of an object varies significantly from its material origin, explains Nordstrom (2013), who addresses the use of objects with dimensions of space and time, their cultural and aesthetic interpretations, and their agentic qualities. Dyer (2021), in agreement, describes objects as autonomous agents in creating that history. Brown and Cook (2022) agree, asserting an artifact can hold value if it continues to move through many hands and passes through generations. With each transition, the object layers stories that may reveal “kinship networks, shared beliefs, and social relationships” (Brown & Cook, 2022, p. 4). To explain, Brown and Cook describe a witness to history, the last Canadian soldier killed in battle by a German sniper on the Western Front during World War I. The Canadian died minutes before the Armistice; this historic death defined him for decades.

Initially, Brown and Cook's (2022) research with material culture from the First World War knit together rich primary sources acting as witnesses that offered a new view of war. However, in 2018, postcards were discovered, written by this soldier, sent to a sister, and resting with a great-niece. The great-niece added depth to the story, noting, "I grew up knowing that he loved my great-grandmother very much and felt that she had loved him in return" (Brown & Cook, 2022, p. 45). This participant, the great-niece, shifted the focus from the cultural effects of events (the war) onto their "aesthetics, semantics and functions" (Haug & Hielscher, 2021, p. 4). The narrative seeks a new level of understanding, changed by a body of material witnesses (the postcards).

Situated within the inherited gifts from objects lies, according to Hodder (2012), "intended and unintended residues of humanity" (p. 174). A soldier dying minutes before a declaration of peace defines a moment. However, scholars engaging with objects to establish relationships with people "help make thoughts and events tangible," write Haug and Hielscher (2021, P. 3). An object survives its initial function through an intimate engagement with people. Researchers Haug and Hielsher (2021) believe people can recognize and re-frame an event first situated in the past to frame the present and future culture. These authors agree that re-framing and reexamination require foresight and imagination. War-time postcards delivered home over one hundred years ago become an "alchemic messenger of meaning" (p. 3).

Although material culture studies help define relationships between significant historical events and their participants, there remains a need for researching objects and people when the past is less clearly depicted. For example, for some, the circumstances surrounding an adoptee's pre-adoptive history, such as birth, foster care, and adoption, remain shrouded in secrecy. While current adoption research draws more attention toward the experiences of adopted adults

(Grotevant & Von Korff, 2011), there remains a need for a co-construction of meaning that encapsulates adoption and the time before adoption. The material culture found before adoption may assist researchers and adoptees seeking this alchemic quest for meaning. However, grasping this sought-after pursuit for meaning is like trying to hop aboard a moving train. The meaning has forward motion; by the time you grab it, the train of thought is further down the road. This next session attends to the dynamic theoretical challenges inherent when people become entangled with inanimate objects.

Theorizing Objects

Material engagement theory, coined by Malafouris (2013), best describes the value of objects in shaping the mind. Malafouris' theory invites material objects into the human cognitive fold by influencing people's thoughts and actions. Engagement with objects in participatory ways involves thinking and feeling with, through, and about things (Malafouris, 2013). Claude Lévi-Strauss recognized the potentiality of objects, reflecting, "He 'speaks' not only with things, as we have already seen, but also through the medium of things."(Levi-Strauss, 1988, p. 14). This suitable theoretical framework situates the interplay between objects (artifacts), their intentionality, and potentialities. Barona (2020) agrees, explaining that an active engagement with objects achieves certain ends. Material engagement theory "affirms that the human mind has always been inextricably coupled to the material forms that people create; for this reason, human cognitive and social life is a genuinely mediated process and, often constituted by material culture environments" (Malafouris, 2018, p. 755).

This mediation is no easy task. For instance, Godon-Decoteau and Ramsey (2020) describe adoptees' challenges when they pour over orphan records, birth documents, and DNA test results only to find previously constructed and limited answers. In many ways, Godon-

Decoteau and Ramsey believe knowledge of this historical event will always be incomplete. P. Miller (2017b) further explains the difficulty in extracting knowledge from muted forms of inanimate things. According to Miller, knowledge of the past in the present requires re-entry through a shared humanity. “Things made by people are, and even more importantly remain, proxies for those people and thus can be re-experienced and understood in the same way that we might an individual” (Miller, 2017b, p. 206). Barona and Malafouris (2022) suggest this guided interaction opens a space to be “attentive to the unexpected, new or indeed unconventional opportunities – both for the mind and the material – blurring the boundaries between human imagining and material affordance” (pp. 551–552). Hoskins (2013) suggests objects are “infinitely malleable to the shifting and contested meaning constructed for them through human agency” (p. 75). Researchers working with material culture find similar malleability in paradigms across multiple disciplinary boundaries of inquiry (Monterroza-Rios & Gutiérrez-Aguilar, 2022)

As Koukouti and Malafouris (2020) suggest, this type of critical theory research paradigm challenges meaning when observing an object to find what is present and absent. They concur the actual and the possible are experienced together. Findings from Rizzo’s (2022) work with 50 adoptees 18 years or older who had obtained their original birth certificates drew on data that critically intersected with adoption laws and policies, social identity, mental health, and socioeconomic influences. In Rizzo’s study using an object/interview method, the researcher initially found no symbolic representation of the intersecting lines between self, adopted self, and birth self. The written word alone, a document, failed in its grasp of truth.

Dyer (2021) further challenges the over-reliance on the written word to narrate history, suggesting that objects can take on this role of priority in research. She asserts, “Objects are

omnipresent, acting as a uniquely sympathetic point of connection between humans, past and present" (p. 282). This reframing of objects, seen as having lives of their own within historical narratives, raises the value of material culture studies and shines potential for adults searching for meaning surrounding their birth stories (White & Beaudry, 2009). Researchers using a critical lens can view less traditional objects, such as the role of sound, a feeling, food, or scars assisting with meaning-making. The following are reflections from Ethiopian adoptees who grew up in France:

> "My first experience in life is the ordeal of hunger. It has never left me, and it belongs to me. These are the experiences absorbed by my body, which are the foundation of my being (Evans et al., 2022, p. 220).

> It wasn't until high school, around the time you try and find yourself, that I started digging my roots back up. I started listening to music and the first few months, I cried every time (yes, every time) I put Ethiopian music on. I can't say why, but I knew it was important to continue listening to it. (Evans et. al., 2022, p. 135).

> I have nine scars (p. 194): two rows of three arranged vertically on my torso, one under my navel, one at the bottom of my back, and another on top of my head. They were done with a heated, red-tipped stick that was rubbed against a spinning barrel – probably for a religious ceremony. Every time I go to the pool (or when people see me shirtless), I feel their gaze on my scars. I wonder what they are thinking: do they think I was beaten as a child, or that I cut myself? (Evans et al., 2022, p. 194).

This specialized lens requires a theoretical framework that includes an imaginative relationship between a non-verbal object and a pre-verbal past. According to material culture scholars (Dyer, 2021; Holmes, 2020; Nordstrom, 2013), this unique type of inquiry, which serves a fundamental need to acquire secret, novel, and valued knowledge, naturally seeks a point of engagement where theory meets practice. Both Nordstrom (2013) and Davies (2020) believe this constant collective engagement with humans and objects enters and leaves ideologies, patterns of thought, and beliefs with great fluidity, producing alternative knowledge.

Along with the critical research paradigm described above, material culture studies can apply a constructivist research approach, allowing participants to form a deeper understanding and knowledge of themselves in the world through an unpredictable, unsettling engagement with inanimate material that can open up access to a person's past, present, and future. This transactional knowledge between an object and subject has a not-yet-known outcome. In this unrestricted way, an object may inspire a person to act. In a larger sense, an object held becomes the teacher, narrating without words, a new way of seeing the world.

Material engagement theorists view objects and people in constant motion. Dyer (2021) writes about this transformative movement, mostly unrecognizable. In the construction of a snowflake, Dyer (2021) notes:

> – an ice crystal that looks rigid and frozen in place. In reality, on an extremely tiny level, smaller than a couple of nanometers, as it freezes it vibrates like crazy, all the billion, billion molecules that make it up shaking invisibly, practically burning up. These tiny instabilities in those vibrations give snowflakes their individual shapes (Dyer, 2021,p. 24).

Doerr (2021) further explains movement among objects and people is everywhere, even where we imagine there is none.

Thus, if movement is everywhere, from the tiniest unrested snowflake where motion seems unimaginable, Davies (2020) describes people engaging with material culture as equally in constant motion, being *of* the world through intra-actively engaging with the world, affecting the world, and being affected by it. For adopted people seeking to understand their constructed self, which can appear as unique as a snowflake, Malafouris (2021) suggests the significance of dynamic, participatory, and transactional interchanges between objects and people.

Yet another research paradigm positioned well within a material engagement theory is an interpretive construct that includes ways of understanding ourselves concerning cultures, social settings, and relationships. Objects can present a worldview that aids in a human narrative. A collection of over 400 tokens on display at London's Foundling Museum provides glimpses into eighteenth-century practices and policies situated in London society (Parker, 2016). Relinquished children were renamed upon admittance into London's first public orphanage, the Foundling Hospital. Tokens left by mothers left clues to their original identity, leaving hope that they would one day be able to return to claim their child. Unfortunately, most mothers never returned. In time, administrators separated the tokens from the records books. Today, they are behind glass at London's Foundling Museum, acting as anonymous, silent witnesses to systems of oppression, poverty, gender bias, and social standing.

Figure 1

Foundling Hospital Token

Note. This token was meant for a child admitted in January of 1758. Courtesy the Foundling Museum, London.

As Miller (2017a) suggests, these tokens have the potential to provide hints, showing names, birth dates, terms of endearment, shape, and choice of material. Although the families connected with the tokens are long gone, the evocative artifacts stand in proxy and, when engaged with other orphans, can *speak* directly of love, longing, and loss. On loan from the past, the objects resurrect a story for today's currency. The social reality of the present time includes mothers still relinquishing their children. By engaging with these tokens from the past, an object may provide evidence that mothers losing their children in any century may have spoken their babies' names.

Figure 2

Foundling Hospital Token

Note. Handmade paper and textile heart left at the Foundling Hospital with a child at admission, eighteenth century. Purchased for the Foundling Museum by William and Helena Korner, 2005. Courtesy the Foundling Museum, London.

What this discovery about past artifacts means for adoptees sifting through the fragmented pieces of their past is essential. While objects from the 18th century failed to serve their purpose, they remain powered with intention. This concept is illustrated by P. Miller (2017b) using Rainer Marie Rilke's *Ninth Duino Elegy* (Rilke, 1923, translated in 2017). Included below is Rilke's third stanza:

> Tell him of Things. He will stand astonished; as *you* stood
> by the ropemaker in Rome or the potter along the Nile.
> Show him how happy a Thing can be, how innocent and ours,
> how even lamenting grief purely decides to take form,
> serves as a Thing, or dies into a Thing–, and blissfully
> escapes far beyond the violin.–And these Things,
> which live by perishing, know you are praising them; transient,
> they look to us for deliverance: us, the most transient of all.

They want us to change them, utterly, in our invisible heart,

within–oh endlessly–within us! Whoever we may be at last.

Rilke (1923, translated in 2017) thinks of objects quite differently than archeologists, who stand beside ancient artifacts from Rome and along the Nile and wonder about their cultural meaning. P. Miller (2017b) believes Rilke thinks of objects to inspire questions about existence – if even for a short time (transient). Rilke's answers are surprising, explains P. Miller, as the poet appears to choose things over people to help answer this existential quest. P. Miller surmises Rilke writes as if he knows a responsibility to things, adding later in the poem, "they look to us for deliverance" (line 65). In P. Miller's interpretive research, Rilke imagines things rising into consciousness, asking people to change them and keep them alive by making them ours in ways that draw less from their physicality and more on their condition of consciousness. Rilke's reverence for things leaves no doubt their usefulness endures over time.

By holding an evocative object and imagining where it has been and where it will go, one can consider life's events as ever-changing. Birth-related artifacts discussed in Rizzo's (2022) research sat dormant for years in vital statistics offices. Once released, they reveal the urgency of an object's desires, giving rise to voices that aid transparency. Thus, interest in material culture studies can aid adoption researchers using integrating disciplines, concepts, and methodologies to (1) explore pre-adoptive artifacts, (2) re-consider adoption narratives, and (3) anchor a sense of meaning and belonging for adoptees. This review draws on these three areas of meaning-making utilizing the unique qualities of material culture to memorialize and shape conceptions of the past (Buchli, 2020; Gaskell & Carter, 2020).

Exploring Pre-Adoptive Artifacts

If people see the world through an object's eyes, as Yalouri (2020) suggested, the task appears endless. Historian Farge (2017) uses material culture to examine how identity is marked, inviting attention to human relationships with material things. For example, as described by Farge, a clock owned by Thomas Jefferson had various functions built into its design. By peering into the exterior face of the clock, historians noticed an hour hand with no minute or second hand. When researchers studied the artifact from an interdisciplinary perspective, they gained an understanding of the ways objects mark identity at that time and place. However, we can also view the clock as an equal participant in the present and future time and place. Jefferson's clock marked the passage of time for enslaved workers and was visible from the planting fields. Minutes and seconds were unnecessary; only the hour to determine labor starts and stops. In this view, Gaskell and Carter (2020) wonder how artifacts such as this clock might be used to create people as much as people create things.

Today, the ancient artifact built over two hundred years ago inspires closer observation to think deeply and critically with wonder, awe, curiosity, and engagement. Through this material, Gaskell and Carter (2020) suggest we can piece together facets of social, cultural, and economic standing. Farge (2017) describes the dual faces of Thomas Jefferson's Great Clock, as it is known. On the outside wall, the clock displays a face with just the hour hand as an accurate tool for outdoor laborers. Material culture studies help us explore the value of time used among marginalized populations. On this side of the clock, the hours, not the seconds, mattered to the clockmaker and owner, reinforced by an attached bell, which chimed each hour and was loud enough for enslaved people working in the fields to hear it three miles away.

In contrast, the part of the clock facing the interior of the building reveals a clockface with the hour, minute, and second hands. Using material culture studies to examine the

mechanics of Jefferson's clock, researchers can view artifacts whose purpose served seconds and minutes to one group, not another. Birth certificates can serve similar purposes, providing partial information to select groups of people. Fathers' names are protected and omitted from the records of illegitimate births.

These examples of Jefferson's Great Clock and birth-related documents make it clear that objects are things in motion that can give voice to some past narrative (Appadurai, 2017). Miller (2009), in his engagement with people and objects, believes the mute forms of objects and individuals can be made to speak more easily and eloquently about the nature of these relationships. This novel ethnographic object-interview approach demonstrates how artifacts can be a proxy for a person, as stated by P. Miller (2017b). Researchers and participants work together in object interviews to reveal an object's biography (Holmes, 2020). The method involves exploring an object's material qualities that, in turn, can influence people's relationship with the object. This deeply co-constructed entanglement between humans and the material can develop conditions of possibility (Hultin, 2019).

Specifically, objects accompanying interviews shed light on details that encompass multi-dimensional, multi-disciplinary insight. In Rizzo's (2022) research, adoptees elevated their perspectives by observing an object's physical aesthetics (shape, color, and form) as well as the object's functionalities and oddities. Interview questions invited curiosity about the artifact's past life, once sealed and protected. At this stage in Rizzo's object interview, the researcher, the participant, and the object simultaneously developed a relationship of entanglement (Hultin, 2019). Angela Tucker, a transracial adoptee, explains, "Sometimes it's easier to talk about nonhuman objects than about ourselves and our parents" (Tucker, 2023, p. 22).

Object interview follow-up questions draw upon the intra-relations continuously performed via social, cultural, historical, spiritual, and environmental perspectives (Nordstrom, 2013; Hultin, 2019). According to Nordstrom, the resulting unstable narratives occupy the past, present, and future. Her work avoids using objects as probing or prompting tools. Instead, she relies on the connections shared during the interview that reveal dynamic, detachable, reversible, susceptible perspectives that constantly challenge possible meanings (p. 12).

The resulting data shows the capabilities of material artifacts as navigational tools, revealing details that initially may seem insignificant. Similar to the missing hands on a clock face, a blank space or crossed-out section on a birth certificate may appear strange. A researcher or a participant might initiate curiosity and ask about the omitted section. Soon, a clearer picture may emerge, giving voice to an absent father whose name was not required.

According to Hultin (2019), the addition of objects in interviews allows a shift of focus that, through object engagement, elicits emotion and a nuanced sense of how a change in practices such as adoption occurs not always with human intention but in the mundane repeated practice over years of omitting names on birth certificates. Now, as equally participating researcher and participant, both can explore how the actions (anonymous fathers) conditioned other actions (sub-class of daughters and sons). A researcher's job in this type of interview, according to Hultin, is to draw connections between the participant's specific ways of being. By adding the kaleidoscopic lens of an object, the result is a diffractive and critical analysis of boundaries, properties, constraints, inclusions, and identities.

For example, a historical artifact such as the Derringer pistol used to kill President Lincoln helps reshape and reframe our understanding of U.S. political history. In this historical setting, material culture methodologies examine the relationship between the artifact and the

assassination of President Lincoln's narrative. The meaning attributed to the Derringer displayed at the Ford Museum has been shaped by events that unfolded on April 14, 1865. But meaning can hold a variety of interests. Gerritsen and Riello (2021) describe the interdisciplinary nature of material culture.

Art historians may study the patterns on the handle of this pistol. In contrast, technology historians might be interested in the pistol's size, which enabled the owner to conceal the weapon, something quite impossible a century earlier. Thus, studying artifacts as objects of material culture points to the "affective, social, cultural and economic relationships that form our lives" (Gerritsen & Riello, 2021, p. 4). This broader view enriches understanding of events and people.

Evidence drawn from artifacts, as shown in Rizzo's (2022) research, offers a historical past where birth mothers did not die, where fathers may have never known about the pregnancy, and may present siblings who either proceeded or followed the adoptee's birth. Further, birth-related artifacts such as DNA tests, pictures of biological family members found on social media such as Facebook, or original birth certificates can fill in the missing or semitransparent details surrounding an adoptee's birth event. Consequently, Rizzo's findings support the functional qualities of the material that can gather inertia, according to context, giving rise to new thoughts involving agency.

Sociologist Zuev (2022) believes this participatory engagement with photographs provides an emancipatory space for participants in research, such as adoptees, to visualize their world. Now, the story is more than just an adoption story, and the artifacts that helped achieve this miracle are like the Caribbean pearls holding history for enslaved African pearl divers. These free divers carried pearls up from depths of 58 feet deep in the sea. Today, researchers lift

these pearls to the present light of day to gain insight. Engaging with objects that served a purpose in the past, suggests Zuev, permits their secrets through.

During multiple object interviews, Nordstrom (2013) photographed the objects brought in by participants. Regardless of the object's constant physicality, the connections to these objects shifted focus and meaning in each setting. Nordstrom's results show the many trajectories material items can take through different and sometimes unrelated meanings that defy order and direction (Nordstrom, 2013; Hodder, 2012). Rather than objects being used as a probe or prompt for inquiry, Nordstrom's approach produced narratives that carried past events forward. She asked participants to describe objects associated with their ancestors. Interviews lasted 2-4 hours each and required follow-up sessions. Her participants connected with details surrounding deceased relatives through an "animated force of possibility in which multiple interpretations proliferate" (p. 244). Nordstrom avoided interpretive and phenomenological questions, shifting the conventional qualitative interview from gleaning the perspectives from a participant to a larger space that equally includes objects, subjects (participants, ancestors, the researcher), and events generating knowledge. Nordstrom used subjects (participants) and objects as primary data sources to form multiple connections to thoughts and actions. When events happen pre-verbally, such as an adoptee's birth through adoptive history, pre-adoptive artifacts stand in as proxies for remembering (Prezioso & Alessandroni, 2023).

Reconsidering Adoption Narratives Through Objects

Objects associated with a troubled origin can help untangle the cognitive view of the past. Biologically, these object-centered autobiographical narratives that evolve through engagement with others may collaborate between both hemispheres of the brain (Siegel, 2013; Vanfraussen, 2020). While the left hemisphere provides a linear narrative telling of a story, including

recognizing emotions, the right hemisphere makes sense of and processes these experiences (Siegel, 2013). The resilience and instability of objects that take on new meanings in new times and places offer a revised sense of self.

Scholars of material culture studies such as Miller (2001, 2008, 2009, 2017a) and Nordstrom (2013) suggest objects' viability, fluidity, and engaging nature to help move a subject's story forward. By placing objects at the center of analysis, Pitts and Versluys (2021) suggest a new history arrives based on this human-object entanglement. Adoptees feeling stuck with only their adoption stories as a reference can find movement through their pre-adoptive material. Assembling a new historical trajectory is derived from what purpose the object (a birthmark, a scar, a photograph, a document) may have served in the past. It confronts the potentiality of what it may serve now and in the future.

In *The Imprint of Another Life*, Homans introduces an elderly adoptee who said, "I just want to know who I am before I die" (Homans, 2015, p. 17). The fragmented parts of identity often haunt the body because its source is "forgotten, exhausted, or not locatable" (Bahr, 2016, p. 111). Seeing one's life from a self-reflected view is difficult for those who begin their lives in the middle of a story, holding their trauma and shock (Winterson, 2012). Stored in an isolated, non-verbal form, the memory of early trauma has nowhere to live. This dysfunction makes narratives that require access to implicit memory originating from the early limbic area of the brain so tricky. In an attempt, the brain tries to make guesses about this predicament of loss.

Some adoption researchers refer to this phenomenon as *phantom identity* (Rizzo, 2022) or *phantom pain* (Bahr, 2016), referring to the experience adoptees have when they consider the life they might have had without their adoption. The loss of biological connections, along with the

associated pain of such a loss, is compared to the loss and pain from an amputated limb. Things that should be there are just gone, yet the feeling persists in the present.

In response to paternal loss before birth, adolescents describe the experience of missing someone they had not ever met (Mahat-Shamir & Pitcho-Prelorentzos, 2019a, p. 181). They describe this ambiguous loss below:

"I'm in pain because I lost something, but I don't even know what I have lost. That feeling of not knowing can drive you crazy!"

"It's like a hole, a void that I don't really have words to describe.…It's just this chronic pain in my body, this hole that I can't even place, it's everywhere and it's nowhere, but it's there, in my body."

"Losing a father, it's like losing a part of one's self.…It's like losing an organ, like losing a part of my body.…This is the pain I'm feeling, the pain of losing an organ."

Researchers have long studied people who lost limbs from amputation. They explore a phenomenon called *phantom limb pain,* in which there lies the perception of pain in a limb that is no longer there (Hanyu-Deutmeyer et al., 2023; Ratcliffe, 2019). In the New Yorker article, *The Itch* (2008), Gawande (2018) explains what happens in the brain to make our body believe the limb still exists. He stated,

> Our sensory experiences are not sent to the brain but originate in it. When your arm is amputated, nerve transmissions are shut off, and the brain's best guess often seems to be that the arm is still there but paralyzed, clenched, or beginning to cramp up. Things can stay like this for years. The pain or itch may stop if the brain receives contrary signals (p. 11).

Whether the loss is an actual body part, such as a limb or loss from maternal relinquishment, managing phantom pain requires reshaping the automatic nervous system, adding contrary signals. The shift involves making the implicit experience explicit by adding context through the lens of discernment. An artifact may fill in some gaps between *this* artifact and *that* person to soothe some of that phantom ache (Zytaruk, 2015). Artifacts can help pre-adoption memory, which is stored pre-cognitively, become explicit.

In her book *Birth's Hidden Legacy* (2014), Brook believes people can access these episodic memories (what, when, where) through a felt sense in our bodies to repair issues of identity and self-regulation. Feeling embodied loss in the heart and stomach or in the tension set in the shoulders, considers the past as a present rehappening. While language or narration may help tease apart the threads of trauma, it often fails when the experience of trauma is ambiguous loss. It is difficult to recognize a felt sense without accurate words or if the event seems unspeakable, forgotten, exhausted, or not locatable (Bahr, 2016). Bahr, when discussing embodied trauma and depression, believes a person in pain exceeds language. Brook (2022), in agreement with Repetto and Riva (2023) who suggest using a somatic approach to therapy using mind-body techniques, reasons resiliency and movement through the tissue may begin by going back in time and clearing out the triggers. When the emotion clears, the body goes much deeper in its willingness to shift and open to new sensations and perspectives.

Adoptees searching for the imprint of a past life must also search for an imprinted *feeling* from their past life. Accessing a felt sense is different for everyone. Barrett, (2017), in her book *How Emotions are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain* states, "Emotions are not built-in but made from more basic parts. They are not universal but vary from culture to culture. They are not triggered; you create them (xii). If adoptees move from one cultural setting to a completely

new setting, I wondered how embodied loss entangled with the dynamic neuron-wired brain detecting novel and confusing environments from birth through adoption.

Some researchers studying the mind-body embodied effects of somatic therapy find it necessary to add a socio-cultural element. Etzelmuller and Tewes (2016) describe the cultural nature of human beings as "characterized by an irreducible mutual interdependence of nature and culture, body and psyche" (Pg. 197). Suppose an adopted person can assimilate into a new social unit – an adoptive family along with a completely different cultural unit early in life. Researchers wonder what stops them from further reinvention later in life. Van der Kolk (2104) explains, "Everything about us – our brains, our minds, and our bodies – is geared toward collaboration in social systems" (pg. 168).

Considering the social nature of human development, I chose to collaborate with participants as a co-participant and a researcher. Positioning myself as an equal explorer of pre-adoptive artifacts, I recognized the plasticity of human development with an emphasis on interpersonal neurobiology, the study of how a positive engagement in the world ignites significant learning leaps as active neurons connect and interact with present experiences with memory networks (O'Keane, 2021). The collaboration of interpersonal connection is our most potent survival strategy, van der Kolk (2014) explains. Perry (2017), in agreement, adds, "You cannot love yourself unless you have been loved and are loved (p.262) . Further, John Steinbeck wrote, "The greatest terror a child can have is that he is not loved, and rejection is the hell he fears" (Steinbeck, 1968, p. xxii). While I engaged with each participant's pre-adoptive artifacts including my own, I wondered if the newly acquired artifacts opened doors toward love.

People adopted in childhood are finding and sharing proof of their identity through DNA reports, recently released original birth certificates, adoption and orphan records, and photos

posted on social media. In her article *Object-Interviews: Folding, Unfolding, and Refolding Perceptions of Objects,* Nordstrom (2013) utilizes the shifting group of objects associated with a person to construct an *ensemble of life* that includes an uncompromising expression of self.

In Rizzo's (2022) study with 50 adoptees who had reunited with at least one birth family member, research findings showed identity shifts related to the participants' original birth certificates. One adoptee in Rizzo's study discussed new findings surrounding identity:

> I got the birth certificate and I'm like, oh my God, she named me Suzanne. And so when you see that and you're just like, you know, you'd kind of wonder why. Why she named me Suzanne, was there somebody related to her named Suzanne? Was it just a name she liked? Like, did she have to do that? It's so it, it's almost like answers questions and then gives you ten more. Forever. Really. You're not ever really without questions, you know? Did somebody, did her mom force her to give me up? Was it a decision she made when she was 22 years old (p. 276)?

The document, a birth certificate previously sealed, gained traction by raising critical inquiry. Further research is needed to recognize the value of such inquiry. While Rizzo's (2022) research findings recommend "additional examination into current adoption record practices in the United States, additional state mutual consent registries, and increased access to adoption-competent counselors for adoptees" (p. 271), more work was needed to address the recognized presence of an "ambiguous and unsolvable identity that interpenetrated with their other identity layers" (pg. 271). Participatory sessions with documents in hand may have raised questions such as, "Did her first mother assign a loved name? Was the decision to relinquish made with care?" Engaging evocative objects with others turns a seemingly benign document into a quest for a human voice, into a quest for love.

In agreement, Miller's 2008 observations noted in his book *The Comfort of Things* state, "The narratives from people you first encounter can be restrictive, defensive, or carefully constructed (p. 2). However, when engaged with ordinary objects, Miller recognized an immediate shift in posture and facial expression. He writes, "A dynamic power changes and a person can have an authentic other voice different from language" (p. 2). Miller (2008) theorizes that material objects are integral to all connections (p. 286), weaving complex history into a recognizable pattern. The outward validation from tangible material culture aids in recovering, defining, and enacting a sense of identity.

Anchoring a Sense of Meaning and Belonging for Adoptees

In Homer's *The Odyssey* (2015*)*, the social and cultural artifacts associated with Odysseus have symbolic significance, playing active roles in the story. More importantly, these evocative objects can change meaning and purpose through time and space. For instance, the unmovable bed, beautifully carved by Odysseus from the base of a live olive tree, solidified stability, its legs firmly rooted in the ground. Later, the same bed revealed the identity of a wandering stranger, Odysseus. Objects, when engaged with by others, uncover secrets of identity. By attaching a story to objects, they become entangled with humans, interwoven with agency. Like today's proof of identity, the DNA report, Odysseus could point to the many ways his identity linked and anchored to an object – the uniquely constructed bed made by the hands of Odysseus was linked to his home, which was linked to his marriage and finally, to his wife. Object biographies help shape identity.

Like Odysseus' artifact, his bed, it is only through an embodied engagement with artifacts that helps contextualize the meaning, allowing for personalized connections (Canevaro, 2018). In most research settings, researchers learn from previous scholars, from their

participants, and from analyzing findings, but they can also learn from objects. In Miller's work (2001, 2008, 2009, 2017a) and Nordstrom's (2013) object interviews, the researchers lose the role of the dominant researcher. In a sense, the objects step into this role, easing the relationship between participant and interviewer. Re-experiencing an object allows the person to decide what meaning serves him best. Adoptees can consider new thoughts and meanings surrounding birth and adoption a year from now.

Dyer (2021), in agreement with Buchli (2020) and P. Miller (2017b), recognizes an object's potentiality as it emerges from the seemingly ambivalent chaos of material culture studies to illuminate a sense of authority, agency, and information. Yalouri (2020) agrees, explaining how incomplete world knowledge remains. Knowledge often begins with books to define the world. However, the birth history of adoptees from closed adoption settings lacks written evidence. Instead, Yalouri suggests researchers work "from the world, including objects from lived experiences, back to books" (p. 204). Applying this type of learning through objects can potentially revitalize, upend, and reconstitute how researchers examine current adoption culture. Legitimizing an adoptee's life requires an interdisciplinary approach that adds a necessary component to turn static birth, orphan, and adoption records into a dynamic power-play of options and insight. As more objects fill the magnanimous role, adoptees may discover a wider opening, leading them further into a once-closed system. Consider a transracial woman adopted by a White family in the suburbs of Colorado. At age 54, she combs her fingers through her black, straightened hair and wonders how it might feel to let it kink and curl again, showing its natal birthright. Her hair is the artifact, and as the years progress, the hold on her adoption loosens as her Black birth story unravels before her.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Overview

The previous chapter offered an extensive body of research on the psychological, biological, and emotional components working collectively to help shape identity. The primary purpose of my study was to explore an adult adoptee's understanding of their adoptive identity using pre-adoptive artifacts. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative methods permit researchers to shape a study's design or procedures. My exploratory study aspired to tease apart the adoption story, casting light on the pre-adoptive history and, thus, interrogating how healing is possible. Adoption researchers Darnell et al. (2016) reason qualitative methods can encourage adoptees to engage with, understand, and then act upon views of their history.

Upon receiving approval from the University's institutional review board, I conducted object interviews (Nordstrom, 2013) to understand the lived experiences of adults adopted in childhood. Considering the social and cultural influences on identity development (Vygotsky, 1978), I included artifacts designed and held first by other social groups to parse out and challenge the socio-cultural position of adoptive identity (Candlin & Guins, 2009). By studying the materiality of adoption with an adoptee, I adhered to ethnographic and archeological disciplines to help broaden an adoptee's understanding of their timeline from birth through adoption.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), ethnographic studies offer ways to explore the beliefs, language, behaviors, and issues facing a cultural group such as adoptees. The inquiry examines power, resistance, and dominance within a social group. One challenge of exploring adoptive identity lies in the ambivalent features of adoption when the "legal termination of the link with the birth parents" marks the event closed. (Lambert, 2019, p. 364). When history is

unattainable, archeology helps. Tilley explains, “Artifacts provide spatial and temporal markers of ethnic identities and primarily reflected ideas in the minds of their makers” (Tilley, 2013, p. 2). The study traded the power from the maker of the artifact to the present-day user, allowing for “intentionality of consciousness, which turns the lens of inquiry on oneself” (Creswell and Poth, 2018, p. 76).

Participatory Research

Participatory research approaches often include marginalized populations willing to share lived experiences noting inequalities. This type of research aims to gain insight into adoptive identity through collective action. (Groot & Abma, 2021). My roles as a researcher and a participant raised in a closed adoption environment aided in a deeper understanding of how “people make sense out of themselves, for themselves” (Myerhoff, 1986, p. 261). In contrast, much of adoption research has made sense of the phenomena of adoption for others. Studies abound comparing some type of adoptee with a non-adoptee population.

Additionally, studies often compare adoptees from one setting with another. Conversely, studying adoptive identity requires a social-cultural setting, shifting power away from the researcher to the participant’s emancipatory power. My contributions as a co-participant enabled conversations that challenged, interpreted, reflected, contradicted, extended, and re-created claims made by researchers for people other than adoptees. Reason and Torbert (2001) explain participatory research involves doing research with, rather than on participants of a study.

Some participatory research studies involve participants in every step of the process, including research design and shared decisions (Vaughn & Jacquez, 2020). My research became participatory through an equal engagement with pre-adoptive artifacts. Pre-adoptive artifacts were all made in social-cultural settings, helping adoptees identify and translate meaning across

time and space within these intersecting social worlds separating birth and adoption. In participatory research, participants have a shared interest in improving the practices and policies that have had such a hold on their history.

In the book *The Objects That Remain*, Levitt (2020) explains how objects can become sacred after being involved with trauma. Objects can help a person tell stories from their past. From a Vygotskian (1978) point of view, artifacts (original birth certificates, photos, textiles, signs, and tools) may help reveal a complete story, mediating interactions with the world and other people. The relational space between the participant and the researcher provides a zone of proximal development. Vygotsky (1978) uses this concept to bridge gaps between what a learner can do without help and what they can achieve with guidance and encouragement from others.

My role as a participant meant I also learned from others to help make meaning surrounding my adoptive identity. Artifacts shared by participants helped me. Likewise, my collection of artifacts added insight for others. Thus, everyone was involved in the meaning-making process. According to Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014), "the artifacts themselves are resources for constructing identity. In a sense, identity is embedded, distributed, and spread among geographical locations, people, social institutions, activities, and practices" (p. 44). Participatory research methods align with the social nature of inquiry.

Limitations

The blurred distinction between researcher and participant has its limitations. My experiences as a researcher adopted from a closed setting allowed me to engage with my participants more fully because of our shared experience. However, my particular adoption was not a shared position by all. I found myself recognizing the different shades of meaning for

people adopted internationally, interracially, and into adoptive families that failed to meet the needs of adoptees.

Further, my experience as an adoptive parent added complexity to the role of participant and researcher. One potential participant, eager at first, dropped out at the last minute because of my status as an adoptive parent. Consequently, I accounted for the impact on my orientation as an adoptee and adoptive parent. All participants in my study felt lifelong grief over their relinquishment, including myself. Adoptees hold anger over separation, blaming the system, the mother, the grandparents, and the father. Looking at the picture more broadly, they question the role of economic and social power, colonialism in international adoption, and the decline in mental health and wellness among adoptees. Some participants had separated from their adoptive parents. Other adoptees knew that some birth family members would have cared for them had they known. My study recognized the often-destructive role adoptive parents play in the phenomenon of adoption. I often wondered if adoptions save true orphans or separates infants from mothers. The adoption and welfare industry is a multi-billion-dollar industry.

I felt I needed to shield my role as an adoptive mother, protecting a decision I had made without complete knowledge of how my son came to be an American son. I rarely spoke of my role as an adoptive parent in my sessions with adoptees. Instead, I only shared my worldview as an adoptee from a secret, closed adoption. My experiences as an adoptive mother remained hidden, shrouded in shame, contention, and confusion.

These contested spaces kept me questioning my positionality, recognizing how easy it is to establish a power dynamic dishonoring the personal experiences of all participants. When I asked participants to complete a final project memorializing their birth through adoption timeline, I had to renegotiate my power relations with those who could not finish the task. I

wondered which times I acted as a researcher and which times I acted as a participant. As a researcher, I had expectations for a finished birth memorial. I wondered if participants completed the project solely for my benefit, pleasing the researcher. I hoped they also benefited from the task which asked them to explore their adoptive identity.

These unsettling and highly individualized challenges reminded me that research is always fraught with biased good intentions. However, I believe the artifacts became the antidote to such difficulties. They never failed to lift the power negotiations moving back and forth from participant to researcher. I often wondered how many participants turned an emotion over so quickly, from anger to sadness. When we engaged with objects, our attention was drawn to a more mutual understanding of maternal loss. Holmes (2020) reasons, "Objects form part of networks with other objects. They have past and future lives, they enable and afford certain practices and activities, and they often play a central role in the relationships we have with others" (P. 1). When studying several same objects at once, such as photographs, new thoughts quickly arose. A birth mother emerged more fully as a human.

Ultimately, my study's primary purpose was to replicate the voices of a marginalized population. The integrity of the findings relied on the validity of the data. I mitigated potentially limiting data results by sharing my findings with participants, asking for feedback and data accuracy. Member checking, according to Creswell and Poth (2018), aids in the credibility of the findings and maintains focus on the subject of the research.

Ethics

Participants were assured they could ask questions at any time. Additionally, they could stop the interviews without further obligation. They were informed of confidentiality and anonymity protocols remaining throughout the study, with pseudonyms applied to participants.

A release form provided permission to use the artifact photographs and scanned documents (Appendix G). Participants signed two consent forms. The first described the details behind a survey (Appendix C). The second consent form provided specific information describing the study's objectives and procedures (Appendix E). Additionally, all participants were allowed to validate their contribution sections. Member checking added to the trustworthiness of the study.

Applying a collaborative and exploratory process with participants and objects moved the study closer to understanding the shifting, complex identities among adoptees. While I considered sensitivity toward the nature of my inquiry, I recognized and worried about the risk of stress that could be a byproduct when studying adoptive identity. Along with keeping a reflective journal, I needed to realize that the list of resources I shared with participants (Appendix H), which included ideas surrounding counseling, mindfulness therapy, additional reading, and support groups for adults adopted in childhood, could also be helpful to me. I relied on friends and family for support. I hoped the same was true for my participants. Occasionally, I booked extra sessions with a participant who struggled to complete her final project. Together, we discussed the fear of looking back rather than ahead. At one point in the study, I wondered if she was okay because I hadn't heard from her in weeks. In the next chapter, I report my findings.

Pilot Study

Two adults adopted in childhood participated in a pilot study to determine the quality of research aims, methods, analysis, and findings. Both participants were male. One was adopted internationally, is a transracial adoptee, and was 22. The other participant was in his 50s and adopted domestically in a same-race adoptive family. During a 90-minute session per participant, we each shared our pre-adoptive artifacts, including birth certificates, clothing, photos, and orphan records.

My pilot study produced significant findings that enabled me to replicate many methods in the larger body of research. The research focused on the particular stories told about adoption. An artifact became the story's central focus. I found participants displayed a yield or passivity when speaking of the things "done to them." I believe some awareness occurred about the event of adoption, the memory of adoption, and the distinction between fact and fiction. My participants eventually demonstrated agency and ownership in their adoptive story once they discussed their pre-adoptive artifact as a matter of possession. Adoptive thought, or adoptive consciousness, according to Rizzo (2022), involves its history as complete as possible. The artifact broke the enchanting spell of loving and safe adoptive homes to gain new perspectives.

In preparation for my larger study, I listened a great deal to the recorded transcripts of my pilot study and ascertained a few takeaways that would increase my success in a more extensive project. Witnessing the power of objects in interviews made me realize I had wasted much time. Before we engaged with artifacts, I noted how much I talked. Additionally, I allowed participants to speak a great deal. I almost missed opportunities to engage with the objects because of these initial, lengthy conversations about adoption. The pilot study instilled in me the confidence to rely on the significance of various elements in guiding research with objects, ultimately yielding pivotal discoveries.

Participant Recruitment and Selection Criteria

I invited nine participants to the study, using convenience and criterion sampling to find adults adopted in childhood. I chose participants based on the following criteria: (a) adoptees are adults ages 25 or older, (b) participants contribute artifacts carried from pre-adoption (photographs, clothing, letters, audio files, scars, hairstyle, names, birth certificates, birthmarks, etc.), (c) background diversity of adoptee (d) age adopted, experiences, if any, in foster care,

gender, race, ethnicity, present age, open or closed adoptions, etc.). I list myself as a full participant. Before and during my research, I participated in an adoption mentorship program through Angela Tucker's *Adoptee Mentoring Society*. Angela's guided online group, facilitated by adoptees for adoptees, formed connections made strong by shared experiences with adoption. Consequently, I mirrored Angela's mentorship concept through my role as a participant sharing adoption experiences, which led to authentic interview sessions.

For convenience, I used the *Adoptee Mentoring Society* to request volunteers. Additionally, I sent requests to adoption researchers I had met at adoption conferences. I also asked adoption counselors and friends. After initial interest, five people changed their minds. One mentioned a lack of access to any pre-adoptive artifacts noted in the invite. Another potential volunteer agreed, saying, "It is my feeling that you will not find many baby scoop era adoptees that have anything passed on to them at the time of relinquishment from their genetic parents" (personal conversation, 2023). The Baby Scoop era defines a three-decade period after World War II characterized by a high rate of pre-marital pregnancies and closed adoptions (Wilson-Buterbaugh, 2017). Three more people of interest backed out because of time pressures.

The remaining interested participants completed an eleven-question digital survey requesting biographical and adoption-related information (Appendix D). Each volunteer provided written consent (Appendix C), stating their willingness to participate in the initial survey, which declared that the research posed minimal risk. Potential risks noted in the consent form included exploring sensitive material and historical facts surrounding birth and adoption.

All participants who completed the survey were selected for the study. They agreed to allow the use of a pseudonym and their artifacts in the final study. A list of participants (names

anonymized) and their type of adoption are shown in the table below. I include my name, Ellen (the researcher), as a co-participant who shared and discussed artifacts with participants.

Table 1

Participants: Age at Adoption and Type of Adoption

Pseudonyms/ Birth year	Described Gender	Age at Adoption	Type of Adoption
Angus 1955	M	2.1 years	White same race domestic
Ruth 1963	F	2 days	White same race domestic
Rebecca 1967	F	4.5 years	White same race domestic
Jess 1991	F	11 months	Chinese, raised in a White family
Tasha 1969	F	5 months	Bi-racial, raised in a White family
Esther 1985	F	13 months	Black, raised in a White family
Willow 1984	F	28 days	White/Indigenous raised in a White family
Ann 1978	F	2 weeks	White, same race domestic
Pat 1988	F	4 months	South Korean raised in a White family
Ellen 1958	F	6 months	White same race domestic

My participants varied significantly by age, ranging from 33-68. Nine participants were female. One was male. Seven adoptees were adopted before their first birthday. Five adoptees came from same-race adoptions; three were transracial (adopted into a different race family), and two were transnational (adopted internationally) adoptees. All participants had what they called a closed adoption. Access to their birth information was limited.

Data Collection Plan and Methods

I asked each participant to attend three individual sessions via Zoom, lasting approximately one hour each session. They were informed of my role as a researcher and participant as an adopted person. Each session served a unique purpose leading up to the next session, which led to a final presentation from participants. I recorded Zoom sessions and used a

Voice Memo Application owned and operated by Apple as a backup. Questions and prompts can be viewed in Appendix F.

My interview series included an initial meeting to establish rapport, gain insight into birth and adoption stories, and learn about the participant's artifact. I purposefully asked questions that drew out some of the nuances of adoption narratives. For instance, by asking, "Tell me about your family," answers could describe their birth family, adoptive family, or both. When questioned about birth names, I listened to how the information was acquired, such as from adoptive parents, from documents, or the birth family. The majority of time spent in the initial session involved hearing about their adoption, such as when, where, how it was closed, etc. Some artifacts were briefly introduced in the first session.

Engagement with objects came in the second session. To prepare, I sent letters asking for digital copies of their artifacts to share on Zoom. I listed the items we discussed in the first session and the artifacts they included in the initial survey. I helped define artifacts as anything with a birth through an adoptive context. An artifact could include DNA reports, birth certificates, and letters. It could also include eye color, freckles, a song, or a dream if these were connected to their adoption somehow. To help them prepare, I shared:

> When you think about sharing your pre-adoptive artifacts, consider objects as heirlooms – family keepsakes that may aid in understanding a complex time where the memory of such events lacked language. History begins with bodies and artifacts. Let's look at what little you may have from before adoption. Together, we will follow its associations. Where does it take you? What do you feel? What are you able to understand? Objects can open a route to both thought and intangible feelings.

The second session was devoted to an engagement with artifacts. Guiding questions asked where, how, and when the artifact was found. Additionally, I asked where the object is kept, where it has been, and what its significance is presently. The majority of time was spent studying the artifact intimately to find what it said, what it didn't say, what could be said, what should be said, and why these answers matter.

The last session required participants to create a final project to share. Participants were tasked with memorializing their birth through adoption timeline using their artifacts through a medium such as art, music, movement, or writing. I asked participants to consider how adoptees take the scattered and fragmentary remains collected from their past and create meaningful, reasonable interpretations of history from birth through adoption. I explained that healing from the trauma of relinquishment is challenging because the experience occurred before you had language. Consequently, there is no language to un-sting the insult to your body, heart, and mind. I suggested that artifacts associated with birth may help represent the unspeakable, providing testimony.

I reminded participants that a birth certificate can list names, places, and times. For some, it can omit details such as fathers' and birth names. But it can also state that you were born – here in this world. They can own the document, allowing the object to be their companion–an opening to their emotional life. I included suggestions based on our sessions together and shared my birth memorial project as an example. I share some of these projects in the next chapter.

As an equal participant, I shared and discussed my birth and adoption story as well as my collection of objects that became part of my birth memorial. I offered these as examples and guidelines for inquiry, but I also used them to connect one lived experience with another.

Researcher's Journal

As an adoptee from a closed setting, my research was a personal affront to feelings and beliefs I had choreographed alone for decades. Meeting with others from somewhat similar settings, I discovered other adoptees sharing similar narratives that I had thought were unique to my experiences. Besides narratives, we shared dream themes I had previously felt could only be dreamed by me. At the same time, I learned that my experiences in some situations were entirely different and conflicting, leaving me feeling off-kilter – a step out of rhythm. Journaling about these findings helped me reflect on my experience as a researcher and participant. Themes resulting from my emotional work will be discussed in the next chapters.

Data Analysis Procedures

The purpose of my study was to ask how adults adopted in childhood understand their adoptive identity using pre-adoptive artifacts. Further, my study asked how one's understanding of adoptive identity might change over time in relation to a specific artifact. Accordingly, this research analysis examined the complicated relationship between material objects and individuals to determine how artifacts influence and occupy the past, present, and future.

Data analysis involved specific steps, drawing from Nordstrom's 2013 study, *Object-Interviews: Folding, Unfolding, and Refolding Perceptions of Objects*. My study focused on redefining and reframing the adoptive self (Rizzo, 2022) as my participants explored relationships, settings, experiences, and cultural tools and symbols. They used artifacts as their funds of identity, often unlocking secrets to aid in constructing identity as adults adopted in childhood. Creswell and Poth (2018) aided in my analysis. They described data summaries as "weaving the description against time, space, the lived body, and relationships to others" (p. 239).

Analysis of Text

I analyzed text, developed codes into themes, reviewed each video, re-read notes, and studied all the artifacts numerous times to form conclusions surrounding adoptive identity. Once I transcribed all 28 hours of raw data into text (using Rev.com), I downloaded my transcripts into Atlas.ti, a software program that utilizes artificial intelligence to help code research data. Organizing such a body of information became unwieldy. Relying on the software to shuffle contents into some form of clarity proved awkward at first. The program can easily place text into coding categories, but I lost sight of which categories produced meaning. After two attempts coding all the data, I started again with a more synthesized perspective. Insight came from hours spent recognizing patterns of similar ideas, taking notes, aligning notes in categories, reshuffling, deleting, and consolidating codes, and starting again. I found the software program most helpful as a search function. I could ask for quotations I had selected grouped by codes. I ended up using fewer codes than the initial 12. Consolidating codes made analysis easier to digest. Eventually, I could begin thematic coding.

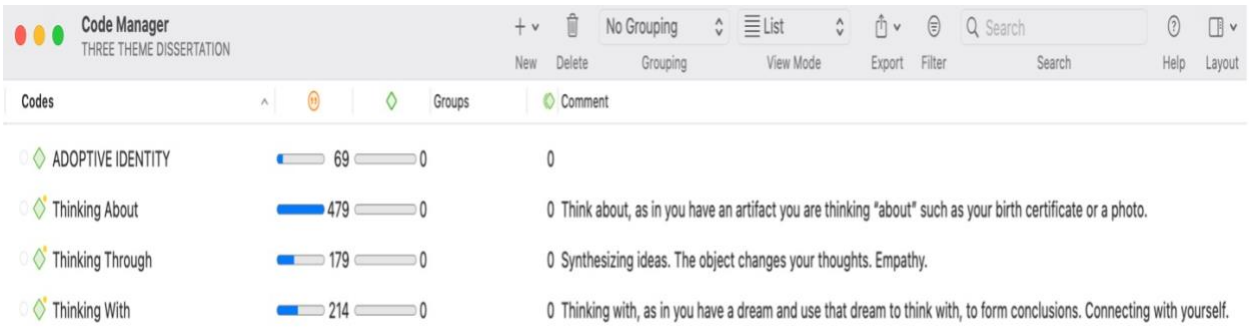
According to Creswell and Poth (2018), thematic coding is a form of qualitative analysis that helps identify common themes or ideas. I utilized *in vivo* (Creswell & Poth, 2018) coding derived from the actual language of the participants. Gill (2022) calls in vivo coding in that which is alive. Two approaches aided my coding process. I used an etic approach when I was positioning myself outside the culture of a particular adoption setting, such as transnational or transracial settings. I applied an emic approach to coding when I found myself within a particular adoption setting. Used together, I generated codes that later identified my significant findings discussed in the next chapter.

The following figure shows four codes used to analyze how artifacts aided in adoptive identity. In 69 text examples, participants explored adoptive identity when engaging with their

artifacts. I detected 479 examples where participants could think about artifacts in ways that contributed to findings. I noted 179 specific data points leading to meaning-making by thinking through artifacts. Finally, I found 214 examples of participants thinking with artifacts to gain insight. These coding examples show just one way I used the software to consolidate some of the ideas emanating from the data. I discuss just how my coding progressed to findings in the next chapter.

Figure 3

Codes for Analysis



Note. To develop my themes, I used four codes: adoptive identity, thinking about, with, and through artifacts.

In addition to coding raw data, I found replaying video recordings helpful. According to Nassauer and Legewie (2018), video recordings in research can capture situational details to establish data analysis. These authors suggest researchers can "focus on even the most fleeting of information (such as microexpressions of emotions) and reconstruct the exact sequence of interactions frame by frame, even during long and complex situations" (Nassauer & Legewie, 2018, p. 141).

All individual Zoom sessions were available for my review. In my pilot study, which was conducted in person, I utilized video playback to recognize a physical change in posture from

both the participant and me when an object was the focus. When I played back the tape, I could see our chairs shuffling closer to the object, our bodies moving in, and our hands adjusting the angle or closeness of the object to our bodies. Instead of facing off, we sat more parallel. Video playback lacked features from the pilot study. Unfortunately, I could not offer in-person sessions because most participants were out of state. However, I observed voice intonation and body posture changes throughout the sessions through playback. I highlight these findings in the next chapter.

Summary notes from each session were handwritten and stored in separate folders for perusal. I used these notes to prepare for my subsequent sessions. Later, I used my notes to analyze birth memorial projects. I wondered how my position as an equal participant changed weight when I led a final assignment. The note below includes suggestions I made to a participant based on our past sessions to guide her in a birth memorial using artifacts. I clarified that the suggestions carried no obligation, yet I wondered if they added to or subtracted from their original ideas.

> "Live the most you possibly can." This phrase seems to be a theme suggested to you by both parents, who fell ill from the stressors of life, from poor care, from poor decisions, etc. Your mother stayed in the same house with her folks, stagnant life. But she let you go out into the world. Untethered. I know you feel this – like the balloon flying around – where will it land? You and I share that fear. Staying home didn't do your mom any good.
>
> The potency of your history: It's fascinating that you feel and recognize the fragility of these records, the letter, the picture, and the background baby information. Every time

you look at these artifacts, they gain in potency. Explore with awe, with wonder – not with fear. Anger – yes. Just not fear.

I reviewed these notes later to determine positions of authority. Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend balancing views (p. 258). I checked whether participants acted based on their discoveries or simply followed my guidelines and suggestions. I wondered, if my participants positioned themselves first or merely following my lead.

Lastly, I revisited the collection of artifacts from participants. I noticed more detail with each visit. I examined how letters were folded and how the edge of documents were decorated. I wondered how certain poses in pictures proved blood-tie connections, or failed to make a connection.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in research requires data analysis conducted in a "precise, consistent, and exhaustive manner through recording, systematizing, and disclosing the methods of analysis with enough detail to enable the reader to determine whether the process is credible" (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 1). To establish trustworthiness, I applied the triangulation of multiple data sources, including diverse participants who helped "corroborate, clarify, or negate existing evidence" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, pp. 260–261). I often recognized the value of having adoptees from various backgrounds who emphasized themes and concepts I might have overlooked had I chosen adoptees all from similar White family backgrounds such as mine.

Overall, my role as an adoptee contributed to the trustworthiness of the research. Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasize the benefit of a researcher's closeness to participants in the study as an added value to research. When participants and I shared a similar dream or backstory, the sessions became places with rich, descriptive narratives—further, my role as an adoption

researcher extended trusted data analysis. In the past years, I acquired corroborating evidence from multiple data sources as an adoption scholar. These academic sources include collaboration with adoption researcher peers, adoptee authors, adoption research professors, adoptee counselors, and adoption conference keynote speakers.

Further aiding in trustworthiness, my commitment to understanding material culture, salient to the study, enabled participants to imagine the complexities of having no access to deeply personal information such as a birth certificate. In London, I attended a conference called *Secret London*. During one of our field trips throughout the city, we found birdboxes placed all around London parks. A pencil and a blank-paged diary were inside the birdbox, placed chest high on a tree. The instructions suggested people write all about their secrets. The pages were filled with apologies, love interests, regret, and confessions. I developed a deeper understanding of material culture through this activity. I felt that adoption was similar to those birdbox diaries, filled with secrets. However, as an adoptee, I do not hold the key. Other people can learn about when and where you were born, who your mother was, and who your father was. They can know you. Adoptee secrets are often locked up forever.

Material engagement theory contributed to the trustworthiness of research by promoting rich description, reflexivity, triangulation, and participant engagement. The addition of artifacts in my study added a key to unlocking a secret. Birth certificates, for example, held multiple meanings across the study. Some international adoptees felt they would never receive their original birth certificates, while others weren't quite sure that the certificate they possessed was a real (not amended) document. By attending to the active role of material objects in shaping adoptive identity, material engagement theory enhanced the credibility, reliability, and validity of my research findings. In the next chapter, I report my findings.

Chapter Four: Findings

Overview

In Chapter Three, I described a methodology practice that formed the basis of my research. Adoptees constructing their identity are challenged by the complex narrative timelines intersecting with known and unknown details surrounding their birth through adoption journey. My study explored how adoptees use pre-adoptive artifacts to guide a historical and cultural quest for meaning. Additionally, I wanted to know how one's understanding of adoptive identity changes over time with a specific artifact. Findings in Chapter Four support the clarifying value of artifacts to help adoptees frame new adoptive narratives.

Four findings arose from our sessions spanning three months. Like narrative themes in literature, findings presented involved stories that contained conflict with plot, setting, and characters. Protagonists and villains abound. However, adoptees in the study realized they need not feel stuck in their adoption stories. Participants found artifacts that helped rearrange places, people, dates, and times to revise their birth narrative. Additionally, participants analyzed their artifacts to gain novel thoughts and feelings surrounding birth mothers. Several findings resulted in a deepened sense of self, moving adoptees closer to playing a more central role in their adoptive narrative.

I present my findings, with accompanying examples, later in the chapter. I first introduce my participants, describing multiple plots and settings that shaped their adoption narratives. I also introduce the artifacts accompanying these narrative developments, often interfering, upending, and complicating their adoptive narrative themes. Regardless of the artifact's effect on moving and revealing birth facts previously withheld, adoptees were willing to let the secrets surrounding their adoptive story bleed through.

Adoptees' Relationship with Pre-adoptive Artifacts

Adoptees from closed adoptions have a history that is not verifiable. Pat cannot find, and perhaps never will find, information surrounding the approximately 100 days leading up to her placement in foster care in South Korea. Luckily, she did find some information from social workers that led to a 2022 reunion with her birth mother. Pat received her birth information on the sly. A woman in the South Korean social worker's office held Pat's file tightly to her chest and emphatically said, "You will never get these records." Then she told Pat she'd be right back after a visit to the restroom; she left the office with the file on her desk. Pat took the opportunity to grab her file. As wonderful as her reunion was, neither her birth mother nor social workers have a record describing Pat's first 100 days of life. Constructing Pat's adoptive identity resulted in an exhaustive archeological dig that produced many treasures. However, Pat's tireless efforts to complete her complicated birth puzzle, filled with odd shapes and sizes, left her observing a final product with one piece missing. Rather than looking at all that is there, Pat's eyes often land on the annoying gap that marks the puzzle incomplete. She felt someone must know where she was for 100 days.

Adoptees from closed settings have few pre-adoptive artifacts. Several adoptees expressed interest in my study but felt they could not think of anything carried from birth through adoption. Like archeological treasures, some digging is required. Once unearthed, participants were unsure what to make of them. The birth/adoption door had been shut for so long that when they laid out all their artifacts, they asked, "Is this me, as a baby? Is this a real or fake document? Is this my foster name or birth name?"

Participants talked about the ways they traveled from their birth to the adoption setting. Jess is a participant who, as a baby, was found abandoned in China and, decades later, almost

walked away from her buried treasure, her twin sister. Eight co-participants entered adoption through foster care or directly from the hospital. Many artifacts came from those settings. Five participants come from states that refuse to open up birth records. Throughout their lifetime as an adoptee from a closed setting, the plot of each participant's adoption story maintained a solid starting point, which always began with their adoption, such as, "I was two weeks old." Next, the adoptive plot added twists such as Jess' comment, "If relevant, my twin was also adopted, although by a different family." Or, from Angus, "I was in five foster homes for short periods. I was a tiny little guy and didn't eat very much." The plot always had a resolve, taking the orphan plot and changing it to an adoptive story. Ruth reflected,

> [My adoptive parents were] just simple people, very quiet. Dad worked as a business manager. She never worked. She was a stay-at-home mom, very involved in church, and always told me how I was adopted and how they chose me. I think that was one of those beautiful aspects of adoption; I was proud of it.

I wanted to know about the things that adoptees carried from birth through adoption. I wondered how these objects affect the plot line. In the initial survey (Appendix C), I asked for a description of their pre-adoptive artifact. I list these items in Table 2, shown below. The survey allowed space for comments about their artifacts.

Table 2

Artifacts Listed in Survey

Participant (Age at Adoption)	Artifact	Comments
Angus (2 years one month)	DNA	"I am not aware of any birth artifacts."

Ruth (2 days)	Original Birth Certificate, Court Papers, Doctor's Reports, Dress, Photos, DNA	"My adoptive parents kept the dress I wore on the day my adoption became final, and I have the photos of the attorney and my parents with that dress on. It is definitely a cherished photo."
Rebecca (4.5 years)	Red Hair	"I have red hair and was adopted by parents who had black hair. My biological brother was also adopted by them and also has red hair. It was like a very visible *birthmark*."
Jess (11 months)	Photographs, Sweater	"I have photographs that my adoptive mother took in the orphanage before the finalization of my adoption. I also have a sweater from the orphanage (I think it might have been made by one of the aunties who worked there). My daughter has worn/wears the sweater."
Tasha (5 months)	Hair, Birthmark	[Tasha left no comment about her artifacts. However, we had talked earlier about her black hair amongst her blonde-haired, White family as a biracial adoptee].
Esther (13 months)	T-shirt	"My foster mom gave me one of her T-shirts to help me transition to my adoptive home. I slept with the T-shirt for the first few years of my life and feel it is one of the reasons I have been able to make successful attachments with other people in my life."
Willow (28-days)	3X5 Index Card, Document	"I came with a 3X5 index card from a social worker or nurse. It detailed my eating habits and a few details about my birth parents."

Ann (2 weeks)	Social Worker's Report	"I was given a fuzzy copy of a typed, one-paragraph description of my birth parents haphazardly written by the social worker."
Pat (4 Months)	Box, Photos, Clothing	"I have a cardboard box that I was shipped in between Korea and Canada. I also have a few photos and some baby clothing that I was sent with."
Ellen (6 Months)	DNA, Original Birth Certificate, Photo, Orphan Records	"I waited decades for the state of New York to open adoption records. When I finally got them, I felt nothing. Birth weight figures for six months?"

Note. In the initial survey, participants were asked, "What are the things you carry from the time before your adoption?" In this survey, I include myself - Ellen (the researcher and co-participant).

Receiving the surveys, I was elated to find that other adoptees had artifacts. They had listed them like revered items one might carry back from a long journey – cherished but seldom used. Both Ruth and Willow's adoptive parents kept their artifacts in their homes. Willow commented, "Mom gave me this packet of stuff, and I don't even think she remembered that she had it." Ruth added, "My adoptive parents kept the dress I wore on the day my adoption became final."

All surveyed participants met the criteria for owning pre-adoptive artifacts. Three adoptees had their DNA tested. Four objects came from inside baby books – a single 3X5 index card sandwiched between the pages, a newspaper article "advertising" a special needs child, a

first photograph taken before the adoption and decorated during the pre-teen and adolescent years, and a receipt. “A receipt,” I asked, not understanding.

“A receipt,” Tasha said. “I have the receipt. It was $12, and it was just a court order; they had to go to court and sign papers and pay that fee, and that’s it. So yeah, I was basically a $12 purchase.”

The Accessibility of Pre-adoptive Artifacts

In preparation for my first session, I discovered participants knew about their pre-adoptive artifacts, listing them on the survey. However, they didn’t necessarily have easy access to them for our study. Most artifacts arrived years earlier through great effort and were tucked away for safe keeping. After months of traveling, Ruth returned to her hometown. She had records of her adoption in a storage unit and had spent hours trying to find them. She reflected,

> I couldn’t find my stuff. And it’s like, you can’t just start taking this [storage unit] apart because I know I tucked it away safely, and I obviously tucked it away too safely. And so, it’s somewhere in a box – somewhere in there. But I was sad yesterday when I left because there were things (she paused), you have opened that Pandora’s box, if you will, and now it’s safe to talk about these things. Now it’s fun to talk about them. And you’re making me question so much. And now there’s part of me that’s sitting there [in the storage unit] that one day I’m going to be able to open up. So, it was frustrating yesterday. There’s my life in a 15X10 storage unit.

I delayed some sessions, waiting for the arrival of artifacts. While living far from her mother’s home, Willow asked her mother to send what she could find. Willow shared,

> My mom went down memory lane for me, and I'm so glad because not only did she send me what I asked for, but she also sent me about 60 other pictures unrelated to pre-adoption: me, my cousins, and my siblings. I think she just had a really good time.

Ann, adopted at two weeks old, had artifacts she felt needed protection. She thought the documents would lose their potency by making copies. She explained,

> I was given a fuzzy copy of a typed, one-paragraph description of my birth parents haphazardly written by the social worker. Even as a child, it felt like an afterthought. It included my time of birth (which felt really important to know for some reason), along with a brief physical description of both parents and two or three words about their personalities. No names. No ages. No reasons why. Yet I clung to this piece of paper. My adoptive mom, knowing it was important, kept it in my adoption file in our family file cabinet. I would take it out and read it periodically, and then put it back in its safe place so it would never get lost or damaged. (As I'm typing this, I realize I never thought to make more copies of it. But that almost seemed like it would dilute the original somehow). I'm 45 and that piece of paper is still there, in my parent's file cabinet. I have a love-hate relationship with it. It was the only connection I had to my birth story and birth mom.

Ann's adoptive mother felt cautious about letting the birth-related artifacts leave her home. When Ann asked to take a file, her mother responded, "I don't want you to take it because I want to keep it safe, but I will make copies for you." By making copies of artifacts, Ann felt the duplicates might somehow diminish the severe experience of relinquishment. Ann wrote, "After I'm done, I just want to throw the copies away because they're not the real thing, which is weird."

Two participants came to the study with few artifacts. I found quantity mattered less than the quality of our engagement with a particular artifact. Angus stated in his survey that he wasn't aware of any artifacts, but he did have DNA results. Angus and I are friends from our teaching days in Germany through the Department of Defense Dependent Schools. At that time, I recalled Angus often discussing his adoption experiences. I wondered how a person moved through five foster homes, carrying nothing from one setting to another.

During our first session, Angus said he had forgotten about an artifact. He revealed he had a 3X5 index card that stated there was high blood pressure in the family and that his mother had an eighth-grade degree and was going through an annulment. While searching for artifacts as a young adult, Angus described his interaction with a woman from Catholic Charities. "She looked at me and said, very sternly, 'Our records are unsalable. A lot of people think that you can get to them. You will never get to our records.'" Eventually, though, they sent him a thick packet with pages of information. After reading the first few pages, he realized they had mistakenly sent him his adopted brother's records. After much effort, he got his record—a 3X5 index card containing minimal details.

Months after our sessions, Angus sent a picture of a significant artifact. He said, "I found something else. These are the shoes I wore when my mom and dad picked me up."

Figure 4

Angus' Bronzed Shoes

Note. An artifact preserved. Angus, adopted at age two, came to his adoptive parents' home wearing these shoes. They were later bronzed. Used with permission from participant.

The preservation of Angus' pre-adoptive artifact, his shoes, was vital to Angus' family. Similarly, throughout childhood, Pat's family kept her artifact, a cardboard box, in her parent's basement.

Like Angus, Jess initially reported having just a few artifacts carried from her foster care in China to her adoptive home in the US. She said she had a sweater and some photos. I later learned that her collection of artifacts actually doubled in size when she discovered her identical twin in 2014. The girls were separated from their orphanage through adoptions that sent Jess to Nashville and her sister to New York. No records revealed their status as siblings. When Jess was a freshman in college, a student walked up to her and, in a familiar, excited way, said hello. Jess described the scene:

> He realized that I wasn't her [my twin sister]. But then I actually really applauded this guy because he did not know me, and I've never seen him since. But he said something, and then he was like, 'Oh, sorry, sorry.'

> And I was like, 'no worries.' It was right at the beginning of freshman year, so I thought it was; he'd met someone at a mixer or one of those freshman orientation activities and just thought I was someone he had met. And I was like, 'No worries, it's fine.'
>
> He walked away, and he came back, and he was like, 'I'm so sorry, you just look so much like this person I know back home. Can I take a picture of you?'
>
> I was like, 'Sure, why not? I guess.' So, he took the picture and then posted it on Facebook privately to his friend.

Jess eventually connected with her sister through Facebook and has been in reunion since. Jess and her sister have an unknown past. They were found somewhere in China and placed in an orphanage together. They are now eagerly trying to engage with their collective photos and documents to fill in their timeline accurately. They analyzed dates to match the day they were found and noticed the separate days they left the orphanage. Unlike any other participant, Jess now has a very accessible artifact to help with her birth through adoption narrative: her twin sister.

Willow shared, "When we started this journey together, I started digging [into my story], and I felt more comfortable with what I do know. I think laying it all out like this just makes it more acceptable." When so many closed adoptions made knowledge inaccessible, participants found hope in what little was left. Every participant expressed their feelings about secrets, the idea that someone knows more about your birth than you do.

In this next section, I report four key findings. Participants used pre-adoptive artifacts as anchors to initiate critical reflection on secrets, microfictions, and mishaps that all occurred before adoption catapulted them all in new directions.

Findings Overview

Adoptees navigated the tension between what they had lost and what they had gained through adoption. In this study, the process of change began by engaging with artifacts to a) explore beliefs, values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions about the phenomena of adoption, b) investigate the relationship among the elements that contribute to or inhibit the participant's perception of their adoptive identity, and c) provide a structure to understand better how these ideas fit into an understanding of self, relationships, family, and culture.

By the end of my study, all participants recognized the potential for expanding their adoptee narratives. Guiding questions utilized a critical lens, keeping the sessions from turning into a limiting show-and-tell project. In my review, Zytaruk (2105) discussed the shift involved in making an implicit experience explicit. Through active engagement, an artifact can add context through the lens of discernment to fill in some gaps between *this* artifact and *that* person. According to Hafetz (2021), explicit behaviors occur at the conscious level and form more deliberately than implicit memory. In this study, participants formed explicit attitudes to construct new models of truth, meaning, and significance of their birth through adoption timelines. Through our sessions together, Willow took the ambiguous loss of relinquishment and added thoughts of her birth mother to soothe some of the ache of maternal loss. She said,

> Although it's a huge trauma for an infant, I can imagine that it would be very traumatic for a person who has just given birth as well; [a person who] gets less of a say in decision-making. And I wonder, too, if my birth mother had any kind of support that she needed emotionally.

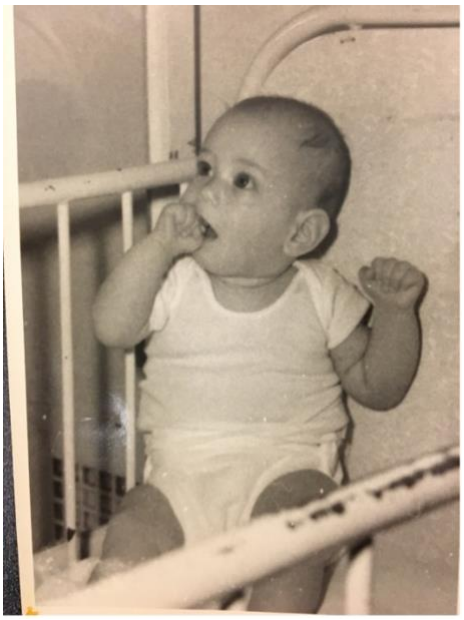
The following four findings show observable outcomes identified from my data analysis. Results showed patterns of change noted by all participants by reframing existing perspectives about their birth through adoption narratives.

First Finding: Birth Selves and Adopted Selves: Self; Same Self

In my literature review, I wrote about learning and the brain. Often, in people with early life adversity, disorganized attachments show up in dissociated behaviors such as freezing or appearing inattentive. According to Hanson and Nacewicz (2021), this maladaptive behavior occurs when someone is unsure who signals safety and security. In my first finding, I focus on how adoptive identity is structured around a sense of self before adoption and a sense of self after adoption. Four participants shared their baby photos, all taken before adoption. In all four photos, babies showed a lack of focus (as seen in Figure 5 and Figure 6) towards the person taking the photo. After adoption, photos showed babies smiling and facing the person holding the camera (See figure 7).

Figure 5

Baby Ellen



Note. Ellen, the researcher and here, the co-participant, looks away from the camera.

Interestingly, while participants noticed this lack of emotion in their baby photos, one participant found her baby photo failed to hold any feelings for her. Willow said,

> I don't really recognize her. I know it's me. But you know, I just, I don't recognize her face. And I know babies can come out all sorts of ways, but it's just something that I wonder about, you know, like, do I even recognize my own face now, really? I don't know, and it's partially because of my unknown background.

Figure 6

Willow Before Adoption

Note. Willow's pre-adoptive photo shows her looking away from the camera. She cradles a soft stuffed animal in her right arm. Used with permission from participant.

There are parts of Willow's identity that are not locatable. During our second session together, we tried to *find* Willow. We imagined her photo from several angles, with different clothes, movements, and sounds. After spending months with her artifacts, Willow said, "I grow more comfortable with this idea of artifacts. You know, I've been wanting to meet that little baby."

In my study, participants discovered that by spending time with artifacts, certain restraints lifted prompting the emergence of new thoughts and feelings. For Willow, spending time with artifacts meant placing parts of her history in some kind of order. For our third session together she constructed a birth memorial, her final project involving the use of artifacts to depict the period preceding and following her adoption. Willow could detect changes in her baby

photos taken before and after adoption. In the first two pictures, Willow is seen looking away from the camera. She shared, “I wanted to include those very first pictures of me as a baby, that I'm not looking at the camera. I can barely recognize myself. And it just seems so, things seem so unknown.” The third photo, in the middle, shows Willow smiling. She said, “I think it might be my blessing day or some other day, but the point is – I am looking at me and I have a smile on. And that’s significant to me.” Willow’s birth memorial beautifully attends to the tension between the two opposing sides of her life.

Figure 7

Willow’s Birth Memorial

Note. Willow added two pre-adoptive photos and an index card to her birth memorial. The other images show her happy arrival into her adoptive home. Used with permission from participant.

Willow’s initial artifact shared in the first session was a 3X5 index card containing few details about her birth. In the second session, she brought her baby photo. By the final session, Willow shared a collage containing new characters, settings, events, and socio-cultural context within her birth through adoption narrative. She linked her birth self with her adoptive self.

When facts surrounding birth failed to connect with an adoptive life, such as missing birth names, adoptive identity became fragmented. All participants worked to form a more vital link between their birth and adopted selves through their active engagement with artifacts associated with their birth. Every participant shared a story about the loose connections generated between their birth and adopted names. Jess shared, "I was a sophomore in college when I found out that the name I had discovered wasn't my actual birth name." A lot of adoptees acquired names before their adoption. Some began life named *Baby Girl* before their adoptive parents added a name. But other adoptees started their lives with a birth name, received names in the children's homes, and then received their adopted name. Jess does not know her birth name, only her orphan name.

Esther knew she had a name before she was adopted. But she didn't know how to carry that name through her adoption. She explained,

> I had this framed artwork, and it said the words *Jocelyn-Kate* (foster name). It was like a figure eight sort of symbol of words. I had it hanging on my wall forever. When I moved out of my parent's house, I asked them for it, and at first, they said they couldn't find it. And then maybe fifteen years ago, when I was moving somewhere else to another house, I said, 'Oh, I really want that on my wall.'
>
> My mom just kind of said to me, 'Esther, I think I found it one day, and it was all ripped up. I think you ripped it up one day.'

Esther remembered her artwork, memorializing her name. She learned the name she received and still uses came from social workers who spun a Rolodex and landed on the letter E. No one calls her Jocelyn-Kate today, except her foster mother. Her identity is fixed based on what is relevant at that particular time. Consequently, some self-aspects, such as acquired

adoptive names, are more relevant and accessible than previous names. As an adult, Esther is considering changing her name. She admits, “Esther doesn’t mean a lot to me.

Like Esther, Pat struggled with the tension between her genetic inheritance as a South Korean-born adoptee and her Canadian upbringing. She wrote of her race/ethnicity in her survey: “South Korean. Japanese. Western European; British Isles.” In other words, she included the ethnicity of her adoptive parents because that is how she was raised.

Five participants had recurring dreams centered around loss. Esther dreams of losing the same thing over and over. Adopted at age 13 months, she lost her birth parents, her foster name, her ethnicity, and what we understood to be her mother’s heartbeat. Esther’s favorite music is Pachelbel’s Canon in D Major. Often used in weddings, the music maintains a consistent bass line pulsing steadily throughout, like a heartbeat.

In my recurring dreams, I (the researcher and co-participant) am crawling on the ground in dim light, looking for something I have not named. I am searching for something but have not identified what it is. I know I should look, but it is so dark, and the search feels elusive. It is like standing in a room wondering why you are even there.

Ann, who was adopted at two weeks, had repeated dreams of being alone. She said, “I understand the reasons for this dream. Even when I’m with my family, I’ve always had this sense of just being alone, a drifter kind of.” Like Esther, she also dreams of losing things. In her recurring dream, she goes to the mall, and when she returns to the parking lot, the car is gone. Even if the vehicle is found, it does not start. Ann reflected, “That car is the safety of getting where I need to go, and I can’t get there. You just wake up feeling so lost.” When Ann connected with her birth mother in reunion, her dreams of losing her car stopped.

Willow's dreams are often about authenticity. During our study, Willow questioned her authentic self, barely recognizing herself in her baby picture. She has college degrees taken away from her in her dreams as if she never earned them. Willow has dreams about flying. She shared, "I know I can fly. I'm running, and I'm trying to take off, but it's just not working. I know I can fly. You're less competent than you really are."

My first significant finding showed participants attending to their losses, disappointments, and outdated assumptions surrounding their birth through adoption stories. In this study, three participants discovered their repetitive dreams ended after a reunion with their birth family. I share Rebecca's story next.

Rebecca had vivid recurring dreams that included several particular settings – a rose garden and a room. Objects accompanied these dreams (a pink toy elephant, an orange plastic Halloween pumpkin with a thin black handle, and a rose). Rebecca was with her birth parents for two years and then in foster care for another 2.5 years. She was finally adopted along with her younger brother.

Most recurring dreams shared in our sessions lacked a social or cultural context with family, peers, or social expectations. The concepts emerging from dreams required us to add pieces to the puzzle, such as the type of loss, the significance of such losses, and the possible reasons for the loss. Rebecca's dreams were different. She is a little girl in a rose garden smelling the flowers in one dream. She reasoned, "My whole life, I have loved flowers and am often found pausing in the middle of a walk to sniff tree blossoms or flowers." Rebecca's rose garden dream repeated for one to two years in high school. The dream always made her happy. In a separate session, Rebecca added details about her dream. She said,

> I had forgotten that a pumpkin was also in my dream. For so long, I only saw the rose, but then a pumpkin appeared. That pumpkin is very symbolic because we grew up with these pumpkins. Even though we didn't trick or treat very often, I grew up with these plastic, orange pumpkins.

Rebecca had a second recurring dream in high school involving a plastic, inflatable pink elephant. The toy puzzled her. She said, “I didn’t have such a toy in my upbringing – in this very conservative Mennonite home.” She even recalled in her dream the words painted on the elephant, *Never Forget.* She explained, “We didn’t have these extra little toys or even sayings like that. It would’ve been too worldly.”

When Rebecca turned 17, she met some members of her biological family. During her visits, she asked everybody questions related to her dreams. “Do you have a dining room table that has this feature? Were the windows sort of like this?” Nobody had answers. Since Rebecca was adopted at age 4.5, she reasoned that the dreams had to be memories before her adoption. She said, “I went in and out of foster care homes between ages two and a half and three and a half until my adoption. The dreams must have originated in one of those homes.” The elephant was a clue. She said, “I can't imagine these memories being planted in my brain, but these dreams, with the elephant that never forgets ….”

While Rebecca was still in high school, she met her paternal grandmother. She was given a box filled with photos, all taken before her adoption. One photo, shown below, is of Rebecca smelling a rose in a garden. Her grandmother had taken the photo of Rebecca during her monthly visits to the Office of Children and Youth. Her grandmother explained how Rebecca would play in the narrow yard behind the house. Roses bordered the yard.

Figure 8

Rose Garden

Note. Rebecca, who was adopted at age 4.5, is seen before her adoption. She wears a checkered green and white coat, holds a plastic Halloween candy pumpkin with a thin black handle, and reaches up to sniff a rose. Used with permission from participant.

Rebecca's dream originated from a memory of her life before adoption. The pumpkin, the dress, and the rose were all in her dream. An additional photo from that box brought by her grandmother confirmed her second recurring dream.

Figure 9

"I Never Forget"

Note. Rebecca plays in a room at the Office of Children and Youth. Her grandmother, visiting for the day, took the picture. Used with permission from participant.

Rebecca is seen enjoying a visit with her grandmother while in foster care. She learned her grandmother cried after every visit but was told that because she was a grandmother and not a parent, she could not take Rebecca home. An inflatable pink elephant is visible in the photo with the words, “I never forget.”

Unlike the recurring dreams shared by other participants, Rebecca’s dreams were not about questioning authenticity or examining loss. Instead, her dreams marked truth. They allowed Rebecca to make sense of her time before adoption. She had many meaningful years to share with her grandmother. She never dreamed about rose gardens or elephants again.

I found Tasha’s dreams did not necessarily fit in a pattern of having things that get lost or having talent questioned. Instead, her dreams are about place. She described her recurring dream, which only appeared in childhood: “It was very odd. In this dream, I feel like I just got married, but we didn’t have a place to live. So, we lived behind a wheelbarrow.” Tasha’s dream involved

situating herself in place and time. She had moved several times from birth to foster care to her adoptive home. Tasha's recurring dream stopped after childhood.

In my first finding, I showed participants willing to step past the point of adoption and into a complex world of unknowns. In this study, change began with critical insight. Participants questioned their birth names, ethnicity, and the origin of their recurring dreams to examine the complex and confusing parts of self that had been relocated, often abruptly, from their birthplaces to their adoption places. They all described a felt sense of their lived experiences before adoption, allowing them to feel more at home in their body both before and after adoption. For all participants, this initial feeling of self; same-self, showed up as grief as they became more aware of the *something* that happened before they were adopted. My next finding provides examples of participants attending to this unsettled emotion.

Second Finding: Disorienting Unmatched Outcomes

My study found that engaging with artifacts did not always lead to initial positive experiences. At the start of our sessions, adoptees held their pre-adoptive artifacts as somewhat sacred, passive objects that hadn't yet fulfilled a purpose. Reflections about artifacts were limited. Ann looked at a picture of her birth mother and said, "It's almost been painful for me to look at her picture. I look at it, and then I'd put her picture away, and I wouldn't look again for a couple years."

Similarly, Tasha hadn't looked at her documents for ten years, and when she found them again, she discovered where she was before her adoption. She commented,

> I never knew where I was before I came to live with my family, so apparently, I was with a foster in a foster home. I think I was in this woman's home. Yeah, for sure. I mean, she signs it, *Foster Mother*.

The process of exploring adoptive identity placed a magnified lens on secrets withheld, birth fathers unreported, settings and time unclear, and behaviors lacking care and attention to the well-being of babies. In my second finding, I show situations in our sessions that revealed disorienting dilemmas initiated by a broader worldview of their adoption.

Earlier in my paper, I mentioned an elderly adoptee who said, “I just want to know who I am before I die” (Homans, 2015, p. 17). By the last session, all ten participants found parts of their birth through adoption stories mismatched newer versions of the story based on the arrival of artifacts. Updating narratives meant leaving some pieces of the story behind. The challenging letting-go process required an enhanced understanding of options.

Participants recognized the value of discernment which sparked action based on newer truths. Each participant discovered new information about their birth mother, birth father, birth setting, or birth name narratives either in our sessions or through prior engagements with birth-related artifacts. An identity-revised theme emerged after discerning differences between what participants heard as their adoptive narratives and what participants recently discovered as more accurate birth through adoptive narratives.

Engaging fully with birth-related artifacts required reading for meaning within the context of that object’s maker, distributor, and possessor. Tasha’s *Life with Baby* artifact taught her she liked to eat Graham Crackers and ice cream. She was bathed in a tub at 9:00 AM, using Dial soap. Once Tasha recognized who had written these words, her artifact, *Life with Baby,* took on a new meaning. Her foster family wrote at the bottom of the form, “She needs lots of love. We sure have enjoyed her for five months. We are glad this little girl found a home.” Tasha, who social workers advertised as a special needs child because of her biracial background, found a

home because she was a girl needing love, and, coincidentally, her adoptive parents wanted a girl to love.

When engaged with others, an artifact presented a different point of view. Reflecting critically on the context of adoption brought a felt sense, or a feeling of behavioral situations, that invited caregivers, photographers, social workers, birth families, and foster families into the narrative containing babies needing homes. These characters tilted the equilibrium of adoption stories recounted years ago among adults adopted in childhood. New facts made the plot dimensions feel off-kilter. Ann explained the disoriented feeling of her initial engagement with artifacts:

> It's nice to talk to another adoptee through this because I've only ever shared this stuff with people who are not adopted, so they don't really get it. And so, I don't dive into these things very often. I haven't read that letter from her [birth mother] for years, probably not even since my kids were born, so 13 years or something. So, when I first took it [the letter]out of the box, I was almost afraid to open the can of worms, so to speak. I don't know, am I going to cry? Am I going to get mad? I don't know. But I just read it and was like, okay, I feel okay. Now, I want to dive in because I have a bunch more letters. I want to read all those again and see how I feel now.

I first recognized Ann's hesitancy in trusting the validity of her artifacts. They acted as messengers, not intending to cause fear, angst, or anger. A letter from Ann's birth mother, initiating her first contact since the relinquishment, ended with a typed closing: *Warmest Regards*. The words angered Ann. She asked, "Who says that?" The letter, Ann's artifact, presented its unbiased, innocent offerings. Through our engagement with Ann's letter, we began recognizing its potential to help us extract new meaning. We questioned why her mother typed

the letter, making it seem formal. She had the salutation, date, and closing all perfectly aligned. We noticed she left Ann with three email addresses. Two creases divided the letter into three equal folds. We thought her mother's actions in constructing the letter were precise and careful. As perfect as the letter looked, we noticed a slight error in her hand-written signature.

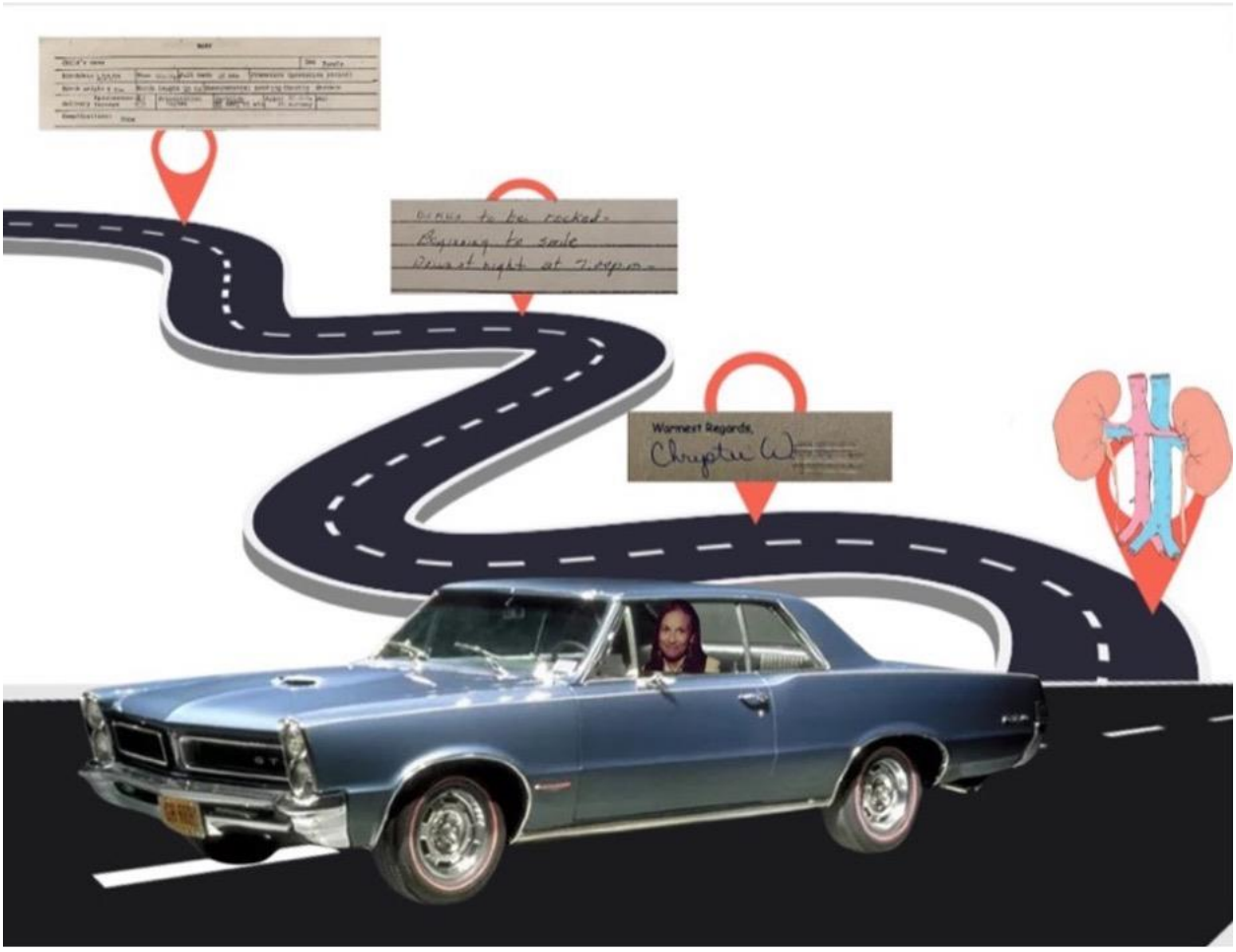
Anne's birth mother died shortly after contacting her through a letter. Anne is left with an artifact acting as a silent but active witness. Initially, she did not like the way her birth mother signed off on the letter. Her feelings changed with time and through an in-depth engagement with an evocative artifact.

Ann's Birth Memorial

I highlight a birth memorial made by Ann because it shows her transition from anger to empathy. After two sessions, Ann was asked to use her artifacts to help memorialize her birth through adoption narrative. She used a car to situate her birth mother in her collage scene. Ann had described recurring dreams that often involved missing or broken cars. One recent dream involved driving. When Ann looked over to the car next to her, she saw her birth mother. Ann said the car in her dream was blue, and when she saw her mother, she got excited. She said her mother looked over at her, kind of smirked, and then drove off. Ann said her dream gave her both a sense of longing and loss. She said, "Oh my God, there she is. And now she's gone."

Figure 10

Ann's Birth Memorial



Note. There are three clippings from Ann's birth artifacts. The first contains her baby information: Name: Blank. Birth date, time, gestation, weight, length, head and chest measurements. Delivery: Spontaneous, Presentation: Vortex. Duration: 24 hours, 22 minutes, Apgar: 10; Complications: None. The second clip contains evocative phrases: Likes to be rocked. Beginning to smile. Down at night at 7 PM. The third clip: Warmest Regards, Chrystie. W*******. Just behind the car, Ann placed a picture of a kidney. Her mother died of kidney failure. Used with permission from participant.

In our final session together, Ann reflected,

> The car is really symbolic for me. As I was making this, I was getting angry. I was like, okay, the first step on the road, she gave me up for adoption. There's the information about the baby, and then there's a little more information about me. And then later in life, we sort of get to talk [through letters], and it's like *warmest regard*. I was kind of pissed. I was like, Ugh, *warmest regard*. And then you have kidney failure, and you die. I was mad when I was making this collage. And then, as I started thinking about it more, I started to get less mad. Here she is; she gave me up for adoption. We get to meet for a second, then she dies. Now she's driving away, but I'm like, maybe she's driving towards me now? Maybe I'm healing. She's coming towards me. I can see her in a different way and not be so angry.

Understanding a Birth Mother's Point of View

Ann and I worked together to make sense of her collage. I asked her how she was able to change her feelings from anger to empathy for her birth mother. Ann was able to understand the decision her birth mother faced. She first explained,

> I didn't have it [empathy], not in the past. But digging into this more, I felt more anger come up. But then, as I was thinking about this, our meeting today, and I was kind of thinking about it last night, I softened a little bit, and I was looking at her face, kind of smiling at me in the car [beside her, in the dream] and she didn't do it on purpose. She didn't do this to me. I have anger about her, but I can; it softened me a little bit. So, I'm sure it [relinquishment] was a really hard choice for her. I'm sure she didn't want to die. I'm sure she probably would've wanted to be hanging out with me now if she were still alive. So, it helped me kind of let go of a little bit of that.

Ann and I studied the car scene more fully. We noticed the new road Ann's birth mother traveled on. It was straight, unlike the curved road passing all of Ann's birth artifacts. Ann said, "Just seeing her in the car, smiling at me, it's like she's coming *towards me* instead of running away from me in my dream."

A Birth Mother's Lived Experience

We spent an hour engaging with Ann's collage that memorialized her birth. A second change occurred when Ann could conceptualize her birth mother's lived experiences. I remarked how cool her mother looked in the picture she chose and recalled her saying she was disappointed with her looks in an earlier shared photo. Ann reflected,

> I remember before I met my birth mom, I had this image of her that she was some cool seventies rocker chick or whatever. And then, when I met her, I was kind of let down. I was like, oh, she's not that at all. But this kind of makes it like here she is. She probably could have been really cool if she didn't go through the trauma of giving a baby away and all of her health stuff.

Ann shared her life story, adding her birth mother clearly in the narrative fold. At the end of our session, we explored the words *Warmest Regards,* which appeared in her collage and at the end of the first one-page typed letter she received from her birth mother. Ann reflected,

> It's almost like she's holding back by saying that. I feel like it's such a loaded two words. There's so much she wants to say, but she's like, do I say love? Do I say I miss you? Do I say sincerely? *Warmest regards* just seems kind of right in the middle.

In Ann's dream, she said her birth mother looked *kind of snarky*. But now, in the newest photo she had found, her face looked warm and inviting. In our session, Ann was softening her

feelings for her birth mother. The birth memorial she made helped us both see this woman as real. We regarded her with warmth.

My session with Ann was the first time I had ever heard an adoptee empathize with their birth mother in this way, imagining what her life would have been like had she not placed Ann for adoption. Ann shared,

> I can't imagine giving up a baby and then having kind of a boring life living with my parents till the day I die. That's not a very fun life. And it can manifest in physical ways. So maybe all her health issues stemmed from all that stuff that she went through. So, not that it's my fault, but in a way, it kind of is. I don't take that on, but I don't know how else to say it. You know what I mean? If she would've just had me and lived a different life, would she still have died from the kidney stuff? I don't know.

Ann's feelings toward her birth mother began with a disoriented view. But, by the end of our session, Ann felt she could create a new, more positive adoptive story, which included an imagined day with her birth mother. Ann said,

> She's pulling up to my house, and we're going to have lunch and go shopping, and I get to sit next to her and smell her. And it's kind of nice because I've never thought of it that way. I've always just been kind of mad about it.

My second finding showed how adoption stories started with limited language. The feeling of adoption had few words. By adding a turbulent feeling, such as anger, participants stayed disoriented. But Ann eventually chose what sensory information to keep and what to filter. She could connect the event of her birth with the people at her birth – her birth mother.

Ann was one of five participants able to push through earlier primitive emotions about adoption and move toward the process of empathy. She added historical facts, such as the lived experiences of her birth mother, to aid in meaning-making. Ann recognized that the information excavated would never quite fit into the older, complex, and layered puzzle of her existing adoption narrative.

Five participants in my study formed new thoughts surrounding their birth and, thus, could construct unique puzzle pieces to fit within their evolved selves. Earlier adoption stories told by others failed to do justice to Ann's latest and transformative story assembled through her art-inspired collage. The following finding shows new lines of inquiry for birth through adoption narratives.

Third Finding: Reframing the Birth Through Adoption Narrative

All ten participants surrendered to the realization of loss. By introducing new facts and characters, participants began to create a more precise construction of their adoptive identity. The process initiated a form of grief. Participants spent considerable time imagining what life must have been like before adoption. Table 3, seen below, provides information added by participants that helped revise their birth through adoption narrative.

Table 3

Revising the Birth Through Adoptive Narrative

Artifact's Contribution	Example Quote
Birth Mothers	"Mom is a teenager; she wants to be a model." (Willow) "It was kind of cool to see a brief description of what she looked like. I had painted a picture of her as the years went by; when I actually saw what she looked like, I was kind of disappointed." (Ann)

	"I found out only my birth mom's name was on the birth certificate. (Tasha)
	"She was a waitress at a truck stop and didn't know who the father was." (Angus)
	"She was 18 when I was born." (Pat)
Birth Fathers	"Dad looks nervous." (Willow)
	"There's no doubt where the red hair came from. That was what I felt with that picture [of her paternal grandmother]." (Rebecca)
	"There was no father listed on my birth certificate." (Willow)
	"[My birth father] played guitar, and he wrote some songs." (Anne)
	"He didn't know about me until after I was born." (Ann)
	"My birth father died at age 20, not knowing about me." (Ellen; researcher and co-participant)
Birth Setting	"My documents say that supposedly I was found in December of 1991." (Jess)
	"Chattanooga, Tennessee. Love the spelling and the letters of the city because growing up, I had one sweatshirt that said Chattanooga across it. I wore it a lot. And then there was this street near my house in Bellingham, Washington that I would pass by on the bus to go to school. And the street was, I think it was like Chautauqua or something, But for a long time, I thought it was Chattanooga, and I thought that's where I was born." (Esther)
	"My paperwork says I was born at eight in the morning. Korea time." (Pat)
	"There's a hospital [in North Hollywood, CA] called Queen of Angels, which has now been renovated into a

	homeless shelter. It's called the Dream Center now, and it's one of those, as you're driving down the congested freeways of Los Angeles, it sits on the side of the freeway, and it's just this old, beautiful building." (Ruth)
Birth Names	"I remember so clearly my [adoptive] mom saying, 'Here are some middle names that I've picked out. Which one do you like best?' I would've been just four, four and a half. She gave me a list of five names, and one of them was Gail. There was a little boy in my class named Galen, and I liked him. So, Gail suited me. I have kept that middle name all the way through my adulthood because I had choice in that name." (Rebecca) "I discovered my half-sister, born four years later and adopted as well, shares my exact birth name." (Ellen; researcher and co-participant) "So my birth first name was my middle name after I was adopted. So, my adoptive parents took my first name in Korean and made it my middle name. But, the name that they wrote down on my paperwork when I came from Korea was not correct. So, my actual legal middle name is not what my birth mother actually named me." (Pat) "My name in the orphanage was John Paul. When my parents got me, my father wanted to name me after his grandfather. I wanted to change my name back to John Paul, but then the Pope took the name and, well …." (Angus) "I do remember seeing my original birth certificate, and it said, *Baby Girl." (*Willow)

Note. Artifacts informed a birth through an adoptive narrative by adding details.

Many participants heard stories about their birth mothers that were guesses at best. "She was young and unwed. She wanted what was best for the child. She couldn't care for the child due to poverty." Willow's shared,

> I had experiences in my teenage life that really helped me come to this conclusion that if you're an unwed mother, you are just put away and not just pretty much hidden from the church congregation. And so that's where I thought, well, of course, I was baby girl because we just wanted to hand this baby off as quickly as possible and then go back to normal, normal, I guess. So that was what I constructed in my head from a very young age.

Character development requires three-dimensional perspectives, which may include movement, desires, agency with decisions, and external and internal motivations. Participants added a third dimension to their birth mother's identity. Three participants found that their birth mothers dreamed of being a model, a musician, or a college graduate. One birth mother stayed in her childhood home, never married, never had other children, lost a leg, and died of kidney failure at age 45. Two birth mothers drew actions from their religious beliefs. One waited two years until her annulment came through to give up parental rights. Another birth mother secretly married the birth father in Mexico before they both gave up their rights to parent.

Participants willing to explore motivations surrounding relinquishment found the compelling power and danger of secrets. The following example shows a moment in time meant to be kept secret and, once found, caused such hurt. Angus shared,

> My grandfather had these notebooks, and he wrote – one day was every page. After my grandmother passed away in 1969, I found these journals in a box with an entry on the day before I came home. It said, 'Stopped by to go to Portland to see about another boy. Hope they don't get him.'
>
> So, I went out, my mother was in the kitchen, I remember, and I said, 'Here, Mother, please read this.' So, she reads it and goes, 'Oh, he meant nothing by it, Angus.'

For all participants, artifacts revealed unexpected findings years later. Angus returned to his deceased grandfather's journal and learned more. He shared,

> So, the next day, the journal writing was, 'The kids got him; we're all headed down to Coos Bay to have a big family to do with Bud's side and her side.' The next journal entry said, 'I took Angus out to buy his first pair of shoes. We love him.'

In this finding, Angus observed his grandfather's perspective of life before and after Angus' arrival. The outcome mismatched Angus' earlier thoughts of love expressed by his grandfather. Angus learned how adoption throws everyone off-kilter, including adoptive grandfathers.

Settings include time and space. When examining a birth through adoption story, placing characters in a particular setting can add rich elements that keep a story alive. While growing up, six participants were not aware of where they were before their adoption. One adoptee knew she had been placed in an orphanage in China but was unaware she shared that space with her identical twin. In the study, participants felt relief when they learned that an artifact could be something other than tangible, such as music, hair, a dream, a beauty mark, or a freckle. Jess and I wondered if a freckle could be an artifact. We reasoned the freckle marked the only recognizable difference between Jess and her identical twin. They found each other years after being separated from an orphanage in China. I felt her twin was an artifact, providing pre-adoptive details to her narrative. The freckle also broadened the timeline in surprising ways. Before Jess knew her twin sister, the freckle was just a freckle. After her reunion, her freckle became necessary for distinction. Jess explained,

> We actually have a very similar sense of style. It's easy if we're together to mistake one of us; we are probably wearing something very similar to each other without planning it. It's what happens.

Jess' freckle is an artifact, distinguishing near-identical features between one sister and another. Surprisingly, Jess' freckle appeared later in life, just before her reunion with her sister. In some of the most evocative stories in literature, there always seems to be an artifact that plays a tattle-tale role. Jess' freckle, birth siblings younger or older, birth parents who got married secretly, journals never meant to be shared, orphan reports, birth names found listed on original birth certificates, and hospitals where four siblings were born all took a daunting event such as maternal loss and allowed adoptees to recognize the malleability of their birth through adoption narrative.

My third finding shows various ways all participants in the study moved their adoption stories from the scripted, narrated tales told by adoptive parents and shifted the focus towards their self-orchestrated newer adoptive plots. They reversed the lens of discernment, which previously began from the world back to themselves. Instead, they reached their sense of self, agents of change.

Fourth Finding: Recasting Characters

Each participant in my study reconsidered the significance of the roles played by individuals within their narrative of birth through adoption. As stories pivoted around key birth and adoptive events, main characters such as adoption agents, birth and adoptive families, lawyers, social workers, and caretakers emerged carrying lesser or more weight than others. Through their engagement with artifacts, participants recasted and revised these roles, shifting their unique position as an adoptee towards center stage.

For example, like Ann's newer connection with her birth mother, Pat found that broadening the social, economic, cultural, political, and historic landscapes surrounding maternal relinquishment helped frame a revised understanding of the various complexities involved in maternal relinquishment. Once a change in perception occurred, Pat's story headed in a new, positive direction.

The Feeling of Gall

Pat said that she hates her most talked-about artifact. She shared, "When people would ask me about my adoption, I'd be like, yeah, yeah, I got shipped in a cardboard box." She said the story made people uncomfortable, and they would often stop asking her questions. The story often made her feel ashamed. Now, she feels differently about feeling such shame because she has a deeper understanding of the systems that help arrange adoptions.

Pat recently returned to South Korea, her birth country, to toss her artifact into the Han River. While five people in the study had articles of clothing worn during their adoption journey, Pat had a box marked with the Korean Airlines logo for her birth artifact. As a four-month-old baby, she traveled in this box, unaccompanied, on a long flight from South Korea to Canada. Pat had a photograph of the box to share. She explained,

> So it's in that plastic because I was packing it to bring with me to Korea when I went last year. It was normally open and folded, so I had to take it apart a little bit to make it flat so it would fit in my very large duffle bag. So that's just the photo of it. I don't have it anymore. After my sister joined me in Korea, we opened it up, put it back into a box again, and I wrote my name in Korean with a Sharpie on the floor of it, and then my

name in English. And we both went down to the Han River, which runs through Seoul. We just put it in the river and watched it float away.

Figure 11

"I was Shipped in a Box"

Note. A Korean Airline logo is stamped on a cardboard box, wrapped in plastic in preparation for Pat's return to South Korea. Used with permission from participant.

Pat's older sister did not want her to throw the box, seen above, into the river. Pat explained,

> She did not want me to do it, but I just said she feels some ownership over it, too, because she was the first one to hold me in the box when I was given over by the airline staff. She feels like it's a very important artifact, but I just hate how much it reminds me that I was shipped in a box.

The Feeling of Caring

Pat learned that the way she entered her adoption was not through the carelessness of her birth mother. Pat was separated from her birth mother as a three-day-old newborn. When they

finally met again in South Korea almost two years ago, Pat's experience with her birth mother changed everything she knew about her birth story. Pat's mother didn't place her in a box without a blanket to travel unaccompanied six thousand miles away from her. The adoption agent did that. Instead, during their reunion, Pat's birth mother acted carefully. She purposefully switched places with Pat while walking on a sidewalk near heavy traffic. Her mother wanted to be closer to the traffic. At lunch, Pat's mother took the pieces of shrimp out of the soup and peeled off the shells. These acts of kindness contradicted what Pat felt previously. She said, "I used to feel embarrassed about it [the box]. My family, my adoptive family, for years, we just had it in the basement, stored away." Now, instead of a box, she is accompanied by her birth mother. Below is a picture of the two navigating the city streets of Seoul, South Korea.

Figure 12

Pat and Birth Mother in South Korea

Note. Pat's birth mother, on the right, switched places, walking closer to busy traffic as a means of protection. Used with permission from participant.

Pat's positive reunion with her birth mother aided in her sense of self. By discarding the box and adding photos of her reunion with her birth mother, Pat reframed her previous perceptions of her birth through adoption timeline. Her adoption theme shifted focus from her box artifact to her birth mother. She shared,

> She stayed in the hospital for three days, which is a cultural thing that you eat specific meals when you have a baby in Korea. Then, they just sent her out the door. And that was it.

A Heightened Sense of Self

Pat recognized her evolving identity. She said, "By bringing the box back to South Korea, it was a way of saying, 'That's not how I think about my adoption anymore.'" Pat shared a video depicting the emotional reunion with her birth mother. Pat is seen comforting her birth mother, rubbing her back, and leaning in for a kiss as they spend time with photos Pat brought with her to share. I told Pat it looked like she had almost stepped into the role of mother in a maternal way to care for her needs. She was considerate of allowing the reunion to be directed by her birth mother. In the video, Pat tells her translator, "She can take her time, no rush, just sit if that's what she wants to do." Pat explained, "I very much felt that she needed the care and the support more than I did."

I admired Pat for her ability to cross previously kept secret boundaries of time and place. The act of being relinquished invited all types of people to express opinions about Pat's birth details. Pat invited more people to her adoptive plot and timeline through her investigations. She discovered social workers had recorded details about her birth. The file she took had enough information to help Pat find her birth mother. Upon separation, there was a gap of 100 days, followed by foster care. When Pat returned to Seoul to meet her birth mother, she also looked for her foster family. There was no trace, and she thinks they may have died. Pat took a more comprehensive view of her adoption story. She stated, "That [shipped in a box story] is no longer part of my identity as an adoptee." In all sessions, I asked each participant about their dreams. So many adoptees had dreams related to their adoption. Pat shared, "When I have dreams that I do

remember, I'm in the same world as my dream if that makes sense." I found it amazing that Pat, born in one country with one family and then lived in another country with a new family, can have both conscious thoughts and sub-conscious dreams all grounded by the same world.

By engaging with pre-adoptive artifacts, Pat allowed space to consider life's experiences within her world before adoption. She is fully committed to her evolving adoptive identity. Meeting her birth mother gave her insight into the complexities of maternal relinquishment. Pat learned her mother's sister also relinquished a child to adoption. She also discovered her mother had a son later in her life. She did not relinquish her son, Pat's half-brother. Pat also considered life's experiences at the moment of adoption when a social worker placed her in a box and put her on a plane. Pat continues to work on her evolving adoptive identity, changing through time. She is an adoption advocate involved in a lawsuit with other Korean-born adoptees. Additionally, Pat mentors other adoptees through Angela Tucker's *Adoptee Mentoring Society*.

Tasha's story is included in this finding because of her evolving adoptive identity through the conceptual makeup of pre-adoptive artifacts. Tasha is a transracial adoptee born to a White mother and a Black father. She was considered a special needs child with little chance for adoption because of her mixed race. Luckily, Tasha was adopted at the age of five months. I have known Tasha for years. My daughter was a flower girl at her wedding. When Tasha was thirty-one, she had a horrific bike accident that left her paralyzed from the chest down. My research focused on Tasha's adoption. However, her identity as an author, Paralympic athlete, public speaker, disability advocate, wife, and mother to Charlie and Jack, her cats, aids in the depth of her unique story. She is not a special needs person, as described in her "Life with Baby" artifact. She brilliantly explains,

> You know, nobody has special needs. We all have the same needs. We have the need for food and shelter and love and money and jobs, and all of that. So, you know, when I read that I'm special needs, it's just such an old archaic way of thinking.

Besides an old way of thinking, Tasha believes the assumption and judgment interfere with a person's right to be loved. Another participant, Esther, talked about the same issue. Esther's Tennessee Department of Human Services flyer stated, "The prognosis for Esther is uncertain. The physical handicaps interfere with her reaching physical developmental milestones as early as would be anticipated otherwise." Esther grew up far from having an uncertain physical outcome. For one, she played collegiate basketball. Her life's accolades of achievement and success are bountiful.

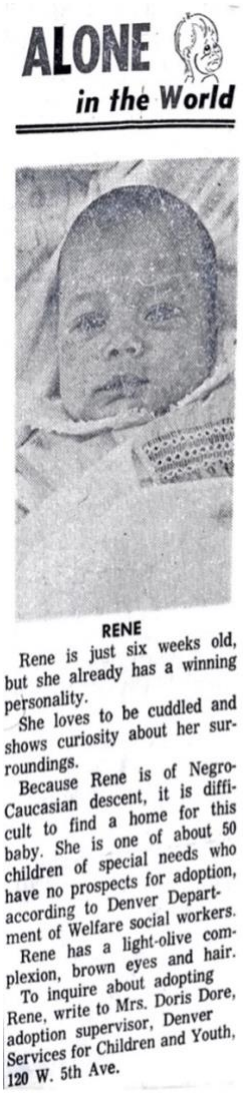
Tasha lives in the same town as her birth mother, and although they have exchanged email letters, they have not met. Occasionally, Tasha drives by her home, noticing how she likes to garden. She has not met her father, who may live in Chicago. Tasha described her adoption:

> I have three brothers. My mom really wanted to have a girl, and she felt that if they tried for another child, it might be a boy. She wanted to adopt a girl. She found an article in the newspaper talking about special needs children who needed homes. They considered me special needs because I am biracial. And so, in 1969, biracial kids weren't a group of children that people wanted to adopt. Unlike now, when different races are, that's what people are looking for. They're not looking for plain White babies. They're looking for exotic from other countries or different backgrounds. And you see a lot of White moms with Black kids. I don't know if I've ever seen a Black family with a White adopted kid, but it's always the other way around. And White families tend to adopt all kinds of different races.

But at that time, in ’69, that was not the case. And so, they put this little blurb in the paper that said, we’ve got these kids who have no prospects for adoption because they’re biracial. So my mom saw that article, and she decided to adopt me from that. The article shown below is not a picture of Tasha. It is the actual article that Tasha’s adoptive mother read, encouraging her to seek adoption for one of the 50 babies available.

Figure 13

Alone in the world



ALONE
in the World

RENE

Rene is just six weeks old, but she already has a winning personality.

She loves to be cuddled and shows curiosity about her surroundings.

Because Rene is of Negro-Caucasian descent, it is difficult to find a home for this baby. She is one of about 50 children of special needs who have no prospects for adoption, according to Denver Department of Welfare social workers.

Rene has a light-olive complexion, brown eyes and hair.

To inquire about adopting Rene, write to Mrs. Doris Dore, adoption supervisor, Denver Services for Children and Youth, 120 W. 5th Ave.

Note. An article provides details about Rene, an orphan needing a home. According to the article, Rene has little prospects for adoption because of her skin color. Used with permission from participant.

The Cultural Code-Switch of Adoptive Identity

Tasha and I pondered over the terms *Negro-Caucasian* and *special needs* used to describe Rene, the baby in the article. Tasha explained,

> That was the attitude of that time period. It was like, these kids are no good. They were made from two different races of people. That's not an appropriate way to have a kid. And so, it's like, we've got these throwaways in the throwaway bin, and if you want to get one, it's a cheaper price. So yeah, that's kind of what that is.

Growing up with a White family, Tasha felt safe, loved, and belonged. She had distinguishing characteristics that were different from those of her siblings. Tasha was not a boy. She did not have blue eyes or blond hair, and her skin was darker. Tasha did not see these distinguishing factors as artifacts carried from birth. Instead, she viewed them as features that added to or were sculpted by the human experience. If you are half-Black and half-White, Tasha reasons,

> You could be raised White by a White family. You could be raised Black by a Black family. You could be raised biracial by a biracial family, and that changes you. You could have three of me sitting here. I would be a very different person.

I wondered how Tasha, who is an adopted person of mixed race, navigated her adoptive identity. I saw her artifacts, which, in my mind, included her skin, dark hair, and dark eyes, all trying to say something, yet they remained in hiding. Her hair is straightened. I understood. Everyone in her family had straight hair. She said, "You see yourself as who you grew up with.

So, I see myself as being White." Colorblindness, the ability to ignore color or racial contrast, makes identity only half-right, and it is not her fault. Tasha had known no Black people to show her anything other than White. Tasha added,

> Technically, people who are biracial would identify as Black, but I don't necessarily identify that way because I don't know anything about being Black. When George Floyd died and people were coming on TV and being interviewed and talking about, you know, the Black experience, I was like, yeah, I don't even know what that's like. That's not my experience. Nobody ever preached to me the importance – if a cop pulls you over, put your hands on the wheel. Be in clear visibility. Don't talk back. That was never a lesson that was taught in my house because my household was White.

Even if Tasha, at her age, embraced Black culture, she felt it would be a simulated attempt. She likens the experience to people who think they know what it is like to be in a wheelchair, as Tasha is because they were in one for a month with a broken leg. You might navigate the stairs okay, but Tasha explained,

> To feel the experience of people deciding that you are either defective, that you're not very smart, or that you can't do certain things requires being immersed in the wheelchair community as a user. Once the leg heals, you're up walking again. If I tried immersing myself in a Black community, I could always go back to White.

Tasha described the tension of holding on to two sides of her identity, both her birth and adoptive identities. Through an engagement with artifacts, she was conscious of both at once. But she does not necessarily need to experience the tension. She said,

> I can pass as White, but I can't necessarily hide that I'm part Black, either. Sometimes, people will catch on to my hair or my skin tone based on my brothers and be like, I don't

> know what's different about her, but something's different about her. So it's like you are kind of right in the middle between Black and White. You're in that gray zone, basically.

Fitting in at All Costs

I understood why someone like Tasha would want to remain in the gray zone. Adoptees have a heightened desire to fit in. Transracial adoptee, Angela Tucker (2023) describes,

> Even in loving families, adoptees can sometimes feel like "guests" or "outsiders"; they may feel an ongoing obligation to be constantly grateful to their adoptive parents, and, of particular significance, they may view Black babies as less desirable for adoption than White babies (p. 23).

Tasha struggles to make a conscious connection between her adoption as a "special needs" child with a discounted, cheaper, only $12- price and her present life as a vibrant, competent, independent woman. Hiding her identity is easier. She explained, "I think that for me, that's kind of like the chameleon part. You have to sometimes be one thing and sometimes be another. So sometimes you have to hide certain parts." Tasha made a conscious decision to fit in with her environment as a transracial adoptee raised in a White setting.

Tasha did search for her paternal family. She eventually discovered her biological father's name through an email exchange with her biological mother. She searched extensively on databases online, circling in on places in Chicago. Tasha stated, "

> As far as I know, he's got two sons and a daughter. I'm not sure if there are any others that I'm missing. I do think I am a total secret with him because when I tried to contact him through his daughter, she didn't know about me. I know that the guy [her biological father] had no part in it [the relinquishment]. It wasn't like he couldn't keep me. It was more like *she* couldn't keep me because he was not in the picture.

The Fluidity of Thought

Most everyone in the study agreed that adoptive identity changes with time and with life's experiences. Tasha reflected that her identity has changed in the last ten years. She is interested in meeting her birth mother and feels if she does, her identity will change again by seeing her, observing how she acts, and sitting with the fact that she came from this woman. She wondered out loud, "Would we like each other? Would we get along? Would we have things in common?" Tasha added,

> Sometimes, you can look at [the trauma of adoption], but other times, you can look at the beauty of adoption. It can be different things at different times with just different moods. You could be in a bad mood and ask, why did I get stuck in this White family? All these people don't understand me. Or it could be like, oh, I got to be in this White family where people love me, and they are raising me. I think it depends on you, your mood, your lens, and all of the different ways that you could view it.

Tasha and I worked together to discover all the different ways to view *Alone in the World*, Tasha's pre-adoptive artifact found in her baby book. She reflected, "I don't know; when I first saw it, imagine entering your adolescence years, going through identity yourself, and you were to read this." Table 4 shows the narrative elements of Tasha's adoptive artifact.

Table 4

Tasha's Pre-Adoptive Artifact

Characters	Plot	Setting	Conflict	Point of View	Style	Resolution
Mrs. Doris Dore (Social Worker), Denver	Special Needs Children Needing Homes.	Denver Services for Children and Youth.	"Negro-Caucasian" Children.	Special Needs with No Prospects	Appeals to Empathy. Alone in the World. Likes to be	Adoption

Department of Welfare Social Workers, Rene, Tasha, Adoptive Parents, 50 babies.	for Adoption.	Cuddled. Curious. Light Olive Complexion. Six Weeks Old.

Note. Alone in the World advertised 50 bi-racial babies needing homes.

Tasha and I examined her artifact to conceptualize what parts of her identity made her present as *alone in the world*. She added 55 more characters to the narrative elements, as shown in Table 4. First, she talked about her parents, who weren't looking for a special needs child. They were looking for a girl. Tasha filled that role well. Next, Tasha reached beyond her microfiction, suggesting one person's point of view considering her a special needs child. We studied the tone or style of the document used to describe her age, skin color, and observable behavior. Tasha's inquiry gained movement when she pulled stories away from this artifact and towards her birth mother and father. Initially, Tasha said she had no idea what her birth parents' lives were like. She explained,

> I found out only my birth mom's name was on the birth certificate. There was no father listed. I think that was purposeful because (A) she wasn't going to keep me, and (B) her parents had wanted her to sever ties with the guy. So there was no man's name on it.

By the second session, I learned Tasha had met one of her birth mother's relatives – her sister's child, who would be Tasha's cousin. She told her cousin she wanted to meet her birth mother but was told by her cousin that her birth mother was not courageous enough to meet her. Recently, Tasha sadly discovered she has stage one breast cancer. She is confident her birth mother will reach out based on her scary news. She felt if there was ever a time for her birth

mother to show courage, this would be the time. To complete the study, Tasha made a birth memorial appropriately named *Caught in the Mix*. She wrote:

> Identity. Sister. Daughter. Biracial. Half Black. Half White. Adopted. These are just a few of the identities with which I relate. I was born of a White woman and a Black man, but my adoption brought me to a White family. Having darker skin than my family but appearing "ambiguous" in terms of race has challenged me, defined me, exploited me, and made me. Most importantly, however, it has shown me the positive and negative of the world of the chameleon – constantly trying to fit into the world, sometimes hiding and other times standing out. Because I don't have the lived experience that compliments the Black roots of my family, I have a perspective of not being White, not being Black, but being somewhere *Caught in the Mix*.

Tasha became more understanding of just how unique an adoptive identity can be. People have frequently asked her, "So what are you, anyway?" She claimed her most essential question is, "Who have I become?" Tasha concluded,

> We live in a world of classifying, defining, and deciding who fits in and who is cut out. When I think about who I have become, a mix of nature and nurture, I find that I am not inferior but have lived from a unique perspective, which only comes from being a mix of all who have given me life.

Tasha's artifact, *Alone in the* World, gained momentum the minute she considered the plasticity of its meaning. A social worker had a unique perspective on biracial babies. Through her experiences, Tasha has a unique perspective of herself, not alone but *in* the world.

A Summary of Key Discoveries

Chapter Four provided four findings supporting themes surrounding adoptive identity. I purposefully designed my study as participatory research, inviting adoptees to engage with artifacts associated with their birth. Guiding questions developed through the lens of neuroplasticity prompted mismatched outcomes and *aha moments* of discovery. I utilized the artifacts to a) explore beliefs, values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions about the phenomena of adoption, b) investigate the relationship among the elements that contribute to or inhibit the participant's perception of their adoptive identity, and c) provide a structure to understand better how these ideas fit into an understanding of self, relationships, family, and culture.

I listed my findings in a progressive order as I detected patterns of growth. Finding One showed how participants recognized their adoptive selves along with their pre-adoptive selves. After studying baby photos, bronzed shoes, foster and adoptive names, and freckles, all participants viewed themselves as the same person before and after adoption. Finding Two demonstrated how discovering an unmatched outcome within a historical event before adoption felt disorienting. Grief was felt among all participants as they recognized, analyzed, and enriched events that occurred before their adoption. Finding Three showed how participants could utilize that unmatched outcome to construct a new narrative. I found six participants ready to move in this direction while others were not. Not ready does not mean *never ready*, however. Like Angus finding bits and pieces of artifacts throughout and after the sessions, archeological digs take time. Finally, Finding Four showed six participants able to cast themselves as main characters, taking a center stage role in their birth through adoptive experience.

Participants took a critical view of the landscape in which their adoption sat. Artifacts helped draw attention to how new life, wanted or not, shaped a person such as a birth mother. Participants challenged false assumptions made about relinquishment. For instance, not every

member of the biological family knew about the baby before relinquishment. Some adoptees learned they were rocked and loved before adoption. By exploring beliefs, values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions about their adoption, participants all gained an altered sense of adoptive identity.

Participants held their artifacts like a deck of cards, shuffling to find meaning. Like their dreams, they could discard artifacts that no longer served a purpose. For example, Tasha's *Alone in the World* article failed to include and illuminate her birth parent's roles as characters in her narrative. While participants discarded some documents, other objects provided new insights in the shifting pile of facts. Ruth reflected,

> Until these past three years, I didn't take into consideration the true weight of why there was such a void in my life. Even though I had a beautiful upbringing, why did I have so many questions and longing to find the foundation of who I truly am? As a child from a closed adoption, my story had always started from chapter two. There was an entire, wonderful book being written without the beginning. :Can you imagine reading a great mystery but not having the details of how the story began? That is how the story of my life had felt until 2020 when, slowly, the pages of my chapter one began to turn.

The stories I first heard surrounding an adoptee's birth through adoption timeline changed meaning by the end of our three-month study. At first, the stories originated from other people and were retold by the participants. New stories emerged from an engagement with objects that tapped into thoughts and feelings, allowing us to imagine or consider what life was like before our adoption. The artifacts helped structure our understanding of self, relationships, family, and culture.

Self

Participants gained access to their pre-adoptive artifacts from social workers, adoptive parents, genetic testing labs, biological families, and government agencies, all wielding great power. Change occurred once participants began manipulating the documents, questioning their legitimacy, and reading between the lines to notice what was missing and why. Participants started to discern differences between what they heard as their adoptive narratives and what they discovered through their pre-adoptive artifacts.

After studying photographs taken before adoption, participants recognized a pivotal witness to the event of adoption – the photographer. They added even more characters standing among the events surrounding the social, economic, cultural, political, and historical effects of maternal relinquishment. Most importantly, adoptees added themselves as material witnesses to their adoption event.

The results of their dig produced a more authentic adoption narrative. One participant learned that her birth mother named her at birth. The words *Baby Girl* appeared on her documents, but her birth mother had a private name for her, shared later in reunion. That fact changed exponentially the perceptions of adoptive identity – knowing during that vital infant stage, someone whispered your name.

Two participants believed their birth mothers felt solid about their decision to relinquish. Discoveries found birth fathers or family members of the birth father never wanted it to happen. These archeological treasures provided facts that allowed for a stronger sense of self.

Relationships and Family

Four adoptees considered their birth mothers with indifference until they found clues that altered their perceptions of their birth. Two participants lessened their feelings of deep anger toward their maternal loss. In place of anger came empathy toward the birth mother's difficult

decision. Esther wanted to know how her mother, who was homeless, got to the hospital. Pat does not hold her mother responsible in any way. She said her mother was the victim of the system.

Well into a reunion with her birth mother, Ann explained how upset she was when her birth mother missed wishing her a happy birthday by three days. Then, Ann started studying dates on the hospital records and noticed her birth mother stayed in the hospital for three days after Ann's birth. So, maybe, she guessed, the date that is important to Ann's birth mother is the day she gave her up.

Culture

The shoes worn and later bronzed by Angus' adoptive parents were witnesses to the event of adoption. Angus was relinquished by a mother who was Catholic. At the time of his birth, she had applied for an annulment. The lengthy wait to approve the annulment was the reason his adoption placement took so long. Angus waited over two years and was placed in five different foster homes before he was eligible for adoption.

My initial interest in pre-adoptive artifacts failed to resolve my anger toward my birth mother. I had acquired a considerable pile of stuff to sort through. I did not like what my orphan records said about me. In the six months of my care, no one recorded me smiling or being rocked or held. I did not like looking at my birth certificate. Where my father should have signed, someone scratched an ugly X. The word VOID was stamped all over the document, making me feel like I had not been born. My DNA test results said I was someone I did not feel I was – half Jewish. I did not mind being Jewish, but you cannot *be* Jewish just on paper. An entire heritage was missing from my experiences, even though my blood knew the truth. I struggled to be happy

with the fact that my half-sister got my birth name, too. I did not even have a unique name. I honestly did not like any of these artifacts.

My thoughts and feelings about my misfit collection dramatically changed when I visited the Foundling Museum in London to view the 400 birth tokens held in storage for centuries in London's Foundling Hospital, an orphanage open from 1749-1951. Objects offer hints to secret stories, and these tokens helped identify babies left in the care of others. I wondered who made the object, how many hands touched it, and for what purpose. For hundreds of years, these birth tokens have kept a promise of secrecy. Charles Dickens, who lived near the Foundling Hospital from 1822 to 1860, used an object as a literary tool to drive his novel *Oliver Twist* (1838). Oliver's parents, a married man and an unmarried woman, share a bond forbidden by society. Oliver's mother possessed a locket containing a lock of hair from both involved. Womack (2012) writes, "The locket hangs in suspended circulation throughout the novel, as does the identity of the illegitimate, orphaned child, Oliver" (p. 452).

Artifacts associated with secrets are often made worse by wonder. I knew I was adopted, but for the majority of my life, I did not understand the real reasons why. The artifacts I dug up hung in suspended circulation. However, when engaging these objects with people and events, they can clarify, reveal, and retell the historical timeline between a person's birth and adoption. I gained a better understanding of my birth mother's lived experiences and choices by excavating not only the facts surrounding her life but also through my exploration of the environment in which her life revealed itself. Other birth relatives told me my birth mother did not have the skills motherhood requires because her parents had not acquired the skills either. She led a troubled life.

Conclusions: Momentum for Future Thoughts

The four critical findings above show how adoptees located and used their pre-adoptive artifacts. My study asked how adoptees understand their adoptive identity using pre-adoptive artifacts. Through engaging with their artifacts, they revised their birth through adoptive narratives by adding plot, character, and setting details. Developing these story elements within the context of the event, participants altered perceptions about their pre-adoptive history and gained a heightened sense of adoptive self. In these concrete ways, participants discovered how pre-adoptive artifacts may guide a novel meaning.

My second research question asked how one's understanding of adoptive identity changes over time with a specific artifact. Adoptees found they could decide if they wanted to stick with the jarring stories such as shipped in a box, found on the street, how much you cost, or how you traveled from one foster family to another. Participants could take their thoughts and feelings pulled from earlier versions of their adoptive story and create enough space for a new narrative.

All participants initially used their artifacts to think about adoption. After some time, all participants added thoughts and feelings using their artifacts as a catalyst for change. They deciphered specific facts in their documents that placed themselves within the social-cultural setting of their birth and later empathized with mothers making urgent decisions. They all saw themselves within their fluid adoption setting, such as South Korea, Hollywood, California, or a small village in China. By thinking and feeling *about* these artifacts, and by thinking and feeling *with* these artifacts, we were able to gain ground on the complex, confusing thoughts and feelings surrounding adoptive identity.

I previously mentioned Perry's (2017) statement, "The nature and timing of our developmental experiences shape us. Like people who learn a foreign language late in life, some

adoptees will never speak the language of love without an accent" (p. 106). Ruth was adopted within two days of her birth, while Rebecca waited over four years. Regardless of timing, the human experience of relinquishment and adoption impacted each participant similarly. They all had questions that, during their lifetime, felt unanswered. Some of their questions reframed truths told initially by trusted sources such as birth families, adopted families, social workers, newspaper reports, and caretakers. At their earliest stage of development, they found inconsistent patterns of trust. No doubt, these participants had needs unique to their circumstances.

Luckily, most adoptees in the study found beautiful, caring, nurturing adoptive homes. They received and gave love easily, but I now wonder in what ways adoptees expressed love. Two participants shared how difficult their adoption was. One is no longer in a relationship with her adoptive parents. Perry's (2017) comment about expressing love with an accent makes me wonder how emotions got translated throughout the adopted human experience. Ann commented, "It's nice to talk to another adoptee through this because I've only ever shared it with people who are not adopted. They don't really get it."

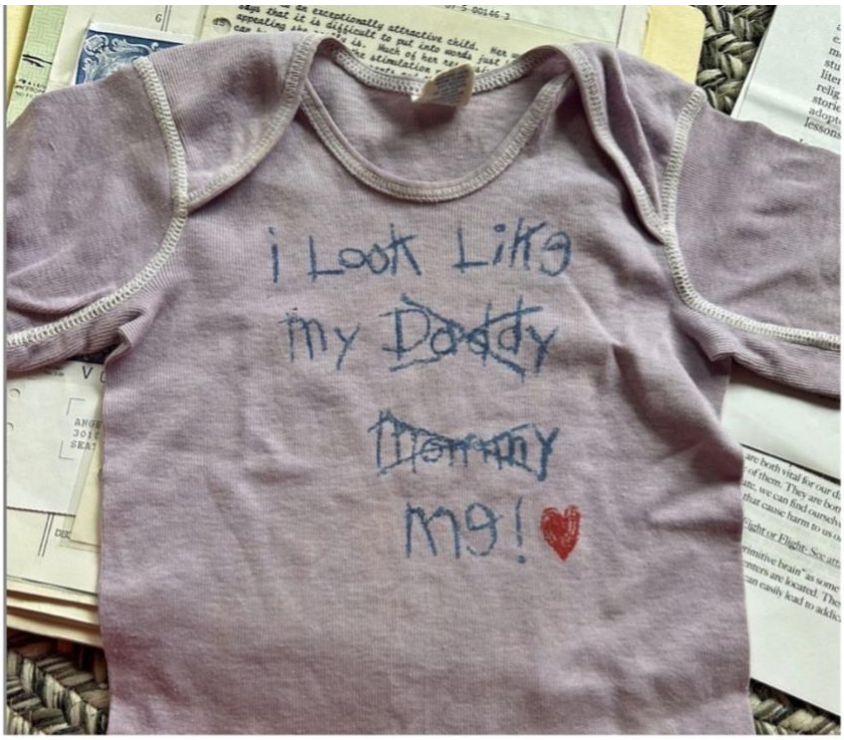
Family relationships, cultural allowances and constrictions, and economic, social, and political circumstances all situate an adoptee within her world. All these sub-plots drive a narration. Esther's artifact, an advertisement announcing her potential adoption, made predictions for her. It read, "The prognosis for Esther is unclear. The physical handicaps interfere with her reaching physical developmental milestones." Esther chose not to live by the uncertain, limiting chances for success, as implied by her document. Instead, she took the messages and reversed their projection. Artifacts traveling from the maker to the receiver arrive with their narrative locked solid. Initially, they provide no new meanings. But they can be translated and revised differently.

During times of stress, when her adoptive household was too chaotic and loud, Esther would play the piano. She ignored her *physical limitations,* as stated in her advertisement. Instead, Esther took the piano bench away, laid on the floor with her back to the keys, and played the piece with her left hand acting as right. Esther wonders why she often played in this unique way. Maybe, she reasoned, she was redirecting the prevailing messages, all running in a particular direction for her to follow.

Engaging with artifacts began with a deep desire to learn more about our birth and adoption timeline. These treasures found in unassuming places helped adoptees act upon and shape their worldviews. Music, which was also Esther's artifact, was meant to be played in certain ways, at certain times, and in certain settings, according to long-held traditions. But Esther's worldview defied earlier predictions for limited success. Instead, she turned her back and played her song.

Figure 14

Esther's Announcement



Note. Esther's artifacts lay stretched out on her table. Used with permission from participant.

Chapter Five: Summary of Findings, Conclusion, and Recommendations

Overview

In Chapter Four, I presented four new findings that shed light on the significant contributions made by participants as they worked with their pre-adoptive artifacts to reframe adoption narratives. The existing literature surrounding adoptive identity and well-being lacks discussion on the historical events leading from birth through adoption. In closed adoptions, some adoptees face challenges reconciling their identities when much information is missing, altered, or ambiguous. Adoptees' lives are determined by countless and chaotic factors that include, in most U.S. states, sealing adoption records and original birth certificates marking a person's birth. My qualitative, participatory, artifact-oriented study asked adoptees to engage with pre-adoptive artifacts to gain a deeper relationship with their identity. Specifically, it asked adoptees to explore what it means to be an adopted person.

Adoptees brought a variety of artifacts to their online Zoom session. These included clothing, birth certificates, foster records, photographs, DNA reports, letters, dreams, birthmarks, and hair, all helping bridge the historical distance between an adoptee's birth and adoption. Results from this study add to the sparse adoption research focusing on the concepts of material culture engagement suggested by Malafouris (2018) to broaden an understanding of adoptive identity and well-being. Findings indicated that artifacts associated with birth may be helpful to a) explore beliefs, values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions about the phenomena of adoption, b) investigate the relationship among the elements that contribute to or inhibit the participant's perception of their adoptive identity, and c) provide a structure to understand better how these ideas fit into an understanding of self, relationships, family, and culture.

Adoptees identified aspects of their identity that lacked clarity, such as missing family members, access to their birth certificates, knowledge of their birth names, and confusing and conflicting reunions with birth family members. Perceptions of their adoptive identity changed after learning more about their history before adoption. Through their engagement with artifacts, they added clues that aided in a deeper empathetic understanding of the complex thoughts and feelings surrounding their birth parents, adoptive parents, and foster families. By taking a closer look at themselves, their relationships, their families, and their cultures, adoptees could step back from the confusing plot of adoption, adding their unique adoptive point of view to drive the narrative themes.

Looking back on three months of research, I realized how much enjoyment I derived from the process. As an adopted person, I had not spent a lot of time with other adoptees. While I participated in a few adoptee discussion groups, I found the tone and direction often too harsh for my liking. Additionally, I had read several adoption memoirs, each evoking a shared recognition of loss that brought me to tears. The methodology developed for this study contributes to adoption research in novel ways. Having spent twenty years teaching elementary and middle school students, I particularly loved lessons involving collaborative, experiential inquiry. I firmly believe *show and tell* sessions should be a staple in all classrooms, irrespective of age, as objects curated with care possess a magical storytelling quality. I learned that through a deep engagement with evocative objects, showing and telling loosened and realigned the static elements of an adoption story.

Chapter Five includes a synthesis and analysis of my extensive research on adoptive identity among adults who were adopted in childhood. Throughout my study, I helped adoptees engage with pre-adoptive artifacts. All adoptees came from closed adoptions with limited birth

information. By delving deeply into themes of loss, identity, misinformation, and the construction of a future self, all participants broadened their birth through adoption timelines. Artifacts helped participants discard or rearrange existing meaning surrounding their adoptive narratives, allowing new constructs to emerge. The primary focus of the study was to explore two key research questions: How do adoptees understand their adoptive identity using pre-adoptive artifacts? And, how might one's understanding of their adoptive identity change over time in relation to a specific artifact?

I identified two main themes based on my four findings: (a) artifacts hold the initial threads that can aid in the formation of an individual's adoptive identity, and (b) pre-adoptive artifacts must be viewed, engaged with, and untangled by the relevant social group of those most affected by the practices and policies of adoption. I discuss each theme in detail later in this chapter.

Resuscitating Artifacts

All participants underwent significant shifts in perspecitve, deepening their adoptive identity or a sense of who they are as an adopted person. Changes occurred through progressive sessions of inquiry. Like all research, I was unsure about the journey. The pre-adoptive objects I had collected years earlier had all remained tucked away in my cabinet – inactive and unresponsive. Like adoptive memoirs, they evoked anger, tears, and confusion. But they also sparked a curiosity urging me to explore deeper into my adoptive identity. Much like Pat's missing 100 days, they represented pieces of an unfinished puzzle. My extensive research showed me the value of object-centered participatory sessions with adoptees. However, I also recognized the inherent risks in conducting research that demanded so much from participants. I

realized the challenge of finding adoptees who met specific criteria and were willing to take a survey and dedicate three hours to a stranger.

Moreover, while designing my study, I questioned participants' abilities to use artifacts to enact meaning. Despite being an adoptee, I knew that my perspective and willingness to engage with artifacts did not guarantee the study's success. First, though, I needed participants to find their artifacts. Unearthing artifacts proved to be a challenge. Some participants who showed interest in participating in the study found themselves unable to do so due to a lack of artifacts carried from birth to adoption. Interestingly, Angus, despite initially reporting in his survey that he possessed no artifacts aside from his DNA report, later uncovered two items that significantly informed his exploration. Similarly, Jess possessed a sweater that instilled sentimental value as an origin artifact. She eventually had to hide her sweater from her daughter, who often wore it, because threads had loosened. She said, "This is one of the only things I have that is from our birth city."

Ruth embarked on a considerable journey to her storage unit in California, only to come up empty-handed after an exhaustive search for her adoption file. It became apparent that many participants had not recently engaged with their pre-adoptive artifacts. I had expected a bit of reluctance. My adopted son, a participant in my pilot study, said,

> Every few years, I'll come back to it [my artifacts], but there's not like a point in time where I'll be like, 'Oh, the box.' It'll be like I'll stumble across it, and then I'll take a look through it when I'm cleaning my room or something. Maybe I'll grow to like these.

Ultimately, each participant carried their evocative objects into the fold of our progressive sessions of inquiry. They reshaped narratives and left with a more positive outlook on their adoption stories. However, qualitative research seldom follows a linear trajectory. Ruth

remained unable to locate her adoption file, while Pat struggled to complete the final project due to overwhelming emotions. Additionally, my friend Tasha was diagnosed with cancer. My teaching career sensitized me to the fragility of individuals, particularly within the context of adoption. My research underscored the importance of revisiting the most vulnerable pathways through which adoptees from closed settings enter their adoptive homes. I present my themes below.

Theme One: Artifacts as Threads of Identity

Two overarching themes emerged from my study, encapsulating the shared experiences among participants across my four key findings. Recurring elements woven throughout the data highlighted the effectiveness of guided artifact exploration in uncovering and examining the initial adoption narrative. Across multiple findings, data revealed participants willing to reflect on and change underlying meanings and perspectives surrounding their adoption.

The first theme showed artifacts holding early threads aiding in forming an adoptive identity. Artifacts helped participants form links between their adopted and biological history. An evolved sense of self emerged when adoptees released the passive fate of their objects through active engagement. Initial sessions found artifacts relatively impotent. They loosely held adoption stories through shame, ambiguity, passivity, and wonder but failed to extract much meaning. Participants acquired artifacts that uncovered secrets, including birth names, dates, and places. However, in the first two sessions, participants talked about the difficulties faced by entangling with artifacts. Pat struggled to enact meaning from many of her artifacts. Before Angus read his grandfather's journal, he only knew his grandfather's love. Brown (2009) suggests, "We look through objects because there are codes by which our interpretive attention

makes them meaningful because there is discourse of objectivity that allows us to use them as facts" (p. 140).

In my study, numerous stories contained intriguing twists and turns, which I believed could be enriched through an entanglement with artifacts. In my first finding, I looked for places where participants detached from or felt conflicted with birth identities. Willow's perception of herself as a smiling baby did not match her pre-adoptive baby photo. She discovered a disconnect between her current understanding of self and the passive demeanor captured in her baby photo. Initially, the artifact failed to evoke meaning in her adoptive identity. Likewise, Ann found dissonance between the photo of her birth mother and the rock star image she idealized. Ann's photographs of her birth mother confronted unexpected reality. If left alone, these early threads of adoptive identity fail to ignite change.

Participants found the revelation of truths satisfied a curiosity, but they also learned the artifact could recast how people confronted their birth and adoptive facts. Learning commenced when their active engagement in searching garnered surprising results. Once held to the light, the unexpected, conflicting, intriguing, and perhaps shocking aha moments caused significant learning leaps (Salinas-Hernàndez & Duvarci, 2021). Participants took facts surrounding their pre-adoptive history and added people, places, and cultural settings to penetrate the interior message of the secret. The static act of adoption shifted with the knowledge that history is fluid. Once artifacts became more than objects delivered by someone else, participants detected the calculated power emanating from outside their selves.

Stretching an understanding began with a slight pull before the idea returned to its original form. Ruth's adoptive family made her feel, not intentionally so, like an outlier. She hungered for adventure against a backdrop of stable and predictable caregivers. When she met

her biological family, she found them all active risk-takers. Ruth wondered if the family's lifestyle was biologically innate or resulted from the risky way their marriage began. Ruth's birthmother and birthfather kept her a secret. She learned her birth mother was not sure of her love for her birth father when she became pregnant. The doctor who assisted in her birth was married to an adoption attorney. Relinquishment, therefore, would be swift– Ruth was adopted two days after her birth.

After giving birth, Ruth's mother and father became engaged and wed three months later. Not long into their first year of marriage, they had a son. Two daughters followed. If Ruth found her identity through her biological family, looking and acting quite similarly, we questioned Latchford's belief about heredity. In her book *Steeped in Blood* (2019), she wrote, "The biological tie in and of itself is not really a connection at all" (Latchford, 2019, p. 304). We wondered if the secret experiences shared between Ruth and her birth parents contributed to and shaped their behaviors later in life. Ruth's courage to stretch her birth through adoption story beyond recognition gave her the capacity to reflect critically on the tension and contradiction that is adoption.

If adoptive identity is a sense of who one is as an adopted person, constant revision is deemed helpful. Rebecca revised her narrative a month after the study. When discussing birth and adoptive names, Rebecca said she was able to choose her middle name when she was adopted at 4.5 years old. But she later clarified, "As a child, I never asked what my original middle or last name was even though I was so curious." Rebecca felt that if adoption is truly open, the practice should permit questioning the behaviors of others.

We learned that artifacts are passive until people engage with their content and history. Through the power of shared experiences, Ann found solace in discussing her artifacts with

fellow adoptees. She discarded the initial picture of her birth mother, opting instead for more pleasing ones. Similarly, Willow curated a collection of photos that captured her journey from detachment to joy. A seemingly innocent artifact, Ann's letter from her birth mother, initially sparked judgment. However, through empathy and understanding, Ann eventually found forgiveness. She gained clarity by stepping into her birth mother's shoes.

I asked a lot of my participants, not knowing if the cutting away of previous knowledge could encourage new growth. However, the recurring instances of revised narratives surrounding adoptive identity underscores the efficacy of guided artifact exploration. My study demonstrated the value of this methodological approach in delving into the complexities of adoption experiences, offering insights that enrich an understanding of the adoption journey. Artifacts kept their innocent qualities, conveying information as needed. Moving forward, continued exploration and examination of adoption narratives through guided artifact exploration hold promise for further deepening our comprehension of this intricate and deeply personal aspect of adopted life.

Theme Two: Ownership

This second theme served as a framework for exploring my research question regarding how adoptees perceive and comprehend their adoptive identity. The theme emerged from my findings and revolved around the emancipatory power held by adoptees viewing, engaging with, and untangling clues from their pre-adoptive artifacts. Once held by others, the artifacts now shared by participants offered the stimulus required for critical and deeply personal expression in exploring and reshaping adoptive narratives. My second theme shows how participants began to view their pre-adoptive artifacts as a beacon of hope and highlights the capacity for individuals to transform their adoption narratives into broader, more meaningful stories. Across each

finding, I observed participants who acknowledged and embraced the multifaceted nature of their identities. This change occurred as participants actively engaged with and claimed ownership of artifacts, thereby affirming and solidifying their right to exist.

For instance, through the birth memorial project, participants were given a platform to reimagine their adoption stories, utilizing various artistic mediums to construct personalized timelines. This task unlocked the potential of artifacts to transcend their inert nature and become agents of narrative reconstruction. Adoptees in my study expressed a strong desire to understand their origins, the circumstances surrounding their placement, and the reasons for their separation from biological families. Their focus was not solely on acquiring bio-genealogical knowledge but rather on uncovering the truths and secrets surrounding their past. Artifacts served as symbolic representations of their unique adoptive journey across time and space, allowing for a broader understanding of self that embraced their adoptive heritage. Without involving adoptees in engagement, pre-adoptive artifacts merely echo the silent narratives of maternal loss, akin to the tokens preserved behind glass at London's Foundling Museum.

Participants engaged in an advocacy-driven approach to learning. As the subject of their inquiry, they confronted the dehumanizing ways closed adoptions occur. They uplifted secrets, unveiling people who played a dominant role in influencing, upending, revitalizing, and reconstituting their birth through adoption journey. Participants utilized tangible evidence to delve into the identities of those who authorized, sealed, and carried their adoption documents. Their attention to time and place extended to post-adoptive artifacts to aid in meaning-making. For instance, Ann scrutinized the cursive strokes of her birth mother's signature, revealing a subtle deviation in the formation of the letter "y." Drawing from Yalouri's (2009) assertion that one can study people by studying things, the exploration prioritized learning originating from a

person's experiences. We pondered the implications of a shaky hand amidst a sea of typewritten words.

Broadening the boundary of their identity, participants such as Jess could look at the sameness and differentness of her identical twin as part of her unique heritage. Participants discovered that the materiality of their adoption shaped their perspective on contemporary notions of family. Embracing their adoptive identity demanded confronting the prevailing structures entrenched within government, institutions, and society. They acknowledged the potential inherent in claiming ownership of their narrative – a narrative with the power to catalyze reform.

By the second session, participants ignited a sense of familial connection akin to a long-awaited reunion. Secrets poured out, revealing personal tales of loss, teenage pregnancy, missing birth fathers, a singer-songwriter, a found orphan, and a lost identical twin. Drawing inspiration from Erik Erikson's (1959) seminal work on identity and life history, particularly his emphasis on the power of storytelling, participants embarked on a journey that emphasized the engaging role of storytelling.

For instance, Ann's journey changed perceptions of her birth mother through an engagement with artifacts. By crafting a birth memorial collage, Ann symbolically placed her mother on a road, signifying movement through time. My second research question explored how one's understanding of adoptive identity evolves over time in relation to specific artifacts. As Ann's perspectives shifted, she could surmise her birth mother's perspectives shifted as well. Within the collage, Ann depicted her birth mother driving towards her instead of away, indicating a desire to reconnect. The inclusion of three email addresses in her letter suggested a longing for connection that, sadly, remained unrealized due to her birth mother's untimely death.

Similarly, Pat's reunion took a compassionate turn as she courageously extended an invitation to meet her birth mother. Over time, the ability to adopt a new perspective toward her birth mother diminished the anger harbored over the way authorities handled her adoption. Reflecting further, it's conceivable that artifacts played a pivotal role in shaping Pat's evolving identity, serving as a vital piece in reconstructing her birth through an adoptive narrative.

According to my findings, change began through critical reflection. Pat's intensely emotional adoption journey unfolded as a tale of resilience against adversity. Pat's solo journey as a four-month-old baby embarked on a 6500-mile flight carried in a cardboard box. She traveled to a foreign land with unfamiliar faces, a new language, and new customs, all while having lost her birth mother. The cornerstone of Pat's adoption story came through forgiveness, deemed an elusive virtue. Pat's transition from anger to forgiveness came through an outmatched outcome.

Drawing on the work of Salinas-Hernàndez and Duvarci (2021), Pat's journey toward forgiveness began with a low reward expectation for maternal love and security. She arrived tempered by the trials of her relinquishment and adoption. When the actual reward of love and security exceeded Pat's reward circuitry, a sense of safety and acceptance evolved, paving the way toward forgiveness.

Participants rejected the characterization proposed by Smith (2021) of being mere vessels through which "bodies, territories, beliefs, and values have been traveled *through*" (p. 91). For instance, Pat discarded the cardboard that carried her through a portion of her adoptive journey. In reclaiming her adoptive narrative, Pat exemplified determination in pursuit of truth. Pat felt the box that carried her from South Korea to her adoptive home could not contain the immensity of adoption. Her artifact reminded her how easy it is to ship a package containing everything

from electronics to babies from here to there. With her awareness of the exorbitant cost involved in international adoptions, she knows authorities could have managed a safer alternative for travel, such as a car seat. Thus, a box, which for a time marked a place on her timeline, now occupies much less space. Instead, that space is occupied by her birth mother.

Pat's awareness of her adoption on a macro level followed this study's aim to empower marginalized voices and challenge adoption practices by scrutinizing dominant narratives. Pat questioned taken-for-granted assumptions about her adoption journey. Through critical analysis, she gained insight into how power operates, who benefits from it, and who is marginalized or excluded. Adoption advocates have coined a term for Pat's discovery process. *Coming out of the fog* implies an awareness of their personal adoption experience against the backdrop of culture, politics, economics, social, and religious systems. The process awakens perspectives of the rights and privileges originated from others who determine the worth and value of adoptees. While providing clarity of critical adoption perspectives, coming out of the fog begins with limited sight. Initially, the view still holds whisps of unassuming fog delivered as guilt and shame "whilst we swam about in our privileged lives" (Timeless Clips, 2016). It took Pat tremendous courage to travel through the shrouded, secretive mist of adoption to reconcile with a foreign landscape that was neither nature nor nurture. Like an absent father, an adoptee's biogenetic imprinting is beyond recognition. Instead, Pat re-invented herself from the material culture left behind, leading not backward to a world that no longer existed but forward.

Similarly, Ann's constructed narrative of her birth mother painted her as a figure akin to a rock star. However, the reality was starkly different; her birth mother battled kidney disease, lost a leg, and died at the age of 48. The narratives inherited from birth through adoption and into adulthood are subject to revision. Ann's birth mother barely survived relinquishment. She never

ventured beyond her paternal home, never married, and never experienced motherhood again. Coming to terms with this profound loss enabled Ann to reclaim her identity while advocating for empathy and compassion towards her birth mother.

Esther had suppressed memories of ripping up her artwork bearing her foster name. She had struggled as an adoptee to articulate her sentiments regarding her discarded identity to her adoptive family. Adoptees often grapple with feelings of disloyalty towards their new families when acknowledging their pre-existing lives. Reflecting on her time with her foster family, Esther expressed profound affection. She had said of her foster family, “It was a deep love. I just long to be close to them a lot and to learn how much love they gave.” As an adult, Esther revisited and reimagined her sense of self, incorporating not only the loss of her birth family but also the loss of her foster family. Her newfound memories enrich her identity, allowing her to cherish both the name bestowed upon her by her foster family and the love of her adoptive family without diminishing either.

Thus, approaching adoption from an advocacy standpoint amplified the voices of adoptees, honoring their authentic narratives while recognizing the loss and longing associated with adoption. Without these revised narratives, adoption becomes entangled in antiquated practices and policies that fail to prioritize the adoptee’s best interests. The compelling narratives from this study demonstrated the profound emotional connections to pivotal characters and settings in time and space. When adoptees begin their stories at the moment of their adoption, a sense of dissonance arises. Owning authentic stories, such as those told by participants, releases old knowledge. Their re-oriented narratives generated a sense of wonder about a more complete story. They also generated a sense of loss. Angus can revisit his bronzed shoes and contemplate

the emotions that must have accompanied his departure from his foster home into the arms of a family that embraced him with love.

In my study, participants were all active researchers, replacing partial knowledge with more accurate history timelines. Minnich (2005) offers, “When the point is to be able to re-create a picture of, say, the Taj Mahal as someone else has painted it, we can hardly want people inserting pieces from a puzzle depicting an aardvark” (p. 233). All participants from the study talked about their adoptive identity as a puzzle constructed by others. The pre-adoptive information they excavated as adults appeared incompatible and will likely never integrate smoothly into their pre-existing narrative. Instead, this study asked each participant to build their own Taj Mahal, or rather, their unique adoptive identity, according to how they see, feel, and understand its existence.

Participants who kept the emotional balance between a felt sense of grief (anger, confusion, insatiable curiosity) mixed with a cognitive state of emancipation (new name, found birth mother, twin sister) made the most growth to broaden the timeline between birth and adoption. Willow showed this growth. She has a small index card and a photo to offer clues about her time before adoption. Willow worked hard to recognize herself as the same baby in the pictures before and after adoption. The change, she discovered, was her environment. Discussing a photograph taken on her adoption day, Willow said, “I am looking at this photo, and I am smiling. That’s significant to me.” Willow paired both pictures together to gain a heightened sense of felt self.

Additionally, participants changed plot lines by attending to socio-cultural changes in their stories. They examined the intricate interplay of social injustices, economic disparities, political power dynamics, and cultural influences that shape the adoption experience. The

following reflections from Jess demonstrated her growth, primarily due to a heightened awareness of social and cultural contexts. She summarized her experiences meeting her twin sister. She said, “You can tell us apart by our freckles found on different sides of our faces.” She discussed how thoughts emerge simultaneously between the two. They dress alike without prior notice. However, in some ways, even though they are identical twins, she revealed she was less close with her sister than she imagined other people would be who grow up together in families such as younger or older siblings.

Jess’ somewhat loose connection with her twin gave her surprising, intriguing, and conflicted messages. Jess experienced an *aha* moment, recognizing how the people in her life can influence nature (her biological, identical twin). In her book *Steeped in Blood,* Latchford’s (2019) research with adoptees from closed settings advises caution when considering adoptees lacking their genetic blueprint. Instead, Latchford considers a more direct focus on the term *lacking*. Jess lacked a sister. That is a significant loss. Her twin’s biogenetic heritage does not add a complete truth—instead, the end of a secret adds to a complete truth and a better sense of self. Thus, according to Latchford, the discovery of her twin does not make her adoptive ties inferior. Her twin’s arrival should not destabilize her sense of self. She can have a twin and an adoptive family threaded within her adoptive heredity.

Tasha shared a similar example through her bi-racial birth. She grappled with the challenge of reconciling her identity, feeling unable to integrate her Black father with her White mother into a cohesive sense of self. Tasha expanded a narrow conception of wholeness confined to racial categories. In her poignant birth memorial, she articulated her struggle against societal norms of classification and exclusion. Her *Caught in the Mix* memorial illuminated the pervasive tendency to delineate who belongs and who does not. Tasha revealed a nuanced understanding of

her identity formation, recognizing the interplay of nature's characteristics influenced by nurture. She wrote,

> "Unfortunately, we live in a world of classifying, defining, and deciding who fits in and who is cut out. It's a question I hate to hear, but when I think about who I have become, a mix of nature and nurture, I find that I am not inferior but have lived from a unique perspective, which only comes from being a mix of all who have given me life."

Tasha's adoptive story considered the pervasive influence of cultural attitudes on her identity. She extended her thoughts to maternal loss and adoption, prompting reflections on the complexity of her experiences as well as considering the experiences of her birth mother. Tasha's sensitivities towards the circumstances surrounding her birth included the ramifications of societal stigma and the intricate dynamics shaping adoptive identities. She wrote,

> I was thinking about her [my birth mother] this morning. I feel like she was shamed. I feel like she's probably carried that shame through her whole life. I feel like potentially having a baby inside of you and feeling all of this shame; how can you not pass some of that on to a being that you're carrying inside your body? And I don't know if that's true or not, but to me, it feels like that can happen from the beginning, that you're not necessarily, I don't know, not necessarily wanted, but not necessarily unwanted either.

Attention to a shifting self-narrative allowed Tasha choices in weaving her early pre-adoptive threads of identity into the present and future. Her evolving adoptive identity included an intrusion of thoughts and rules made by others. She said of the year she was born, "Two races were not supposed to be together."

Tasha's childhood dreams about living beside a wheelbarrow suggested displacement, separating place and time. Tasha's challenging birth through adoption timeline involved

navigation through her intersecting identities. Tasha adopted a proactive approach, using artifacts to help solidify a connection with her birth mother. She sent her birth mother pictures showing every stage of her life. She hopes a shared experience with her birth mother leads to a future defined by empathy and reconciliation.

If she found her Black father, Tasha could discover that she is just like him, or she could see that, like Jess and her twin, they are actually very different. *The Archeology of Adoption* seeks artifacts supporting the idea of found treasures supporting identity. These treasures do not lead us back to the genetic imprint of our life. Instead, they are meant to untangle the knots constricting us from discovery. If Tasha does meet her birth mother, her biggest surprise may not be that they look alike or get along. Her most significant learning leap may be in the changed feeling when she drives by her birth mother's house, knowing the person who lives there.

My second theme emerged from data indicating that participants like Jess and Tasha progressed beyond their initial adoption experiences to recalibrate and fully embrace ownership of their adoption narratives. They reintegrated previous thoughts into a new frame of thinking. It is unimaginable how Jess began her life separated from her identical twin. Equally traumatic is Tasha's *Alone in the World* beginning. Revised identity markers provided accurate testimony to the resiliency and power of the human brain and heart to endure and overcome adversity.

Chapter Summary

I recognize not all adoptees have the same shared experiences of actively seeking changes in their adoption narratives. However, in a short three-month span, all participants from this study moved beyond the initial ways they identified as an adopted person. Artifacts were the cue cards that enabled their success.

In my literature review, L. Miller (2021) warned that the invasive, severe, and profound event of relinquishment can remain unknowingly gridlocked for a lifetime. Rizzo (2022) described phantom identity as an unsolvable aspect of adoptive identity where an adoptee feels something missing but does not know concretely what that loss is, exactly. Some adoptees feel you should leave things as they are. However, this study found that growth occurs through a cutting back or pruning of misguided ideas that have been cultivated since childhood. Like growing sweetgrass, you have to take away a portion of what grows to get the best results. The task is counterintuitive. Participants were initially unsure how to begin. They did not know what to cut, how much, and when.

This study found that the brain must first recognize loss. The phantom limb representing birth is no longer attached to the body. Birth mothers do not carry us through life. Instead, adoptees have others carrying them forward. They can consider all the people who have touched their lives from birth through the adoption: birth mothers, birth fathers, adoptive parents and siblings, caretakers, and social workers. They can place these people in order of significance. They can also shuffle this order at any time, discarding one while adding another. It is a puzzle that starts from scratch, not from the frame built by others. Through an active engagement with the plot – using artifacts that surprise, confuse, redirect, and realign- we come to a closer understanding of the truth.

My first research question asked how adoptees understand their adoptive identity using pre-adoptive artifacts. *The Archeology of Adoption* applied a theory of material engagement, enriching adoptive identity construction with diverse elements and approaches. I found nine participants willing to share long-forgotten artifacts buried deep within closets and in their minds. The key word in my research question was *how*: How do adoptees understand their

identity? Participants found the very active process of identity formation began with being at the center of the inquiry. They learned they were not the *product* of their adoption, relinquished for adoption. How they acquired an evolving adoptive identity was through their very personal journey that recognized life before adoption. They had all started this journey years before my study. The artifacts bore the marks of previous engagements –weathered, colored over, marked up, dog-eared, creased, torn, scratched, hole-punched, and tenderly adorned with fabric or colorful construction paper. In light of misguided adoption practices and policies that have kept adoptees from closed adoptions in secrecy, participants discovered renewed purpose in their pre-adoptive artifacts.

My second research question delved into the dynamic evolution of an individual's adoptive identity over time, particularly in connection with a specific artifact. As an engaged participant in the study, I found myself immersed within a cohort of adoptees who openly shared their vulnerabilities. They recounted a spectrum of experiences, emotions, dreams, misplaced anger, regret, curiosities, and an unquenchable desire for resolution. Through their evolved narratives, these participants vividly illustrated how concealment of their true origins inflicted more harm than good.

Contemplating the plight of 18th-century orphans from London's Foundling Hospital, whose identities were altered upon admission, I wondered how their sense of self might have changed had they encountered an artifact tied to their birth. Instead of enduring the burden of concealed truths, these orphans could have carried tokens of acknowledged love – gifts from mothers thwarted by oppressive systems.

Moreover, I gained insight into the enigma of my dreams, finding resonance with those of others who shared similar dreams of loss. In my primal consciousness, just weeks after birth, I

began forming initial memories of my experiences. In infancy, limited sight shrouded my world, moving from hospital to orphanage. Those early perceptions orchestrated the fabric of my dreams; I find myself searching in a dark room on all fours. At first unrecognizable, a small shape gradually emerged from the fog – it is me.

Most sincerely and passionately, participants discovered that pre-adoptive artifacts never lose their significance or fade away. They remain deeply embedded, extended, and enacted in our sense of self, evolving into a reenactment of our unidirectional journey from birth through adoption. The once obscure and daunting events preceding our adoptions gain fluidity through engagement with these artifacts, providing a vehicle for constructing an engaging, coherent, and cohesive life narrative.

Figure 15

Safely Returned

Note. This token from London's Foundling Hospital worked exactly as it was meant to. In 1758, a baby boy was admitted to the orphanage. The baby was left with this token, a note describing it, and a piece of yellow ribbon. Five years later, in 1763, his father returned to claim him, proving his identity with a matching token, a piece of the same ribbon, and a copy of the note. The boy, originally Oliver Luke and renamed Luke Perkins by the Hospital, was returned to his father, along with his pre-orphan artifact. Courtesy the Foundling Museum, London.

Recommendations for Practice

Tucker (2023) speaks of having an "insatiable curiosity for truth and a hopeful desire for a contented spirit" (p. 24). She adds, "Not knowing our full story cannot coexist with contentedness" (p. 24). Adoptees who choose to search for answers need guidance from counselors, peers, birth and adoptive families, teachers, and adoption support groups. Each recommendation is accompanied by a link, found in Appendix H.

Counselors

Counselors are becoming more equipped to handle the nuances of adoption support. Many counselors are also adoptees. *Grow Beyond Words* offers a directory of licensed U.S. mental health professionals identifying as adoptees and working with adoptees/adoptive families in various public and private settings. Additionally, *A Home Within* provides open-ended, individual psychotherapy, free of charge, to current and former foster youth.

Mindfulness Practices

There are numerous therapy techniques suitable for adoptees. Adoptees may consider adding additional support to the more-traditional talk therapy practice. Annie Brook's *Healing Adoption Imprints* taps into and helps resolve a person's earliest impressions (physically, relationally, emotionally) that shape movement patterns, identity beliefs, relational habits, and protective response behaviors for a lifetime.

Dr. Peter Levine developed *Somatic Experiencing*® (SE™) to address the effects of trauma. Levine established an approach after observing the behaviors of prey animals, whose lives are routinely threatened in the wild. These animals can recover readily by physically releasing the accumulated energy from stressful events. Humans often override these natural ways of regulating the nervous system. Instead, feelings of shame, fear, judgment, and pervasive

thoughts make regulating emotions difficult, impacting the developing self. Somatic therapy allows access to our sensorimotor system and stored information containing traumatic experiences.

Expressive Arts Therapy combines psychology and creative processes to promote emotional growth and healing. The approach uses music, theater, poetry, dance, painting & drawing, along with other artistic forms, as a therapeutic tool to help initiate change.

Experiential Therapy includes several types of therapy and therapeutic interventions designed to focus on experiences that include emotional processing, interactions with others, creativity, and reflections of events that go beyond traditional "talk therapy." This type of therapy may include animal-assisted therapies (e.g., equine-assisted therapy, wolf-connection therapy, adventure, and wilderness therapy.

Adoption Support Groups

Numerous adoption support groups provide a safe space for adoptees to share their experiences with peers who understand their journey. Sessions foster an exclusive environment where adoptees can express themselves freely. *The Adoptee Mentoring Society* holds virtual meetings for adoptees by adoptees of all ages. *The Celia Center: Adoption and Foster Care* is another virtual group events includes support for adult adoptees.

I offer links and additional resources for adoptee-centered podcasts, social media, books, and film in Appendix H.

Recommendations for Future Research

The following recommendations for future research include longitudinal research on adults adopted in childhood from open settings. This research should include more amplified voices from birth parents and adoptees. Further research is also needed to investigate the

restraints that slow and impede progress opening birth information to adoptees. Research should also address the needs of adoptees presently searching for, and struggling with the information they receive as they consider their transitions from birth to adoption settings. Additional research is needed to mark the experiences of adoptees using direct-to-market genetic testing. Finally, from a research standpoint, I found that the methodology uniquely developed for this study utilizing pre-adoptive artifacts in sessions with adoptees served as a novel and valuable methodological tool for gaining insight into addressing complex themes more effectively. Future research is essential to advance knowledge of adoptive identity construction using pre-adoptive artifacts as elements aiding in discovery.

Final Reflections

My final chapter summarized the shifting adoptive narratives that kept the cadence of thought navigating between the dynamic themes of loss and gain. I am captivated by Esther's utilization of a metronome to measure the intervals between her gains and losses as an adopted person from a transracial adoption. Findings showed marked fluidity in identity formation among these particular adoptees.

In my research, identity encompassed a felt sense of self. Participants calibrated their adoptive inquiry between the two chasms of losses and gains. Pat's lost 100 days countered a better sense of self felt during her reunion with her birth mother. If Ann remained in her state of anger over her birth mother's pivotal decisions, she never would have imagined a life with her, instead of living with her adopted family. Findings recognized just how volatile and inconsistent adoptive identity can be when mixed with the instability of closed adoptions.

Artifacts held these opposites together by examining the context of their journeys. They added the literary elements necessary for storytelling, particularly through the element of setting.

Angus' story changed dramatically when he discovered why his adoption took so long. An annulment, the Catholic church, and the year all entangled with Angus' positive experience with his adopted family. As a researcher and participant, I visually observed when the insights from time and space occurred. In almost every session, including the pilot study sessions, a marked transformation began with a change in body language. When participants told their adoption stories, their postures appeared natural and relaxed, with their backs resting on seatbacks. Voices were fluid, carrying a cadence of both familiarity and authority. When the artifacts entered the screen through screensharing, participants, including me, leaned in. The artifacts kept us engaged and at the edge of our seats. Facial expressions turned from rather serious to lifted smiles or curious glances. Sentences became exclamatory and inquisitive as artifacts captured a time before we had memory. They fully captivated our attention as we reordered, classified, and calibrated our multi-dimensional world.

When I began my doctoral journey, my Senior advisor, Dr. Gammel, emphasized that obtaining a doctoral degree marked not the culmination, but rather the commencement of inquiry. Similarly, the journey of adoptive identity construction is one with an ever-open door, representing an ongoing, ceaseless voyage of self-discovery.

References

Adedayo, L., Ojo, G., Umanah, S., Aitokhuehi, G., Emmanuel, I.O., & Bamidele, O. (2023). Hippocampus: Its role in relational memory. In D. D. Burman (Ed.), *Hippocampus - more than just memory* (pp. 63–141). IntechOpen. https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.111478

Adichie, C. (2009, October 7). *The danger of a single story.* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9Ihs241zeg

Appadurai, A. (2017). *The social life of things: Commodities in cultural perspective*. Cambridge University Press.

Arnold, C. (2012). *The impact of complex trauma on development*. Jason Aronson, Inc.

Arponen, V., Grimm, S., Käppel, L., Ott, K., Thalheim, B., Kropp, Y., Kittig, K., Brinkmann, J., & Ribeiro, A. (2019). Between natural and human sciences: On the role and character of theory in socio-environmental archeology. *The Holocene*, *29*(10), 1671–1676. https://doi.org/10.1177/0959683619857226

Baden, A. (2016). Do you know your *real* parents? and other adoption microaggressions, *Adoption Quarterly*, 19:1, 1-25, DOI: 10.1080/10926755.2015.1026012

Bahr, D. (2016). The things we carry: Embodied truth and Tim O'Brien's poetics of despair. In S.S. Horton (Ed.), *Affective disorder and the writing life* (pp. 100–115). Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137381668_7

Baltimore, D. (2009). A Phenomenological exploration of adoption. *Journal of Ethnographic and Qualitative Research*, *3*, 69–78. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272476988_A_PHENOMENOLOGICAL_EXPLORATION_OF_ADOPTION

Barrett, L. F. (2017). *How emotions are made* (Unabridged ed.). Brilliance Audio.

Barona, A. M. (2020). The archaeology of the social brain revisited: Rethinking mind and material culture from a material engagement perspective. *Adaptive Behavior*, *29*(2), 137–152. https://doi.org/10.1177/1059712320941945

Barona, A. M., & Malafouris, L. (2022). On making futures with human touch. *Adaptive Behavior*, *30*(6), 551–553. https://doi.org/10.1177/1059712321989428

Berger, A. A. (2016). *What objects mean: An introduction to material culture* (2nd ed.). Left Coast Press.

Bin Ibrahim, M., Benoy, A., & Sajikumar, S. (2021). Long-term plasticity in the hippocampus: Maintaining within and 'tagging' between synapses. *The FEBS Journal*, *289*(8), 2176–2201. https://doi.org/10.1111/febs.16065

Bork, V., Kwee, J., & Socholotiuk, K. (2022). Intergenerational voices of adoption: Family stories of adoptees and their adult children. *Adoption Quarterly*, *26*(1), 22–50. https://doi.org/10.1080/10926755.2022.2156010

Braby, M. (2018, August 26). Curious kids: Do butterflies remember being caterpillars? *The Conversation*. https://theconversation.com/curious-kids-do-butterflies-remember-being-caterpillars-99508

Brodzinsky, D., Gunnar, M., & Palacios, J. (2021). Adoption and trauma: Risks, recovery, and the lived experience of adoption. *Child Abuse & Neglect,* 105309. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2021.105309

Brook, A. (2014). *Birth's hidden legacy: Volume 2*. Smart Body Books.

Brook, A. (2021). *The physiology of shock and trauma and somatic methods of treatment* [Workshop Material].

Brook, A. (2022). *Applied neuroplasticity™: Healing adoption imprints* [Workshop].

Brown, B. (2009). Thing theory. In F. Candlin & R. Guins (Eds.), *The object reader* (pp. 139–152). Routledge.

Brown, L., & Cook, T. (2022). The lives and afterlives of material culture: New first world war artifacts at the Canadian war museum. *Scholars Commons, 31 (2)*, 1-46.

Buchli, V. (2020). *The material culture reader* (1st ed.). Taylor & Francis. https://doi.org/978-1859735541

Butler, B. (2013). Heritage and the present past. In C. Tilley, W. Keane, S. Kuchler, M. Rowlands, & P. Spyer (Eds.), *Handbook of material culture* (First ed., pp. 463–479). SAGE Publications Ltd.

Canevaro, L. (2018). *Object-oriented Odysseus*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198826309.003.0004

Carp, E. W. (2002). Adoption, Blood Kinship, Stigma, and the Adoption Reform Movement: A Historical Perspective. *Law & Society Review*, *36*(2), 433. https://doi-org.ezproxyles.flo.org/10.2307/1512183

Carp, E. W. (2019). A Historical Perspective on Openness and Secrecy in Adoption. *Adoption & Culture 7*(1), 136-139. https://doi.org/10.1353/ado.2019.0000.

Cashen, K. K., & Grotevant, H. D. (2019). Relational competence in emerging adult adoptees: Conceptualizing competence in close relationships. *Journal of Adult Development*, *27*(2), 83–94. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10804-019-09328-x

Caspers, K. M., Paradiso, S., Yucuis, R., Troutman, B., Arndt, S., & Philibert, R. (2009). Association between the serotonin transporter promoter polymorphism (5-httlpr) and

adult unresolved attachment. *PubMed Central (PMC).* https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3676880/

Cherot, N. (2006). Transnational adoptees: Global biopolitical orphans or an activist community? *Culture Machine*. https://culturemachine.net/community/transnational-adoptees/

Cherot, N. (2009). Storytelling and ethnographic intersections: Vietnamese adoptees and rescue narratives. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *15*, 113–148. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ846800

Cope, S. (2012). *The great work of your life* (9th ed.). Bantam Books.

Costandi, M. (2016). *Neuroplasticity* (1st ed.). Random House Publishing Services.

Côté, K., & Lalumière, M. L. (2019). Psychological adjustment of domestic adult adoptees. *Journal of Adult Development*, *27*(2), 118–134. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10804-019-09337-w

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

DNAWeekly.com. (2024, February 4). *My heritage vs ancestry dna: Which one is better?* DNA Weekly**.** https://www.dnaweekly.com/blog/myheritage-vs-ancestrydna/

Darnell, F. J., Johansen, A. B., Tavakoli, S., & Brugnone, N. (2016). Adoption and identity experiences among adult transnational adoptees: A qualitative study. *Adoption Quarterly*, *20*(2), 155–166. https://doi.org/10.1080/10926755.2016.1217574

Davies, B. (2020). *Entanglement in the world's becoming and the doing of new materialist inquiry* (1st ed.). Routledge.

Dickens, C. (1838). *Oliver Twist*. Penguin UK.

Doel, M. (2023, March 12). Using objects in social work [Resource Pack]. *Objects and Their Stories*, London, United Kingdom.

Doerr, A. (2021). *About Grace*. Penguin Books.

Doidge, N. (2008). *The brain that changes itself*. Penguin Books Ltd.

Donato, F., Alberini, C. M., Amso, D., Dragoi, G., Dranovsky, A., & Newcombe, N. S. (2021). The ontogeny of hippocampus-dependent memories. *The Journal of Neuroscience*, *41*(5), 920–926. https://doi.org/10.1523/jneurosci.1651-20.2020

Downes, S. M. (2019). The role of ancient dna research in archaeology. *Topoi*, *40*(1), pp. 285–293. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11245-019-09665-2

Dudai, Y., Roediger, H. L., III, & Tulving, E. (2009). Memory concepts. In H. L. Roediger, Y. Dudai, & S. M. Fitzpatrick (Eds.), *Science of memory* (pp. 1–15). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195310443.003.0001

Dunwoodie, K., Macaulay, L., & Newman, A. (2022). Qualitative interviewing in the field of work and organisational psychology: Benefits, challenges and guidelines for researchers and reviewers. *Applied Psychology*, *72*(2), 863–889. https://doi.org/10.1111/apps.12414

Dyer, S. (2021). State of the field: Material culture. *History*, *106*(370), 282–292. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-229x.13104

Eriksen, T. H. (2017). *What is anthropology?* (2nd ed.). Pluto Press.

Erikson, E. H. (1959). Identity and the life cycle: Selected papers. *Psychological Issues, 1*(1).

Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. W. W. Norton & Company.

Esteban-Guitart, M., & Moll, L. C. (2014). Funds of identity: A new concept based on the funds of knowledge approach. *Culture & Psychology*, *20*(1), 31–48. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354067x13515934

Etzelmüller, G., & Tewes, C. (Eds.). (2016). *Embodiment in evolution and culture*. Mohr Siebeck. https://doi.org/10.1628/9783161549014

Evans, A., Berhanu-MacDonald, K., & McCauley, M. (Eds.). (2022). *Lions roaring far from home: An anthology by Ethiopian adoptees*. Independently published.

Farge, A. (2017). *The allure of the archives*. Yale University Press. https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300180213

Felnhofer, A., Kernreiter, J., Klier, C., Huscsava, M. M., Fiala, C., & Zeiler, M. (2023). Anonymous birth: Biographical knowledge and dyadic coping in adoptive mothers and fathers. *Current Psychology, 42*(4), 2719-2732.

Findlen, P. (2021). *Early modern things: Objects and their histories, 1500-1800 (early modern themes)* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Freire, V. B. (2023). Neuroplasticity: A mechanism with multiple outcomes. *PriMera Scientific Surgical Research and Practice*. https://doi.org/10.56831/pssrp-01-010

Gaskell, I., & Carter, S. A. (Eds.). (2020). *The oxford handbook of history and material culture* Oxford University Press.

Gawande, A. (2008, June 23). The Itch. *The New Yorker*. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/06/30/the-itch

Gerritsen and, A., & Riello, G. (2021). Introduction: Writing material culture history. In G. Riello & A. Gerritsen (Eds.), *Writing material culture history* (pp. 1–14). Bloomsbury Academic.

Gill, V., Dr. (2022, July 26). *Data analysis methods*. PowerPoint.

Glaser, G. (2021). *American baby: A mother, a child, and the secret history of adoption* (5th ed.). Penguin Books.

Godon-Decoteau, D., & Ramsey, P. (2020). Transracial adoptees: Awards and challenges of searching for their birth families. In G. M. Wrobel, E. Helder, & E. Marr (Eds.), *The routledge handbook of adoption* (pp. 238–252). Routledge.

Goleman, D. (1988, June 4). Erikson, in his old age, expands his view of life. *The New York Times*, 1–14.

Grotevant, H. D. (1997). Coming to terms with adoption. *Adoption Quarterly*, *1*(1), 3–27. https://doi.org/10.1300/j145v01n01_02

Grotevant, H. D. (2000). Openness in adoption. *Adoption Quarterly*, *4*(1), 45–65**.** https://doi.org/10.1300/j145v04n01_04

Grotevant, H., Dunbar, N., Kohler, J., & LashEsau, A. (2007). Adoptive identity: How contexts within and beyond the family shape developmental pathways. In R. Javier, A. L. Baden, F. A. Biafora, & A. Camacho-Gingerich (Eds.), *Handbook of adoption: Implications for researchers, practitioners, and families* (pp. 77–89). SAGE Publications, Inc. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412976633.n6

Grotevant, H. D., & Von Korff, L. (2011). Adoptive identity. In S. Schwartz, K. Luyckx, & V. Vignoles (Eds.), *Handbook of identity theory and research* (pp. 585–601). Springer New York. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-7988-9_24

Grotevant, H. D., Lo, A. H., Fiorenzo, L., & Dunbar, N. D. (2017). Adoptive identity and adjustment from adolescence to emerging adulthood: A person-centered approach. *Developmental Psychology*, *53*(11), 2195–2204. https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0000352

Grotevant, H. D. (2020). Open adoption. In G. M. Wrobel, E. Helder, & E. Marr (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Adoption. Routledge*.

Gunnar, M. (2021, July 6). *The effects of early institutional care on children's development* [Keynote]. International Conference on Adoption Research, Milan, Italy.

Gunnar, M. R., & Reid, B. M. (2019). Early deprivation revisited: Contemporary studies of the impact on young children of institutional care. *Annual Review of Developmental Psychology*, *1*(1), 93–118. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-devpsych-121318-085013

Hafetz, R. A. Implicit memory and adoption. *Adoption Star*. https://www.adoptionstar.com/understanding-adoptee-behavior/

Hambrick, E. P., Brawner, T. W., & Perry, B. D. (2019). Timing of early-life stress and the development of brain-related capacities. *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience*, *13*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fnbeh.2019.00183

Hanson, J. L., & Nacewicz, B. M. (2021). Amygdala allostasis and early life adversity: Considering excitotoxicity and inescapability in the sequelae of stress. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, *15*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2021.624705

Hanyu-Deutmeyer, A. A., Cascella, M., & Caracalla, M. (2023). Phantom limb pain. *StatPearls Publishing*.

Hasselmo, M. (2011). Models of hippocampus. *Scholarpedia*, *6*(5), 1371. https://doi.org/10.4249/scholarpedia.1371

Haug, A. & Hielscher, A. (2022). Materiality as Decor: Aesthetics, Semantics and Function. In A. Haug, A. Hielscher & M. Lauritsen (Eds.), *Materiality in Roman Art and Architecture: Aesthetics, Semantics and Function* (pp. 1-24). Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110764734-001

Henze-Pedersen, S. (2019). Known and unknown identities: Openness and identity as experienced by adult adoptees. *Adoption Quarterly*, *22*(2), 135–156. https://doi.org/10.1080/10926755.2019.1625834

Herman, E. (2022). Adoption history: Adoption studies/adoption science index page. *The Adoption History Project.* https://pages.uoregon.edu/adoption/studies/index.html

Hodder, I. (2012). The interpretation of documents and material culture. In J. Goodwin (Ed.), *Sage biographical research* (1st ed., pp. 171–188). SAGE Publications, Ltd. (UK).

Holmes, H. (2020). Introduction: Mundane methods and the extraordinary everyday. In H. Holmes & S. M. Hall (Eds.), *Mundane methods* (pp. 1–14). Manchester University Press. https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526152732.00011

Homans, M. (2006). Adoption narratives, trauma, and origins. *Narrative*, *14*(1), 4–26. https://doi.org/10.1353/nar.2005.0026

Homans, M. (2020). Jackie kay's trumpet: Transnational and transracial adoption, transgender identity, and fictions of transformation. *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, *39*(1), 123–150. https://doi.org/10.1353/tsw.2020.0004

Homans, M. (2015). *The imprint of another life: Adoption narratives and human possibility*. University of Michigan Press.

Homer. (2015). *The odyssey*. Createspace Independent Publishing Platform.

Hoskins, J. (2013). Agency, biography, and objects. In C. Tilley, W. Keane, S. Kuchler, M. Rowlands, & P. Spyer (Eds.), *Handbook of material culture* (pp. 74–84). Sage Publications.

Hultin, L. (2019). On becoming a sociomaterial researcher: Exploring epistemological practices grounded in a relational, performative ontology. *Information and Organization*, *29*(2), 91–104. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.infoandorg.2019.04.004

Hutto, & McGivern. (2021). Updating the story of mental time travel: Narrating and engaging with our possible pasts and futures. In R. Altshuler & M. J. Sigrist (Eds.), *Time and the philosophy of action* (pp. 149–166). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315819303-15

Hussain, S. T., & Will, M. (2020). Materiality, agency and evolution of lithic technology: An integrated perspective for palaeolithic archaeology. *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory*, *28*(2), 617–670. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10816-020-09483-6

Jenkins, J. (2022). From an adoptee's perspective: Interracial adoption and identity. *Summer Research*, *456*. https://soundideas.pugetsound.edu/summer_research/456

Josselyn, S. A., & Frankland, P. W. (2018). Memory allocation: Mechanisms and function. *Annual Review of Neuroscience*, *41*(1), 389–413. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-neuro-080317-061956

Jung, C. (2015). Conscious, unconscious, and individuation. In R. C. Hull (Ed.), *Collected works of C.G. Jung, volume 9 (part 1): Archetypes and the collective unconscious* (pp. 275–289). Princeton University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400850969.275

Jung, C. (2022). *Visions: Notes on the seminar given in 1930-1934* (1st ed.). Routledge.

Karanova, P. A. (2022, May 12). *Adoptees, why are you so angry? Over 100 adoptees share heartfelt feelings*. Pamalakaranova.com. https://pamelakaranova.com/2022/05/12/adoptees-why-are-you-so-angry-over-100-adoptees-share-heartfelt-feelings/

Kay, A. C., & Taverner, N. V. (2022). Adoptees' views and experiences of direct-to-consumer (dtc) genomic testing: An exploratory interview study from the UK. *Journal of Community Genetics*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12687-022-00622-y

Kegan, R. (1994). *In over our heads: The mental demands of modern life*. Harvard University Press.

Keyes, M. A., Sharma, A., Elkins, I. J., Iacono, W. G., & McGue, M. (2008). The mental health of US adolescents adopted in infancy. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, *162*(5), 419. https://doi.org/10.1001/archpedi.162.5.419

Kim, E. (2019). My folder is not a person: Kinship knowledge, biopolitics, and the adoption file. In S. Bamford (Ed.), *The Cambridge handbook of kinship* (pp. 451–480). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781139644938.020

Kimmerer, R. W. (2013). *Braiding sweetgrass* (First ed.). Milkweed Editions.

Kopytoff, I. (2014). The cultural biography of things: Commoditization as process. In A. Appadurai (Ed.), *The social life of things* (pp. 64–92). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511819582.004

Kos, A., Lopez, J., Bordes, J., de Donno, C., Dine, J., Brivio, E., Karamihalev, S., Luecken, M. D., Almeida-Correa, S., Gasperoni, S., Dick, A., Miranda, L., Büttner, M., Stoffel, R., Flachskamm, C., Theis, F. J., Schmidt, M. V., & Chen, A. (2023). Early life adversity shapes social subordination and cell type–specific transcriptomic patterning in the ventral hippocampus. *Science Advances*, *9*(48). https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.adj3793

Koskinen, M. G., & Böök, M. (2019). Searching for the self: Adult international adoptees' narratives of their search for and reunion with their birth families. *Adoption Quarterly, 22*(3), 219–246. https://doi.org/10.1080/10926755.2019.1627449

Koukouti, M., & Malafouris, L. (2020). Material imagination: An anthropological perspective. In A. Abraham (Ed.), *The Cambridge handbook of the imagination* (pp. 30–46). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108580298.003

Latchford, F. J. (2019). *Steeped in blood*. Mcgill-queen's Press - Mqup.

LeCompte, M. D., & Ludwig, S. A. (2007). I am my identity kit: Using artifact data in research on identity. *EMIGRA Working Papers*.

Lee, H., Vogel, R. I., LeRoy, B., & Zierhut, H. A. (2020). Adult adoptees and their use of direct-to-consumer genetic testing: Searching for family, searching for health. *Journal of Genetic Counseling, 30*(1), 144–157. https://doi.org/10.1002/jgc4.1304

Levi-Strauss, C. (1988). *Savage mind*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

Levitt, L. (2020). *The objects that remain*. Penn State University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780271088792

Lewis, S. & Brady, G. (2018). Parenting under adversity: Birth parents' accounts of inequality and adoption. *Social Sciences*, 7. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci7120257

Ligier, F., Body Lawson, F., Lamourette, M., Giguère, C.-E., Lesage, A., & Séguin, M. (2022). Comparing childhood characteristics of adopted and non-adopted individuals deceased by suicide. *Frontiers in Psychiatry, 13*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2022.756306

Lipschutz, R., & Bick, J. (2020). The neurobiological embedding of early social deprivation in children exposed to institutional rearing. In G. M. Wrobel, E. Helder, & E. Marr (Eds.),

The routledge handbook of adoption (pp. 367–380). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429432040-26

Lipton, B. H. (2015). *The biology of belief: Unleashing the power of consciousness, matter & miracles*. Hay House UK.

Liu, S., & Kwon, M. (2020). Interpretation of Siberian shaman costume through Roland Barthes's semiotics approach. *The Research Journal of the Costume Culture*, *28*(6), 858–874. https://doi.org/10.29049/rjcc.2020.28.6.858

Lo, A. H., Grotevant, H. D., & Wrobel, G. M. (2023). Birth family contact from childhood to adulthood: Adjustment and adoption outcomes in adopted young adults. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, *47*(4), 283–293. https://doi.org/10.1177/01650254231165839

Luce, G. (2022). *The United States of obc*. Adoptee rights law center. Retrieved July 1, 2023, from https://adopteerightslaw.com/united-states-obc/

Lynch, J. (2022, February 13). *Great adoption story* [Review of the book *The chosen baby*, by V. P. Wasson]. Amazon. https://www.amazon.com/Chosen-Baby-Valentina-P-Wasson/dp/0397301650#customerReviews

Mackes, N. K., Mehta, M. A., Beyh, A., Nkrumah, R. O., Golm, D., Sarkar, S., Fairchild, G., Dell'Acqua, F., & Sonuga-Barke, E. S. (2022). A prospective study of the impact of severe childhood deprivation on brain white matter in adult adoptees: Widespread localized reductions in volume but unaffected microstructural organization. *eneuro*, *9*(6), ENEURO.0188–22.2022. https://doi.org/10.1523/eneuro.0188-22.2022

Madden, E. E., Aguiniga, D. M., & Ryan, S. (2020). Birth mothers' options counseling and relinquishment experiences. In G. M. Wrobel, E. Helder & E. Marr (Eds.), *The Routledge*

handbook of adoption (pp. 219–237). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429432040-16

Mahat-Shamir, M., & Pitcho-Prelorentzos, S. (2019a). Grieving from the womb: Meaning construction in response to father loss before birth. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology, 33*(2), 172–187. https://doi.org/10.1080/10720537.2019.1568939

Mahoney, D., & Markel, B. (2016). An integrative approach to conceptualizing and treating complex trauma. *Psychoanalytic Social Work, 23*(1), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/15228878.2015.1104640

Malafouris, L. (2013). *How things shape the mind*. The MIT Press. https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/9476.001.0001

Malafouris, L. (2018). Bringing things to mind: 4Es and material engagement. In A. Newen, L. De Bruin, & S. Gallagher (Eds.), *The oxford handbook of 4e cognition* (pp. 755–771). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198735410.001.0001

Malafouris, L. (2021). Mark making and human becoming. *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory, 28*(1), 95–119. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10816-020-09504-4

Maree, J. G. (2021). The psychosocial development theory of Erik Erikson: Critical overview. *Early Child Development and Care*, *191*(7-8), 1107–1121. https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2020.1845163

Mariner, K. A. (2019). White parents, Black care: Entanglements of race and kinship in American transracial adoption. *American Anthropologist*, *121*(4), 845–856. https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.13312

Marr, E., Helder, E., & Wrobel, G. (2020). Historical and contemporary contexts of us adoption. In G. Miller Wrobel, E. Helder, & E. Marr (Eds.), *The routledge handbook of adoption* (pp. 3–21). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429432040-1

Martin, B. (2021). What's home got to do with it? In *Feminism without borders* (pp. 85–105). Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11smp7t.7

McCarroll, C. (2018). *Remembering from the outside: Personal memory and the perspectival mind* (Illustrated ed.). Oxford University Press.

McCluney, C. L., Robotham, K., Lee, S., Smith, R., & Durkee, M. (2019). The costs of code-switching. *Harvard Business Review*. https://hbr.org/2019/11/the-costs-of-codeswitching

McKee, K. (2019). The consumption of adoption and adoptees in American middlebrow culture. *Biography, 42*(3), 669–692. https://doi.org/10.1353/bio.2019.0065

Melero, S., & Sánchez-Sandoval, Y. (2017). Mental health and psychological adjustment in adults who were adopted during their childhood: A systematic review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *77*, 188–196. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.05.006

Merritt, M. (2021). Adoptees online: Community-building, collective affect, and a new generation of activists. *Adoption & Culture*, *9*(2), 219–246. https://doi.org/10.1353/ado.2021.0024

Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning* (1st ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Miller, D. (2001). *Home possessions*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003085607

Miller, D. (2008) *The comfort of things*. Polity Press.

Miller, D. (2009). *Stuff* (1st ed.). Polity.

Miller, D. (2017a). *The comfort of people* (1st ed.). Polity.

Miller, L. C. (2021, July 9). *Effects of early undernutrition* [Keynote]. International Conference on Adoption Research, Milan, Italy.

Miller, P. N. (2017b). *History and its objects: Antiquarianism and material culture since 1500* (1st ed.). Cornell University Press. https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/lesley/reader.action?docID=4847957&query=

Minnich, E. K. (2005). *Transforming knowledge* (2nd ed.). Temple University Press.

Miranda Samuels, G. E. (2022). Epistemic trauma and transracial adoption: Author(iz)ing folkways of knowledge and healing. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 105588. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2022.105588

Miranda Samuels, G. M. (2009). Being raised by White people: Navigating racial difference among adopted multiracial adults. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *71*(1), 80–94. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2008.00581.x

Monterroza-Rios, A., & Gutiérrez-Aguilar, C. (2022). Enactivism and material culture: How enactivism could redefine enculturation processes. *Philosophies*, *7*(4), 75. https://doi.org/10.3390/philosophies7040075

Montirosso, R., & McGlone, F. (2020). The body comes first. embodied reparation and the co-creation of infant bodily-self. *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews*, *113*, 77–87. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neubiorev.2020.03.003

Morelli, G., Della Valle, F., & Orlando, V. (2023). Epigenetics and brain plasticity: Back to function. In M. Manto (Ed.), *Contemporary clinical neuroscience* (pp. 237–252). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-24930-3_11

Morton, J. M. (2013). Cultural code-switching: Straddling the achievement gap. *Journal of Political Philosophy*, *22*(3), 259–281. https://doi.org/10.1111/jopp.12019

Nassauer, A., & Legewie, N. M. (2018). Video data analysis: A methodological frame for a novel research trend. In F. Elwert (Ed.), *Sociological Methods & Research*, *50*(1), 135–174**.** https://doi.org/10.1177/0049124118769093

Neil, E., Rimmer, J., & Sirbu, I. (2023). How do adopted adults see the significance of adoption and being a parent in their life stories? A narrative analysis of 40 life story interviews with male and female adoptees. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *155*, 107267. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2023.107267

Newton, G. (2022). The trauma and healing of consciousness. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *130*, 105563. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2022.105563

Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *16*(1), 1609406917733847. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847

Nordstrom, S. (2013). Object-interviews: Folding, unfolding, and refolding perceptions of objects. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *12*(1), 237–257. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940691301200111

O'Keane, V. (2021). *A sense of self: Memory, the brain, and who we are* (2nd ed.). W. W. Norton & Company.

Oliver, M. (2018). *Blue horses*. Hachette Uk.

Oparah, J. C., Shin, S. Y., & Trench, J. J. (Eds.). (2021). *Outsiders within: Writing on transracial adoption*. Univ Of Minnesota Press.

Palacios, J., & Brodzinsky, D. (2010). Review: Adoption research: Trends, topics, outcomes. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, *34*(3), 270–284. https://doi.org/10.1177/0165025410362837

Parker, C. A. (2016). *Found: An exhibition curated by Cornelia Parker*. Foundling Museum.

Perry, B. D. (2017). *The boy who was raised as a dog* (3rd ed.). Basic Books.

Perry, N. B., Donzella, B., & Gunnar, M. R. (2022). Pubertal stress recalibration and later social and emotional adjustment among adolescents: The role of early life stress. *Psychoneuroendocrinology*, *135*, 105578. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psyneuen.2021.105578

Perry, S. L. (2024). How White Americans experience racial gaze: Public interactions and White parents of Black adopted children. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, *10*(1), 89-104.

Pitts, M., & Versluys, M. (2021). Objectscapes: A manifesto for investigating the impacts of object flows on past societies. *Antiquity*, *95*(380), 367–381. https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2020.148

Prebble, S. C., Addis, D., & Tippett, L. J. (2013). Autobiographical memory and sense of self. *Psychological Bulletin*, *139*(4), 815–840. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0030146

Preston, J. (2007). *The dig*. Viking. https://doi.org/978-0-670-91491-3

Prezioso, E., & Alessandroni, N. (2023). Enacting memories through and with things: Remembering as material engagement. *Memory Studies*, *16*(4), 962–983. https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9823-1522

Provenzi, L., Giusti, L., Fumagalli, M., Frigerio, S., Morandi, F., Borgatti, R., Mosca, F., & Montirosso, R. (2019). The dual nature of hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis regulation in dyads of very preterm infants and their mothers. *Psychoneuroendocrinology*, *100*, 172–179. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psyneuen.2018.10.007

Rafferty, J. P. (2022, June 24). *Donald Johanson*. Encyclopedia Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Donald-C-Johanson

Ratcliffe, M. (2019). Grief and phantom limbs. In T. Burns, T. Szanto, A. Salice, M. Doyon, & A. Dumont (Eds.), *The new yearbook for phenomenology and phenomenological philosophy* (pp. 77–96). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429061158-6

Reason, P., & Torbert, W. (2001). The action turn: Toward a transformational social science. *Concepts and Transformation*, 6(1), 1–37. https://doi.org/10.1075/cat.6.1.02rea

Repetto, C., & Riva, G. (2023). The neuroscience of body memory: Recent findings and conceptual advances. *EXCLI Journal; 22:Doc191; ISSN 1611-2156*. https://doi.org/10.17179/excli2023-5877

Rizzo, M. (2022). "i want the piece of paper that is my history, and why the hell can't i have it?": Original birth certificates and adoptive identity. *Journal of Family Communication*, 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/15267431.2022.2097234

Rizzo, M., & Hosek, A. M. (2020). Birth mothers' experiences of privacy turbulence in relation to closed adoption information. *Journal of Family Communication*, *20*(3), 250–264. https://doi.org/10.1080/15267431.2020.1761807

Salinas-Hernández, X. I., & Duvarci, S. (2021). Dopamine in fear extinction. *Frontiers in Synaptic Neuroscience*, *13*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fnsyn.2021.635879

Sanchez-Sandoval, Y., Jimenez-Luque, N., Melero, S., Luque, V., & Verdugo, L. (2020, September). *Support needs and post-adoption resources for adopted adults: A systematic review*. OUP Academic. https://academic.oup.com/bjsw/article-abstract/50/6/1775/5581825

Selim, L. (2019, December 10). *What is birth registration and why does it matter?* Unicef.org. https://www.unicef.org/stories/what-birth-registration-and-why-does-it-matter

Selman, P. (2023). The rise and fall of intercountry adoption 1995-2019. In N. Lowe & C. Fenton-Glynn (Eds.), *Research Handbook on Adoption Law* (pp. 321-345). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Simon, R. J., & Altstein, H. (2000). *Adoption across borders* (1st ed.). Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Siegel, D. J. (2013). *Healing trauma: Attachment, mind, body and brain (norton series on interpersonal neurobiology)* (1st ed.). W. W. Norton.

Smith, L. T. (2021). *Decolonizing methodologies*. Zed Books.

Soares, J., Ralha, S., Barbosa-Ducharne, M., & Palacios, J. (2018). Adoption-related gains, losses and difficulties: The adopted child's perspective. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, *36*(3), 259–268. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-018-0582-0

Sokol, B. W., Chandler, M. J., Hammond, S., McEnerney, K., & Marle, P. (2017). The "spaces in-between": Applying relational developmental systems to identity and moral character. In A. S. Dick & U. Müller (Eds.), *Advancing Developmental Science* (pp. pp 235–247). Routledge.

Steinbeck, J. (1968). *East of Eden*. William Heinemann Ltd.

Stetz, M. (2014, January 18). *What is material culture?* Center For Material Culture. https://sites.udel.edu/materialculture/about/what-is-material-culture/

The White House. (2022, May 31). *Reducing the economic burden of unmet mental health needs* [Press release]. Whitehouse.gov. https://www.whitehouse.gov/cea/written-materials/2022/05/31/reducing-the-economic-burden-of-unmet-mental-health-needs/

Thomasy, H. (2023). Early life adversity leaves marks in the brain: Negative childhood experiences can leave epigenetic scars that haunt organisms for life. *Drug Discovery News*, *19*(11).

Timeless clips. (2016, November 17). *Lion Movie Clip - Don't Know What It's Like (2016) - Dev Patel Movie* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2wPMf9G2WdY

Tucker, A. (2023). *You should be grateful: Stories of race, identity, and transracial adoption*. Beacon Press.

Tucker, A., & Bartz, E. (2021). An interview with Angela Tucker. *Adoption & Culture*, *9*(1). https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2124-6339

Tucker, L. A. (2020). From contract rights to contact rights: Rethinking the paradigm for post-adoption contact agreements. *SSRN Electronic Journal*.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). *Number of children under 18 years living in U.S. households in 2022, by relationship to householder*. Statista. https://www.statista.com/statistics/255758/number-of-children-in-the-us-by-relationship-to-householder/

Uwizeyimana, D. E. (2022). Black Africans' contributions to global industrial revolutions. *The Thinker*, *1*(90).

van der Kolk, B. (2014). *The body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma* (1st ed.). Penguin Books.

van der Vegt, E. M., van der Ende, J., Ferdinand, R. F., Verhulst, F. C., & Tiemeier, H. (2008). Early childhood adversities and trajectories of psychiatric problems in adoptees: Evidence for long lasting effects. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, *37*(2), 239–249. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10802-008-9272-2

Vaughn, L. M., & Jacquez, F. (2020). Participatory research methods – choice points in the research process. *Journal of Participatory Research Methods*, *1*(1). https://doi.org/10.35844/001c.13244

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes* (Revised ed.). Harvard Univ Pr.

Warsh, M. A. (2019). Even the Black women wear strands of pearls. In M. Warsh (Ed.), *American baroque* (pp. 78–127). University of North Carolina Press. https://doi.org/10.5149/northcarolina/9781469638973.003.0004

Wasson, V. P. (1939). *The chosen baby* (1st ed.). J. B. Lippincott Company.

Wexler, J. H., Cai, J., McKee, K. D., Blankenau, A., Lee, H., Kim, O., Kim, A. Y., & Lee, R. M. (2023). Understanding adoption as a reproductive justice issue. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *47*(4), 510–527. https://doi.org/10.1177/03616843231166376

White, C. L., & Beaudry, M. C. (2009). Artifacts and personal identity. In D. Gaimster & T. Majewski (Eds.), *International handbook of historical archaeology* (pp. 209–225). Springer New York. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-72071-5_12

White, E. E., & Baden, A. L. (2021). The intersection of race and adoption: Experiences of transracial and international adoptees with microaggressions. *Journal of Family Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000922

Williams, S. (2021). DNA dilemmas. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3846271

Wilson-Buterbaugh, K. (2017). *The baby scoop era: Unwed mothers, infant adoption and forced surrender* (1st ed.).

Winterson, J. (2012). *Why be happy when you could be normal?* Grove Press.

Womack, E. (2012). A pledge out of time: Redemption and the literary pawnshop. *Victorian Literature and Culture*, *40*(2), 451–467. https://doi.org/10.1017/s1060150312000046

Woodward, I. (2007). *Understanding material culture* (1st ed.). SAGE Publications Ltd. https://doi.org/9780761942252

Wrobel, G.M.,& Grotevant, H.D. (2019).Adoption- related curiosity at emerging adulthood. *Adoption Quarterly Advance.* online publication.

Wynne-Jones, S. (2020). A material culture: Introduction. In S. Wynne-Jones (Ed), *A material culture* (pp. 1–19). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198759317.003.0006

Yalouri, E. (2020). *The Acropolis: Global fame, local claim (materializing culture)* (1st ed.). Routledge.

Yasin, G. (2021). Fluid identity of the muslim migrants in America: A case study of Hayat Shah in Ayad Akhtar's American dervish. *University of Chitral Journal of Linguistics and Literature*, *5*(I), 27–41. https://doi.org/10.33195/jll.v4iii.263

Zhang, X., Kim, J., & Tonegawa, S. (2020). Amygdala reward neurons form and store fear extinction memory. *Neuron*, *105*(6), 1077–1093.e7. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neuron.2019.12.025

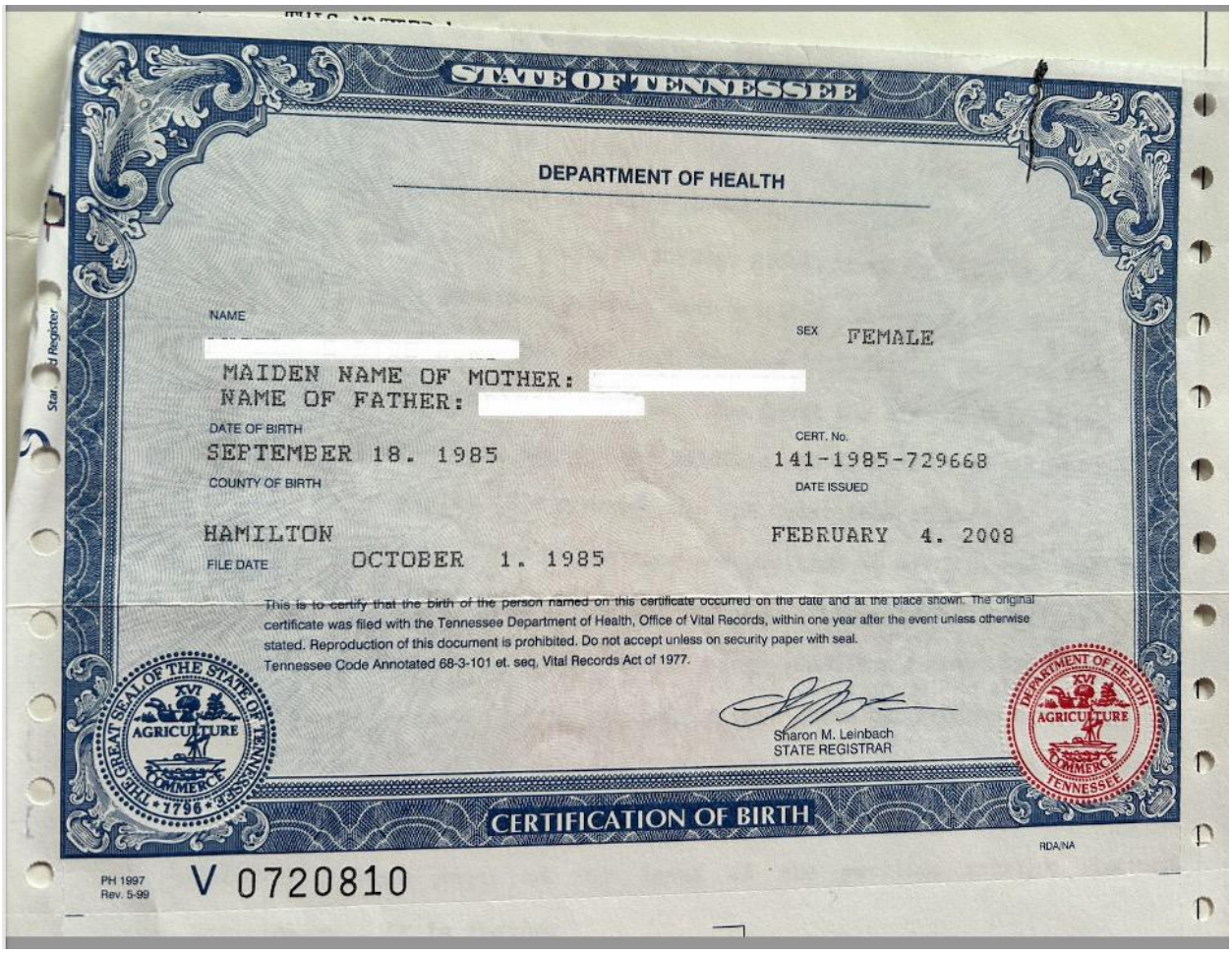
Zuev, D. (2022). *Visual sociology: Practices and politics in contested spaces* (1st ed., 2020). Palgrave Pivot.

Zytaruk, M. (2015). Artifacts of elegy: The Foundling Hospital tokens. *Journal of British Studies*, *54*(2), 320–348. https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2015.1

Appendix

Appendix A: Artifacts and Birth Memorials

I include additional artifacts that contributed significantly to the study. The certificate below is from Esther's files. She was born in Tennessee. It appears as an authentic birth certificate, but it is not. Notice the various dates listed. Adoptive parents list their names as Mother and Father. The document shown below is a certificate of adoption. Tennessee is considered a "compromised" state restricting some adults adopted in childhood from obtaining a copy of their original birth certificate. Typically, copies of birth certificates cost $15 for most Tennessee citizens. Adoptees hoping to get their copies, if approved, pay $300.


STATE OF TENNESSEE

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

NAME

SEX FEMALE

MAIDEN NAME OF MOTHER:

NAME OF FATHER:

DATE OF BIRTH
SEPTEMBER 18. 1985

CERT. No.
141-1985-729668

COUNTY OF BIRTH
HAMILTON

DATE ISSUED
FEBRUARY 4. 2008

FILE DATE OCTOBER 1. 1985

This is to certify that the birth of the person named on this certificate occurred on the date and at the place shown. The original certificate was filed with the Tennessee Department of Health, Office of Vital Records, within one year after the event unless otherwise stated. Reproduction of this document is prohibited. Do not accept unless on security paper with seal.
Tennessee Code Annotated 68-3-101 et. seq, Vital Records Act of 1977.

Sharon M. Leinbach
STATE REGISTRAR

CERTIFICATION OF BIRTH

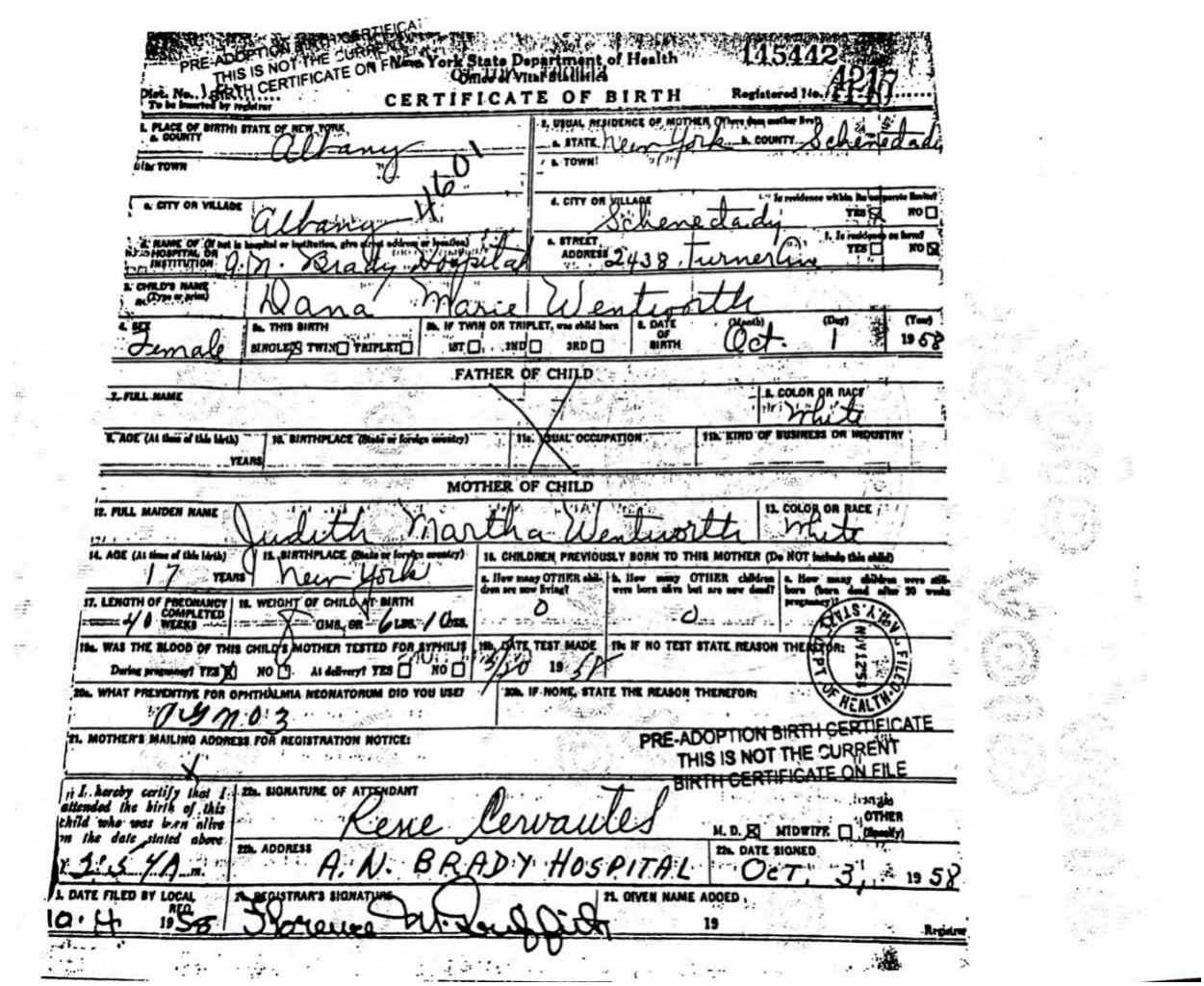
RDA/NA

PH 1997
Rev. 5-99

V 0720810

Used with permission from participant.

The birth certificate below is my (Ellen, the researcher and here, acting as the co-participant) original birth certificate from New York. Since my early twenties, I searched for any valid, official written word marking my birth. The confidentiality record law sealing adoption records was enacted in 1935 by New York Governor Herbert Lehman, an adoptive father. Through the tireless efforts of adoption advocacy groups, the state opened adoption records in 2020. From my original document, I gain insight about my birth, including a birth name that is identical to my sister's birth name. Notice the stamps indicating the certificate is not the "current document on file."



PRE-ADOPTION BIRTH CERTIFICATE
THIS IS NOT THE CURRENT BIRTH CERTIFICATE ON FILE

New York State Department of Health
Office of Vital Statistics

145442

CERTIFICATE OF BIRTH

Registered No. 41-10

1. PLACE OF BIRTH: STATE OF NEW YORK — a. COUNTY: Albany — b. TOWN — c. CITY OR VILLAGE: Albany

2. USUAL RESIDENCE OF MOTHER: a. STATE: New York — b. COUNTY: Schenectady — c. CITY OR VILLAGE: Schenectady — d. STREET ADDRESS: 2438 Turner Lane

3. NAME OF HOSPITAL OR INSTITUTION: A.N. Brady Hospital

4. CHILD'S NAME: Dana Marie Wentworth

5. SEX: Female — 6a. THIS BIRTH: SINGLE — 6b. IF TWIN OR TRIPLET, was child born: 1ST — 6c. DATE OF BIRTH: Oct. 1 1958

FATHER OF CHILD

7. FULL NAME — 8. COLOR OR RACE: White — 9. AGE (At time of this birth) — 10. BIRTHPLACE (State or foreign country) — 11a. USUAL OCCUPATION — 11b. KIND OF BUSINESS OR INDUSTRY

MOTHER OF CHILD

12. FULL MAIDEN NAME: Judith Martha Wentworth — 13. COLOR OR RACE: White — 14. AGE (At time of this birth): 17 YEARS — 15. BIRTHPLACE (State or foreign country): New York

16. CHILDREN PREVIOUSLY BORN TO THIS MOTHER (Do NOT include this child): a. How many OTHER children are now living? 0 — b. How many OTHER children were born alive but are now dead? 0 — c. How many children were stillborn (born dead after 20 weeks pregnancy)?

17. LENGTH OF PREGNANCY COMPLETED: 40 WEEKS — 18. WEIGHT OF CHILD AT BIRTH: GMS. OR 6 LBS. 10 OZS.

18a. WAS THE BLOOD OF THIS CHILD'S MOTHER TESTED FOR SYPHILIS: During pregnancy? YES X NO — At delivery? YES NO

18b. DATE TEST MADE: 3/30 19 58 — 18c IF NO TEST STATE REASON THEREFOR:

20a. WHAT PREVENTIVE FOR OPHTHALMIA NEONATORUM DID YOU USE? Oxy n.o 3 — 20b. IF NONE, STATE THE REASON THEREFOR:

21. MOTHER'S MAILING ADDRESS FOR REGISTRATION NOTICE:

PRE-ADOPTION BIRTH CERTIFICATE
THIS IS NOT THE CURRENT BIRTH CERTIFICATE ON FILE

I hereby certify that I attended the birth of this child who was born alive on the date stated above at 3:54 A.M.

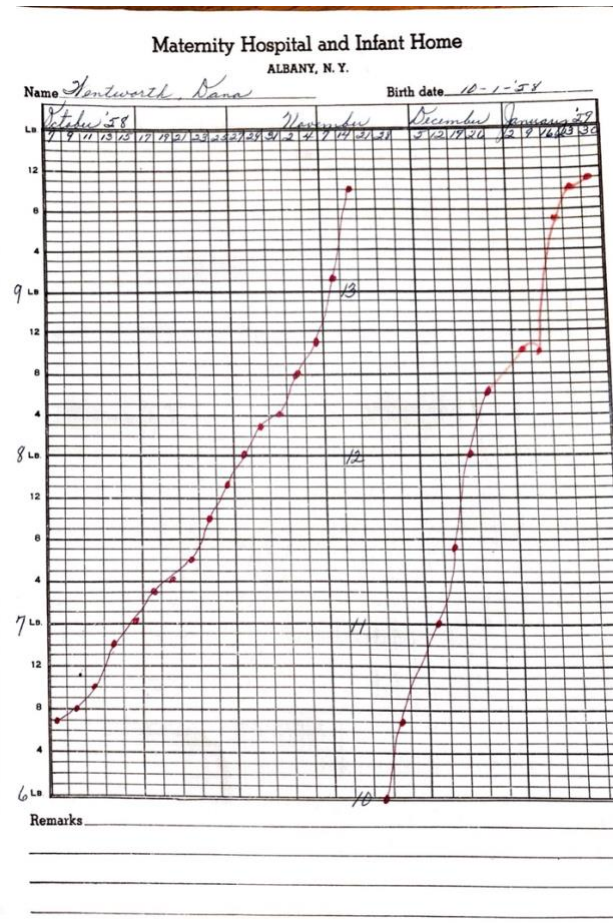
22a. SIGNATURE OF ATTENDANT: Rene Cervantes — M. D. X MIDWIFE OTHER (Specify)

22b. ADDRESS: A. N. BRADY HOSPITAL — 22c. DATE SIGNED: Oct. 3, 1958

23. DATE FILED BY LOCAL REG.: 10-4 1958 — 24. REGISTRAR'S SIGNATURE: Florence M. Griffith — 25. GIVEN NAME ADDED: 19

NOV 25 1958 FILED N.Y.S. DEPT. OF HEALTH

Along with my original birth certificate, I requested my file from St. Catherine's Infant Home. The orphanage was opened on May 25, 1886, by a group of Roman Catholic nuns in what is now the historic Schuyler Mansion in Albany. Today, St. Catherine's Center for Children's Services offers programs addressing issues of homelessness, child abuse and neglect, family instability, and special education, among others. The document below shows how carefully and consistently my weight was monitored, at first, every other day for the duration of my stay. While my growth chart failed to illuminate much of my experience in the infant home, if I trace the dots, I realize that someone held me during each weighing. They noticed my weight stayed the same from January 2-9. They witnessed a jump in weight from January 9-16. The blank space for *remarks* defines the vulnerability of adoption. There just aren't any words.

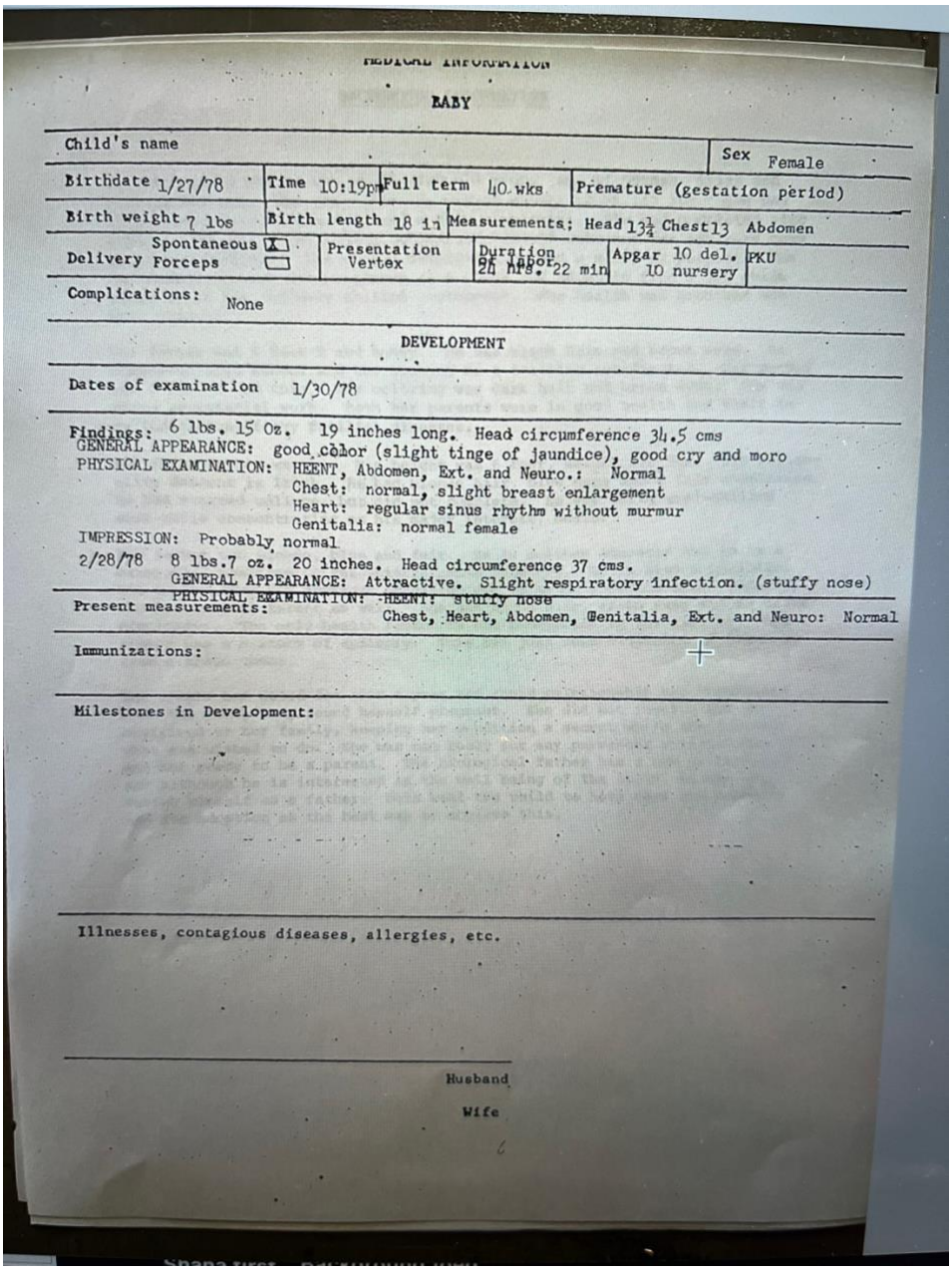

Maternity Hospital and Infant Home

ALBANY, N. Y.

Name Wentworth, Dana Birth date 12-1-58

Remarks

Analyzing the next two documents, I realized how much power there is when language turned from stating birth facts, including dates, measurements, and Apgar scores, to impressions about the baby. Language straying from statistics such as weight and height cannot help but arise from a societal framework. The document lists Ann's baby information. Her general appearance is attractive. We wondered what happened if she was not attractive, according to the observer.



MEDICAL INFORMATION

BABY

Child's name — Sex: Female

Birthdate 1/27/78 | Time 10:19pm | Full term 40 wks | Premature (gestation period)

Birth weight 7 lbs | Birth length 18 in | Measurements: Head 13¼ Chest 13 Abdomen

Delivery: Spontaneous [X] Forceps [ ] | Presentation: Vertex | Duration of labor: 24 hrs. 22 min | Apgar 10 del. 10 nursery | PKU

Complications: None

DEVELOPMENT

Dates of examination 1/30/78

Findings: 6 lbs. 15 oz. 19 inches long. Head circumference 34.5 cms
GENERAL APPEARANCE: good color (slight tinge of jaundice), good cry and moro
PHYSICAL EXAMINATION: HEENT, Abdomen, Ext. and Neuro.: Normal
Chest: normal, slight breast enlargement
Heart: regular sinus rhythm without murmur
Genitalia: normal female
IMPRESSION: Probably normal

2/28/78 8 lbs.7 oz. 20 inches. Head circumference 37 cms.
GENERAL APPEARANCE: Attractive. Slight respiratory infection. (stuffy nose)
PHYSICAL EXAMINATION: HEENT: stuffy nose
Present measurements: Chest, Heart, Abdomen, Genitalia, Ext. and Neuro: Normal

Immunizations:

Milestones in Development:

Illnesses, contagious diseases, allergies, etc.

Husband

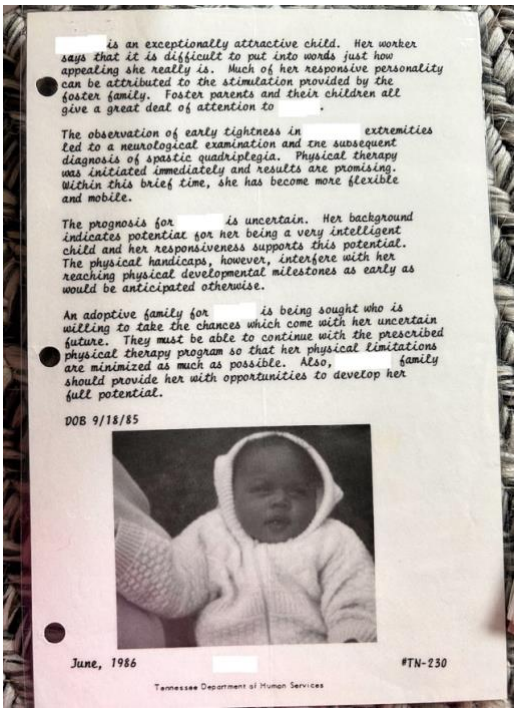
Wife

Used with permission from participant.

Esther's Advertisement

The next document described Esther's health, appearance, personality, and intelligence. According to the observer, some factors affect "chances for her uncertain future." There are so many questions arising from Esther's document. What family purposefully avoids providing opportunities for their children to reach their full potential? When adoptees sit with these documents, it is difficult to comprehend the perspectives of others. These first report cards fail to hit the mark. Only through an engagement with others can the artifacts reveal their present meaning.

Esther's adoptive parents had placed her laminated document on the first page of her baby book. Esther admitted our session together marked the first time she had heard the flyer read aloud – we shared reading paragraphs. She described her feelings erupting from the text. She said, "Exceptionally attractive child. I don't know if that's really that important. The second sentence is very nice. And the photo. That picture I don't enjoy." Keeping a document behind lamination, closed in a baby book, fails to provide new meaning. We agreed the second sentence was nice because it sounded like its context was from an engagement with Esther. Now, like the weight chart, we can imagine hands touching, faces smiling, and hugs provided.



[ ] is an exceptionally attractive child. Her worker says that it is difficult to put into words just how appealing she really is. Much of her responsive personality can be attributed to the stimulation provided by the foster family. Foster parents and their children all give a great deal of attention to [ ].

The observation of early tightness in [ ] extremities led to a neurological examination and the subsequent diagnosis of spastic quadriplegia. Physical therapy was initiated immediately and results are promising. Within this brief time, she has become more flexible and mobile.

The prognosis for [ ] is uncertain. Her background indicates potential for her being a very intelligent child and her responsiveness supports this potential. The physical handicaps, however, interfere with her reaching physical developmental milestones as early as would be anticipated otherwise.

An adoptive family for [ ] is being sought who is willing to take the chances which come with her uncertain future. They must be able to continue with the prescribed physical therapy program so that her physical limitations are minimized as much as possible. Also, [ ] family should provide her with opportunities to develop her full potential.

DOB 9/18/85

June, 1986 [ ] #TN-230

Tennessee Department of Human Services

Used with permission from participant.

Ruth's Tattoo

I consider Ruth's tattoo, seen below, an adoptive artifact. Ruth's young unmarried mother kept her a secret from womb through six decades. The tattoo initiated many conversations in her work and social settings. She is the oldest sibling in her birth family of four, and the only sibling adopted.

Used with permission from participant.

Tasha's Birth Memorial

Tasha's birth memorial is below. She stretches the tension between her birth and adoptive identities. She often feels caught in the world's far-reaching web trapping privilege, power, and oppression. Tasha has lived her biological life, half-White and half-Black. She has lived her experiential life White. She is one of two people in my study whose price for adoption got lowered because of their special need and their skin color. Our engagement with artifacts enabled Tasha and me to ask harder questions. Does she downplay her half-membership in a stigmatized racial group in which she has no context? As Tasha explains, because of her light skin tone, she can always be White.

Caught
IN THE MIX

1969- 1970

Identity. Sister. Daughter. Biracial. Half black. Half white. Adopted. These are just a few of the identities with which I relate. I was born of a white woman and a black man, but my adoption brought me to a white family. Having darker skin than my family, but appearing "ambiguous" in terms of race has challengedme, defined me, exploited me and made me. Most importantly, however, it has shown me the positive and negative of the world of the chameleon —constantly trying to fit into the world, sometimes hiding and others standing out. Because I don't have the lived experience that compliments the Black roots of my family, I have a perspective of not being white, not being Black, but being somewhere Caught in the Mix.

ALONE
in the World

RENE

Rene is just six weeks old, but she already has a winning personality.

She loves to be cuddled and shows curiosity about her surroundings.

Because Rene is of Negro-Caucasian descent, it is difficult to find a home for this baby. She is one of about 50 children of special needs who have no prospects for adoption, according to Denver Department of Welfare social workers.

Rene has a light-olive complexion, brown eyes and hair.

To inquire about adopting Rene, write to Mrs. Doris Dore, adoption supervisor, Denver Services for Children and Youth, 120 W. 5th Ave.

Perhaps the trauma of adoption is being given away, but the blessing of it is being received by a family who vows to love you and take care of you. With this in mind, I cannot look back and ask "what it" but I can look inward to ask who have I become. I think this is an especially important question as I have ofte b een assessed by others, asking repeatedly, "So what are you anyway?"

Unfortunately, that question is the world we live in of classifying, defining and deciding who fits in and who is cut out. It's a question I hate to hear, but when I think about who I have become, a mix of nature and nurture, I find that I am not inferior, but have lived from a unique perspective, which only comes from being a mix of all who have given me life.

Used with permission from participant.

Ellen's Birth Memorial

I (Ellen, the researcher and here, acting as co-participant) made the collage found below. It includes a picture of a quilt sewn by my paternal grandmother, Selma. She used men's ties collected from Goodwill. She lost her son, Joe, my father, to cancer at age 20. A year later, Selma's husband, a pediatrician, died unexpectedly of heart failure. Selma lived 95 years, sewing quilts and writing poetry. No one knew Joe had fathered a daughter. I was born October 1. He died the next June.

The X on my original birth certificate is to protect Joe from me, my mother, and my adopted parents. It does not shield him from being White, which is stated. The certificate is marked VOID to make way for my amended birth certificate, which I am led to believe is the real one.

I had a mother, clearly stated on the health certificate where she handwrites the word *mother*. She also handwrites her name and address, but those details are whited out.

My father, as a boy, is me as a girl. I see me in him. The boy will grow into a man, briefly. Then, his life will be whited out. I have children older than Joe was when he died. I hope we all live long.

For every tie Selma included in her quilt, the material becomes strands of DNA connecting me to Selma's life. A DNA strand is defined as a long, thin molecule. The two strands that compose a double-stranded piece of DNA are antiparallel, meaning they run in opposite directions. Adoption is similar. Biologically, I travel on the same road as my biological ancestors. However, through adoption, I must journey in the opposite direction. In DNA structure, a two-way street is needed. If the DNA structure were parallel, hydrogen bonding would not be possible. If I had stayed with my mother, I never would have known my paternal

family. My mother did not know the father. She named someone else when I asked. DNA structure runs antiparallel to help make sense of the information being read from the DNA.

Selma died before I discovered my paternal history. Two people who knew about my father are still alive. Surprisingly, Judy Blume, the author, is one person who grew up with Joe. Another person, Gail, was a neighbor who spent much of her childhood with Selma, her husband David, Joe, and his older brother Moses. When Selma died, Gail got the quilt, which now rests at the foot of her bed. Because of Gail and Selma's quilt, my father's history now rests with me.

Selma's Quilt

Jess' Sweater

Jess shared her artifact, a sweater. She said, "This is one of the only things I have that is from our birth city."

Used with permission from participant.

Jess's adoptive mother traveled from the U.S. to China to bring Jess home. She had a suitcase filled with new clothes for her, but the suitcase was misplaced in her travels. So, she bought this sweater, which in our study, shared an origin story with Jess – same setting, same time. The tag provided a clue that it was manufactured from a place close to the orphanage. Our engagement with the sweater began with a loose thread, pulled by Jess' young daughter. From

there, our conversations brought Jess back to the orphanage, where she sat in a crib alongside a cohort of orphans, including a baby looking identical to Jess, her twin sister. Jess wanted to know if there might be other siblings for her to discover. We wondered where the other babies from her orphanage might be living out their lives. Our entanglement with Jess's sweater sent us back together to revisit the place and time of an earth-shattering cultural and biological separation from her mother and her sister. Along with all of Jess' adoptive discoveries, the loose thread on Jess' sweater, pulled by her daughter, becomes the thread of Jess' adoptive identity.

Tasha's Hair

The final artifact is from Tasha. Her adoptive mother kept locks of her hair in her baby book. One other adoptee had hair kept in her baby book, and my daughter's baby book also contains a lock of her golden hair. Tasha's lock preserves a moment in time. In Tasha's case, it observed the intersection of time both as an orphan born just a decade after her state lifted restrictions on interracial marriage and her new adoption. Her hair, most likely cut shortly after entering her adoptive home, witnessed both settings.

Used with permission from participant.

Appendix B: Request for Volunteers

Ellen is a doctoral candidate at Lesley University's Graduation School of Education in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Her dissertation study needs volunteers to understand the experiences of adults adopted in childhood. Much adoption research focuses on the experiences of children, adolescents, and adoptive parents. My research hopes to illuminate what it means to be an adopted person decades after the event of adoption. Specifically, the study hopes to bridge pre-adoption and adoption histories, using artifacts to lift adoption secrets while recognizing any impact of confusion, shame, loss, and grief. I list artifacts related to pre-adoption below with descriptions that may help:

- Scars (one transnational adoptee had a TB vaccine scar, indicating he had been inoculated)
- Birthmarks (several transnational adoptees mention their unique birthmarks that could help in identification if their relatives were to search)
- Hair (one transnational adoptee hides the tighter curl pattern in her hair by straightening it)
- Photographs (one adoptee has pictures taken in the orphanage and later sent to the adoptive parents)
- Clothing (some adoptees have fabric or clothing from either birth, foster care, or an orphanage)
- Tokens (toys, trinkets, stuffed animals, books)

- Birth abnormalities (identifying marks on the body)
- Names

Ellen is seeking adoptees over 25 years old, willing to complete a short online background survey, and available to participate in at least three face-to-face or *Zoom* one-hour interviews. Collaboratively, we will examine several pre-adoptive artifacts.

During data collection and in the final report, the identity of participants will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms. Participants will be allowed to read the report's final section related to their interviews to ensure that the information accurately portrays the perspective shared. I will offer final copies of the report. The results of my research could help raise awareness about the many ways adoptees produce knowledge about their adoptive identities.

Please contact Ellen at eweihenm@lesley.edu,

Appendix C: Informed Consent - Survey

29 Everett St., Cambridge, MA 02138f

Informed Consent - Survey

You are invited to participate in *The Archeology of Adoption Research Project*. Some adoptees face challenges reconciling their identities when much information is missing, altered, or ambiguous. Material objects such as original birth certificates, scars, birthmarks, tokens, hair, direct-to-consumer DNA reports, letters, photographs, etc., may help bridge the historical distance between an adoptee's birth and adoption. The benefit of participating in my research is that it offers open dialogue about the developmental factors, attitudes, beliefs, and conditions surrounding adoptive identity. Additionally, participants who have experienced significant transitions such as adoption may benefit by using pre-adoptive artifacts to help reflect upon and retell adoptive experiences.

Your participation will entail a short four-minute online survey with ten questions. Results from the survey will help select approximately ten adults adopted in childhood for further research.

All surveys will receive a response.

In addition

- You are not obligated to answer questions or finish the survey. You may discontinue participation at any time.

- Unless notified with additional written consent, I will keep identifying details from the data collected confidential. Only I will have access to the data collected.
- You are encouraged to ask questions about my survey at any time. You are free to consult with anyone (i.e., friends or family) about your decision to participate or to discontinue your participation.
- Participation in my research poses minimal risk. Potential risks involve exploring sensitive material and historical facts surrounding birth and adoption. You will receive a copy of suggested counseling services and wellness websites to use at your discretion if needed.
- If any problem in connection to the research arises, you can contact the researcher, Ellen at eweihenm@lesley.edu, or Lesley University's sponsoring faculty member, Dr. Jo Ann Gammel; Jgammel@lesley.edu.
- I may select you as a participant for a further inquiry involving three one-hour interviews.

I am 25 years of age or older. My consent to participate has been given of my free will, and I understand all that is stated above. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

_____ _____ _____ _____

Participant's signature Date Researcher's signature Date

There is a Standing Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University to which complaints or problems concerning any research project may and should, be reported if they arise. Contact the Committee Chairpersons at irb@lesley.edu

Appendix D: Survey for Adults Adopted in Childhood

Survey for Adults Adopted in Childhood

This survey helps in my selection of participants for my research project on adults adopted in childhood. I am seeking adults 25 years of age or older who have pre-adoptive artifacts to share. Thanks for your time. I will respond to each survey. For any questions, you have the option to state, "*I prefer not to say*."

1. Contact Information

Name

City/town State

Email address

2. Birthplace

3. Age Group

25-35 ☐

36-45 ☐

46-55 ☐

56-65 ☐

66+ ☐

Prefer not to say: ☐

4. Describe your gender.

5. Briefly describe your race/ethnicity. You may also prefer not to answer.

6. Briefly describe race/ethnicity of adoptive family

7. Briefly describe the type of adoption you had. Closed? Open? International?

8. Age at adoption?

9. Places lived between birth and adoption (foster care, orphanage, etc.)?

10. Describe your pre-adoptive artifact. Items may be a photo, document, clothing, scar, birthmark, hair, dimples, etc. What are the things you carry from the time before you adoption?

11. Add any other comment that you feel may help.

Appendix E: Informed Consent Participant Consent

INFORMED CONSENT

TITLE OF STUDY: The Archeology of Adoption

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of my study is to explore adoptive identity using pre-adoptive artifacts. Some adoptees face challenges reconciling their identities when much information is missing, altered, or ambiguous. In closed adoptions, adoptees' original birth certificates remain sealed in most U.S. states to guarantee that the biological parents cannot disturb the adoptive family's well-being. Only fourteen states recognize an adult adoptee's unrestricted right to their original birth certificate. For some, the idea of sealed records marks a severe distinction between their erased birth and documented adoption. Material objects such as original birth certificates, scars, birthmarks, tokens, hair, direct-to-consumer DNA reports, letters, photographs, etc., may help bridge the historical distance between an adoptee's birth and adoption. My study aims to explore these topics with ten adults adopted in childhood.

METHODS

My research will involve your participation in one-to-one discussions with Ellen Reeve, the researcher, designer, and facilitator of the study. I am conducting research as part of Lesley University's Graduate School of Education Doctoral Program requirements. Participants are chosen based on answers from a questionnaire containing the following criteria: (a) adoptees are adults, (b) participants must include artifacts carried from pre-adoption (photographs, clothing, letters, audio files, scars, hairstyle, names, birth certificates, birthmarks, etc.), (c) background

diversity of adoptee (age adopted, experiences, if any, in foster care, gender, race, ethnicity, present age, open or closed adoptions, etc.). I will schedule approximately two or three appointments for face-to-face or online interviews with selected participants. Each session will be video and audio recorded and last about one hour. The study's results may yield information that advances the support of adoptees of all ages. I will use information from the study in my doctoral dissertation and formal presentations such as an article, book, virtual museum, or visual presentation.

RISKS

Participation in the research poses minimal risk. Potential risks involve exploring sensitive material and historical facts surrounding birth and adoption. You will receive a copy of suggested counseling services and wellness websites to use at your discretion if needed. You may discontinue participation in the study at any time without facing negative consequences. Additionally, you are encouraged to ask questions about my study at any time before or during the research.

BENEFITS

The benefit of participating in my research is that it offers open dialogue about the developmental factors, attitudes, beliefs, and conditions surrounding adoptive identity. Additionally, you may benefit from reflecting upon and retelling adoptive experiences. Although these benefits may occur, I cannot guarantee that you will personally experience benefits from participating in the study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

I will be the only one collecting and analyzing the data from the study. I will take all precautions to maintain confidentiality and participant anonymity. I will video/audio record each

session for accuracy and analysis. You will have the opportunity to review your transcribed section. Transcript data, notes, photos, and related material will be completely separated from any identifying information and may be retained and securely maintained for future studies. Digital photographs of artifacts and audio recordings will be password protected during the study. I will secure all physical notes in a locked cabinet.

Any final report identifies you with a pseudonym that will not reveal your identity and includes a description such as "an adoptee from a closed adoption" or "a transracial, transnational adoptee." Material objects will be shared in the final report only with your permission. After completion, I will delete all video/audio recordings. Despite these measures, there is always a risk that such information might be disclosed.

PARTICIPATION

Participants must consider the following expectations:

1. Are you 25 years of age or older?
2. Do you agree to allow me to video/audio-record the interviews?
3. Do you agree to bring an artifact from pre-adoption?
4. While you can withdraw anytime, would you consider meeting two or three times?

CONTACT

If any problem in connection to the research arises, you can contact the researcher Ellen by email at eweihenm@lelsey.edu Additionally, you may contact my senior advisor at Lesley University: Dr. Jo Gammel: Jgammel@lesley.edu

CONSENT

I have read this form and agree to participate in the study.

_____

Signature of Participant

_____

Date of Signature

_____

There is a Standing Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University to which complaints or problems concerning any research project may and should, be reported if they arise. Contact the Committee Chairpersons at irb@lesley.edu.

Appendix F. Object-Interview Questions

Initial questions in the first interview purposefully established rapport with the participant. The questions posed in the second and third interviews provided answers to my guiding research questions: How do adoptees understand their adoptive identity using pre-adoptive artifacts? How might one's understanding of their adoptive identity change over time in relation to a specific artifact?

First Interview: Questions to Build Rapport

What do you know about your birth name?

Tell me about your family. (open-ended question – birth or adoptive family stories)

Questions Providing Historical Context

Tell me a story about where you were born.

When did you realize you were adopted? How did you first learn?

Could you give me an example of just how the adoption was closed?

Can you tell me about your adopted family and what it was like growing up?

Do you think adoption practices have changed since your birth? In what ways? (more open? Support services? Number of adoptions, from where? Search and Reunion services?)

Second Interview: Questions about the Pre-adoptive Artifact

I will assure participants that their opinions matter and they can speak freely. I will explain again the confidentiality and anonymity procedures. Along with these questions, I might probe, "Can you explain why you feel this way?" For a deeper understanding, I may request that participants provide a story or example to clarify/illustrate their response. I may say, "Can you tell me about a time you experienced this?" This context may acknowledge that all adoptees have challenges and may have diverse experiences unique to their setting.

What can you tell me about your pre-adoptive artifact? Where was it procured, how, when?

What is the significance? What makes it unique?

Who else has seen/possessed your artifact?

Where do you keep it?

Where else has your object been?

Were there other choices of artifacts in mind? Why this one, in particular?

How does your object connect to your pre-adoptive time? In what ways?

Have your attitudes and values changed due to connecting with your artifact? How? Might they change again in the near or distant future? In what ways?

What does your artifact symbolize? Can you draw a picture?

Further guiding questions about the Artifact

What is seen in the artifact (what do you notice)? What is missing?

Who else has seen the artifact? Have you shared your object with others? Why/why not?

What relationship do you have with your object today?

Has your relationship changed, over time? Will it, perhaps, in the future?

How might your object occupy the past, present, and future?

What would you do if you lost it?

Would you ever give it away?

Third and Final Interview: Questions Regarding Identity

I will assure participants that their opinions matter and they can speak freely. I will explain again the confidentiality and anonymity procedures. Along with these questions, I might probe, “Can you explain why you feel this way?” For a deeper understanding, I may request that participants

provide a story or example to clarify/illustrate their response. I may say, “Can you tell me about a time you experienced this?” This context may acknowledge that all adoptees have challenges and may have diverse experiences unique to their setting.

What are your thoughts and feelings regarding how you view yourself as an adoptee?

What does adoption mean to you today as a (young, mid-, or older) adult?

In what ways might your artifact influence your perception of adoption? Does the artifact open new beliefs, values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions about adoption? How so?

What blocks your understanding of adoptive identity, or how you see yourself as an adopted person?

Has meaning changed during your adulthood? In what ways? Might it change again in the future? How so?

Do you (*or did you*) ever feel conflicted about your adoptive identity?

Some adoptees search for remnants of their past, and others do not. Why might adoptees choose to search or do not search?

Having had these conversations about your object, how might you think differently or act differently regarding your object and your identity?

Concluding Questions

In what ways do the ideas we’ve discussed fit into an understanding of your adoptive self, your relationship with friends and family, and your presence as an adopted person in your cultural setting?

If your artifact had a voice, how would it sound? Soft? Loud? Foreign? Old? Young?

Using your imagination, write down or draw what the object tells you today.

What did you know about yourself today that might be different than before?

If you consider your artifact a found item, what might your object trigger in the found parts of you?

Appendix G: Photo Release

Photo Release

Date_____

I grant Ellen Reeve permission to use my likeness and artifact in photograph(s)/video for outside sources such as articles, books, blogs, or virtual museums. I can approve such photo (s)/videos before their use.

I will make no monetary or other claim against Ellen Reeve for using the photograph(s)/video.

Circle your choice below:

a. Photo with Participant and artifact

b. Photo with artifact only

c. Photo with artifact and participant's hand

Name (print full name)
_____

Signature _____

Token Photos Permission Granted: The collections manager at the Foundling Museum confirms permission to use photos in Figures 1, 2, and 13. "I am happy to grant permission on behalf of the Foundling Museum for you to include the three images of tokens." Alison Duke (she/her) Collections Manager

Appendix H: Resources for Participants

Adoptive identity builds by reflexively exploring a relational membership between one's birth and adoptive families. The negotiated feelings between these two dynamic groups may result in conflicted perspectives. The study hopes to ease the tension associated with adoption and birth histories. The following is an abbreviated list of resources that may help support identity exploration.

Counseling and Mentorship Services for Adoptees

Grow Beyond Words: This directory includes licensed U.S. mental health professionals identifying as adoptees and working with adoptees/adoptive families in various public and private settings.

https://growbeyondwords.com/adoptee-therapist-directory/

A Home Within provides open-ended, individual psychotherapy, free of charge, to current and former foster youth. **https://www.ahomewithin.org**

Healing Adoption Imprints by Annie Brook

Brook's work taps into and helps resolve your earliest impressions (physically, relationally, emotionally) that can shape movement patterns, identity beliefs, relational habits, and protective response behaviors for a lifetime.

https://brook.kartra.com/page/HAIEvergreen

From *Psychology Today*, a list of adoption therapists:

https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists/co/denver?category=adoption

The Adoptee Mentoring Society holds virtual meetings for adoptees by adoptees of all ages.

https://www.adopteementorship.org

The Celia Center: Adoption and Foster Care

Virtual group events include support for adult adoptees.

https://celiacenter.org/events-calendar-support-groups/

Podcasts

There are over 70 adoption podcasts. I list four here.

Adoptees On by Haley Radke

Honestly Adoption by Mike and Kristin Berry

Who am I Really? by Damon L. Davis

The Adoptee Next Door by Angela Tucker

Social Media

https://instagram.com/theadopteeopenmic?igshid=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==

Adoptee Open Mike 3rd Thursday of the month

https://instagram.com/hannahjacksonmatthews?igshid=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==

Hannah Jackson Matthews - a transracial adoptee helps adoptees with racial identity and offers support/training for adoptive/foster parents

https://instagram.com/adoptee__diaries?igshid=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==

Adoptee Diaries - content creator and activist focused on working with and for adoptees from Ethiopia

https://instagram.com/psychotherapist.amy_?igshid=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==

Adoptee and adoptee focused psychologist

https://instagram.com/theadoptedchameleon?igshid=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==

Adoptee - content creator - yoga and kundalini instructor

https://instagram.com/rhondaroorda?igshid=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==

Transracial adoptee, author, consultant

https://instagram.com/adopteesconnect?igshid=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==

Adoptee-led in person adoptee meet up groups in various states

https://instagram.com/rewritingadoption?igshid=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==

Adoptee blog with open submissions

https://instagram.com/therapyredeemed?igshid=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==

Transracial international adoptee- counselor trainer and chaplain

https://instagram.com/patrickintheworld?igshid=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==

Transracial adoptee, speaker, podcaster

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jPr8KOp2aMc

Simmons and Tucker. (2022). *Lisa & Isell: A Story about Adoption and the Ghost Kingdom*

Books

Coppola, L. (2022). *Voices Unheard: A Reflective Journal for Adult Adoptees*. Boston Post Adoption Resources.

Tucker, A. (2023). *You Should Be Grateful: Stories of Race, Identity, and Transracial Adoption*. Beacon Press.

Myung Ja, J. (2021). *Adoption Stories: Excerpts from Adoption Books for Adults*

Latchford, F. J. (2019). *Steeped in Blood*. McGill-Queen's Press.

Jay, J., Bara, A., & Feben-Smith, H. (2022). *Whatever Next?: On Adult Adoptee Identities*. Inklings.

Ito, Susan. (2023) *I Would Meet You Anywhere*. Mad Creek Books

Films

Morey, G., and Morey, J. (2019). *Side X Side: Out of a South Korean Orphanage and into the World.* An international journey through the personal memories and experiences of abandonment, relinquishment, orphanages, aging out, and inter-country adoption from South Korea.

https://sidebysideproject.com

See also: https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/23/opinion/korean-adoptees.html

Tucker, B. (2013). *Closure*. A trans-racial adoptee finds her birth mother and meets the rest of a family who did not know she existed, including her birth father. Tucker's story is about identity, the complexities of transracial adoption, and, most importantly, closure.

Davis, G. (2016). *Lion* [Film]. The Weinstein Company. A 5-year-old lost Indian survives many challenges before being adopted by a couple in Australia; 25 years later, he sets out to find his lost family.

Mindfulness Practices

Adoptees may consider adding additional support to the more-traditional talk therapy practice. Dr. Peter Levine developed *Somatic Experiencing*® (SE™) to address the effects of trauma. Levine developed an approach after observing the behaviors of prey animals, whose lives are routinely threatened in the wild. These animals can recover readily by physically releasing the accumulated energy from stressful events. Humans often override these natural ways of regulating the nervous system. Instead, feelings of shame, fear, judgment, and pervasive thoughts make regulating emotions difficult, impacting the developing self. Somatic therapy allows access to our sensorimotor system and stored information containing traumatic experiences.

Expressive Arts Therapy combines psychology and creative processes to promote emotional growth and healing. The approach uses music, theater, poetry, dance, painting & drawing, along with other artistic forms, as a therapeutic tool to help initiate change.

Experiential Therapy includes several types of therapy and therapeutic interventions designed to focus on experiences that include emotional processing, interactions with others, creativity, and reflections of events that go beyond traditional "talk therapy." This type of therapy may include animal-assisted therapies (e.g., equine-assisted therapy, wolf-connection therapy, adventure, and wilderness therapy. https://wolfconnection.org