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Beneath the Beauty: A Mixed Method Approach to Examining
Identity Negotiation Among Asian Transracial Adoptees

A Dissertation by

Noel H. McGuire

Chapman University

Orange, CA

School of Communication

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Communication Studies

Media and Communication Technology

May 2024

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April 2024

Beneath the Beauty: A Mixed Method Approach to Examining Identity
Negotiation Among Asian Transracial Adoptees

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Without the support, kindness, and dedication of those around me, I would not have been able to complete this program or become the person I am today. As such, I would like to take the time to express my deepest gratitude to my advisors, committee members, family, and friends.

To Dr. Sophie Janicke-Bowles. Thank you for supporting me during both my master's and Ph.D. here at Chapman. Amidst the craziness of the COVID-19 pandemic and chaos of online learning, you kept me grounded and helped me discover a line of research that I became passionate about. And, you have modeled for me what it means to have both a successful career and a full life, for which I am deeply appreciative of.

To Dr. Vikki Katz. Words will never truly capture how much you have made an impact on my journey. The only thing that surpasses your sheer brilliance is your kindness (and perhaps your generosity and unwavering patience). From the moment I met you, you have inspired me to not only become a great researcher, but to become a whole human being. Your approach to research and mentorship is truly one of wonders and I cannot tell you how much I admire you. You saw something in me that I had never been able to see in myself and have truly gone above and beyond for me in so many ways. I am so grateful for all the time and effort you have devoted to advancing my skill in research methods and for looking after me. I would also like to thank (and apologize to) Dan, Simon, Theo, and Stella Bella who never signed up for any of this but were welcoming and gracious all the same. Thank you all for providing me with a multitude of "best days ever."

To Dr. Megan Vendemia. I have said it before, and I will say it again: your advanced quantitative methods final exam is the best headache I have ever had. I am eternally grateful for not just the skills you have taught me, but for the friendship you have given me over the years. Your dedication to building my self-confidence and teaching me the ropes of conferencing are

things I am deeply grateful for. I will cherish the memories we share from ICA Toronto for the rest of my life and hope to end up on the same coast one day.

To Dr. Jody Koenig Kellas. The guest lecture you gave in our graduate family communication course was truly life changing. Prior to meeting you, I had no idea what I wanted to do for my dissertation. Your passion for storytelling is utterly contagious. Thank you for being such an inspiration to me and all the future scholars looking to tell their side of the story.

To (now) Drs. Arielle Leonard Hodges and Cailin Kuckenbecker: my Cohortesses. The long work sessions, co-rumination, and abundance of self-deprecating humor we have shared together over the last three years kept me afloat. Thank you for being two of the most supportive friends and colleagues I have ever had. I am honored to have met and grown alongside you two.

To my family. I owe you everything. Mom and Dad, you have made so many sacrifices for me to be where I am today. Thank you for the life you have given me and for the endless love you hold for me. Mali, you are the inspiration for my dissertation. Though our adoption journeys have not been the same, growing up with you has deeply influenced the way I see and make sense of my life and for this I am extremely grateful. Maarten, my chosen family. You have truly weathered the brunt of this storm and I could not have done this without you. Thank you for being the gentle giant that you are and for loving and supporting me even when I made it very difficult to.

And finally, to my birth parents, wherever you may be. I wish that I could tell you that I am thinking of you. Not in wonderment of your names, where you are, or what you look like. But I think of you because I want to thank you. You put yourself through the pain of carrying me to term, knowing that there was little to no chance of a future together. To do this requires an incredible amount of strength, selflessness, and love. You did not have to. And yet, you did. On the days you sit and wonder if your little girl is okay, know that I have a wonderful life because of

the unimaginable decision you were forced to make. Know that though we were unable to remain together physically, we will always be under the same sky. Know that I understand, and I forgive you. We do not know each other, but I love you just the same.

Chapman University School of Communication: Thank you for an incredible seven years.

Paws up!

ABSTRACT

Beneath the Beauty of Adoption: A Mixed Method Approach to Examining Identity Negotiation

Among Asian Transracial Adoptees

by Noel H. McGuire

Making sense of one's identity is an integral part of the human experience. This study examines identity negotiation and sense-making processes among individuals who have particularly complex identities: Asian transracial adoptees. In the past six decades, more than 280,000 infants and children in Asian countries were abandoned or surrendered to social welfare institutes and were subsequently adopted by American families, making Asian transracial adoptees (ATRA) a substantial, if frequently overlooked, proportion of the Asian American community. Prior research indicates that identity negotiation is a particularly daunting task for this demographic due to ever-present paradoxical feelings toward their identity, as they are phenotypically of one race but are raised within families and cultures of another.

This study takes an adoptee-centered approach to examining the struggle and resilience of the ATRA diaspora by efficacy testing a brief intervention, to demonstrate how media narratives can positively impact ATRA self-concept and self-esteem. Guided by the meaning-making model and communicated narrative sense-making theory (CNSM), this study uses a three-phase exploratory, sequential, and mixed-method design. Phase 1 used a secondary data analysis of in-depth, qualitative interviews with ATRA ($n = 14$) to understand what stories about adoption they wished the media were telling. This phase laid an ATRA-centered basis for the intervention. Results indicated that participants wanted to see media narratives about adoption that are: (1) created by adoptees, (2) portray the complexities of transracial adoption, and (3) normalize the adoptee identity. Building on these findings, Phase 2 participants ($n = 90$) stimulus-tested two

media narratives that fit ATRAs' aforementioned criteria. Phase 3 efficacy tested the brief intervention. Participants ($n = 66$) were randomly assigned to an experimental group (i.e., viewing the media narrative and engaging in discussion) or a comparison group (i.e., only viewed the media narrative). Results indicated that although the brief intervention did not significantly increase ATRA well-being in the experimental condition, participants' qualitative reports demonstrate benefits to well-being from partaking in the experiment. The theory-driven approach for developing and testing this mediated intervention contributes to, and extends, literature on the importance of positive media portrayals for individuals in marginalized communities.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<u>Abbreviation</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
ATRA	Asian transracial adoption
ATRA's	Asian transracial adoptees
CNSM	Communicated narrative sense-making
ISM	Interactional sense-making
TRAP	Transracial adoptee paradox

1 Introduction

My dad always said to me that the best winemakers create the best wine from taking the roots of one variety of grapes and grafting it on to another. And doing this, they form this new variety that can grow, and he was always like “That's just like you! The [name] family roots were there, and then, me and my sister, the two Asians, got grafted onto it. So we're, like, growing something new (Sophia, Chinese transracial adoptee).

Sophia is one of the more than 280,000 Asian transracial adoptees (ATRA) who were adopted by U.S. families after being abandoned or surrendered by their birth families. She shared her story with me while I was conducting pilot research, using in-depth qualitative interviews to investigate how ATRA have come to understand and assign meaning to their identity as an adoptee. The carefully crafted metaphor Sophia's father created for her serves not only as a testimony to how ATRA navigate identity construction processes, as they grow up visually and culturally distinct from their family members, but it also highlights the great lengths that adoptive parents go to in order to paint adoption in a positive light for their children. Sophia, and several other ATRA I have had the privilege of speaking to, serve as the inspiration for this study, which takes an adoptee-centered approach to examining the influence of narratives on ATRA identity negotiation and well-being.

Asian adoptees make up a sizable portion of the Asian American community, and the burgeoning number of transracially adopted children in the U.S (Valby, n.d.). Approximately 200,000 Korean adoptees have been brought to the United States since 1953 (Bucholz, 2020). It is estimated that 110,000 of these children were adopted between 1955 and 2001, making up approximately 10% of the Korean American population in the early 2000s (Lee, 2003).

Additionally, due to government mandated birth-planning policies in China that limited most

families to one child, it is estimated that 85,000 Chinese adoptees (mostly girls) have been brought into the country since the 1990s (Johnson, 2016). As a result, children adopted from China were reported to have made up 15% of the annual number of legal Chinese immigrants in the U.S. in 2004 (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2005). “Operation babylift,” set forth by former President Gerald Ford as an intended act of humanitarianism after the Vietnam War, also caused a dramatic increase in the number of Asian adoptees brought to the U.S., bringing approximately 2,500 adoptees from South Vietnam within the mere span of four weeks (Haulman, 2018; NBCUniversal News Group, 2014; Sharpe, 2015).

A majority of these internationally adopted children were placed in White American families across the country, which meant growing up surrounded by people who do not look like them. Due to the evident physical and cultural distinctions between adoptees and their adoptive families, ATRAs must work harder than non-adopted, and non-transracially adopted, individuals in order to make sense of their identity (Laybourn, 2017). To complicate the process further, the frames through which non-adopted individuals discuss and portray adoption dramatically oppose narratives shared by adoptive family members (e.g., Baxter et al., 2014; Kranstuber & Koenig Kellas, 2011). Given that ATRAs are reliant on both family and non-family narratives to negotiate and make sense of their adoptive identity (Grotevant et al., 2000), the iterative push and pull of navigating contradicting narratives about adoption gives rise to feelings of displacement and racial and cultural insecurity (Lee, 2003).

Numerous past studies have established a positive relationship between identity and psychological well-being (e.g., Merrill et al., 2015). However, for adoptees, empirical evidence reveals mixed results. Some scholars investigating adoptee psychological well-being in comparison to non-adopted individuals have found that adoptees report significantly worse

depression, anxiety, self-esteem, and self-concept (e.g., Melero & Sánchez-Sandovol, 2017). Findings from other studies indicate no significant differences between international, transracial, and domestic adoptees across the same dimensions (Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2007). These inconsistent findings suggest that although adoptees face additional barriers to identity development, they can do so in ways that result in comparable levels of psychological well-being to their non-adopted counterparts (Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2007; Kim, 1978). This study explores the variation in ATRA reports of well-being by designing and efficacy testing a media-based, adoptee-centered brief intervention, aimed at identifying how positively framed narratives and communication with others in the adoptee community can be leveraged to increase ATRAs' well-being.

1.1 About the Scholar

The researcher's identity and life experience plays an influential role in the data that emerges from the studies they conduct, especially when engaging in qualitative research (Tracy, 2019). Given that the proposed research utilizes a mixed method design, it would be remiss not to include a brief overview of myself in relation to why Asian transracial adoption was selected as the lens through which I explore identity negotiation processes. This brief written reflection is one of many steps I have taken, and continue to take, as an exercise of self-reflexivity to ensure that my insider position to this community serves as an advantage, not a bias (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022).

In September of 1998, I was adopted from the Yangchun Social Welfare Institute in southwestern China. As was typical with international adoptions during the time of my adoption, my adoption was a closed case and thus, I have no information about my birth family nor any insight into why I was placed for adoption. The only information I hold is that I was discovered

outside the gates of the institute and that my birth parents were nowhere to be found. Though ample scholarship supports the idea that I was placed for adoption as a result of China's one-child policy (Salchi, 2023), it is likely that I will never know the reason I was surrendered. While at times this brings me heartache, I have grown to accept and appreciate the uncertainty that comes as the trade-off for being given a chance at life.

I was fortunate to have grown up in a mixed culture family in the San Francisco Bay Area; a vibrant section of northern California with ample opportunities to engage in and with diverse cultures. My adoptive mother and father identify as Japanese American and White American, respectively. Though classified as a transracial adoptee (Castner & Foli, 2022), I was able to connect with the broader Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community through my mother's Japanese heritage. Though it was not my "own" culture, I believe the support I received from the Japanese American community played an influential role in the way I was able to cope with my adoptive identity.

I was also provided with ample support from my family to connect with my adoptive identity. For example, the Mid-Autumn Moon Festival holds special importance in Chinese tradition, as it symbolizes a time to gather with family and loved ones to connect and share stories under the beauty of the full harvest moon. Each year, my family and I would travel to a scenic lookout to celebrate this holiday. We did so not only to spend time with one another, but also to provide me and my non-biological sister (who is also a Chinese adoptee) the opportunity to talk to our birth parents. I recall many crisp fall nights, wrapped up in mismatched blankets, sitting on the cold asphalt just gazing up at the moon and feeling this unspoken understanding that my birth parents are somewhere out there. We were sitting under the same moon and perhaps, just maybe, they were thinking of me too.

I provide these details in recognition that my story is not representative of the lived experiences of many other ATRAs. A vast majority of internationally adopted children are raised by White American families and often lack the resources and support needed to adapt to those environments (Gross, 2022). I believe I hold a unique position of privilege to not only have been adopted by a wonderful, loving family, but to also have been raised under circumstances that allowed me the freedom to truly explore and connect with a part of myself that is not readily accepted or encouraged by many adoptive parents. Even further, the simple fact that I was raised in a half-Asian household with a Chinese adoptee sister allowed me the privilege of “passing” rather than having no choice but to disclose my adoptive status (which admittedly, I previously have and occasionally still do).

Though I have certainly had my share of adoption-related challenges throughout my life, I was wary of equating my personal story with those who have experienced adoption differently from me. At each step of the dissertation process, I held myself accountable to ensuring that the study is representative of participant adoptees’ perspectives, not my own. Appendix A provides a summary of the self-reflexive practices I engaged in throughout the research process and provides a window into the personal vulnerabilities, difficulties, and growth I experienced as a result of investigating a community with whom I so closely identify.

2 Literature Review

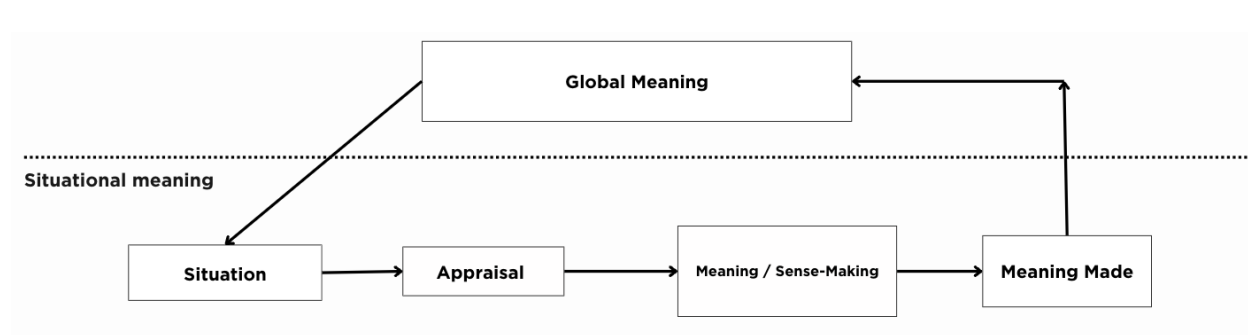
2.1 Meaning-Making and Identity Construction

All individuals have natural, innate, and constructive tendencies to develop an ever more elaborated and unified sense of self...People have a primary propensity to forge interconnections among aspects of their own psyches as well as with other individuals and groups in their social worlds (Deci & Ryan, 2002, p. 5).

As captured by Deci and Ryan (2002), human development centers around meaning-making, which influences the way individuals' make sense of their identity. Though several theories and models seek to explain the relationship between meaning-making and identity development processes, Park and Folkman's meaning-making model (Park & Folkman, 1997; Park, 2010) has been used by scholars studying how these two processes interact with one another in times of difficulty because it specifies how meaning-making as a *construct* differs from meaning-making as a *process*.

According to the meaning-making model, meaning systems function well when "individuals feel that the world and their place in it are comprehensible" (Park, 2017, p. 15). As captured in Figure 1, there are two related but distinct levels of meaning: global and situational.

Figure 2-1: Adapted Model from Park (2010)



Global meaning refers to meaning-making as a broad orientation system, composed of beliefs, goals, and feelings. According to the model, a person's global meaning serves as the basis for how they filter and experience the world (Park, 2010). In contrast, *situational meaning* is said to begin "with the occurrence of a potentially stressful event" (Park, 2010, p. 258) and captures meaning-making as a process within that event, by describing how people (a) appraise information based on their global meaning systems, (b) determine if there are discrepancies between appraised and global meanings, and (c) create or confirm meaning based on the evaluation of the event (Park, 2010). These levels of meaning operate as a meaning system, through which individuals are able to iteratively make sense of both themselves and the world around them.

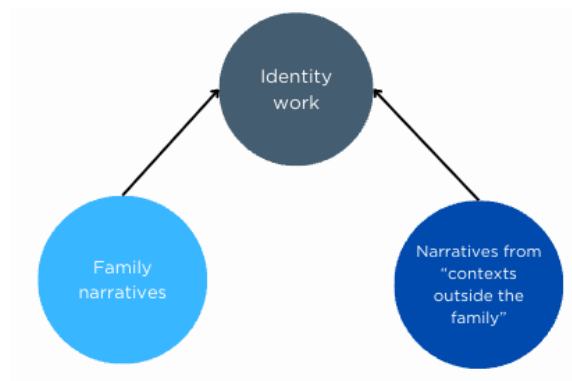
For example, an adoptee may hold feelings that adoption is beneficial for both adoptive parents and adoptees – serving as their global meaning about adoption. This global meaning draws on beliefs that being adopted not only provided their adoptive parents the opportunity to have a child and has given them opportunities as an adoptee that they would not have had if they were not adopted. These feelings and beliefs intertwine to create the adoptee's global meaning about adoption. When this adoptee has adoption-related conversations (e.g., ongoing debates about the risks of transracial adoption; Gross, 2022), they will be predisposed to evaluate and engage in that discussion (i.e., to draw situational meanings) believing that adoption is good, even in the face of challenging evidence.

2.2 Transracial Adoptee Identity Construction

While every individual's identity construction, negotiation, and sense-making processes are unique and complex, prior research indicates Asian transracial adoptees (ATRA) experience additional, unique challenges.

Though many scholars debate the morality of both transnational and transracial adoption, it is universally acknowledged that transracial adoptees experience a unique struggle to negotiate and understand who they, because they have been raised in families from whom they are distinct in terms of racial or ethnic phenotypic markers (Grotevant et al., 2000). These physical differences make adoptees reliant on verbal negotiation and the sharing of stories to not only gain information about how and why they were adopted, but to also legitimize and defend their position in their families even though they are not biologically related (Hays et al., 2016; Kranstuber & Koenig Kellas, 2011). Kellas and Horstman's (2015) model of communicated sense-making (CSM) provides an overarching framework for describing the integral role narratives play in individuals' CSM processes. Narratives are conceptualized as "the central sense-making function of storytelling" (Koenig Kellas et al., 2020). Prior research confirms that, given the inherent complexities of adoptee identity negotiation, adoptees are dependent on the exchange of narratives as means to "create, interpret, and solidify meanings about their [adoptive] experiences and identity" (Hays et al., 2016, p. 918). Thus, the current study takes a communicated narrative sense-making (CNSM) approach to understanding the way in which ATRAs construct meaning and make sense of their identity. Figure 1 shows that adoptees construct and iteratively negotiate their adoptive identity based on stories received from both family members and "contexts outside the family" (Grotevant et al., 2000, p. 384). The following sections provide detail on each of these essential sources of narrative material for their identity work.

Figure 2-2: Sources of Adoptee Identity Negotiation



2.2.1 Family Narratives about Adoption

Family stories about adoption heavily influence the way ATRAs construct and negotiate their adoptive identity (Grotevant et al., 2000). Specifically, many ATRAs depend on CNSM to make sense of “what it means to be adopted, why they were placed for adoption, and where they fit into their adoptive families” (Kranstuber & Koenig Kellas, 2011, p. 180). For example, findings from Von Kroff and Grotevant’s (2011) examination of adoptive family discourse and adoptive identity construction suggest that dialogue about adoption between adoptive parents and their adoptive children is positively related to the development of adoptive identity.

As such, adoptee identity theorizing posits that, when adoptees engage in parent-child conversations about adoption, adoptees are afforded the opportunity to “learn the conventionalized narrative forms that eventually provide a structure” (Fivush & Reese, 1992, p. 115) for the way they view themselves and their adoption. Additional studies show that adoption entrance narratives help “manage uncertainties adopted children face about the details and meaning of their adoptions” (Baxter et al., 2014, p. 255) and function as an aid to negotiate a sense of belonging. Adoptive family stories are most often positively framed (Chatham-Carpenter, 2012), which is not necessarily true of stories about adoption told by individuals outside of the adoptive family.

2.2.2 Societal Narratives about Adoption

Broadly conceptualized as “contexts outside the family” (Grotevant et al., 2000, p. 384), adoptee identity construction literature asserts that adoptees’ self-concept is heavily influenced by narratives received from sources beyond their adoptive family members (i.e., narratives received from friends, colleagues, the media, the government). Later in this review, I will argue for the need to treat the effects of narratives via interpersonal channels as distinct from those in the media. Evidence from Nelson’s (2020) review of adoption-related discourse, policies, and practices from the 19th and 20th centuries clearly demonstrates that societal narratives about adoption have a longstanding association with secrecy, illegitimacy, and being a “second best” option for starting a family. For decades, dominant narratives about adoption have described adoptees as “desperate and in need of being rescued from their dire circumstances” (King, 2009, p. 162). These widespread narratives about adoption have caused the adoptee identity to become heavily stigmatized, often leading to charges of microaggressions against adoptees (e.g., overly intrusive questions, negative assertions about birth parents; Kim, 2022).

Blair and Liu’s (2019) examination of how Chinese TRAs negotiate their bicultural identities provides insight into how ATRAs engage in self-defensive behaviors when confronted about their identity. For example, instead of waiting for others to accuse her of being “not [a] real Chinese,” Sophia would make it a point to refer to herself in that way, stating “you can’t say it because I’m saying it first” (Blair & Liu, 2019, pp. 356-357). Penelope also reflected on her experience at a Chinese camp she attended, noting that she “just really didn’t fit in with the Chinese kids there...they kind of excluded me, but I had my own group of friends who were more Americanized” (Blair & Liu, 2019, p. 355). These accounts demonstrate the common occurrence of situations where ATRAs must simultaneously make sense of and defend their

identity, but also reveal a shared sense of difficulty and pain felt among members of the ATRA community.

2.2.3 Making Sense of the Adoptive Identity

Continually receiving juxtaposed narratives places ATRAs in a unique position where they need to simultaneously negotiate and defend their identity. How adoptees navigate and make sense of these competing narratives is regarded by scholars as a highly personal cognitive and affective processes (Grotevant et al., 2000). This iterative narrative sense-making process whereby ATRAs are constantly negotiating and defending their identity is summarized by what scholars call the transracial adoptee paradox (TRAP; Lee, 2003).

The TRAP synthesizes transracial adoptees' ever-present feeling of displacement (Lee, 2003); feeling like an outsider because of their apparent physical dissimilarities with adoptive family members (Arnold et al., 2016) while also feeling inadequately connected to their cultures of origin. While the previous section illuminated how ATRAs are placed in uncomfortable situations due to microaggressions received from people outside their family, it is important to acknowledge that adoptive family members, specifically adoptive parents, often ignite TRAP stressors as well.

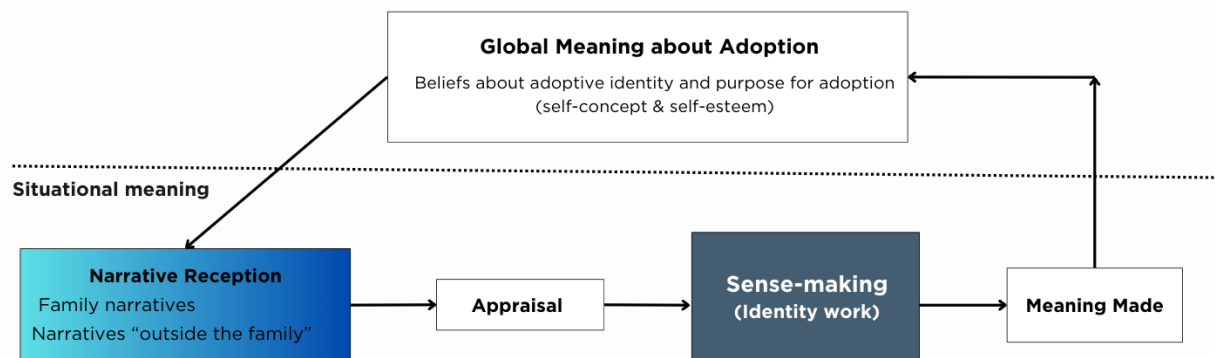
Although adoptive parents are aware of stigmatized perceptions of adoption and do their best to circumvent the development of negative perceptions of adoption (Chatham-Carpenter, 2012), ATRAs often report feeling “a unique burden” (Chung, 2021, para. 7) associated with identity construction and negotiation which their adoptive parents are ill equipped to manage. For example, when talking to NPR reporters about how she has tried to make sense of the increase of anti-Asian violence since the COVID-19 pandemic, Korean adoptee Lacey stated “[my adoptive parents] still don't understand what it means to be another race...and that's the big

difference when you have white people raising other races" (Westerman, 2021, para. 15). ATRA Theresa echoed this lack of understanding stating that:

I expressed this fear [of being assaulted], and my dad was like ‘Bullshit, it won’t happen to you’ And I was like, “Why? Why do you think that?” And he goes, “Because you’re White.” And I was like, “I’m not.” And it took him a long time to really process the fact that people don’t see me as they [my parents] see me.

Lacey and Theresa’s testimonies illustrate the challenges ATRAs face when negotiating their identity; an experience of concurrently constructing and defending their self-concept to family and non-family members alike. In Figure 3, I present a heuristic model I developed to illustrate the iterative and cyclical nature of how ATRAs work to negotiate and defend their identity, as Lacey and Theresa did in the examples above.

Figure 2-3: Adoptee Identity Negotiation



The model combines the meaning-making model (Park & Folkman, 1997) with the adoptee identity construction and negotiation processes that have been previously discussed. As shown in the model, ATRAs’ *global meaning about adoption* is defined as adoptees’ beliefs about their adoptive identity and how they have made sense of why they were adopted. In other words, it encompasses ATRAs self-concept and self-esteem as it relates to their adoptive identity. Throughout the course of their life, ATRAs assess and reassess their global meaning

about adoption by negotiating how narratives received from family and non-family members either do or do not align with their established beliefs about their adoptive identity (Park, 2010).

According to the heuristic model, ATRAs iterative meaning-making process begins with *narrative reception*, which describes an event when ATRAs are exposed to adoption narratives told by family and non-family members. Following the exposure to the narrative, ATRAs then move to the second stage of *appraisal*. During this stage, ATRAs evaluate the narrative they are hearing as it pertains to their existing beliefs and thoughts about adoption. It is important to note that this heuristic model has adapted Park and Folkman's (1997) meaning-making model to omit distress as a consideration for meaning-making. While the original model proposes that individuals only partake in meaning/sense-making evaluations if feelings of distress are present (Park, 2010), this heuristic model follows Possler et al. (2022) in arguing that cognitive elaboration occurs in the meaning-making process regardless of whether or not ATRAs experience distress. After appraising the narrative received, ATRAs engage in the third, most vital step of the process: *identity work*. Here, ATRAs negotiate and evaluate how the narrative they heard fits or does not fit into the way they view themselves and their own adoption. Once this step is complete, ATRAs have entered the fourth and final step of *meaning made*, where they solidify their new understanding of their adoptive identity and renovate their global meaning about adoption accordingly.

In recent years, scholars across disciplines, including positive psychology (e.g., Vanaken, 2022), clinical psychology (e.g., McLean et al., 2020), and health communication (e.g., Lee et al., 2006; Gan et al., 2018) have taken an interest in understanding how identity and narrative sense-making processes impact human development and subsequent well-being outcomes, such as self-esteem and self-concept (e.g., Häuser et al., 2020; Syed et al., 2013; Weinhardt et al.,

2021). Koenig Kellas's (2018) communicated narrative sense-making (CNSM) theory synthesizes these bodies of literature by linking storytelling content and processes to individual and relational well-being (Koenig Kellas, 2018). More specifically, the theory explicates three heuristics – and seven propositions – to describe how CNSM directly impacts ones' sense-making, health, and well-being.

According to the first two heuristics of CNSM theory (i.e., retrospective and interactional storytelling; Koenig Kellas, 2018), the stories we hear and tell – and the process through which we (re)tell these stories – simultaneously illuminate and influence the way in which we make sense of ourselves and the world around us. While scholars have investigated the intersection of narrative content and sense-making processes (e.g., Barney & Yoshimura, 2021; Koenig Kellas et al., 2022; Taladay & Koenig Kellas, 2022) as well as how storytelling processes impact well-being (e.g., Horstman et al., 2016; Koenig Kellas et al., 2021), less attention has been paid to examinations of how narrative sense-making can be used as a tool to positively impact well-being.

According to CNSM theory's translational storytelling heuristic, “narrative methods, empirical results, and theorizing can be used to create interventions and that these interventions predict health and well-being among participants across a variety of contexts” (Koenig Kellas, 2018, p. 67). More specifically, the sixth proposition of CNSM theory builds on prior health research interventions such as the Keepin' it REAL drug resistance program (Hecht & Miller-Day, 2007) and COMFORT program (Goldsmith et al., 2015), by asserting that interventions which facilitate “narrative reflection and sense-making [can] benefit participants in the context of difficulty...and/or stress” (Koenig Kellas, 2018, p. 69). Though direct tests of this proposition to date have been relatively limited, a burgeoning body of literature provides support for its

assertion. For example, Koenig Kellas and colleagues' (2020) narrative-based workshop case study found that providing struggling parents with the opportunity to narratively share and discuss their challenges with similar others led to reports of increased feelings of self-awareness, understanding, and validation – all of which were characterized as perceived benefits of having participated in the narrative intervention.

This study will extend investigations of CNSM theory's translational storytelling heuristic by testing by designing and efficacy testing an intervention that promotes narrative reflection and sense-making among ATRAs as they experience the difficulty and stress associated with adoptee identity sense-making.

2.3 ATRA Well-Being

Research examining adoptee psychological well-being often receives mixed results. Some research suggests that adoptees are prone to developing adverse health and psychological well-being outcomes. For example, Melero and Sánchez-Sandoval's (2017) systematic review found that adoptees demonstrate lower scores of self-esteem, self-concept, and moral approval, and also higher scores of depression and anxiety. Many similar findings were also reported in Corral et al.'s (2021) meta-analytic review of adoptee psychological adjustment.

However, other studies directly contradict these findings, reporting no psychological or behavioral differences between adopted and non-adopted individuals. For example, Juffer & van IJzendoorn's (2007) meta-analytic review of literature examining adoptee self-esteem found no differences between adoptees and non-adopted individual's self-esteem. Interestingly, their findings held true across all comparisons of international, domestic, and transracial adoptees. Similarly, and contrary to past literature, results from Rojewski et al. (2000) found that adoptees from China do not display behavioral problems beyond clinical significance. Scholarship has

found this to be true of Korean adoptees as well, with results from Kim's (1978) longitudinal study of adoptees indicating no display of serious mental health problems.

These historically inconclusive findings indicate that, though it is undeniable that ATRAs face additional barriers to identity construction, it is likely there are external factors working to help or hinder ATRA's psychological well-being. Findings such as Juffer & IJzendoorn's (2007) demonstrate the potential for ATRA resiliency. In fact, results from Askeland et al.'s (2015) comparison of resiliency and mental health among internationally adopted and non-adopted individuals indicate no differences between these two groups, suggesting that when adoptees are afforded the proper resources and support, they can overcome identity distress and report normative psychological well-being. Paniagua et al.'s (2022) investigation of the association between adoption and bullying also provide support for the idea that adoption status alone does not lead to decreased reports of well-being, finding that circumstances surrounding individuals' adoption case (i.e., reason for adoption) and environment in which they were raised is what places adoptees at greater risk for negative outcomes.

The lack of clear associations between adoption status and well-being suggests that adoptees' outcomes exist along a continuum of positive and negative adjustment, underscoring the importance of identifying reasons why some adoptees experience better outcomes than others.

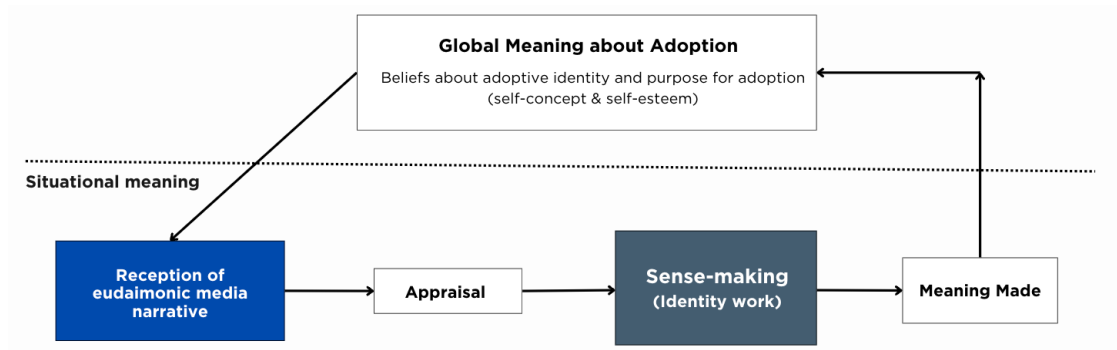
One reason outcomes vary so much may be attributed to the overly broad way in which scholars have approached adoptee identity negotiation. For example, current adoptee identity theorizing examines narratives received "outside the family" as one, overarching frame. This means that stories received from interpersonal relationships with friends, strangers on social

media channels, and mass media narratives about adoption are being treated as one and the same. Decades of computer mediated communication and mass media effects scholarship indicate that this is a severely flawed approach to understanding identity negotiation and meaning-making processes.

2.3.1 Making Sense of Media Narratives

According to the dual-process model of media enjoyment and appreciation, media content can be delineated into two distinct categories: *hedonic* media is that which promotes enjoyment and pleasure among viewers (Jang et al., 2019), whereas *eudaimonic* media facilitate “reflections on life purpose, potential, virtue, and meaning” (Dale et al., 2017). Although ample scholarship indicates hedonic media experiences have beneficial effects on viewers well-being by satisfying the basic human need for play (Vorderer, 2001), the current study investigates eudaimonic media as a prompt and mechanism for facilitating ATRA sense-making due to its inherent connection to meaning making and cognitive elaboration (Bartsch, 2012), as indicated in the Figure 4 version of the heuristic model.

Figure 2-4: Media Narratives as Prompts for ATRA Identity Work and Meaning-Making



According to positive media scholarship, there are two dimensions of eudaimonic media. Firstly, the *affective dimension* captures viewers’ experience of mixed affect (i.e., simultaneously experiencing positive and negatively valenced emotions; Oliver & Raney, 2012) while watching

media entertainment. Common examples from the literature include feeling moved, touched, elevated, inspired, or in awe (Janicke-Bowles & McGuire, in press). Mixed affective experiences are said to promote healthy coping and can “facilitate sense-making processes during stressful situations” (Berrios et al., 2017, p. 843; Larsen et al., 2003). For example, Prestin (2013) found that individuals who viewed media clips centered around underdog storylines reported increased levels of optimism and greater motivation to overcome their own challenges by pursuing their own goals compared to those participants who did not watch the hope-inducing stimulus.

Findings from Meier et al. (2020) also support a positive relationship between eudaimonic media experiences and well-being such that results from their experiment indicate a positive relationship between viewing media perceived as inspiring and self-actualization and life satisfaction. Additionally, and specific to the current study examining how Asians experience mixed affect, Miyamoto and Ryff (2010) found that Japanese individuals who reported higher rates of both positive and negative emotions also reported greater well-being, thus suggesting that the ATRA population could benefit from engaging in a eudaimonic media experience.

The *cognitive dimension* of the eudaimonic media experience is equally important to consider within the scope of the current study as it captures how viewers reflect on and derive meaning from their own life experiences as a result of being exposed to eudaimonic media (e.g., Wulf et al., 2018). For example, results from Bartsch et al. (2014) found that individuals who view moving media narratives were more likely to report reflective thoughts compared to those who did not view moving media narratives.

Scholars argue that the combined affective and cognitive response states which are elicited from eudaimonic media experiences can be beneficial for promoting positive psychological well-being outcomes. For example, Rieger et al. (2014) examined the relationship

between media-induced recovery and various media types and found that, after watching a meaningful movie clip, viewers' reported a positive learning experience which resulted in reports of media-induced recovery. Findings from Ott et al. (2021) also support the notion that eudaimonic media narratives can be used to facilitate well-being with results showing that individuals who viewed more eudaimonic films reported not only an increased ability to make sense of difficulties and accept the human condition compared to those who viewed less eudaimonic content, but they also reported higher motivation to overcome their own challenges by pursuing their own goals.

Due to the wide array of narratives about adoption disseminated by mainstream media, it is important to ensure the media narrative selected resonates with ATRAs. Scholarship that examines the intersection of media and adoption predominantly focuses on describing the content of adoption narratives portrayed in mass media (e.g., Herman-Gallow, 2019; Kirton, 2019; Kline et al., 2006; Waggenpack, 2008). Herman-Gallow's (2019) analysis of films about adoption indicates that stereotypical and dramatized depictions of adoption continue to perpetuate mainstream media. For example, findings indicated that the visual media narratives "Lion" (2016), "Twinsters" (2015), and "Instant Family" (2018) all promoted the idea of adoption involving "being lost and then found" (p. 23). The promotion of this particular theme regarding reunification may be especially harmful for ATRAs, given that the chances for finding biological family members are near zero (Kalb, 2022). Encountering media narratives about adoption places ATRAs in a unique position where they are afforded the opportunity to engage in identity work in a way interpersonal communication does not allow, yet there is little prior research examining media narratives about adoption from the adoptee perspective. As such, it is important to identify (a) what media narratives about adoption ATRAs would like to see and (b)

ensure the media stimulus selected for the proposed brief intervention reflects the desires of ATRAs.

Guided by decades of media effects scholarship which indicates that identification (e.g., Lim et al. 2020), realism (e.g., Busselle & Vierrether, 2022), and similarity (e.g., Guerro-Martín & Igartua, 2021) impact audience interpretations of media narratives, I selected these variables as criteria for evaluating whether video stimuli suit the needs specified. Thus, I ask the following research questions:

RQ1: What narratives about adoption do ATRAs wish were being shared in the media?

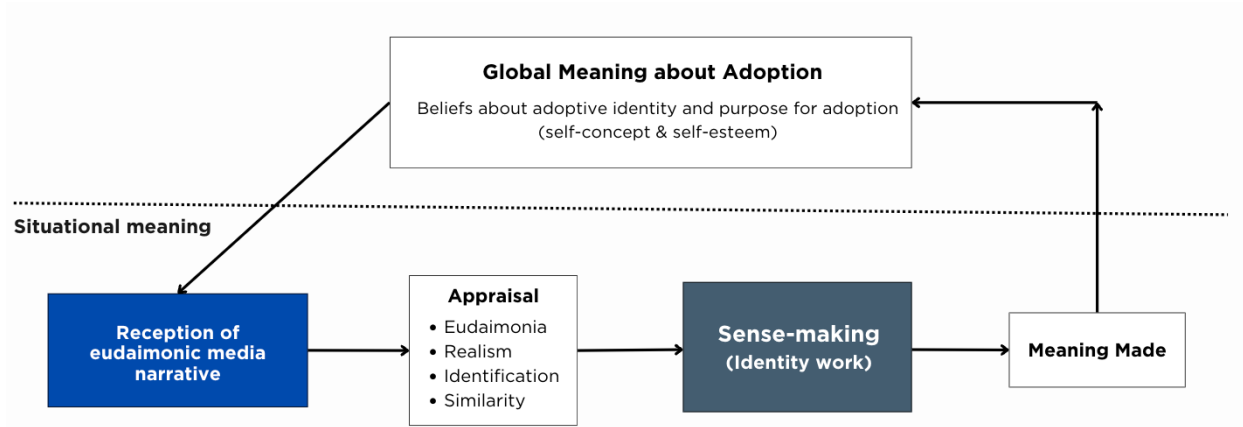
RQ2: Do ATRAs report significantly higher (a) identification, (b) realism, (c) similarity, (d) eudaimonia, and/or (e) identity work when watching media stimulus one or two?

Based on ATRAs' reports of desired media narratives about adoption, this study then directly tests CNSM theory's sixth proposition, which states that "interventions that promote narrative reflection and sense-making benefit participants in the context of difficulty...and/or stress" (Koenig Kellas, 2018, p. 69) via the following hypotheses:

H1: Regardless of condition, ATRAs will report a statistically significant increase (a) self-esteem and (b) self-concept at after the intervention (Time 2).

H2: Regardless of condition, ATRAs who report higher rates of realism, identification, and similarity with the media narrative will also report higher rates of (a) self-esteem and (b) self-concept.

Figure 2-5: ATRA Meaning-Making Process Being Tested



2.4 Examining ATRA Identity Work via Interactional Storytelling

In addition to testing CNSM theory’s sixth proposition, this study also investigates the interactional storytelling heuristic by testing its two propositions related to interactional sense-making (ISM) behaviors in the context of ATRA identity negotiation. In alignment with previous CNSM literature, the current proposal uses two terms: joint storytelling and collaborative storytelling, to describe the process through which individuals interact with one another to share and discuss story content.

The interactional storytelling heuristic of CNSM theory centers around joint storytelling and focuses “explicitly on the communicative processes that characterizes storytelling” (Koenig Kellas, 2018, p. 66). At the heart of this heuristic is the idea that higher levels of ISM predict higher levels of (a) narrative sense-making (the third proposition of the theory) and (b) individual well-being (the fourth proposition of the theory). Though originally proposed in the context of how ISM can function as a mechanism for facilitating positive well-being among family members, I argue the joint storytelling can also be utilized to promote well-being via storytelling among ATRAs, in relation to making sense of messages received from media narratives about adoption.

According to CNSM theory's interactional storytelling heuristic, ISM can be operationalized via four behaviors. Firstly, *engagement* is conceptualized across two dimensions: *interaction* is the extent to which individuals verbally contribute to the conversation and *warmth* is the degree to which participants display both verbal and nonverbal demonstrations of affection and positive affect. *Turn-taking* is the degree to which individuals in the interaction engage in dynamic conversation (i.e., alternating through conversation; Kranstuber Horstman, 2018). The third behavior is that of *perspective-taking* which is the degree to which individuals acknowledge and confirm the others' views. Lastly, *coherence* is understood as the degree to which the story being told contains a logical sequence and flow. Together, these four ISM behaviors serve as the integral process through which individuals make sense of identity and difficult experiences and are said to have positive effects (Koenig Kellas, 2018).

Accounts from ATRA participants in my pilot research examining how adoptees narratively make sense of their adoption stories supports this suggestion. For example, when asked in a follow-up survey how they felt about talking about their adoption stories, adoptees reported common themes of catharsis and cognitive insight into their adoptee identity. Chinese transracial adoptee Maggie reported that the interview was enjoyable for her and that talking about adoption encouraged her to "think more critically about my opinion about adoption" and that "verbalizing my thoughts only made my opinions about adoption more concrete." Similarly, Korean transracial adoptee Ester, stated "it always feels good to talk to a sympathetic person honestly about my adoption, because I've had so little opportunity to do this in my life."

Although adoptees from this pilot research indicated positive reflections and satisfaction with discussing their adoption story, another emergent theme in the analysis was that adoptees were self-conscious about articulating their experiences. For example, though Ester reported

having a positive experience talking about her adoption story, she also stated that “I always wish I could be more articulate talking about my adoption; I really feel like the many years of not having a vocabulary to talk about it has meant that I don't know how to express myself concisely.” Other adoptees echoed this feeling with comments such as, “it was hard trying to articulate my feelings sometimes” (Jessica). Thus, in addition to providing ATRAs with the opportunity to share their adoption narratives, I argue it is also vital to identify how to best facilitate ATRAs sense-making processes. Though positive media psychology research has established eudaimonic media entertainment experiences can have positive impacts on well-being on its own, it is to the best of my knowledge that scholars have yet to investigate media stimuli in combination with collaborative sense-making processes.

Given that the extant CNSM literature indicates that joint narrative sense-making can lead to positive outcomes (e.g., Koenig Kellas, 2020), I hypothesize that the combination of eudaimonic media experience and collaborative narrative sense-making will further increase (1) ATRAs’ engagement in identity work (i.e., narrative sense-making) and (2) ATRA well-being (i.e., self-concept and self-esteem), and after participating in the intervention – thus testing CNSM theory’s third and fourth propositions:

H3: ATRAs in the experimental condition will report significantly higher adoption-related identity work compared to the ATRAs in the comparison condition at Time 2 and Time 3.

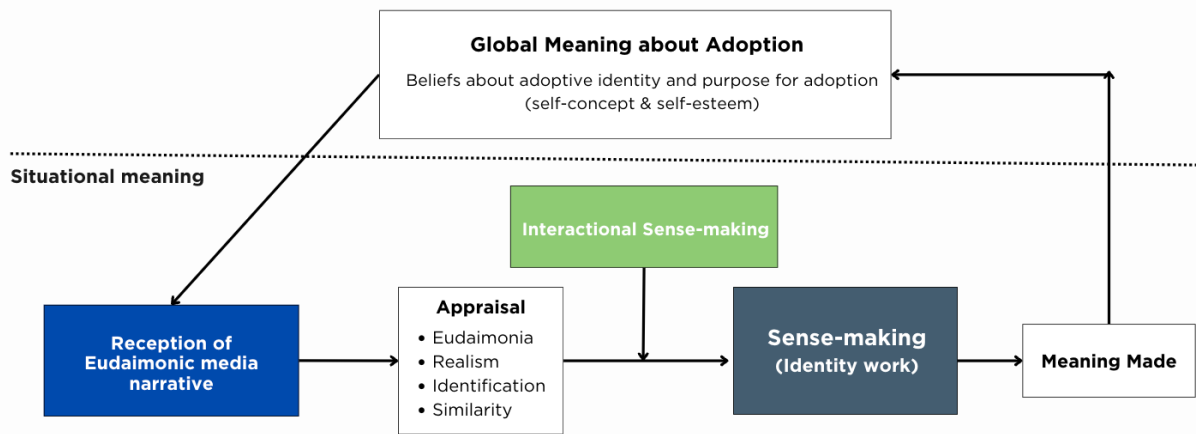
H4: ATRAs in the experimental condition will report significantly higher (a) self-esteem and (b) self-concept compared to ATRAs who are in the comparison condition.

Prior scholarship examines ISM as an explanatory mechanism by investigating how ISM behaviors characterize and explain the way in which people engage in narrative sense-making

(e.g., Campbell-Salome & Rauscher, 2020; Horstman, 2019). However, given that this study examines ATRA identity negotiation within the context of making sense of eudaimonic media narratives about adoption, the current study takes a novel approach to investigating ISM by testing ISM as a moderator in the relationship between ATRAs’ narrative appraisals and narrative sense-making. In other words, to maintain the direct relationship between eudaimonic media narratives and the elicitation of adoption-related identity work, this study hypothesizes that, in the experimental condition, participants who engage in higher levels of ISM will also report higher levels of adoption-related identity work:

H5: For the experimental condition, interactional sense-making behaviors (i.e., engagement, turn-taking, perspective-taking, and coherence) will moderate the relationship between eudaimonic media narrative appraisals and identity work.

Figure 2-6: Complete Heuristic Model



Finally, because the adoption identity construction process is a lifelong negotiation for ATRAs (Grotevant et al., 2000), it is important to account for long-term effects the proposed brief intervention has on ATRA psychological well-being. Although the literature provides support for this notion, particularly among populations facing adversity (Reinecke & Kreling, 2022), few scholars have made efforts to empirically test it. As such, this intervention includes

measures of participant change one week after the intervention, in addition to immediately post-treatment. Thus, the final hypothesis is as follows:

H6: ATRAs in the experimental condition will report significantly higher (a) self-esteem and (b) self-concept one week after participating in the brief intervention (Time 3) compared to ATRAs who are in the comparison condition.

A summary of the proposed study’s specific research questions and hypotheses are detailed in Table 2-1 below.

Table 2-1: Questions and Hypotheses Under Investigation

Phase 1: Identifying Desired Media Narratives and Perceived Benefits
RQ1: What narratives about adoption do ATRAs wish were being shared in the media?
Phase 2: Stimulus Selection
RQ2: Do ATRAs report significantly higher (a) identification, (b) realism, (c) similarity, (d) eudaimonia, and/or (e) identity work when watching media stimulus one or two?
Phase 3: Experimental Efficacy Test of Intervention
H1: Regardless of condition, ATRAs will report a statistically significant increase (a) self-esteem and (b) self-concept at after the intervention (Time 2).
H2: Regardless of condition, ATRAs who report higher rates of realism, identification, and similarity with the media narrative will also report higher rates of (a) self-esteem and (b) self-concept.
H3: ATRAs in the experimental condition will report significantly higher adoption-related identity work compared to the ATRAs in the comparison condition at Time 2 and Time 3.
H4: ATRAs in the experimental condition will report significantly higher (a) self-esteem and (b) self-concept compared to ATRAs who are in the comparison condition.
H5: For the experimental condition, interactional sense-making behaviors (i.e., engagement, turn-taking, perspective-taking, and coherence) will moderate the relationship between eudaimonic media narrative appraisals and identity work.
H6: ATRAs in the experimental condition will report significantly higher (a) self-esteem and (b) self-concept one week after participating in the brief intervention (Time 3) compared to ATRAs who are in the comparison condition.

2.5 Research Design Overview

This project uses an exploratory sequential mixed method design (Creswell & Clark, 2017) to design and efficacy test a brief intervention aimed to assist ATRAs with their identity sense-making process and increase self-reported well-being. Research following exploratory sequential designs utilize both qualitative and quantitative methods across three phases and “start with the collection and analysis of qualitative data that is then followed by the development phase of translating the qualitative findings into an approach or tool that is tested quantitatively” (Creswell & Clark, 2017, p. 84). A brief intervention format was chosen because, in contrast to other forms of translational research interventions, brief interventions are short, structured treatments that are given to participants who have heightened exposure to health-risk behaviors. Brief interventions have previously demonstrated effectiveness in alleviating negative psychological well-being (Ivandic et al., 2017; Miller-Day, in press). Table 2-2 presents a summary of the research design.

Table 2-2: Exploratory Sequential Mixed Method Design.

Research Question / Hypothesis	Data Collection Plan	Data Analysis Plan
Phase 1: Identifying Desired Media Narratives and Perceived Benefits		
RQ1: What narratives about adoption do ATRAs wish were being shared in the media?	Existing data set collected from March - May 2023 ($n = 14$)	Flexible coding (Deterding & Waters, 2018)
Phase 2: Stimulus Selection		
RQ2: Do ATRAs report significantly higher (a) identification, (b) realism, (c) similarity, (d) eudaimonia, and/or (e) identity work when watching media stimulus one or two?	Quantitative survey <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification (Cohen, 2001) • Realism (Ribbins et al., 2016) • Perceived similarity (Tepper et al., 2011) • Eudaimonic media experience (Wirth, 2012) 	Paired samples T-test

Phase 3: Experimental Efficacy Test of Brief Intervention		
<p>H1: Regardless of condition, ATRAs will report a statistically significant increase (a) self-esteem and (b) self-concept at after the intervention (Time 2).</p> <p>H2: Regardless of condition, ATRAs who report higher rates of realism, identification, and similarity with the media narrative will also report higher rates of (a) self-esteem and (b) self-concept.</p> <p>H3: ATRAs in the experimental condition will report significantly higher adoption-related identity work compared to the ATRAs in the comparison condition at Time 2 and Time 3.</p> <p>H4: ATRAs in the experimental condition will report significantly higher (a) self-esteem and (b) self-concept compared to ATRAs who are in the comparison condition.</p> <p>H5: For the experimental condition, interactional sense-making behaviors (i.e., engagement, turn-taking, perspective-taking, and coherence) will moderate the relationship between eudaimonic media narrative appraisals and identity work.</p> <p>H6: ATRAs in the experimental condition will report significantly higher (a) self-esteem and (b) self-concept one week after participating in the brief intervention (Time 3) compared to ATRAs who are in the comparison condition.</p>	<p>Pre-test questionnaire</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-esteem (Rosenburg, 1965) • Self-concept (Campbell et al., 1996) <p>Post-test questionnaire</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes all aforementioned pretest measures • Interactional sense-making (Thompson & Schrod, 2015) <p>Note: Experimental condition participants will also answer the media stimulus questions from Phase 2 (i.e., identification, realism, perceived similarity, eudaimonic media experience items) during the post-test.</p>	<p>H1: Paired samples t-test</p> <p>H2: Multiple regression</p> <p>H3 & H4: Independent samples t-test</p> <p>H5: PROCESS macro Model 1</p> <p>H6: Independent samples t-test</p>

2.5.1 Research Design

Phase 1 of exploratory sequential designs leverage the strengths of qualitative research to identify contextual and nuanced information about participants’ perspectives and experiences to inform design of the Phase 2 intervention (Creswell & Clark, 2017). There is no extant research examining how ATRAs perceive adoption-related media stories, nor any that identifies what ATRAs would like to see the media in terms of adoption representation (Liu et al., 2018). While past scholarship has examined the content of media narrative portrayals about adoptees (e.g.,

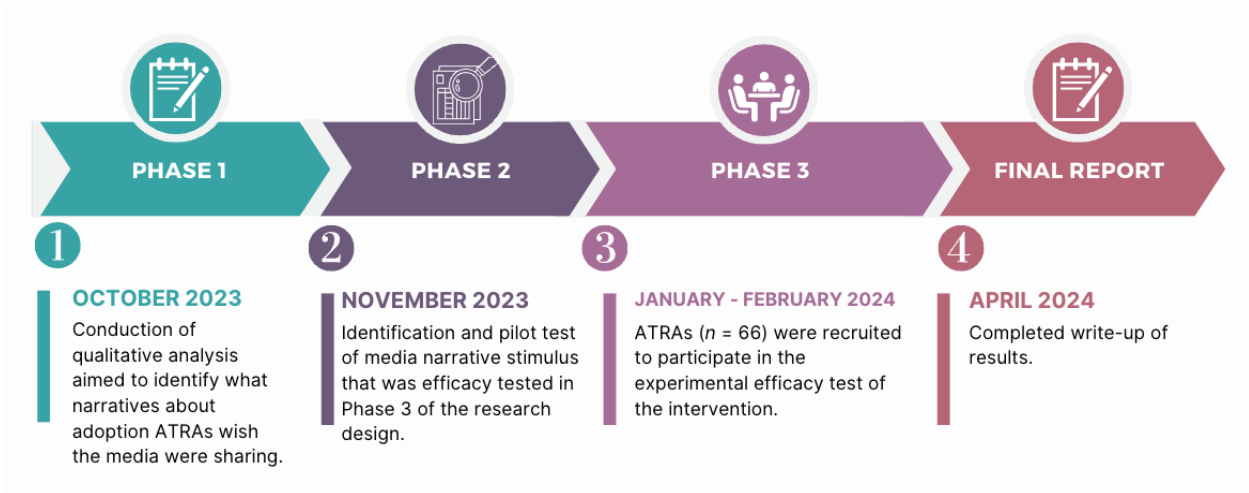
Kline et al., 2006), these studies do not explore perceptions of these portrayals from the adoptee perspective. In recent years, adoptees have begun to take to social media platforms to speak out about their experiences as adoptees, often critiquing the perceptions mainstream media narratives spread about adoption (e.g., Martinez, 2021; Mei Lan, 2020).

Phase 1 addresses these gaps in the literature beginning with qualitative methods, which allowed me to design the experimental video condition in a way that places the specific needs of ATRAs at the forefront. Additionally, research in both message design and persuasion literature demonstrates the importance of message tailoring, further indicating how this approach will be advantageous since it will ensure that the media stimulus chosen for the experimental condition of the research design is grounded in the perspective of ATRAs themselves (Noar et al., 2009).

Phase 2, often referred to as “the point of integration,” serves as the crux of the mixed methods intervention designs since it draws on the strengths of qualitative research to inform quantitatively testable hypotheses (Creswell & Clark, 2017). In this study, the second phase utilizes the results from Phase 1 to identify the media stimulus used in Phase 3.

Phase 3 follows a qualitative experimental design where participants a new sample of ATRAs were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: (1) an experimental condition where participants engaged in viewing the media narrative selected in Phase 2 and engaged in ISM with other participants, or (2) a comparison condition where participants only viewed the media narrative selected in Phase 2. The final interpretation of the study results accounts for the dialectical perspective of adoptive identity construction while also working towards practical application that can be utilized to aid adoptee well-being (Creswell & Clark, 2017). Figure 2-7 provides a timeline of the implementation of the three phases.

Figure 2-7: Study Timeline.



In summary, the exploratory sequential mixed methods design allows for the creation and efficacy test of a brief-intervention aimed at increasing two dimensions of ATRA well-being. This design allows a grounded approach to the intervention design which will not only account for the perspective of ATRAs themselves but will also advance adoption identity construction literature by identifying how media narratives influence their sense-making processes.

3 Phase 1: Identifying Desired Media Messages

3.1 Research Design & Participants

Data for Phase 1 was drawn from a subset of individual, in-depth Zoom interviews conducted between March 22 and May 19, 2023. The larger study ($n = 26$) sought to uncover the perceptions and meaning that adoptees' draw from media narratives about adoption and investigated the impact of media narratives on adoptees' sense-making processes. The sample included domestically and internationally adopted individuals, and although most participants had closed adoption cases, some participants had an open adoption or had reunited with their birth parents. Extant adoption literature suggests that while the adoptee demographic as a whole often struggles with cognitive and emotional adjustment (Holmgren et al., 2020), the forms and degree of identity-related difficulties varies depending on type of adoption (Grotevant & McDermott, 2014). The goal of the broader study was to understand ATRAs' experiences within the broader context of adoption narratives and experiences. For Phase 1 of this dissertation study, I re-analyzed data from the 14 participants who met the following criteria: (1) 18 years or older at the time of the interview, (2) adopted from an Asian country, and (3) adopted and raised by parents of a different race.

Table 3-1 presents demographic information about these 14 ATRA participants, whose ages ranged from 20 to 36 years old ($M = 25.9$). A majority identified as female adoptees (92.9%; $n = 13$) from China (85.7%; $n = 12$) and reported having grown up in various parts of the U.S., with nine states represented.

Table 3-1: Phase 1 Participant Demographics.

Characteristics	M	Min	Max	N	%
Age (mean)	25.14	20	29		
Age at adoption in months (mean)	9.64	3	22		
Gender Identity					
Female				13	92.9
Male				1	7.1
Country of adoption					
China				12	85.7
Korea				1	7.1
Vietnam				1	7.1
Highest level of education					
High school diploma or GED				1	7.1
Bachelor's degree				8	57.1
Graduate or professional degree				5	35.7
Location of childhood residence					
Western States				8	57.1
Eastern States				5	35.7
Other				1	7.1

3.2 Data Analysis

Interview data was analyzed using the QDA software NVIVO 14 and followed Deterding and Waters' (2018) flexible coding technique. In contrast to traditional grounded theory practices, flexible coding begins with the examination of broad themes across cases in the data, and works toward capturing more granular insights within and across cases. This method of coding was most appropriate for analyzing the study's dataset because it offers an iterative coding process that is optimal for datasets containing greater than ten interviews (Deterding & Waters, 2018).

The flexible coding process begins with index coding each of the transcripts. Index codes "represent large chunks of text, enabling data reduction and retrieval as the analyst proceeds through constructing and documenting their argument" (Deterding & Waters, 2018, p. 19). The

organization of index code creation provides a logical sequence of data analysis that follows the structure of the interview guide, making it more certain that overarching themes were accurately identified. As such, because Phase 1 focused on identifying what media narratives about adoption ATRAs wish to see in the media, the data analysis process began by examining the subset of participants' responses to the index code "desired messages." This code primarily stemmed from the interview protocol's question: "What messages and stories about adoption do you wish the media was sharing?" Examination of this index code helps to capture what previous scholars have failed to account for: adoptees' own perspectives on desirable media representations. Identifying this information ensured that the intervention took an adoptee-centered focus and was tailored specifically to ATRAs stated desires.

Within that index code, I created analytic codes to identify cross-case themes. For example, the analytic code "adoptee complexity" contained sub-themes of displays of "uniqueness" and "microaggressions." The "uniqueness" sub-theme captured participants' calls for depictions of the multiple, often conflicting emotions they see as uniquely associated with the ATRA identity, even in comparison to other adoptee experiences. The sub-theme "microaggressions" captured the desire for accurate portrayals of the unintentionally hurtful comments ATRAs encounter throughout their lives. For example, Rachel described a desire for depictions of how ATRAs are "belittled" by people "asking who [their] real family is." Both themes speak to participants' desire for media that depicts the intricate and diverse, but also distinctive, challenges ATRAs encounter.

Finally, I used NVIVO 14 to "test and document key relationships in the data" by identifying relationships between analytic codes and the ATRAs' demographic information (Deterding & Waters, 2018). For example, I examined if the country from which the participant

was adopted impacted their media portrayal preferences. Given that political and cultural circumstances vary across adoption sending Asian countries, it was important to evaluate if adoptees' country of origin impacted their views.

3.3 Results

Results indicate that ATRAs have three primary desires: (1) amplification of adoptees' own voices, (2) portrayals of the complexity inherent in the adoptee experience, and (3) normalization of adoption. I detail each of these themes in turn, below.

3.3.1 Amplification of Adoptee Voices

Media narratives influence identity negotiation and sense-making by depicting storylines and characters that resonate with audience members (Moyer-Gusé, 2008). Although there has been an increase in Asian American representation in the media over the last several years (Venkatraman, 2023), participants stated that adoptee experiences are rarely featured in the media. Given that the adoptees make up a large proportion of the Asian American population and have unique experiences due to the diasporic nature of their unchosen identities (Lee, 2006), ATRAs stressed the need for more depictions of the adoptee experience, emphasizing that their stories are “just as important as the stories that are already out there [about Asian Americans]” (Lila). For example, Rachel asserted that “a lot of people [adoptees] have really valuable stories to tell and share, and that should be a priority in the media to be raising awareness and sharing these people's stories.” Participants acknowledged that getting any kind of adoption narrative “on the [entertainment] map” is a part of the broader issue with the lack of diversity in the industry as a whole, but nonetheless felt their stories deserved to be told.

Participants also stated that they were frustrated by the fact that, for the media narratives about adoption that do exist, stories are often dominated by the perspective of adoptive parents

(Baxter et al., 2014; Harrigan, 2009). Instead, participants reported wanting to see more work written, produced, and directed by adoptees themselves. For example, when asked what messages or stories about adoption she wished the media was sharing, Ester asserted:

The number one thing I think is that adoptive parents should stop being featured and centered in media stories period. They've had decades and decades and decades to tell their stories, and it's time for them to step back.

Much of the participants' criticisms about media narratives developed by non-adoptees were grounded by the notion that these stories “quickly become very generalizing” (Katie) and do not accurately capture adoptees’ experiences with identity construction and negotiation. This finding is supported by a growing but limited body of research that suggests transracial adoptee experiences frequently differ from what others imagine them to be. For example, studies have documented that adoptive parents’ use of a color-blind approach to adoption (i.e., where parents largely ignore race and ignore racial differences between themselves and their child; Killian & Kanna, 2019) has unintended negative consequences on adoptee identity construction and well-being (Cho, 2023; Reynolds et al., 2020). Participants reported concerns that omitting adoptee voices from the creation of mass media narratives about their experiences further promotes inaccurate assumptions that adoptees “assimilate to American culture and you're fine and that’s it” (Jessica).

It is interesting to note that participants appeared to share a collective sense of responsibility to support younger ATRAs who may be struggling to make sense of their adoptive identity as they had as children. Rather than waiting passively for media companies to listen to their call for increased representation, participants were using their own talents and resources to create and disseminate content, ignoring the challenges of independent content creation

(Arriagada, & Ibáñez, 2020). For example, several of the participants disclosed that they were actively working on adoptee-centered projects which aim to raise awareness of lived adoptee experiences, mirroring the increase in self-generated adoption-related content across social media platforms (Martinez, 2021). Additionally, two participants host a podcast where adoptees are invited to share their thoughts about adoption and how they have (or are coming) to terms with their identity, and another two are working on producing films of their own which portray the day-to-day experiences of adoptees. This emergent theme not only exemplifies participants' desire to have their stories told and heard, but also demonstrates ATRA's determination to - "speak up" so "the next round of kids that get adopted know that there's a platform and that parents that decide to adopt understand the process doesn't just end" (Jessica).

3.3.2 Complexity

Although participants were cognizant that not all ATRA experiences are the same, participants reported a shared disdain for the media's topical, stereotypical, and "palatable" portrayals of adoption. ATRAs further criticized current media depictions of adoption, saying they are not representative of the true adoptee experience which is filled with uncertainty and identity distress (McLamb et al., 2022). For example, Penelope stated that though she thinks the media does a good job of documenting reunification stories with "happy endings," they rarely represent the "missingness" that is inherently with the ATRA identity journey:

P: I don't think it [the adoptee's journey] was documented enough to really feel like it represented that missingness in our life.

NM: How would you describe the missingness?

P: I would say it's never enough, kind of thing...constantly pushing forward...because you have this void and you don't know what it is so you try super hard... [thinking] maybe one day you'll find it if you try hard enough.

Penelope is describing the participants' call for media narratives about adoption to “explore the different layers and nuances” of the ATRA identity sense-making process as it relates to navigating the in-betweenness of birth and adoptive family membership (Docan-Morgan, 2022). Participants explained that rather than promoting unrealistic reunification narratives (Baden et al., 2012; Reynolds et al., 2020), they wanted “stories about loss and ambiguity and identity forming without answers” (Sophia). Kenzi described:

You have to share all the different outcomes in order to give a better understanding that it's not just as simple as you being adopted...you can't paint it as all rainbows and unicorns....But you also can't make this picture that they [birth parents] want nothing to do with you and they hate you... It's so easy for the media to just cling on to those extremes, and just portray that because it's easier to digest. But obviously it's way more complex than that.

Kenzi's response not only exemplifies participants' critiques of media portrayals about adoption, but also speaks to the added challenges the TRAP brings to ATRA identity construction and negotiation (Lee, 2003). Adoptees often struggle to navigate the emotional tension between feeling grateful for their adoptive families and inherent feelings of loss and rejection as a result of being abandoned or surrendered by their biological parents (Tucker, 2023). Participants demanded that media narratives integrate depictions of ATRAs experiencing these deeply-rooted complex emotions so the stories “bring to light that adoption isn't easy on [adoptees],” as Sophia phrased it in her interview.

3.3.3 Normalization

Participants reported that the media frequently exacerbates their feelings of racial and cultural paradox by exaggerating how “distinct” adoptees are in comparison to naturally conceived children. For example, media storylines centering around the adoptee experience often emphasize adoptees’ desire to find their birth family, crafting narratives around a presumed inherent need for reunification to feel complete. Participants openly criticized these cliché storylines and stated that, rather than clinging to overly dramatic depictions of adoptive family experiences, ATRAs expressed a desire for a balanced approach to adoption portrayals. Participants reported that, while the stories should still recognize adoption as a unique family structure that is inherently tied to several identity related challenges (Lee, 2003), it should also deemphasize the salience of the adoptee identity in adoptees’ everyday lives. For example, when describing how media narratives about adoption differ from his experience as an adoptee, Steve noted that media shows adoption as “a very black and white thing” with “not a whole lot in the middle.” Though he agreed that ATRAs face additional challenges to identity sense-making due to evident phenotypical differences with adoptive parents, he wanted the media to show adoption as “just a very normal human experience.” Lila shared similar sentiments, stating “I want to uphold the adoption boom up for what it was...but I also want people to not look at adoptees as just part of that...it's not the most important part of our story.”

Steve and Lila’s statements reflect the disconnect between intended media messages and audience message reception. Although the entertainment industry’s goal may have been to destigmatize adoption through portrayals that promote the notion that love can overcome the challenges and stressors associated with transracial adoption (Kirton, 2019), participants did not receive the stories as such.

3.4 Summary

Phase 1 of the research study was designed to give a voice to ATRAs, with the overall goal of developing an understanding of what ATRAs wish they were seeing represented in media narratives about adoption. Results indicated three central desires. First, they desire an increase in ATRA representation in the media that is specific: they want to see adoptees themselves leading those creative projects. Second, they want to see the full complexity of adoptee identity negotiation displayed in media portrayals. And finally, they report a desire for more normalized portrayals of adoptees, and families who adopt, in the media. These results served as the guiding criteria for stimulus selection for the brief intervention, a process which is detailed in the following chapter.

4 Phase 2: Stimulus Selection

This phase built on the findings from Phase 1 to identify two publicly available media narratives about adoption that met the criteria ATRAs had identified as important in Phase 1 interviews and could be used as the media stimulus in the brief intervention (Phase 3).

Given that Phase 1 participants emphasized their preference for content created by adoptees' themselves, I began by searching through the user-generated content creation site, YouTube, to locate media narratives about adoption. With over 500 hours of video uploaded per minute, YouTube serves as content creators' optimal platform for sharing long-form videos (Shepard, 2024). Sample search criteria used include "Asian adoptee story," "Asian transracial adoption," "Asian adoption by adoptee." Due to time constraints within the brief intervention's design, videos longer than 15 minutes were not considered. While watching potential video stimuli ($n = 34$), I continually referred to Phase 1 results to ensure the video content reflected ATRAs' perspectives on complexity and normalization of the adoptee experience. Two videos were ultimately selected for the stimulus pre-test. The two videos are similar in that they are both personal testimonies of ATRAs sharing their own adoption story, followed by their own reflections on the adoptee experience. However, the artistic style of the video differed and the adoptees shared different viewpoints on the adoptive experience.

One video, titled "My Adoption Story: The Truth About Chinese Adoption," used a documentary-style approach to share the narrating adoptee's story and perspective on adoption. The 6:18 video displayed a series of photos and videos from the adoptee's life while she uses voiceover tools to provide descriptions for each clip. Though she does not reveal her name, the adoptee does not "beat around the bush" and states she was adopted from China by a couple from the Netherlands and does not have information about her birth or biological parents. This

adoptee explains that she is unbothered by the lack of information regarding her adoption and almost forgets about her biological parents, thus touching on how adoptees' view adoption as normal. The adoptee then continues to share her personal adoption experience and dives into the complexity surrounding adoption in China by explaining the One-Child policy imposed by the government (Salchi, 2023) during the time of her adoption.

The second video featured a Korean adoptee, Sara Jones, using TED as a platform to share her adoption story (TED, 2020). The full length of this video was approximately thirteen minutes, however, to ensure the stimuli were comparable in length, this video was shortened to seven minutes. Jones begins by describing the mysterious scar on her arm and the sadness she experienced when thinking about her adoption. She addresses the criteria by discussing both the desire for normalization and the complexity associated with adoption through her anecdotes about times where she “didn’t want to be reminded I am adopted all the time” (TED, 2020, 05:37) and her opinion that adoptees should be granted the space to process the complex emotions of holding both gratitude and loss as it relates to the adoptee identity.

4.1 Participants

ATRAAs for this phase ($n = 243$) were recruited in two ways: purposive sampling from my own networks (i.e., via text message and social network site posts) and a snowball sampling method where I asked individuals in my network to pass information about the study along to others who they believe are interested and eligible to participate. In accordance with data cleaning procedures set forth by DeSimone et al. (2015), participants who: (1) failed one or more of the four attention checks, (2) indicated the same answer selection for an extended number of questions in a row, and (3) had missing data items for one or more scales were eliminated from the analysis. This resulted in a final sample of 90 participants. Participants ranged in age from 20

to 57 years old ($M = 25.9$, $SD = 7.5$) and most ($n = 64$; 71.1%) were adopted into White families . Although most ATRAs reported having been adopted from China ($n = 37$; 41.1%), there were also adoptees from Japan ($n = 15$; 16.7%), Korea ($n = 12$; 13.3%), and other Asian countries represented in the sample. Table 4-1 provides an overview of the sample's demographic characteristics.

Table 4-1: Phase 2 Participant Demographics.

Characteristics	M (SD)	Min	Max	N	%
Age of participants	25.9 (7.5)	20	57		
Age at adoption (months)	19.4 (14.0)	2	70		
Adoptive parent race					
White or Caucasian				64	71.1
Black or African American				12	13.3
American Indian/Native American				15	16.7
US Spanish, Hispanic or Latino				6	6.7
Other				1	1.1
Country of adoption					
China				37	41.1
Japan				15	16.7
Korea				12	13.3
Taiwan				7	7.8
Vietnam				7	7.8
Other				7	7.8
Highest level of education					
Some high school or less				3	3.3
High school diploma or GED				7	7.8
Some college, but no degree				11	12.2
Associates or technical degree				17	18.9
Bachelor's degree				36	40.0
Graduate or professional degree				15	16.7
Prefer not to say				1	1.1
Political affiliation					
Republican				18	20.0
Democrat				41	45.6
Independent				15	16.7
Other				4	4.4
Prefer not to say				12	13.3

4.2 Procedure

Potential participants were required to answer a series of eligibility questions to confirm that they were 18 years or older, identify as an Asian adoptee, and were adopted by individuals of a different race. They also provided voluntary consent prior to receiving access to the stimulus check survey. If determined eligible, ATRAs were then directed to an anonymous Qualtrics survey that took approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Participants were asked to watch the two media narratives about adoption and subsequently answer questions about what they saw, to capture aspects of eudaimonia, identity work, identification, realism, perceived similarity, and their video preference. To account for possible ordering effects, participants were randomly assigned to watch either the documentary style video or the TED Talk video first. After responding to these primary questions, adoptees were asked to provide basic demographic information, including their age, age at adoption, country of adoption, and race/ethnicity of their adoptive parents. Finally, after submitting the survey, participants were asked to follow an external link to a separate survey where they provided an email address for their \$15 gift card to be electronically delivered. This link is provided separately to ensure the anonymity of their data.

4.2.1 Instrumentation

To evaluate the two media narratives, participants were asked to report levels of eudaimonic experience and identity work. Additionally, because results from prior pilot research indicate that adoptees believe identification, realism, and perceived similarity have a significant impact on the way they connect with media content about adoption, items from previously validated scales investigating these five dimensions were used to check the appropriateness of the stimulus video (see Appendix B for full list of items).

Experience of Eudaimonia

Eudaimonic media experience is measured using 10-adapted items from Wirth et al.'s (2012) Eudaimonic Entertainment Experience scale ($\alpha = .79$). Sample items include "I have a good feeling because the video has shown me how content I can be with my own life" and "I feel good because this film has helped me to accept myself and my life". Items were selected based on relevance to the current study.

Identity Work

Identity work is measured using 5-adapted items from the Adoption Identity Work Scale (AIWS; Colander, 2014; $\alpha = .65$). Sample items include "Watching the video helped me reflect on the events leading up to my adoption and has been helpful to me" and "After watching the video, I feel that I have spent an appropriate amount of time thinking about my adoption."

Identification

Identification is measured using a shortened, adapted version of Cohen's (2001; $\alpha = .77$) identification scale. Some items from the original scale were omitted due to irrelevance. Sample items include "I think I have a good understanding of the adoptee from the video" and "During viewing, I felt I could really get inside the adoptee's head."

Realism

Realism is measured using Ribbins et al.'s (2016; $\alpha = .70$) subscale for social realism. Sample items include "The adoptee in the video acted like adoptees would act in real life" and "The content in the video bears similarities to things that happen in the real world."

Perceived Similarity

Perceived similarity was measured using adapted items from Tepper et al. (2011; $\alpha = .83$). For these 5-items, participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement to statements

starting with the stem “The adoptee in the video and I...” Samples include “are alike in a number of ways” and “see adoption in much the same way.”

Video Preference

Participants were asked to indicate their video preference by answering one binary item (i.e., “Which of the two videos did you enjoy watching more?”) and one open-ended response question (i.e., “Based on your answer above, please describe why you liked that video more than the other.”).

4.3 Data Analysis and Results

The purpose of Phase 2 was to determine what eudaimonic media narrative stimulus would be most appropriate for the intervention (RQ2). To do so, a series of paired samples t-tests were conducted in the computational software IBM SPSS. As shown in Table 4-2, results indicated no significant differences in the two video stimuli for any of the variables. In other words, participants did not report feeling significantly higher levels of identification, [$t(86) = -.35, p = .73$], realism [$t(86) = 1.10, p = .28$], perceived similarity [$t(86) = -1.25, p = .22$], eudaimonia, $t(85) = .14, p = .89$, or identity work [$t(82) = .76, p = .45$] with either video.

Table 4-2: Descriptives Using T-Test for Equality of Means.

	<u>Documentary Video</u>		<u>TEDx Video</u>		<i>t</i> -test	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>N</i> = 33		<i>N</i> = 33				
	M	SD	M	SD			
Identification	4.42	.55	4.44	.50	-.35	86	.73
Realism	4.50	.41	4.44	.50	1.10	86	.28
Similarity	4.17	.80	4.26	.55	-1.25	86	.22
Eudaimonia	4.36	.57	4.35	.51	-1.26	85	.89
Identity work	4.16	.61	4.13	.55	.76	82	.45

Although there were no statistically significant differences between the two video stimuli in relation to the aforementioned variables, participants reported a preference for the TED video, with 55 (61.1%) favoring Jones's narrative video over the documentary style video ($n = 35$; 38.9%).

Seventy-nine of the 90 respondents provided open-ended responses with reasons for why they preferred one video to another. Using Owens' (1984) thematic analysis technique, four reasons emerged for why respondents preferred the TED Talk video over the documentary video.

Approximately one-third ($n = 24$; 30.4%) preferred the TED Talk video because of the information and perspective it gave. Participants reported that Jones's narrative did a better job of narrating the various layers of complexity and nuance associated with the ATRA identity. For example, one participant reported:

The TedX video was much more comprehensive and confrontational about the feelings we can feel as adoptees and how we can still be positive and find positivity through the complexity of our emotions.

Others noted that they preferred this video because "it talked about what Asian adoptees are going through each day, the emotional and psychological stress," and because it included a discussion of "the bottom-line effect that happens to kids adopted, [and] how life is after adoption." These reports mirror results from Phase 1, indicating that ATRAs enjoy and desire media narratives about adoption that acknowledge the hardships associated with adoption, and not only the highlights.

Respondents also preferred the TED Talk video because it was "more relatable and more closely aligned" with their own experiences ($n = 22$; 27.8%). For example, one ATRA stated they felt they "had a bond with her speech, because it was so centered with what I'm going

through right now.” Another reason respondents reported a preference for the TED video was because of the eudaimonic emotional responses it elicited ($n = 11$; 45.8%). They reported that this narrative “was more touching,” and that it gave them “the hope that things will get better someday for Asian adoptees.”

Lastly, some participants noted they enjoyed Jones’ video more because of the way the story was presented ($n = 22$; 27.8%). For example, ATRAs appreciated that the TED Talk video was “more concise, and her [Jones’s] story was easier to follow” and that “it wasn’t as fancy, and didn’t have ‘cool’ editing.” It was also noted that the speaker’s facial expressions made the video more engaging and that ATRAs appreciated Jones’s “bold” approach, telling her story and experience to a large, live audience rather than utilizing voice-overlay. These open-ended responses suggest that the TED Talk video met participants’ needs for depicting more authentic, normalized portrayals of the ATRA experience, because Jones presented her story in a way that did not feel overly dramatic to them.

4.4 Summary

The purpose of this phase was to apply the findings from Phase 1 to select a media stimulus that could be used as the centerpiece for the brief intervention to be tested in Phase 3. Although results from independent sample t-tests indicated no significant differences between respondents’ reports of identification, perceived similarity, realism, eudaimonia, and identity work, an analysis of open-ended responses from 87.8% of the participant sample revealed a clear preference for viewing the TED Talk video over the documentary style video. Reasons for this preference included the elicitation of eudaimonic emotions, “resonating” more with the adoptee featured in the TED Talk video, and particular stylistic attributes to the video itself (e.g., straightforward and concise).

5 Phase 3: Experimental Efficacy Test of Intervention

Phase 3 served as the efficacy test for the intervention, meaning this phase is the “proof of concept stage” (Miller-Day, in press, p. 14) which evaluates the initial impact of the identity negotiation intervention. As will be discussed in subsequent sections, this phase was designed according to best practices for efficacy testing interventions, meaning the phase took place within a highly controlled setting and used a smaller sample size compared to effectiveness tests (Streiner, 2002). This phase transformed the knowledge gained from Phases 1 and 2 into a translational program that can be used to aid other ATRAs’ well-being and identity negotiation processes (Miller-Day, in press).

5.1 Participants and Procedure

Recruitment took place between January 6 and 8, 2024. Using a purposive sample via social network site groups, participants who met the following eligibility requirements were invited to participate: (1) 18 years or older, (2) identify as an Asian adoptee, and (3) were adopted by parents of a different race (i.e., are transracial adoptees). Of the 101 potential participants who completed pre-test measures (see Appendix C), 88 participants provided contact information to participate in the brief intervention and completed pre-test measures (Time 1). Due to scheduling restrictions, 66 of these 88 participants attended one of 14 scheduled focus groups held from January 9 to February 12, 2024.

A majority of participants identified as female ($n = 57$) and were adopted primarily from China ($n = 50$) or Korea ($n = 12$). All participants reported having one or more White adoptive parents and were between the ages of 20 and 51 ($M = 27.6$, $SD = 6.3$). Table 5-1 provides an overview of participant demographic characteristics.

Table 5-1: Phase 3 Participant Demographics.

	All ATRAs	Experiment	Comparison
<i>N</i>	66	33	33
Gender			
Female	57	29	28
Male	6	3	3
Non-binary/third gender	2	0	2
Prefer not to say	1	1	0
Age (years)			
Mean (SD)	27.6 (6.3)	28.5 (7.0)	26.8 (5.4)
Age at adoption (months)			
Mean (SD)	13.1 (11.5)	13.6 (13.2)	12.7 (9.6)
Country of adoption			
China	50	22	28
Korea	12	9	3
Taiwan	2	0	1
Other	2	1	1
Highest level of education			
High school diploma or GED	2	1	1
Some college, but no degree	7	4	3
Associates or technical degree	5	2	3
Bachelor's degree	31	14	17
Graduate or professional degree	21	12	9
Religious Affiliation			
Atheist	10	4	6
Agnostic	10	5	5
Nothing in particular	15	8	7
Protestant	6	6	0
Roman Catholic	2	1	1
Other	9	1	3
Prefer not to say	1	0	1
Political affiliation			
Republican	3	2	1
Democrat	44	21	23
Independent	13	6	7
Other	4	3	1
Prefer not to say	2	1	1

This phase followed a qualitative experimental design (Robinson & Mendelson, 2012) where participants were randomly assigned to an experimental or comparison Zoom focus group based on the intervention session time they chose. A random number generator was used to establish which group was an experimental or comparison condition. Specifically, intervention sessions were conducted as an experimental condition session if the generator assigned the session number into “category one” and sessions assigned to “category two” were conducted as comparison condition sessions. Experimental condition participants viewed the eudaimonic media narrative stimulus and participated in a collaborative storytelling discussion ($n = 32$), whereas comparison condition participants only viewed the eudaimonic media narrative stimulus, with no subsequent discussion ($n = 33$). All sessions contained four to six participants.

Regardless of condition, participants were asked to introduce themselves once the session began. Following introductions, all participants then jointly viewed the media narrative selected in Phase 2. Participants in the comparison condition were then asked to complete a confidential posttest survey (Time 2), after which they were excused.

Participants in the experimental condition engaged in a semi-structured discussion about the adoptee experience following the joint media viewing. As a transition into the discussion, experimental condition participants were asked to spend five minutes writing down their reactions and thoughts about the media stimulus. Once five minutes had passed, participants were then invited to read what they wrote to the other members in the session and encouraged to interact with one another throughout the rest of the call (see Appendix E and F for instructions). Probing questions were asked when necessary (Tracy, 2020). Following this discussion, participants then completed the same posttest measures as the comparison condition participants.

All participants, regardless of condition, were contacted one week after their intervention session (Time 3) to take the posttest measures a second time in order to investigate the

longitudinal effect sought in the sixth hypothesis. In an effort to retain as many adoptees as possible to complete longitudinal posttest measures, participants were compensated with a \$10 gift card if they completed longitudinal measures. All but one participant completed longitudinal survey measures ($n = 65$).

5.1.1 Instrumentation

In addition to the media appraisal measures specified in Phase 2, participants were asked to respond to questions regarding self-esteem, self-concept, and identity work in both the immediate and longitudinal posttest. Unless otherwise indicated, all scales used were 5-point Likert scales (see Appendix C for full list of measures and Appendix D for zero-order correlations among the key variables).

Self-Esteem

To measure self-esteem, participants were asked to keep their story of adoption in mind and indicate the degree to which they believed the statements applied to them. Self-esteem was measured using 10 items, adapted from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965; $\alpha = .88$). Sample items include “I think I have a good amount of respect for myself” and “It is rare for me to feel useless.”

Self-Concept

Self-concept was measured using 12 adapted items from Campbell et al.’s Self-Concept Clarity Scale (SCC, 1996; $\alpha = .86$). Sample items include “I think I know myself better than I know other people” and “My beliefs about who I am seem to change rarely change.”

Identity Work

Identity work was measured using an adapted and shortened version of the 5-item reflection exploration subscale from the Colander’s (2014) Adoption Identity Work Scale

(AIWS; $\alpha = .84$). For this measure, participants were asked to keep their identity as an adoptee and their adoption story in mind, then use the given scale to indicate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with the given statements. Sample items in the immediate posttest measure included “Participating in the Zoom call helped me reflect on the events leading up to my adoption and has been helpful to me” and “After participating in the Zoom call, I feel that I have spent an appropriate amount of time thinking about my adoption.”

The Time 3 posttest used slightly different verbiage to measure identity work that participants may have engaged in since participating in the brief intervention. For this measure, participants responded to the stem, “In the past week I...” with sample items including “Have reflected on the events leading up to my adoption and has been helpful to me” and “Feel that I have spent a good amount of time thinking about my adoption.”

Interactional Sense-Making Behaviors (ISM)

ISM behaviors were measured using an adapted 9-item version of Thompson and Schrodts’s Interactional Sense-Making self-report scale (ISM-SR, 2015) and contains four subscales (engagement, turn-taking, perspective-taking, and coherence). However, because this scale operationalizes turn-taking as a form of polite interaction rather than as a dynamic, shared exchange of conversation, alternative items informed by Koenig Kellas and Tree’s (2006) were used to operationalize turn-taking. A sample item includes “I think that each of the adoptees and I had an equal chance to tell our stories.”

5.2 Data Analysis and Results

Hypothesis 1 stated that, regardless of condition, participants would report a statistically significant increase (a) self-esteem and (b) self-concept after the media treatment. Results of a paired sample t-test indicate no significant changes in participants’ self-esteem [$t(61) = -.70, p =$

.49], or self-concept [$t(65) = .25, p = .80$] as a result of participating in the intervention. Thus, H1 was not supported.

Hypothesis 2 stated that, regardless of condition, participants who report higher rates of eudaimonia, realism, identification, and similarity with the media narrative will also report higher rates of (a) self-esteem and (b) self-concept.

H2 was tested using multiple regression and controlling for whether participants had seen the media narrative prior to viewing it during the intervention. Though recent discussions among quantitative scholars question the necessity and potential issues with over controlling for variables (e.g., Hünermund, & Louw, 2023), controlling previous exposure to the media narrative was important since research suggests repeated exposure to media impacts viewers' perception of content (e.g., Hassan & Barber, 2021). Results indicate none of the media appraisal variables predicted participants' self-esteem at Time 2, $F(7, 55) = 1.83, p = .10, R^2 = .19$, nor at Time 3, $F(7, 55) = 1.67, p = .14, R^2 = .18$. This was also true of participants' reports of self-concept immediately after the intervention, $F(7, 57) = 1.12, p = .37, R^2 = .12$, and at the time of the longitudinal posttest, $F(7, 55) = .68, p = .66, R^2 = .08$. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Hypothesis 3 stated that participants in the experimental condition will report significantly higher adoption-related identity work compared to the participants in the comparison condition. Results of an independent sample t-test finds partial support for this hypothesis such that participants in the experimental condition ($M = 4.03, SD = .64$) reported significantly higher identity work compared to the comparison condition ($M = 3.55, SD = .96$), [$t(63) = 2.39, p = .02$] during the immediate posttest, but not at the time of the longitudinal posttest [$t(60) = 3.50, p = .73$]. Thus, H3 was not supported.

Hypothesis 4 posited that participants in the experimental condition will report significantly higher (a) self-esteem and (b) self-concept after participating in the brief intervention compared to comparison condition participants. Results of an independent sample t-test indicate no significant differences in self-esteem between the experimental condition ($M = 3.72, SD = .83$) compared to the comparison condition ($M = 4.0, SD = .68$), [$t(62) = -1.58, p = .12$] participants. In regard to self-concept, results of an independent sample t-test indicate no significant differences were found between the experimental condition ($M = 2.88, SD = .63$) or the comparison condition ($M = 3.1, SD = .84$), [$t(64) = -1.11, p = .27$]. Thus, H4 was not supported. Interestingly, and contrary to what was hypothesized, the comparison condition reported descriptively higher self-esteem and self-concept compared to the experimental condition. Implications for this finding are discussed in the following chapter.

Hypothesis 5 posited that, for the experimental condition, ISM (i.e., engagement, turn-taking, perspective-taking, and coherence) will moderate the relationship between media narrative appraisals and identity work. PROCESS macro Model 1 (Hayes, 2020) was used to test this hypothesis. Results indicate that ISM behaviors do not significantly moderate the relationship between realism ($b = -.87, t = -1.48, p = .14$), identification ($b = .66, t = .41, p = .12$), similarity ($b = -.33, t = -1.72, p = .09$), feelings of purpose in life ($b < -.01, t = -.02, p = .99$), feelings of competence ($b = .19, t = .68, p = .50$), or feelings of relatedness ($b = -.71, t = -1.68, p = .10$) and identity work. H5 was not supported.

The final hypothesis (H6) stated that participants in the experimental condition would report significantly higher (a) self-esteem and (b) self-concept at Time 3, compared to participants in the comparison condition. Results of a paired sample t-test indicate no significant

changes in self-esteem [$t(61) = -.66, p = .51$], or self-concept [$t(63) = -.94, p = .35$] between posttest and longitudinal times. Thus, H6 was not supported.

5.3 Post Hoc Analysis

The results above suggest the intervention was not effective in increasing participants' self-concept and self-esteem, as I had hypothesized. These findings were surprising, both because the extensive extant literature suggested the intervention would be successful, and because participants frequently reported having benefited from participating in the intervention throughout the data collection process. For example, Jay (experimental condition) remarked that “this [intervention session] is the *coolest* thing ever. I've never really met and talked to people who are *also* adopted...I'm just living my best life right now!” Additionally, I received multiple, unsolicited emails from participants after participating in the session inquiring if I will be conducting similar studies in the future which they could be a part of.

Given that participants indicated that they had had positive experiences with the intervention, I ran post-hoc analyses to (1) try to identify why statistically significant results were not found, and (2) investigate benefits the perceived participants shared in their open-ended responses after participating in the intervention, which may not have been captured by the measures used in hypothesis testing.

5.3.1 Sample Differences

Intervention efficacy tests are intended to take place under optimal conditions, using an ideal sample to provide proof of concept for creating change among the intervention's intended audience (Streiner, 2002). This means that in order to find significant results, this study was dependent on Phase 2 and Phase 3 participants being homogenous. Participants for both phases were recruited using the same inclusion and exclusion criteria (i.e., 18 years and older, identified

as an Asian adoptee, and adopted by parent(s) of another race). Although both phases utilized social network sites to recruit participants, the online group pages I recruited from for each phase were distinct.

Phase 2 participants were recruited through my network of research exchange pages. Research exchange pages are social network site forums where scholars are invited to share their projects with fellow researchers and others' who are interested in engaging in research studies they meet inclusion criteria for. These pages are relatively permeable, welcoming scholars to recruit participants for studies on an array of subjects without strict gatekeeping.

Phase 3 participants were recruited through adoption-specific community pages, of which I am a member. These pages are hosted by gatekeepers who limit who can join the community and what can be shared to the group. For example, in addition to being obliged to provide evidence that I was an adoptee to gain access to their community, the Facebook page "subtle asian adoptee traits" required both group moderator and Institutional Board approval for me to be given permission to recruit within the network.

The decision to recruit participants from different sources was informed by my pilot research (from which Phase 1 interviews are drawn for this project), as I experienced great difficulty in recruiting ATRAs for that sample. Thus, in order to ensure that the efficacy test in Phase 3 would draw as many highly qualified participants as possible, I chose to sample from the research exchange pages' broader network in Phase 2. Even though the inclusion criteria were the same for both Phases 2 and 3, it is possible that participant demographics between the two phases may have differed.

A chi-square test of independence was conducted to test whether or not Phase 2 and Phase 3 participants significantly differed across demographic information. Specifically, I

examined differences in participants' age, age at adoption, country of adoption, level of education, and political affiliation. Results indicate no significant difference between the phase participants' level of education, $\chi^2(6, N = 156) = 12.18, p = .06$. However, Phase 2 and 3 participants differed significantly in terms of their age, $\chi^2(23, N = 151) = 47.06, p < .001$, with Phase 2 participants skewing younger than Phase 3 participants. Participants in the two phases were also significantly different in terms of their age at adoption, $\chi^2(41, N = 154) = 72.02, p < .001$, with Phase 3 participants reporting being adopted at significantly younger ages than those in Phase 2. They also differed in terms of their country of adoption, $\chi^2(6, N = 156) = 30.93, p < .001$, and political affiliations, $\chi^2(4, N = 156) = 14.76, p = .01$.

Given that the purpose of Phase 2 was to stimulus check the media narrative for the intervention in Phase 3, it is potentially consequential that the participant compositions differed so significantly across a myriad of traits. Ample bodies of literature have documented that identity development is associated with increased age (Haslam et al., 2021), implying that having an older sample of participants in Phase 3, who have had more time to engage in adoption related identity work, could have influenced the study's findings.

Additionally, past research has made connections between political party affiliation and beliefs about adoption, with Republicans favoring adoption comparatively more than Democrats (Christian & Geen, 2023). Significantly more Phase 2 participants identified as Republicans compared to Phase 3 participants (20% versus 4.5%) which may help explain differences between Phase 2 and Phase 3 participants.

5.3.2 Perceived Benefits of Participating in the Intervention

I also analyzed participants' open-ended responses to investigate whether they identified benefits to participation in the intervention that may not have been captured by the quantitative

measures used for hypothesis testing. Immediately following the intervention, all participants, regardless of condition, were asked to write a minimum of three sentences to the following prompts: “In what ways did participating in this group call help you make sense of your adoption?” and “How has participating in this Zoom group changed your feelings toward your identity as an adoptee? If you do not feel it has, please write why.” These two prompts were selected because they capture both cognitive (i.e., prompt 1) and emotional (i.e., prompt 2) processing that may have occurred during the intervention session.

Cognitive Sense-Making

Participants were asked to write about how the intervention helped them make sense of their identity. While open-ended responses from experimental and comparison condition participants were analyzed separately, findings indicate that participants felt the intervention helped them make sense of their adoption in similar ways across the two conditions. Due to the extensive overlap between the two sets of responses, I present the results together.

Participants across conditions reported that the intervention facilitated sense-making by: (1) creating a shared community, (2) giving them the opportunity to reflect on their own adoption, and (3) being able to hear the “diversity of adoption experiences” from other ATRAs.

Creating a Shared Community

Participants overwhelmingly reported that the intervention facilitated sense-making because it provided them with a shared community ($n = 43$; 65.2%). For many, being a part of this study afforded them a rare, precious opportunity to connect with others who deeply understood the simultaneous joy and pain of the ATRA identity. For example, Jay (experimental condition) shared:

Growing up I did not have contact with a group of people who were adopted and sometimes it was lonely. I didn't want to seem ungrateful, at the same time I felt alone and like no one understood me. I feel more seen now.

Jay captured the sentiments of many participants who also noted that “talking to other adoptees about our shared and differing experiences” created a space where they could feel “validated” and “less guilty” about how they viewed their adoption. Ali (comparison condition), who was randomly assigned to the comparison condition where participants only shared brief introductions, noted:

Listening to people's stories and the video is really interesting to me because sometimes hearing other adoptees' stories is like "Duh, of course." Specifically with the video... There is so much transracial adoptees have to explain to non-transracial adoptees that to me is just as normal as breathing.

Ali continued to state that this shared sense of understanding “reiterated” to her that ATRAs have diverse, yet surprisingly similar experiences in the way they are “taught to view race and adoption.” Joseph (comparison condition) also stated that coming together to hear other ATRAs’ stories “helped remind [him] he is not alone,” despite being “the only male in my cohort to meet for a Zoom call.”

Nearly half of the comparison condition participants ($n = 16, 48.5\%$) shared Ali and Joseph’s sentiments that the intervention aided identity sense-making by evoking feelings of a shared community. This emergent finding is important: it suggests that simply bringing ATRAs together in an online space to jointly watch a media narrative together seemed to stimulate sense-making –even for those who did not actually have a discussion about the media narrative (i.e.,

the comparison condition groups). These qualitative findings offer insight into why significant differences between experimental and comparison groups may not have been found in Phase 3.

This sense of visibility and mutual understanding as a means for sense-making aligns with participant reports from Phase 1, who also clearly expressed the need for adoptees to be seen and heard. For example, when explaining why increasing the number of adoptee-told narratives would be beneficial, Sophia (Phase 1 participant) said that “actually talking to adoptees” would create “more room for the amount of emotional processing that is involved in thinking about one's [adoption] history.”

Though community as a sense-making tool was heavily reported among participants in both the experimental and comparison conditions, participants in the experiment condition mentioned community more frequently ($n = 27$; 69.7%). This finding provides further support for H3 which found participants in the experiment condition reported significantly higher identity work at Time 2.

Time to Reflect

Participants stated this intervention helped them make sense of their adoption because it gave them time to reflect on their own experiences as an ATRA. For comparison condition participants, this self-reflection was comparatively topical in the sense that it made them “wonder about a scar that I've had since I was adopted that no one can figure out where it came from” (KimJi, comparison condition) or “realize [they were] in the orphanage for a long time” (Sammy, comparison condition) in comparison to other participants. In contrast, participants in the experimental condition stated the intervention facilitated sense-making by making them reflect on their upbringing as an ATRA. For example, Sarah K. (experimental condition) wrote:

I appreciated hearing that another adoptee's adoptive mother was not a great mother like my own. I think it made me think about the shared characteristics that adoptive parents have and whether or not there are psychological patterns there, such as narcissism or other personality disorders.

It is important to note that not all participants' reflections simply echoed what other participants in the group were reporting. For example, Rita (comparison condition), wrote in her posttest response "I am grateful to be adopted and I have never felt jealous or resentful when my parents are praised for adopting us. They have done so much for me. I love my family."

While other participants in her group wrote about the way the intervention made them think about their adoption in terms of how their adoption was "similar to many [other participants]" or that they came to realize their story "is likely far more complex than the common narrative of adoption portrays," Rita reported the intervention reinforced her global meaning about adoption such that she loved and appreciated her adoptive family, despite what others were reporting. This distinction is important as it suggests that participants may not have felt susceptible to pressures of social desirability bias (Bergen & Labonté, 2019). Accounts like Rita's also help explain why participants did not report significant increases in self-esteem, because she came to the session already holding a positive global meaning for her adoptive identity and experience, which also implies the possibility of a ceiling effect.

Hearing the "Diversity" of ATRA Experiences

Approximately one in three participants across both the experimental and comparison conditions ($n = 20$; 30.3%) reported that the intervention helped them make sense of their adoption by showing the "impressive diversity of adoption experiences." Specifically, participants reported that being exposed to other participants' experiences and opinions was not

only something they “enjoyed” doing, but also “offered a lot of room for nuance and non-black and white thinking.” For example, Emmy (experimental condition) stated:

This group helped me normalize the complexity of adoption and the mixed feelings that come with being a transracial adoptee. The group further showed me the diversity of Asian transracial adoption but that there are a lot of common threads among transracial adoptees. I haven't been a part of a group like this, so it helped me find the language to use to talk about my adoption and validate my experiences.

This finding mirrors Phase 1 participants’ statements that showcasing the diversity of ATRAs' circumstances and experiences with adoption would aid younger generations of ATRAs, thus further reinforcing the notion that hearing ATRAs voices across a broad range of experiences is important to ATRAs.

It should also be noted that while this theme emerged across participants’ regardless of condition, it was more common among participants in the comparison condition ($n = 14$; 42.4%) compared to participants in the experimental condition ($n = 9$; 27.3%). This suggests participants’ who viewed the media narrative about adoption and did not have the opportunity to discuss their personal adoption story had a heightened awareness of the unique perspective the media provided, compared with participants in the experiment condition. This finding supports prior findings that adoptee identity sense-making is a highly individualistic experience (Grotevant et al., 2000). It also extends extant knowledge of how watching ATRA media portrayals without the opportunity to jointly make sense of the co-viewing experience may alter audience perspectives of a media narrative.

Emotional Sense-Making

A majority of participants reported no difference in emotional sense-making, regardless of condition ($n = 42$; 63.6%). Participants reported that rather than changing their feelings toward adoption, the intervention either (a) validated and reinforced their established meanings about adoption or (b) inspired them to engage in future identity work. The following sections unpack each of these findings, beginning with participants' reports as to why they believe they did not experience any changes in emotion.

No Change

A majority of participants reported that the intervention did not impact the way they feel about adoption. Participants attributed this lack of change to having already engaged in high levels of identity negotiation and adoption-related sense-making in the past. As a result, this intervention did not lead to new revelations. For example, participants across both conditions frequently reported that they have been members of “a lot of Asian adoptee communities” for quite some time. Their pre-established connection with these communities thus gave them space to engage in high levels of adoptee identity negotiation prior to attending the intervention, thus making participants' feel that they “had already considered everything that had been said [during the intervention] before.” For example, Jordan (comparison condition), stated that while the media stimulus was interesting, “it didn't present anything I haven't heard through other adoptee forums.”

Another reason participants reported no significant changes was because they believe that their feelings toward their adoption is fluid and subject to change throughout the course of their life. For example, Han (experimental condition), stated, “I think my adoptive identity will always be chaotic and ever-changing.” Sammy, (comparison condition), echoed this sentiment, saying:

“I have thought a lot about being adopted and have tried to come to terms that I am adopted whether I want to be or not, and some days I may like it and some days I may hate it.” Though this finding may appear to contrast the previous finding that participants’ felt their view of adoption cannot change anymore, it is still important since it demonstrates a different way participants felt they had already “come to terms” with what their adoptive identity means to them.

Validation

Although there was an overwhelming consensus that the intervention did not impact their feelings toward adoption due to possible ceiling effects, roughly one-quarter of participants ($n = 18$; 27.3%) reported that the intervention did help them reinforce their previously established understanding of their adoptive identity by providing validation of their existing thoughts and emotions. In other words, the intervention facilitated sense-making because it gave them new evidence that supported their global meanings about adoption. For example, Jae (experiment condition) reported:

I feel pretty settled in my perspective and opinion on adoption and so my opinion on my adoptee identity doesn't tend to change much these days. I think what does change is how seen I feel in that identity, and it seemed, for the most part, everyone in the call had similar experiences, so I feel more validated in my identity.

Participants in the comparison condition also reported feeling validated by the intervention, saying it “reaffirmed views that adoption is complex and many adoptees face similar struggles with identity and reframing the narrative of adoption.”

A notable difference between experiment and comparison condition participants is that comparison condition participants were unsatisfied with the way the intervention was conducted.

Specifically, comparison group participants indicated a strong desire to engage with other participants in the session. For example, Erin stated there was not “enough structured discussion to have changed [her] feelings” and suggested “perhaps if there had been more open-ended questions that would allow people to share more detailed experiences,” then she would have experienced emotional changes toward her adoption experience. Miranda shared a similar sentiment, stating that she came to the study expecting “more opportunity for back-and-forth conversation.” This finding suggests participants may have been primed to expect the intervention session would allow them to “really dig into [their] stories more as a group.” Denying them this opportunity may have impacted their evaluations of the intervention (Sherman & Rivers, 2021). This finding also supports the rationale for H5, namely that allowing participants to engage in interactive sense-making with other participants would be beneficial.

The following, concluding chapter considers Phase 3 findings in more detail, explains how these post-hoc analyses provide valuable insight into why statistical significance was not found in the experimental design, and considers theoretical and practical implications of this project.

6 Discussion and Conclusion

Guided by the meaning-making model (Park & Folkman, 1997) and CNSM theory (Koenig Kellas, 2018), this study took an adoptee-centered approach to understanding ATRA identity negotiation and sense-making processes. The majority of prior scholarship places interpersonal and family narratives at the heart of adoptee identity theorizing. This project sought to break new ground by exploring the influence of media narratives on ATRA identity sense-making, by developing and efficacy testing a media-based brief intervention aimed at increasing ATRA's self-esteem and self-concept. This final chapter considers the three study phases' results together. My hope is that this holistic approach allows for a more cohesive discussion of how this intervention contributes to adoptee-identity construction scholarship, despite the statistically non-significant findings.

I begin by providing a brief review of key findings from the three phases and discuss potential reasons for the statistically non-significant results in Phase 3. I then discuss the theoretical contributions this study makes to burgeoning media effects, family communication, and adoptee-identity research and provide suggestions for future research exploring ATRA identity negotiation and narrative sense-making.

6.1 Review and Discussion of Findings

In Phase 1, I utilized flexible coding techniques (Deterding & Waters, 2018) to re-analyze the subset of ATRA interviewees within a broader qualitative study of adoptees from varied backgrounds. This analysis supported identifying a media narrative stimulus best tailored to the desires and needs of ATRAs. Phase 1 results indicated that the media stimulus must: (1) be written and produced by an adoptee, (2) discuss the complexities associated with the ATRA identity, and (3) normalize the ATRA identity.

Phase 2 then identified and tested two media stimuli that fit these three criteria to determine which of the videos would be used in the brief intervention in Phase 3. Though there were no statistically significant differences in Phase 2 participants' appraisals of eudaimonia, identification, realism, or perceived similarity when comparing the two video stimuli, open-ended responses provided a clear indication that participants preferred watching a TED Talk video of Korean adoptee, Sarah Jones.

Phase 3 followed a qualitative experimental design (Robinson & Mendelson, 2012) by randomly assigning 66 participants to either an experimental condition focus group (where participants watched the media stimulus chosen in Phase 2 and engaged in a joint sense-making discussion) or a comparison condition focus group (where they viewed the media stimulus with no group discussion following). Although the study's hypotheses were largely unsupported and the intervention did not increase participants' self-esteem and self-concept as hypothesized (i.e., H1, H3, H5, and H6), post-hoc analyses provide some rationale as to why these non-statistically significant findings may have occurred and suggest alternative benefits participants received from the intervention that were not accounted for in the quantitative measures.

6.1.1 Statistically Non-significant Results

Sample Bias

In addition to the quantitative measures Phase 3 participants completed at Times 1, 2, and 3, all participants (regardless of condition) were asked to provide responses to two open-ended questions in the posttest immediately following the intervention session. These questions assessed participants' cognitive and emotional sense-making processes by asking "In what ways did participating in this group call help you make sense of your adoption?" and "How has

participating in this Zoom group changed your feelings toward your identity as an adoptee? If you do not feel it has, please write why.”

Response to these open-ended questions indicate that the statistically non-significant findings from hypothesis testing may have been due to a selection bias, because Phase 3 participants were disproportionately heavily involved in the ATRA community and had thus already engaged in high levels of identity negotiation prior to the intervention. In fact, participants often stated in their posttest responses that their pre-established ATRA community experiences made them feel as though they had come to terms with their adoption status and thus, didn't need further help making sense of their adoption (Rossi, 2023). For example, Lee (experimental condition) reported that, because she had spent the past 10 years exploring her adoptee identity by being “engaged in many adoptee groups, trips, etc. before,” she did not think her feelings were changed by the intervention. KimJi (comparison condition) shared a similar sentiment, stating that if she “wasn't already familiar with so many similar cases (and even the specific case presented in the TED talk)” she thought the intervention would have been “quite eye-opening and life altering.”

Past research investigating individuals' ability to experience growth in the face of adversity indicates that people at high levels of growth before participating in interventions are less likely to benefit from interventions, like this one (Taku et al., 2017). This intervention may have been unsuccessful because of unforeseen ceiling effects in the population of ATRAs that could be readily recruited for this study. And yet, this risk is hard to avoid, given that ATRAs constitute a largely invisible population and recruiting via Asian adoption community pages online is the most straightforward way to locate ATRAs actively seeking to connect with their adoptee identity (Merritt, 2023). As such, if I were able to repeat this intervention, the

amendment I would make would be to develop pre-test, baseline measures of the extent to which potential participants had previously been active members in the ATRA and their pre-existing levels of adoption-related identity work, in order to control for those differences within the research design and in data analysis to identify more dimensions of difference between participants in experimental and comparison conditions.

6.2 Theoretical and Practical Implications

Although quantitative results indicate that intervention participants did not experience increases in self-concept and self-esteem as predicted, this study still has important theoretical and practical implications for the burgeoning scholarship at the intersection of adoptee identity, media effects, and narrative sense-making.

6.2.1 Theoretical Implications

This study responds to Brown and Shay's call for identity-based investigations of well-being (2021) by providing a nuanced examination of ATRA identity construction and negotiation. It also extends CNSM theorizing by considering how mediated narratives can impact sense-making processes. Decades of literature investigating adoptee identity assumes that adoptees rely on family and societal narratives about adoption to make sense of their identity (Grotevant et al., 2000), which fail to account for how narrative sense-making plays into meaning-making processes.

To address this shortcoming, I proposed a heuristic model that synthesizes Park and Folkman's (1997) meaning-making model and CNSM theory, to provide a more holistic account of how ATRAs manage situations where they are forced to confront their identity as an adoptee and how this process influences their well-being. Specifically, the study detailed how ATRAs

make sense of media narratives about adoption and illuminated how CNSM processes can positively impact ATRA identity negotiation.

Prior CNSM theory and communicated sense-making scholarship is deeply rooted in the family communication discipline. Though the influence of family and interpersonally shared narratives about adoption are central to how ATRAs construct and negotiate their identity as an adoptee (Grotevant et al., 2000), media narratives also play an integral role in facilitating sense-making. This study extends CNSM theory by investigating how ATRAs use media narratives about adoption to facilitate sense-making, and how this process impacts their well-being. This study shows that ATRAs leverage story content across both traditional and new forms of media (Turow, 2020) to make sense of their adoption, and that engaging in interactive storytelling about their adoptee experiences is important to them.

Media Story Content

CNSM theory asserts that “the stories we hear and tell can have significant lasting effects on our beliefs, values, behaviors, and health” (Koenig Kellas, 2018, p. 64) and emphasizes that story content reveals a great deal about individuals’ perceptions of their own identities. The media as a source of narrative content had yet to be investigated through a CNSM lens, although the positive media psychology literature has established that these widely available, non-personal stories can play crucial roles in a variety of sense-making processes. This study brings these two literatures together and reveals that ATRAs are impacted by mediated stories and often rely on these narratives as a means for understanding their own adoption.

Phase 1 participants criticized current media narratives about adoption, stating that the inaccurate and over simplistic portrayals of the ATRA experience are a disservice to ATRAs who are trying to navigate the complexities of their adoptive identity. Instead, participants

desired media content that shares the hardships and emotional tensions of gratitude and loss, which they felt would serve as better resources as younger ATRAs seek out media content to explain and negotiate their identity in the future.

This study also demonstrated that higher-quality media narratives about adoption can, in turn, prompt interpersonal sharing of narratives that influence sense-making not only for adoptees, but for the people who love them. For example, after talking about how she wanted more nuanced depictions of adoption in the media, Katy (Phase 1 participant) stated that watching the television series *This Is Us* allowed for sense-making because it provided a way to show her parents “issues” she too has experienced. She stated:

It was nice to [show my parents the difficulties associated with adoption] without bawling, crying...It's like I can just sit back, relax...and be like: yeah, see, this is something that I've also gone through and not have to like, pour my heart out and [question if] you don't get me?

Emergent themes from Phase 3 also suggest that social media narratives about adoption are impactful, since ATRAs frequently leverage these stories as means for negotiating their global beliefs about adoption. Post-hoc analyses indicated that a disproportionate number of participants had engaged in high levels of adoption-related identity work prior to participating in my intervention. Though previous exposure to diverse stories about adoption likely decreased their ability to maximally benefit from the intervention, the qualitative findings clearly demonstrate that ATRAs consider media narratives about adoption as an important tool for making sense of their identity.

I hypothesized that exposure to media narratives about adoption would increase participants' subjective well-being, specifically within the dimensions of self-concept and self-

esteem. Though Phase 3 results did not find statistical support for this prediction, qualitative post-hoc results indicated that participants did benefit from participating in the intervention. The reported benefits were, however, more closely related to social well-being outcomes stemming from a collective experience (Keys & Lopez, 2002). For example, Victoria (experimental condition) said that participating in the intervention did not impact how she felt toward her adoptive identity because she “just shared her experiences.” However, when asked how the intervention helped her to make sense of her adoption, she stated “I feel like I had a sense of belonging in this group call since I related to the video and people in the group a lot.” This emergent finding contributes to CNSM literature by suggesting that investigations of social well-being constructs (Keys & Lopez, 2002) would more accurately assess the role media narratives play in ATRA identity negotiation than strictly individual-level measures of well-being, like those I focused on in this research study.

Interactional Storytelling as Means for Sense-Making

This study also contributes to CNSM theory by shedding light on the importance of interactional sense-making (ISM) on ATRA identity negotiation. According to CNSM theory (Koenig Kellas 2018), higher levels of ISM predict higher levels of narrative sense-making (the third proposition of the theory) and individual well-being (the fourth proposition of the theory). As such, I predicted that providing Phase 3 participants with the opportunity to engage in interactional storytelling after co-viewing a media narrative about adoption would result in higher reports of identity work, self-esteem, and self-concept among participants in experimental condition. Though these participants did report higher identity work immediately after participating in the intervention, there was no significant increase in self-concept or self-esteem.

Instead, participants in both the experimental and comparison conditions indicated that the intervention increased feelings of validation and their sense of belonging. For example, when asked about how participating in the intervention changed his feelings about adoption, Mark (experimental condition) compared the experience with engagements he had prior:

Each experience in an adoptee space is eye opening (possibly a little overwhelming because it's so new to me). I'd say I've changed in that I feel more interested to keep reflecting and seeking out other adoptees to connect and find a sense of belonging that may not quite 100% be there in other groups.

Mark's report illuminates that while ISM did not significantly change participants' self-concept and self-esteem, they still perceived themselves as having benefited from the experience, which made them want to explore their adoptive identity more in the future. This mirrors Koenig Kellas and colleagues' (2020) findings where parents participating in the narrative parenting intervention reported perceived benefits specific to feelings of connectedness and validation.

The mixed-method, multi-phase design of this research study facilitated detection of important processes and motivations for ATRAs regarding varied forms of sense-making and identity work in how they make meaning of their adoption experiences. The study therefore makes important contributions to the literature by bringing together two well-established, theoretically driven lines of research (i.e., positive media psychology research on reception of media narratives, and ISM as conceived in CNSM) to explain how they interact and intersect in ATRAs' lived experiences.

6.2.2 Practical and Practitioner Implications

This study also has implications for media content development related to adoption, as findings across the three phases illuminated several shortcomings the media industry has when it comes to ATRA storytelling.

Research at the intersection of adoption and media predominantly focuses on describing the content of adoption narratives portrayed in mass media (e.g., Herman-Gallow, 2019; Kirton, 2019; Kline et al., 2006; Waggenpack, 2008), rather than investigating the ways in which adoptees perceive and make sense of the story being told. Phase 1 participants reported being frustrated by both this imbalanced ratio of parent to adoptee-centered stories being disseminated (Baxter et al., 2014; Kline et al., 2006; Young, 2018). Phase 3 participants expressed similar dislike of popular media narratives about adoption, pointing to the detrimental effects they have on ATAs. For example, Rose (experiment condition) observed the participants in her group “seemed to have a lot of similar views on how the media, including television, shows, and books, portray adoption in mostly a positive light” and that they had all received the same societal messages about how ATAs “must feel lucky or grateful for being adopted.” Ali (comparison condition) made this observation as well, asserting:

Beliefs like “love is enough,” color blindness, and “I felt led (especially by God) to adopt you” without enough knowledge and understanding on what transracial adoptees face are really harmful and play out in very individual ways for a lot of adoptees.

Participants’ collective distaste for current media offerings about adoption inspired them to (1) become involved in the adoption storytelling process and (2) engage in scholarly research so their voices may be heard. For example, numerous participants were actively pursuing hobbies and careers that centered around sharing the adoptee experience with others. Whether it was by

producing and sharing podcasts to Spotify (Jessica & Jasmine, Phase 1 participants) or writing and directing independent films (Rachel, Phase 1 participant), participants made clear their deep commitments to the adoptees' side of the story being better recognized and heard.

These accounts from potential participants demonstrate how eager ATRAs are eager to play a role in the next wave of adoption-related storytelling (Darnell et al., 2016; Moss & Waddell, 2023). As ATRAs from the primary “adoption boom” years are now reaching adulthood and are increasingly coming forward to share the “other side of the coin where it's not all positive that there are negatives” (Jessica, Phase 1 participant), it is vital for both media effects scholars and industry personnel to include ATRAs in the storytelling process. While stories that address the complexities and emotional turbulence of transracial adoption have been steadily on the rise (Grice, 2005; Young, 2018), it is clear that further improvements still need to be made.

Furthermore, this study's multi-phase, mixed-method research design can be used by other scholars interested in using narrative-based programs to understand ATRAs' experiences and identity negotiation processes. Beginning with a qualitative investigation of ATRA experiences allowed for the development of a program that was tailored specifically to the desires and needs of the ATRA population. Given that ATRA identity construction often begins at a young age and is iteratively negotiated throughout adolescents and into early adulthood (Bañez, 2015), future researchers and practitioners could consider adopting this intervention design to target a younger (e.g., high school aged) ATRA demographic.

This study's research design and approach would also lend itself well to adaptation for interventions aimed at helping other groups that have similarly complex cases of identity negotiation. The LGBTQIA+ community is one example. Just as ATRAs are distinct from their

family members in terms of racial or ethnic phenotypic markers, members of the LGBTQIA+ community are often distinct from their family members in terms of sexual orientation and/or gender identity (Dhoest, 2016). Additionally, while the LGBTQIA+ individuals are not as widely dispersed as ATRAs, LGBTQIA+ young people often lack immediately available communities and resources that would support their identity negotiation (Williams, 2010). As a result, members of this community are generally limited in their ability to be empathetically understood by those in their immediate support system (Ward & Winstanley, 2005). The heightened barriers and challenges to identity negotiation this community faces mirror the those reported by ATRAs (i.e., stigma, alienation, microaggressions; Trinh & Faulkner, 2022), suggesting that future scholars and practitioners could fruitfully explore development and implementation of this kind of narrative-based intervention for the LGBTQIA+ community as well.

6.3 Conclusion

Although over 250,000 ATRAs currently reside in the United States, this unique diasporic subpopulation of the Asian American community continues to be largely invisible to both media effects scholars and the entertainment industry. This multiphase, mixed-method study contributed to addressing this shortcoming through the design and efficacy test of a brief adoptee-centered, media-based intervention.

The findings from this study, particularly the qualitative findings, reveal both the consequences of overlooking the inherent difficulties associated with international, transracial adoption (Lee, 2003), as well as how powerful relevant media narratives can be for identity work in this population, even absent the opportunity for collective discussion of the media content. This study also advanced adoptee identity theorizing and CNSM theory by laying the initial groundwork for future studies to investigate the relationship between eudaimonic media

narratives, CNSM, and social well-being. I hope this study inspires future scholars and industry stakeholders to take adoptee-centered approaches to understanding ATRA identity construction and negotiation and extend its findings to the design and efficacy test of interventions that facilitate sense-making and well-being among similarly stigmatized groups. Doing so will not only provide a more holistic understanding of the complex processes people undergo to make sense of their identity but will also allow for a more balanced focus on how specific identity characteristics impact one's development and well-being.

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Appendix A. Researcher Positionality

Qualitative researchers often emphasize the importance of self-reflexivity throughout the course of data collection and analysis, as doing so heightens the validity of findings and accounts for researcher bias (Pezalla et al., 2012). Though ample bodies of literature illuminate best practices for producing high-quality scholarship (e.g., Tracy, 2010), there is much less discussion about how we as researchers manage the personal challenges associated with investigating communities with which they closely identify (Moncur, 2013). In addition to demonstrating the ways in which I practiced reflexivity throughout the research process, this appendix describes the difficulty, vulnerability, and growth I experienced researching and treating participants with whom I so closely identified. My hope is that this discussion not only provides a detailed account of how I held myself accountable for the personal bias I cannot avoid bringing to the project. I hope it also illuminates the importance of addressing the cognitive and emotional toll research can take on researchers who closely identify with the communities they study.

A.1 Practicing Self-Reflexivity

Enn was adopted from Korea at six months old. He reported that “not being connected to a physical or a social identity” caused “feelings of sadness, anger, control [issues], grief, and shame,” throughout his life and likened connecting with other adoptees to the feeling he got when he became sober after his decade-long addiction to heroin. Ting Ting was adopted from China at six months old. After the session, she confided in me that both she and her adopted sisters struggle with suicide ideation and have all written “extensively of death wishes.” She believed this mental illness developed as a result of her identity as an ATRA and sincerely thanked me for the work I am doing for the adoptee community. Annie was adopted from China

at two and a half years old. When she was younger, her adoptive mother told her that the reason she was upset that she was “groomed” and inappropriately touched by men after her adoption was “because that probably happened to you at the orphanage” and refused to discuss it further. This is one of many examples that she and other participants shared of adoptive family members blaming traumatic experiences on their adoption.

These reports are just three of the many intimate, carefully worded disclosures that participants shared during group Zoom sessions during Phase 3 of the study. While my personal status as an ATRA offered me the advantage of engaging with participants in ways that outsiders to the adoptee community would not have been able to (Collet, 2008), it is vital to consider how my insider position influenced the collection and interpretation of data. As someone who has shared many of the same feelings and experiences that participants reported, engaging in self-reflexive practices ensures the validity of the data. This was particularly important during Phase 3 of the research design, since the experimental design required sessions to be replicated with as little variance as possible. This section details how I held myself accountable through the use of analytical memos and two research diaries (Kalpokaite & Radivojevic, 2019) throughout the research process.

A.1.1 Analytic Memos

Analytic memos, also referred to as “cross-case memos” (Deterding & Waters, 2018) are used to document and ground data analysis via “direct links to data segments,” thus “providing an audit trail of the evolving analysis” (Kalpokaite & Radivojevic, 2019, p. 50) over the course of the project. Writing and reviewing memos is frequently practiced among qualitative research scholars as they serve as a chronological “record of analysis, thoughts, interpretations, questions and directions” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 110). As such, I rigorously engaged in both writing

analytic memos in all three phases of the research to create a paper trail of my thought process which thoroughly documented my thoughts and reactions as I analytically coded data.

The flexible coding technique I used specifies the need for analytic memos during the data analysis process in order to produce the most “valid and reliable” (Deterding & Waters, 2018, p. 21) results. As such, analytic memos were kept throughout the coding process in Phase 1. For example, as I read through data excerpts assigned to the analytic code “media message complexity,” I began to notice that participants were frequently mentioning the desire for unsolicited questions about birth parents and passive aggressive comments about gratitude to be displayed in the media. This common occurrence prompted the creation of an analytic memo titled “microaggressions.” By documenting this observation, I was able to create a paper trail of my thought process for how the sub-theme of “microaggressions” emerged under the main code of “complexity.”

Though Phases 2 and 3 were designed to rely on quantitative analyses to test the hypotheses and research questions posed, open-ended participant responses also played an integral role in understanding ATRAs identity negotiation processes related to the intervention. Thematic analysis procedures provided the basic steps necessary to reliably analyze the data (Owen, 1984). However, researcher subjectivity was still inherently tied to this coding process (Pezalla et al., 2012). As such, I kept analytic memos during both Phases 2 and 3 data analysis, thus documenting my thoughts as cross-case themes arose. For example, in Phase 3, participants completed post-test measures at the end of their assigned Zoom session which included open-ended survey responses regarding participants’ sense-making processes and potential changes in affect toward the adoptee identity as a result of the intervention. After reading each of the participants’ responses, I created an analytic memo at the end of the group interview sheet

documenting potential themes that may be arising in the data. Since I was compiling data over the course of five weeks, these analytic memos served as a way for me to keep track of the emerging thoughts and feelings I had toward the outcomes of the study.

A.1.2 Research Diaries

Two separate research diaries were kept throughout the research process: a participant diary and a process diary. As will be described in the following sections, the participant diary features memos that are in direct relation to research proceedings and account for the tone, reactions, and thoughts I had while interacting with participants during Phase 1 and Phase 3. In contrast, my research process diary contains entries that reflect my running thoughts, ideas, and emotions related to my dissertation.

Participant Diary

The data analysis for Phase 1 involved a secondary analysis of in-depth interview data I collected in spring 2023. Given that I started that analysis approximately six months after data was collected, I began Phase 1 by familiarizing myself not only with each participant transcript, but by reviewing participant diary entries I had kept before, during, and after participant interviews. For example, one entry that was taken after an interview session with a participant who reported a “really traumatic” upbringing read:

“This interview was so much fun to do. The participant was very open and willing to talk about her experience as an adoptee and was very frank about the trauma she has experienced from being adopted. At times of discomfort, she would smile and say “trauma” and “therapy” in a jesting tone but you could tell she was doing it for the sake of trying to make the conversation more comfortable while still being honest.”

Without having reviewed this memo, the transcript would have read and been interpreted as one of great sorrow and emotion, rather than its true exemplification of the relief that came to participants having had the opportunity to share their story with me. In other words, this process allowed a more contextualized approach to examining the data by bringing my previous thoughts, tone, and understanding of the participants' experience back to the forefront of my mind.

As alluded to in the description of entries I kept during my pilot research, I utilized a bracketing method (Creswell & Miller, 2000) to write participant diary entries during Phase 3 of data collection. Bracketing methods are often used by qualitative researchers as a way to not only protect the investigator from potentially emotionally challenging material, but also to increase the trustworthiness of the study (Tufford et al., 2010).

Following recommendations from Creswell and Miller (2000) which encourage researchers to “acknowledge and describe their entering beliefs and biases early in the research process to allow readers to understand their positions” (p. 127),” I utilized the bracketing method by creating participant diary entries before and after each experimental and comparison group session, allowing me to separate my personal beliefs and experiences from participant reports (Creswell & Miller, 2000) and note where variability between sessions may have arisen. For example, participant diary memos written before and after the third comparison session read:

Pre-interview memo: Going into this session I am sad that my comparison groups do not get to share more with one another and to fully talk about their life and their experiences...I suppose that is the point of this dissertation, but it still makes me sad.

Post-interview memo: This group had more talkative participants who shared more information and thoughts about their adoption during their intro compared to the other

groups. It may be because I altered a sentence or two in the introduction to make the guide more clear, so this is something to note and pay attention to in the data analysis.

Documenting this minor change in session protocol became relevant when I analyzed open-ended participant responses across comparison conditions because it provided rationale for the minor amount of variability that arose between comparison conditions before and after Session 3.

Process Diary

“I loved the idea that came up that adoptees are a diaspora where there is no homeland we can identify with because of the in-between, but that our home is within the adoptee community. We find home with other adoptees who feel the same pains. This validation of experience was so powerful and it made me feel connected on a personal level in the sense that there are people who understand me. Though I am not suffering, that does not mean I do not feel pain” (NCA Adoption Reflection, November 19, 2023).

The passage above comes from a diary entry I wrote after returning from the National Communication Association Convention where I had the opportunity to present my scholarship and listen to advanced family communication scholars speak about the adoptee experience. Written with the intention to “track the developments of the research” and to “clarify [my] assumptions, personal responses, and decision-making” (Kalpokaite & Radivojevic, 2019, p. 49), this entry highlights a moment in my research process which I felt not only proud, but empowered by the work I set out to do. Keeping this process diary documented “backstage decisions” (Reyes et al., 2021) and project rationale I had come to during times I was not directly engaging in research activities specific to the data at hand. Though this research followed an exploratory sequential mixed method design and centered around the conduction of an

experiment, it was important to memo my thought process since my insider position to the community influences the interpretation of data. The following section further details the way in which I believe my life and experiences as an ATRA impacted the findings of this study, looking to provide a greater context to the results and to open a discussion about precautions future scholars can take if they study members of a community they are part of as well.

A.2 Up Close and Personal

As with all prospective dissertation research, conducting this three-phase study was one of the most challenging experiences I have ever endured; cognitively, emotionally, and at times, physically. Entering the project, I was aware of the challenges that come with intimately studying a topic so close to my heart (Edwards, 2002), but do not believe I was adequately prepared for the journey that laid ahead of me. This study centers around ATRA well-being. As such, I believe it would be remiss not to address the ways in which I struggled with my own understanding of adoption and my identity as an adoptee. My hope is that by doing so, I provide a more contextualized account for the study's findings and give future scholars ideas to consider when pursuing research in communities they identify with.

As was built into the experimental design, participants varied in the level of detail they shared about their experiences as ATRAs. Experiment condition participants were permitted the opportunity to divulge their intimate, often heartbreaking, identity construction and negotiation processes while comparison condition participants were only afforded the chance to introduce themselves and briefly summarize their adoption story. As anticipated, hearing participants' in-depth testimonies to the hardship of the adoptee identity negotiation experience ignited several personal reflections about my own journey as an ATRA. Several participant diary entries attest to the difficulty I was having to carry "both the gratitude and sorrow attached to adoption" and

that I often related to participant reports of having “developed their feelings and identity toward adoption because of what other people said/told them to feel.” However, as captured by the post-group participant diary entry below, I was surprised to have struggled comparatively more when the hosting comparison group sessions:

“I have come to realize that one of my worst fears is making people feel like they are not being heard. That people are not around to listen to them when they feel they have something to say. Running these control groups makes me feel like there are these adoptees who are coming forward to speak their truth and want to be heard, but I am denying them the real chance to share” (Session 4, January 18, 2024).

Though I was aware that Phase 3’s qualitative experimental design required adherence to the condition’s protocol (Robinson & Mendelsohn, 2012) and I entered the session well aware that the participants would be denied the opportunity to engage in interactional sense-making processes, I did not anticipate the emotional stress that resulted for me. My experiences with comparison group participants illuminated how eager ATRAs are to surround themselves with others who are similar to them, an opportunity ATRAs seldom get due to the diasporic nature of international adoption (Lee, 2006). Although their evident disappointment works in favor of the study’s hypotheses, it was difficult for me as a community insider to know that I was denying them an opportunity that they, and I, believed would be helpful for them.

The academic community seldom discusses the researchers’ own emotional well-being in the face of studying difficult, taboo topics (Moncur, 2013). It is through this simultaneously empowering and soul-crushing experience that I urge future scholars to not only explicitly consider the potential personal risks they may be undertaking by pursuing their research, but to encourage other researchers to step forward and provide clear advice and tangible resources to

scholars conducting insider research (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2013). For example, in addition to emphasizing the importance of memoing to meet the standards of rigorous qualitative research (Tracy, 2010), scholars should also emphasize the personal benefit researchers gain by documenting their experiences while collecting and analyzing data. Reviewing my process dairy at the end of the project played an integral role in organizing and crafting the discussion chapter for this study, prompting me to write about the previous epiphanies I had and how those tie into the study's findings. It also allowed me to revisit the emotional process associated with each phase of the research and afforded me the opportunity to reflect on my growth both as a scholar and as an ATRA in a way that provided personal relief.

I hope the discussion of the personal hardship I faced as an inside researcher positively contributes to the ongoing conversation about protecting scholars' well-being. It is my wholehearted belief that providing recommendations to alleviate emotional discomfort during the research process serves as a benefit to researchers and the academy alike as it will encourage the continuation of insider research.

Appendix B. Stimulus Check Measures

All scales, unless otherwise indicated, are measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree).

Eudaimonia

On the scales below, please indicate your feelings from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) Only circle one number per line.

Purpose in life/self-acceptance

1. I have a good feeling because the video has shown me how content I can be with my own life.
2. I feel good because now that I have seen this video I recognize my life as fulfilled and meaningful.

Autonomy

3. I feel good because this film has helped me to accept myself and my life.
4. It is good to recognize that the way I see myself is not based on the thoughts of others.

Competence/personal growth

5. I have a good feeling because the video has made me reflect on myself and my life.
6. It felt good to expose myself to this video.

Relatedness

7. It felt good to be captivated by the adoptee during the video.
8. It felt good and right to feel empathy for the adoptee.
9. It felt good to feel compassion for the adoptee during the video.

Adoptive Identity Work Scale (AIWS, Colander, 2014)

Keeping your identity as an adoptee and your story of adoption in mind, use the scale provided to indicate to what degree you agree or disagree with the following statements.

Reflective Exploration

10. Watching the video helped me reflect on the events leading up to my adoption and has been helpful to me.
11. Watching the video helped me reflect on the events leading up to my adoption and has helped me understand how I relate to my birth parent(s).
12. Watching the video helped me reflect on the events leading up to my adoption and has helped me understand how I relate to my adoptive parent(s).
13. After watching the video, I feel that I have spent an appropriate amount of time thinking about my adoption.
14. Watching the video made me think about how my life would have been different if I hadn't been adopted.

Identification

15. While viewing the video, I felt as if I was part of the story.
16. While viewing the video, I forgot myself and was fully absorbed.
17. I think I have a good understanding of the adoptee from the video.
18. I tend to understand the reasons why the adoptee from the video said what they said.
19. While viewing the video, I could feel the emotions the adoptee portrayed.
20. Watching the video, I felt I could really get inside the adoptee's head.
21. At key moments in the video, I felt I knew exactly what the adoptee was going through.

Realism

22. The things that happened in this video could occur somewhere in the real world.
23. The adoptee in the video said things like adoptees would say in real life.
24. The things the adoptee said were realistic.
25. I perceive similarities between the events that occurred in the video and events that occur in real life.
26. The content in the video bears similarities to things that happen in the real world.
27. The interactions described by the adoptee in the video are similar to interactions that adoptees have in real life.
28. In this video, aspects from real life are incorporated.

Perceived Similarity

The adoptee in the video and I...

29. Are similar in terms of our outlook, perspective, and values of adoption.
30. Analyze problems that arise in relation to adoption in a similar way.
31. Think alike in terms of coming up with similar responses to questions about adoption.
32. Are alike in a number of areas.
33. See adoption in much the same way.

Video Preference

34. Which of the two videos did you enjoy watching more?
 - a. I liked Sara's TedX video more.
 - b. I liked the documentary style video more.
35. Based on your answer above, please describe why you liked that video more than the other. [OPEN ENDED RESPONSE].

Appendix C. Time 2 and 3 Post-test Measures

Self-esteem

Directions: Keeping your identity as an adoptee in mind, use the scale provided to indicate to what degree you agree or disagree with the following statements.

1. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others.
2. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
3. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am successful.
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people even though I am adopted.
5. As an adoptee, I feel I do have a lot to be proud of.
6. I take a positive attitude toward myself as an adoptee.
7. On the whole, I am satisfied with my identity as an adoptee.
8. I think I have a good amount of respect for myself as an adoptee.
9. As an adoptee, it is rare for me to feel useless.
10. I rarely think I am no good at all because I am adopted.

Self-concept

11. My beliefs about who I am as an adoptee do not conflict with one another.
12. On one day I might have one opinion of myself as an adoptee and on another day I might have a different opinion.
13. I spend a lot of time wondering about who I really am because of my adoption.
14. Most of the time, I feel that I am the person that I appear to be.
15. When I think about who I was in the past, I'm not sure what I was really like.
16. I seldom experience conflict between the different aspects of my identity.

17. I think I know myself better than I know other people.
18. My beliefs about who I am as an adoptee seem to rarely change.
19. If I were asked to describe my personality, based on my adoptive identity, my description would not change from one day to the next.
20. Even if I wanted to, I don't think I could tell someone being an adoptee is really like.
21. As an adoptee, I have a clear sense of who I am and what I am.
22. I find it is pretty easy for me to make up my mind about things because I know what I want.

Adoptive Identity Work Scale

Keeping your identity as an adoptee and your story of adoption in mind, use the scale provided to indicate to what degree you agree or disagree with the following statements.

Reflective Exploration

23. Participating in the Zoom call helped me reflect on the events leading up to my adoption and has been helpful to me.
24. Participating in the Zoom call helped me reflect on the events leading up to my adoption and has helped me understand how I relate to my birth parent(s).
25. Participating in the Zoom call helped me reflect on the events leading up to my adoption and has helped me understand how I relate to my adoptive parent(s).
26. After participating in the Zoom call, I feel that I have spent an appropriate amount of time thinking about my adoption.
27. Participating in the Zoom call made me think about how my life would have been different if I hadn't been adopted.

Sense-Making

Please write at least 3 sentences for the following question. [OPEN ENDED].

28. In what ways did participating in this group call help you make sense of your adoption?

Interactional Sense-making

When answering the questions below, please consider the interactions you have had with the other adoptees while on the group call.

Engagement

29. When another adoptee shared their story, people showed interest in the story.

30. When another adoptee shared their story, people became involved in the story (i.e., gave non-verbals, replied to them, etc).

Turn-Taking

31. People were courteous and respectful to others who shared their adoption story in the group call.

32. When another adoptee told a story about their adoption, I would describe the atmosphere as polite.

Perspective-Taking

33. When another adoptee told a story about their adoption, it felt like people were able to 'put myself in their shoes' so we could understand where each person is coming from.

34. During the storytelling experience, people made an honest effort to understand the perspective of whomever is telling the story.

35. I felt the adoptees in the group call were successful at understanding others' perspectives.

Coherence

36. People usually did not question the details of the story in the group call.

37. The stories in the group call usually had a definitive beginning, middle, and end.

Appendix D. Phase 3 Zero-Order Correlations

Table 5-1: Phase 3 Zero-Order Correlations Among Key Variables and Descriptive Statistics.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Identification	—	.22	.32**	.43**	.55**	.24	.16	.10	4.3	.48
2. Realism		—	.39**	.22	.27*	.02	.08	.06	4.7	.33
3. Perceived similarity			—	.34**	.32**	-.01	-.12	-.10	4.1	.73
4. Eudaimonia				—	.40**	.24	.15	.25*	3.9	.52
5. Identity work					—	.45**	.12	-.02	3.8	.79
6. Interactional sense-making						—	.18	.05	4.5	.49
7. Self-esteem							—	.62**	3.9	.77
8. Self-concept								—	3.0	.76

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed).

Appendix E. Experimental Condition Protocol

Introduction

Thank you so much for taking the time to be here today. As was said in the participation information, the goal of this meeting is really to bring Asian transracial adoptees together and think about their adoption stories. So, in our time together, I would like to ask everyone some questions about your adoption story.

Please keep your camera on and stay unmuted for the duration of the call as this is intended to be an interactive experience for everyone and I want it to feel as though we are in person together.

I want to remind you that I will take steps to protect your confidentiality; what this means is that your name will not be attached to these results in any way, and we request that you do not talk about anything from this session with anyone else. This is not only to protect your privacy but is also important to the structure of the study. In the email reminder, I asked you to come with a pseudonym in mind. Please use this time to go ahead and change your name on Zoom to what you have selected as your pseudonym.

I want to honor your time, therefore, while I encourage you to elaborate on your answers to my questions, there may be times when I redirect, so that we may be sure to cover everything. You're always welcome to contact me afterward to elaborate on something you may have left out. This session should take no longer than 90 minutes. Does that still work for everybody?

Again, your participation is completely voluntary; if any question is too difficult or you don't feel comfortable sharing, you don't have to answer. You can withdraw from the study at any

time. Do you have any questions before we begin? [Hits “record” on digital recorder or on Zoom.]

I have now begun recording.

Introductory Questions

Can everyone share the name they would like to go by and take 1-2 minutes to tell us your adoption story?

***** WATCH MEDIA *****

Sharing of Story & Guiding Sense-Making Questions

After having watched this video together, what I would like you to do for the next 5 minutes (I am going to set a timer to keep us on track) is for you to write about how this video made you think about your own adoption story. After five minutes, we are going to come back together and take turns reading what we wrote. You are not required to share anything you wrote that you would not like to share, but the intention is for you all to be able to share your thoughts and experiences with adoption.

Now that we have heard about what everyone has written, what are some of the similarities and/or differences you see across everyone’s stories?

Concluding Content Questions

As you reflect on your experience, what would you tell your younger self? At what age do you wish you had known that? What else would you like to share that we have not had the chance to talk about?

Debrief

Thank you so much for taking the time to share your stories with everyone and for watching the video altogether. Now what I would like you to do is complete a survey which asks some questions about what we all just watched as well as some questions related to your thoughts on adoption. This is also where you can insert your email address so I may send you your gift card compensation for having participated today. Also, we will be reaching out to you in one week with another follow-up survey and if you complete that survey in its entirety, you will receive another

\$10 Amazon gift card for your time. I am going to put the link in the chat for you all. While you complete the survey, feel free to turn your camera and microphone off so you have more privacy, then once you are done, you are free to exit the meeting. I will also be turning off my camera and mic but am here if you have any questions. Thank you all so much, I really appreciate your willingness to participate in this study.

Appendix F. Comparison Condition Protocol

Introduction

Thank you so much for taking the time to be here today. As was said in the participation information, the goal of this meeting is really to bring Asian transracial adoptees together and think about their adoption stories. So, in our time together, I would like to ask everyone some questions about your adoption story.

Please keep your camera on and stay unmuted for the duration of the call as this is intended to be an interactive experience for everyone and I want it to feel as though we are in person together.

I want to remind you that I will take steps to protect your confidentiality; what this means is that your name will not be attached to these results in any way, and we request that you do not talk about anything from this session with anyone else. This is not only to protect your privacy but is also important to the structure of the study. In the email reminder, I asked you to come with a pseudonym in mind. Please use this time to go ahead and change your name on Zoom to what you have selected as your pseudonym.

I want to honor your time, therefore, while I encourage you to elaborate on your answers to my questions, there may be times when I redirect, so that we may be sure to cover everything. You're always welcome to contact me afterward to elaborate on something you may have left out. This session should take no longer than 90 minutes. Does that still work for everybody?

Again, your participation is completely voluntary; if any question is too difficult or you don't feel comfortable sharing, you don't have to answer. You can withdraw from the study at any

time. Do you have any questions before we begin? [Hits “record” on digital recorder or on Zoom.]

I have now begun recording.

Introductory Questions

Can everyone share the name they would like to go by and take 1-2 minutes to tell us your adoption story?

***** WATCH MEDIA *****

Debrief

Thank you so much for taking the time to share your stories with everyone and for watching the video altogether. Now what I would like you to do is complete a survey which asks some questions about what we all just watched as well as some questions related to your thoughts on adoption. This is also where you can insert your email address so I may send you your gift card compensation for having participated today. Also, we will be reaching out to you in one week with another follow-up survey and if you complete that survey in its entirety, you will receive another \$10 Amazon gift card for your time. I am going to put the link in the chat for you all. While you complete the survey, feel free to turn your camera and microphone off so you have more privacy, then once you are done, you are free to exit the meeting. I will also be turning off my camera and mic but am here if you have any questions. Thank you all so much, I really appreciate your willingness to participate in this study.