

Transracial Adoptees Face Cultural Disconnection and Identity Struggles

Across the United States, children adopted by families of a different race or ethnicity, known as transracial adoptees, are growing up with love and stability but often without the cultural connection they need.

Representing about [28% of all U.S. adoptions](#), these children face unique challenges as they navigate racial identity and societal biases. Experts and adoptees suggest that while love and care are essential, they are insufficient to help these children understand their racial identity or address the cultural gaps that can arise when they're raised in families unfamiliar with their heritage. While not all adoptees report challenges, many say this disconnection has led to struggles in forming an identity, maintaining a positive self-image and finding a sense of belonging.

A [2009 study](#) by Gina Miranda Samuels, researcher and professor at the University of Chicago's Crown Family School of Social Work, documented the experiences of multiracial adults adopted by white parents. In it, she found many adoptees struggled to understand their racial identity in a society that saw them as different, and in families that often didn't know how to help.

"I'm definitely a little bit nervous when I meet Black people," said Justine, one of the adoptees interviewed for Samuels' study. "It makes me feel like I'm a traitor, like somebody might think I'm a traitor,"

For one [anonymous South Korean](#) adoptee, growing up in the San Francisco Bay Area brought exposure to Asian culture, but not their own. Their family frequently encountered Filipino and Chinese traditions, but they were never introduced to Korean culture.

"I've done a lot of work and know now that this exposure just deepened my impostor syndrome," they wrote in a BuzzFeed community forum. "I was clearly not white like my family, but was also not Filipino or Chinese."

On the surface, [Emma Rady](#) had a different experience. Adopted from China and raised in Indiana, Rady's parents tried connecting her with her ethnic roots—enrolling her in Chinese dance classes, teaching her Mandarin and taking her on trips to China. Despite their efforts, she still faced struggles with her identity.

"I had an internal hatred for being Asian and for looking this way when I was surrounded by my white family," Rady said in the same story.

These stories reflect what adoption professionals have long emphasized: intentional cultural integration must go beyond symbolic gestures.

"Racial identity development is complex and relational." [Samuels said](#). "Parents must be proactive in charting possible pathways for a diversity of experiences to occur naturally and emerge across your child's life course in a host of racial-ethnic communities."

In response, some adoptive parents are seeking support through racial literacy programs and adoptee-led workshops. Others are turning to culture camps or mentorship groups for guidance.

Still, for many adoptees, the search for identity remains deeply personal, rooted not only in family but in the broader social landscape where race and belonging are closely intertwined.

"As much as I love my family," said Rady, "I had to find myself outside of them."