



Transracial Adoption and Sociological Theory

Understanding My Identity

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Abstract: This paper self-reflectively explores from a sociological perspective various issues experienced by an infant adopted into a family of a different race. These experiences cover childhood, adolescence and the search for identity, young adulthood, and a birth-mother reunion. This paper informs adoptive parents of various issues that may impact their adopted child and become a lifelong challenge.

Since the day my mother brought me to the United States from Guatemala she has told me that I am adopted. Even though I have known this since I was very young, it was not until I was four that I understood what this really meant. I was watching the popular children's show titled "Sesame Street" one day, and I remember that the episode was about one of the characters giving birth. I specifically remember that the mother had dark colored skin and so did her newborn. I immediately ran to my mother (who has white skin), and held my arm up next to her and said, "My skin is a different color than yours, why?" My mother was shocked, because she thought that I would not mention race until I was much older. At that time there were not that many adoption resources that dealt with the issues experienced by transracially adopted children. In a recent adoption newsletter I found that nowadays many adoptive parents are aware of this. For in-

stance, Lois Ruskai Melina observes that "A 3 year old is aware of people's color differences...By the age of 4, those color differences are understood to have racial implications; that is; the child is aware that people with dark skin belong to a specific 'group'" (2).

There are many aspects to being a transracial adoptee. For example, in certain places it is harder for me to fit in. If I go to a party with my mother, people always assume that we are not related. Sometimes I feel frustrated because I know that if I had white skin, no one would even question whether or not the woman I walked in with was my mother. To take a closer look at this and other issues related to transracial adoption, in this paper I will use various sociological theories to help me understand my search for identity.

Since the day I realized I was different I have been through many obstacles, including a birth family reunion. Although it has

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been very difficult for me over the years, each day I get closer to a better understanding of who I am.

One sociological theory that has helped me probe deeper into understanding who I am is **phenomenology**. “Phenomenological sociology asks us to challenge our culturally learned values and ideas by questioning our way of looking at and our way of being in the world” (Contreras 14). In the movie, *The Matrix*, for example, Neo, the main character, questions whether the world he has been living in is real. When he learns about the Matrix, he begins to realize that what he regarded as truth is false, and that in fact he has been living in the Matrix, a false world created by a computer program. This idea of problematizing certain things in life has led me to look further into the reasons behind some of my actions and choices. An example of this happened for me when I went to Guatemala to meet my birth mother for the first time in 17 years.

Before I arrived, I was constantly trying to think of why it was that I wanted to meet this woman who was a complete stranger to me. I did not have an innate feeling to have to meet her. The only reason I could think of was because of the **society** I had lived in. I tried to remember all of the instances where my birth mother had been talked about. The beauty salon was a perfect example. When I was a child I remembered going to get my hair cut many times with my mother. The hairdresser would always ask me who the woman was that came in with me. I would tell her that it was my mother and they would look puzzled and ask me more personal questions. I was almost always forced to tell them that I was adopted. Then they would say things like, “So do you have a real mother? Have you ever met her? Have you ever wondered if you have other family?” I would get so angry because this stranger who was cutting my hair would get into my personal space but I would not defend myself to her face. I assumed her **authority** as an adult which

was above me, the child, and that is why I answered her questions. What bothered me the most was that after hearing these questions, I would actually start thinking about my birth mother, just like how Neo started to question his “world” and the Matrix.

Problematizing this situation I have come to the conclusion that the need I had to search for my birth mother was all influenced by the people around me. In a study on transracial adoptees, Florence Westeringh writes, “The phenomenological method allows for a more in-depth analysis of the whole experience growing up in a culture which is vastly different than one’s own and where one is considered a minority” (Westeringh 13). I always wonder if I had been a white girl like my mother, in those times that I had gone to get my hair cut, would the hairdresser have asked me such personal questions?

In the movie titled, *Daughter from Danang*, a Vietnamese adoptee named Heidi goes on a search for her birth mother. One of her reasons for searching is that her adoptive mother had previously disowned her and she felt that if she found her birth mother she would find the mother love that she had lost. Unlike Heidi, I did not have a specific reason for looking for my birth mother. Lee Kang Woon, a Korean adoptee from UMass Boston helped me better understand this situation. He explores, in his *Socialization of Transracially Adopted Korean Americans: A Self Analysis* (2004/5), the influence of every day and broader social worlds on his identity formation. He writes, “In the micro world my family and friends were telling me I was not different, just another American kid...In the macro world, society and institutions were telling me I was Asian” (Woon 80). I also feel like it is the macro world around me that has almost forced me to think about my birth mother. In my micro world, my adoptive mother gave me space on this subject and never pushed me to obsess over it. Although I have read in reports from many

adoption experts that it is natural to look for a birth parent, my own experience leads me to always feel that it is not natural.

A term from phenomenological sociology that has also helped me understand my life as an adoptee is **standpoint theory**. Dorothy Smith defines this theory as the exploration of "...the everyday/every night worlds of individuals situated in subordinate positions" (Wallace 293). Subordinate here, means a group that is considered of lower class or rank than the majority, such as racial minorities. I see myself as part of a subordinate group, being both an adoptee and a person of color. This concept will come up later when I discuss the cultural clash between my birth mother's world and mine. Throughout my life I have been to different therapists to help me cope with problems that I have encountered being adopted. I find it frustrating when I get therapists that specialize in adoption but are not adoptees themselves. They are book smart in the subject but do not let me see the world from the eyes of an adoptee. I will mention this situation and its relation to postmodern theories later in this paper. Using the standpoint theory I have been able to use my personal knowledge and experience of being an adoptee to help other adoptees that I know. My adopted friends want to talk with someone who is having similar experiences. This brings me to some of the specific aspects that transracial adoptees experience in life.

This leads me to examine **symbolic interactionism** and how it can relate to my exploration. Symbolic interactionism "...focuses on the symbols that people use to establish meaning, develop their views of the world, and communicate with one another" (Henslin 11). As a transracially adopted woman this perspective has helped me understand how I have developed my sense of self, and how I view the world around me. Charles Horton Cooley used the concept **looking-glass self** to further explain how people learn to experi-

ence themselves in the world. This concept contains three elements.

The first element is the idea that people imagine how they appear to those around them (Henslin 59). I am especially conscious about this idea when I visited the country where I was born. Even though I am Guatemalan and speak Spanish fluently, I always feel that Guatemalans will see that I am different. They may notice my accent, the way I dress, or the way I act. For example, I get very nervous when I speak Spanish with other Guatemalans because they sometimes say, "Your Spanish sounds different. Are you American?" This makes me upset because I try so hard to blend in with the people I originated from and my Spanish prevents me from doing so, or at least at times I imagine that this is the case.

The second element of the looking-glass concept, is the idea that being around others, we imagine how they judge us (Henslin 60). I am aware of this everywhere I go. For instance, when I go to the mall with my mother I am always trying to read people's faces and reactions when they look at us. Sometimes I interpret their faces as saying, "Who the heck are those two?" I used to get embarrassed, thinking of what others might interpret of an older white woman walking around with me, a young Hispanic. I still read people's faces but I do not obsess over the situation.

The third element of this concept is that by interpreting other people's reactions we have certain feelings and ideas about ourselves (Henslin 60). A good example is when I went on a trip to Guatemala with my mother and my best friend (who happens to be white) when we were both fifteen. We walked into a restaurant and the waiter laughed and asked my mother why she was eating at such a nice restaurant with her maid, assuming her daughter was my friend. I was immediately insulted since that day, when I go on trips with mother around Guatemala, I sometimes hesitate to walk side by side with her be-

cause I feel like everyone will think that I am her maid. Another example is when I visit Guatemala and someone makes a comment on my Spanish, saying that it sounds American. I immediately start having negative feelings and ideas about myself trying to be 100% Guatemalan.

The looking-glass self leads me to another sociological insight on my experience of being adopted.

The sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois introduced the idea of **double consciousness**. I have related this concept to my studies of sociology and my personal search for the understanding of my identity as an adoptee. Du Bois introduced this concept when studying the post-slavery era when blacks live in a world where they are said to be equal to whites, but in truth they are not. The peculiar sensation of double consciousness cause blacks to feel like they have two identities, one black and one American (Edles 324). In my whole life I have also experienced this double consciousness. I try so hard to blend into Guatemalan culture by learning perfect Spanish, knowing the food, and certain parts of the culture. I want to blend in so well that no one will even question whether or not I come from the United States. This is only natural for me to want to do. Melina has pointed out that, "Latino children adopted by Anglos have the...need...to understand that their ethnic heritage and ethnic identity is different than their adoptive family's" (3). If I make myself understand that I will never completely blend into Guatemalan culture, I try to positively think that I can blend into my American culture. As much as I would like this, it never happens because of my brown skin and dark black hair. My adoptive mother tried to raise me in all American neighborhoods, like for example in Brookline, Massachusetts. She wanted to me to fit in just like everybody else. Even though there were immigrant children from all over the world, most of them at this school were white or black. I tried very

hard to be an American child like my peers but at the same time my looks and my perfect English were always deceiving to those around me. Most of my immigrant friends spoke English with an accent, or their parents did. If I was not accepted as an American girl because of my features, I would tell my peers and teachers that I was from Guatemala. Of course, when they saw my mother they did not believe that I was from an all Guatemalan family. After reading the writings of Du Bois I now understand that I have been living with two identities. I have tried to be the all American girl, and at the same time tried to keep my Guatemalan identity.

Another term that relates to the notion of double consciousness is the **Protestant ethic**. This is the belief that success can be achieved through hard work and determination (Henslin 360). I look at how different my features are from my mother. My mother is white with blond hair and blue eyes. Sometimes I do not think that she realizes that at times she gets special privileges solely based on her features. My mother was raised to believe in the Protestant ethic. What my mother does not realize is that even though she thinks that she has been successful because of her hard work and struggle as a woman, her skin color has played a big part in her success. She has been able to avoid any **prejudice** because of being white. She does not realize that if I work hard to become successful, the brown color of my skin is going to be a **racial barrier** preventing me from succeeding. This brings me to the concept of **culture**.

Culture is made up of the languages, beliefs, values, norms and behaviors that are passed on from one generation to the next (Henslin 32). The culture that I have grown up in is that of the American upper class. One of the beliefs I have grown up around is that of the Protestant ethic. American culture is very complicated when discussing transracial adoptees. I was lucky that my adoptive mother made it important

for me to be raised with people around that were of different races and **ethnicities**. Also, she always kept me informed about my origins and my adoption story. This is not always the case for other transracial adoptees. I have other friends who are also adopted from Guatemala, but they have been raised not knowing that for a while, and this despite the fact that they are always the only different person around. They have told me how they feel like they do not fit into the **norms** of the society they were raised in. Norms are, "A group's expectations, or rules of behavior [that] reflect and enforce a group's values" (Henslin 42). These adoptive parents do not have a sociological perspective of what it must be like for their child of a different ethnicity to be growing up around only white people. It is as if they do not see that their child is different. My mother acknowledged that I was different and spoke about that instead of keeping quiet.

A very important part of becoming a healthy adult is to have formed a sense of **self**. This is the unique capacity that humans have to see themselves from the outside (Henslin 59). This can also be called the "self concept" (Brodzinsky 12). Charles Horton Cooley approached the process of self formation with his concept, **the looking-glass self**—which I explored above already. However, George Herbert Mead provided another more in-depth notion of the "self" and how it develops. Emily Margulies explains Mead's theory as follows,

Mead's theory of the emergent self is helpful as it explains how our selves are created. In order to form a self people must take on ideas and attitudes of the generalized other so that they may function in society and interact with its members. This process of socialization begins in childhood. Children begin to take on the **role** of others and themselves as they **play** make

believe roles...Next, kids take part in organized **games** in which they must be able to take on the role of every other member...Finally, individuals are able to control their own desires, to self analyze, and correct themselves in order to gain acceptance of others. (3)

David Brodzinsky describes parts or aspects of "self-concept" in terms of the **physical self**, **psychological self**, and the **social self** (Brodzinsky 13). These three parts of the self I know very well. For the physical self I am always aware of my looks and how different from my mother I am. This goes back to the term of the looking glass self, where a person is very aware of how others judge them just by physical appearance. Explaining the psychological self is more complicated. I think about who I am from my point of view and how I am. For example, I am a quiet person, intelligent, and completely confused on how I should be feeling about being adopted. The social self is about how I see myself in relation to others and my understanding of how others see me (Brodzinsky 13). I am friendly, quiet, and a good listener. Others often call me for advice about their problems. These three parts of Mead's emergent self build identity.

Thus far I have tried to relate various micro sociological concepts to my inquiry. A macro-level analysis of my experience as a transracial adoptee can also be done. I will begin with the **structural functionalism theory** as described by Henslin. This theory defines society as a whole unit. It is made up of interrelated parts that work together (Henslin 13). There are three essential components in the adoption process; the adoptee, adoptive parents, and the birth parents (Pertman 7). This is referred to as a triad. If one of these parts is not fulfilled, then the other parts are not fulfilled either. For example, let's take the part that my birth mother Patricia plays. She was

young, poor, without a husband, and pregnant.

She was working as a live-in house maid. Her employer told her she could not work in their home and raise a baby at the same time. Patricia made a **rational choice** in deciding to keep her job and give me up for adoption. The theory of rational choice assumes that people are rational and base their actions on what they perceive to be the most effective means to achieve their goals (Wallace and Wolf 303). Because her boss would not let her work in her house with a child, Patricia made the rational choice to give me up but at the same time achieve her goals of keeping her work and surviving. This is where the triad comes into play. As Patricia was looking for someone to adopt and care for me, my adoptive mother, Gail, was looking for a child to adopt. Gail, at the time I was born, had a very different **status** than Patricia, economically. She was a forty year old Ph.D. research scientist who was actively pursuing her career. She owned her own home and had other real estate investments. It is important to notice that this is where **conflict theory** fits into this triad. Conflict theory is about how society is viewed as being composed of groups competing for scarce resources. One of the elements of this theory is that "all people want and attempt to acquire certain things" (Wallace and Wolf 68-89). For example, a house, security, a career. My mother already had these things, but now she wanted a child. Patricia, on the other hand, never did acquire these basic things.

In addition to the structural functionalist theory, the **conflict theory** can also be used to explore the transracial adoption experience. Looking at the adoption triad from this perspective provides a global sociological framework. Conflict theory views society as being composed of groups competing for scarce resources. One of the elements of this theory is that "all people want and attempt to acquire certain things"

(Wallace 68-89).

Some examples might be a house, a secure job, a car, etc. One might include an infant, considering that infants available for adoption are a scarce resource in the US.

My adoptive mother already had most of these resources, but she wanted a baby. Patricia, on the other hand, did not have these basic things. There are people who believe that adoptions from birth mothers in the poorer countries of the world is a form of exploitation. Third World adoptions reflect issues of power, money, status, and competition for scarce resources, that conflict theorists explore. My adoptive mother has been told more than once that the only reason she was able to adopt a child from Guatemala was because of money and her status. Some people even wonder why the birth mother did not receive money in the process of giving up her child. Of course, this is ridiculous, because the focus in this triad is the child, not the birth parents receiving money! What is somewhat true is that you do have to have a lot of money in order to adopt a child. Lawyers need to be paid, you need money to pay for all the legal papers, money is needed to live out of the country while you wait for the adoption process to come to an end, and you have to prove to the government that you have money to support a child. My adoptive mother has also been told by these same Americans that adopting me was just her way of doing good for the world. She, of course gets furious, because the only reason she adopted me is because she had the desire to have a child when she could not herself.

There are other perspectives that can shed light on the subject of being transracially adopted. Take, for example, the debate between **sociology of the body** and **sociobiology** on whether behavior is socially constructed or biologically given and which makes explanations of behavior of various parts of the adoption triad more complicated.

The **postmodernist** perspective can also be relevant to my inquiry. Michel Foucault is a postmodernist who questions whether or not mental illness is socially constructed (Wallace and Wolf 389). Who is to decide what is an illness and what is not, and what treatments a person should undergo if they have an illness? Foucault believes that people assume the “truth” about everything and we never question whether or not we are correctly being diagnosed. So much power is given to scientists that people do not think they even have the right to question their conclusions. As a transracial adoptee I have had to deal with many problems as a child, a teenager, and as an adult. To help me my mother used to have me see a psychologist who specialized in adopted children. The one time when I took the most information from my psychologist was on the decision to find my birth mother. It was my psychologist who told me that a search would be healthy for me and that it would help me understand my **identity** and be able to move on with my life. I obviously did not think like Foucault, because I assumed that the expertise and knowledge the psychologist had would provide me with the best answer. I did not even think to question whether or not her experience was enough to say that it is a healthy thing to do—that is, to do a birth mother search. After going through the search, I do not feel like it was a healthy thing for me. The search confused me even more on understanding my identity. I have experienced so many problems; my birth family asks me for money, my 15 year old sister got pregnant, and my birth mother is emotionally cold. Now that I have read about Foucault and postmodernist theory, I believe that I should have questioned my psychologist before I took her expertise. This brings me back to the expectations that I had of my birth mother, Patricia.

In the book *Tuesdays with Morrie*, the sociologist Morrie Schwartz discusses emotions. He says, “If you hold back on

emotions—if you don’t allow yourself to go all the way through them—you can never get to being detached, you’re too busy being afraid. You’re afraid of the pain, you’re afraid of the grief. You’re afraid of the vulnerability that love entails” (Albom 104).

Morrie’s words affected me profoundly because of the experience I went through getting to know my birth mother. I guess that when I first met Patricia I had some expectations of what she would be like and what she would have to offer me. I wanted her to be a caring, empathetic, understanding person. I also expected her to be open with me about my history. For instance, I thought that she would share stories surrounding my birth and adoption without having to ask her. I wanted to know so many details, when I was born, who was there, how long did she have me in her arms, did she give me the name Rosa Maria? I wanted to know about all the things that had been special to me for so many years.

Unfortunately, Patricia did not meet my expectations. Patricia turned out to be a cold person. She was not very caring and empathetic at all. She never brought up any of the details I so badly wanted to know that surrounded my birth and adoption. When I did bring up these questions, she was very harsh and cold. For example, I asked her about my name. At the time of my adoption the lawyer told my adopted mother that my birth mother had given me the name “Rosa Maria.” For my whole life I believed this. It was very special for me to know that part of my name was given to me by the woman who gave birth to me. When I asked Patricia about the name she gave to me at my birth, she laughed and told me that she never gave me a name, She said, “It was probably a nurse that gave you that name.” My reaction to her was anger and frustration that she was not caring and empathetic about my question. I thought that she would have been able to detect that this subject was something very

touchy and special for me to be talking about. This is where I remember Morrie's words. If Patricia had just opened up a little, emotionally, I think she would have been more understanding. Morrie's words guided me in analyzing how cold and harsh she was. From his words I try to think about her position and that maybe she was too afraid to show emotion or love towards me. I should also mention that I realized that some of my expectations would not come true later on in my relationship with Patricia.

One of these expectations was that Patricia would be understanding about the culture I grew up in. This would be the North American culture. I have grown up in a country that has an abundance of technology, food, clothing, luxuries, health care, and many other things. I understand that she lives in a Third World country where there is no work, no safety, little money, and where the gap between the rich and poor is very wide. I also understand that she is not living in extreme poverty. When I began my search for Patricia I was told by the birth mother finding agent that there were many **social classes** in Guatemala; the rich, the middle class, **the poor**, and extreme poor. Extreme poverty is where the people are living in huts made up of chunks of metal sheets and cardboard put together, with dirt floors and no running water. Poverty is where there is money to eat, and the house is usually made of block with a cement floor. Luckily, I found my mother living in poverty rather than in extreme poverty. She has a nice block house and her family eats well. There is never a lack of food in their house. The problem is that there was a culture clash. Patricia had grown up with certain **stereotypes** about the United States. She and her family believe that anyone coming from the United States has a wealth of money. This was very hard for me because that is just not so. Although my family is upper class that does not mean that I myself have access to much

cash.

To help explain this misunderstanding of culture between Patricia and me, it is helpful to relate the situation to the movies *Affluenza* and *The Big One*. In the movie *Affluenza* Americans are so used to the abundance of materials that they become consumed with buying things. Americans want to have the latest fashion, technology, cars, and other luxuries. Materialism and "things" take over our lives here in the US. My birth family started to ask me for things before I left Guatemala. They asked me for clothes, shoes, makeup, perfume, and many other things. No matter how hard I tried to explain to them that I am a student and that my parents support me for school and nothing else, they would not believe me. This was frustrating for me because I felt that I had put myself in their shoes and tried not to be stereotypical of Guatemalans, but they did not do the same for me. I also knew that I could have been **ethnocentric** toward them about the country I grew up in. I could have said that the United States is better than Guatemala and so on. I could have also been **xenophobic** and acted disgusted by the culture my birth family was from. But I am not like that. I was very understanding instead.

In addition to the problem of asking me for things, there was the strangeness of the way my half sisters were brought up. My sisters Lilian and Yenci were not like the typical Guatemalan girls I had met before. Most of the girls I knew in Guatemala were either pregnant, serving their husbands, or knew how to cook and clean from a very young age. Patricia raised my sisters as if they were princesses on a throne. Despite Patricia's low income, she still buys her girls whatever they want including clothes, school things, and even makeup and perfume from a local Avon dealer! This is how I discovered how much *Affluenza* and the ideas behind *The Big One* have affected the entire world.

From watching soap operas where rich

people wear the latest fashion and drive expensive cars, my sisters were acting as if they lived in the United States. They dress up and can put on makeup but do not know how to do things like cooking and cleaning. It is disgusting to see how capitalism has spread so rapidly to places like Guatemala, a Third World country. Here are my sisters living poor under the roof of their mother who still works as a maid in a wealthy person's house. Yet, they act as if they are the latest greatest. They are so young but then so vulnerable. The movie *Affluenza* showed how materialistic children learn about acquiring things from a very young age. This is what happened to my sisters. This happened to me as well, but I have not let capitalism take me over and mold me. In *The Big One* Michael Moore portrays the reality of capitalism, which helped me see the reality of my birth family and their economic state. Americans who work for corporations are getting laid off and they are not able to make money to buy the latest greatest things that these companies are trying to sell. Here is my birth family living at the poverty level and yet wanting to spend money on material things created by popular American culture and capitalism. This reality of capitalism and consumerism is sad for me to see because in the end I think it will end up destroying our cultures and making us all clones who like the same things, buy the same things, and value ourselves based on the amount of "stuff" we own.

Another insight that I noticed with Patricia was the way I had to act around her. I grew up in a liberal, non-religious family. I consider myself an open-minded person who accepts all cultures and beliefs. Patricia is a very strict evangelical Christian. She goes to church not only on the weekends but also during the week. She does not even allow her children to listen to salsa or merengue music because she says that it is the devil's music. This is difficult for me because I act a certain way in front of her fam-

ily and there are certain subjects that I cannot mention. These include mainstream music, boyfriends, Easter (which is the most celebrated holiday in Guatemala), and any other things that are too touchy for Patricia. My birth sisters are only allowed to listen to Christian music. My behavior when I am with Patricia reminds me of the concepts, **frontstage and backstage**, and **impression management**, that Erving Goffman introduced along with the concept of **dramaturgy**. I feel that I have to impress my birth mother by acting as if I am a good girl who does not commit sins—that is, sins according to her! The frontstage is, "the part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance" (Wallace and Wolf 238). My guarded behavior is a performance for my birth mother, who is the audience. According to Goffman partaking in dramaturgy. That is, it is as if I am an actor performing a theatrical performance on stage (Wallace and Wolf 238). The backstage is "the place closed to and hidden from the audience" (Wallace and Wolf 239). In the backstage one usually acts the way one is, and that is usually how I behave around people who share my views and beliefs. However, I noticed that I change into a completely different person when I am around Patricia.

After writing this paper I have realized many things about what I have gone through as a transracially adopted adult. There are so many elements that are part of who I am. I have a long way to go, still, to having a fuller understanding of my identity and my self. I am very grateful for the way that my adoptive mother has raised me. She has never kept it a secret from me that I am adopted. When I was seven she made it possible to live for two years in my country of origin so I could know where I am from. She has given me the truth. Instead of living in a false world, like Neo did in the Matrix before waking up to it, I have

been given the chance to live the reality of who I am as a transracially adopted person. However, sometimes I feel like a **slave** of the Matrix. I am a slave because there are still many things I do not know about myself. Finding my birth mother was something that I wish I had not done, but I have learned from my experience. For now, I think I must take slow steps through my life. There are times when I wish I could just cut off my relationship with my birth family like Heidi did in *Daughter from Danang*, but then I feel like that is not the right thing to do. My next step is to keep trying to make my birth family understand me. I want them to understand the world that I have grown up in and the values that I have.

Apart from my birth reunion, my next step is to continue learning about myself and how I am different from others. Now, when people ask me personal questions about my origins I have learned to tell them that that is my private business. They have no right to walk on a territory that is very touchy for me, and now I can actually tell them that, without assuming they have authority like I once did when I was a child. As an adult, I must learn to become stronger on these sensitive subjects when approached by strangers. I also want to help inform adoptive parents and other transracial adoptees with advice from my experiences. I think the worst thing that adoptive parents can do is not to let their adopted children the truth about who they are. This has been the one gift from my adoptive mother that has helped me become who I am today. Without this gift I would be lost.

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