

## **Sa Likod ng Pagtanggap: The Lived Experiences of Adopted Individuals**

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### **Abstract**

The process of adoption continuously happens today in our society. Individuals, whose biological parents were not able to assume their rights and responsibilities and were not able to provide the children's basic needs will not be raised by their biological parents and will become a fully and permanent member of another family. This study explores the adoptees' viewpoint regarding how they found out that they are adopted, how they formed their identity, their adjustment and how they built relationships with other people. The results of this study showed that adopted individuals found out about their adoption through other people and from their adoptive parents. Adopted individuals also expressed lack of feelings of belongingness from being raised by their adoptive parents that led them to adjust in different ways.

### **Keywords**

Adoption, identity, adjustment, relationship

Adoption started here in the Philippines when some charitable institutions in the 1800's provided a shelter and care for the abandoned and destitute children (Bala, 2011). It has been known that our society created adoption as a means to meet the needs of children whose biological parents were not able to assume their rights and responsibilities and were not able to provide the children's basic needs. Adoption or adopting is widespread in our society; many children are being parented by a single parent, a grandparent, step-parent, foster parent. Teenagers who got pregnant early tend to resort to abortion and suicide that is why our society created and authorized adoption (Bala, 2011).

Adoption is a social and emotional process in which children who will not be raised by their biological parents will become a fully and permanent member of another family. The process of adoption is believed to have a great effect for the child psychologically. The implications of this for the psychology of the adopted child are of the utmost significance. The child who is placed with adoptive parents at or soon after birth misses the mutual and deeply

satisfying mother-child relationship, the roots of which lie in that deep area of the personality where the physiological and the psychological are merged (Clothier, 1957).

A related study that has been conducted about adoption entitled *Parenting style: Adjustments of the adopted children and the effects of adoption to the children* noted that the children's development during toddler and preschool years is significantly important (Patterson & Hastings, 2008) and the parents' presences are vital to this development. Based on researches, adoptees' cognitive functioning are not connected with their biological parents, rather it is more closely related with their adoptive parents' interactional style (Londen, Juffer, & IJzendoorn, 2014).

A study of 1,364 adoptees on the impact of early childhood adversities of international adoptees on adult psychological conflicts revealed that severe early adversities increase the risk of adult psychopathology, even when children are taken out of their problematic environments. These children had an increased risk of having anxiety disorders, mood disorders or



substance abuse disorders into adulthood (Fitagibbons, 2009).

Thus, this research aimed to understand adopted individuals and their lived experiences. Moreover, this study, is foremostly concerned with the experiences of adopted individuals that may contribute to our society's sensitivity to the adoptive individuals' identity construction and how they relate to other people. Also, the adopted individuals' view of themselves, their meaning-making, and the way they construe their life was highlighted in this research. Generally this study targeted to explore the lived experiences of adopted individuals specifically about a) Finding out about their adoption b) Self - concept c) Adjustment and d) Relationship with other people.

### **UNDERSTANDING ADOPTION**

Adoption, in fact, has a long history and adopted children nowadays account for non-negligible share of minors in industrialized countries (Bethman & Kvasnicka, 2012). This was supported by literary and legal sources which indicated that adoption was widely practised in many ancient societies (Brosnan, 1922; Huard, 1956 as cited in United Nation, 2009) and it clearly played an important part in ancient life (United Nation, 2009). Adoption is defined as "to take a child of other parents as one's own" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2004) however, natives from Nigeria see adoption as "the situation where a barren person tries to comfort him/herself by taking control of a child" (Oladokun, Arulogun, and Oladokun, 2009). Today, adoption is undertaken mainly to provide a home for children deprived of parental care (Goody, 1969; Tizard, 1977 as cited in United Nation, 2009). According to Domestic Adoption of 1998 during the 10<sup>th</sup> Philippine Congress, an adopted child should be below eighteen (18) years of age; in contrast to ancient laws, minors were not permitted to be adopted (United Nation, 2009) a clear evidence that children were not the paramount consideration in the decisions related to adoption (United Nation, 2009). But

according to Bethmann and Kvasnicka (2012) infertility, high opportunity cost of own children, emotional attachment to an orphan's fate, and monetary returns to adoption provide motives for adoption. On the other hand, societies of the past regarded adoption as a means of preserving family lineage, enabling the continuation of ancestor worship, political alliance, and ensuring care for adoptive parents in their old age (United Nations, 2009).

### **PROBLEMS IN ADOPTION**

Historically, adoption has been viewed as a highly successful societal solution for the problems confronting children whose biological parents could not or would not provide for them (Brodinzky, 1993). But in reality, birthparents anguish over the loss of their children; adoptive families are just as dysfunctional as natural families; and adoption is a huge, profit-driven industry where babies are the commodity (Gerow, 2004 cited in Dudley, 2004) and that adopted children are at risk of developing emotional and behavioral problems (Brand & Brinich, 1999). Many studies reported that adopted adults have a higher degree of mental health issues, but some researchers view these differences as minor; others view them as substantial (Baden & Wiley, 2007 cited in Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013). According to Silverstein and Kaplan (1986), loss, rejection, guilt/shame, grief, identity, intimacy and control were the core problems in adoption that make the adoptive families dysfunctional, socially. Adoptism is a cultural *belief* that families formed by adoption are less truly connected than birth families; that birth families should be preserved at all costs and under all circumstances except the most severely harmful (Hall & Steingberg, 2004).

### **RELATIONSHIP TOWARDS ADOPTIVE FAMILY**

Understanding children's behavior requires an appreciation of the child's developmental status and the dynamic organization of the

behavior overtime (Cairns, 1979; Cicchetti, 1990; Parker et al, 2005)., Because of these, children may bear residue of attachment doubts (Richardson & Norgate, 2006) due to interruption of initial formation of attachment with the birth family. Attachment style or organization refers to a person's ways of relating in relationships (Levy et al., 2011); this process has been defined as the emotional link that forms between a child and a caregiver, and it is thought to physically bind people over time (Ainsworth, Bell, & Stayton, 1992; Gray, 2011). Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson & Collins (2005) described attachment as a salient issue given its clear centrality to infant functioning and subsequent development (Londen et al, 2007). In the first volume of his trilogy on attachment, Bowlby (1969/1982) described three phases in the process of becoming attached to one's caregiver; pre-attachment, attachment-in-the-making and clear-cut attachment.

## Method

This is a qualitative research about adopted individuals using specifically the phenomenological approach. Qualitative method is inclined towards having thorough and profound details of the understanding of different individuals and their experiences when they underwent a certain phenomenon (Creswell, 2012) and perceiving those experiences in their most natural context which aims to let the researchers have a glimpse of the point of view of the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Harwell, 2011).

Moreover, the results of a qualitative research are largely dependent on the unique interactions between participants and the researchers so generalization is not to be expected in this kind of research (Harwell, 2011). Its inductive nature lets the researchers make hypotheses and arrive at conclusions based from the explanations and statements of the participants that is why it is inherent that this kind of research can somehow be subjective in a sense that the

perception and biases of the researcher can affect the results (Harwell, 2011).

The researchers used phenomenological approach which suggests that experiences can be explained by the participants based on their own perception and that those data are the only ones that are true and certain (Groenewald, 2004). Furthermore, exploratory methodological approach which is focused with inquiry and discovering what is present in the topic of the study (Davies, 2006) was also used.

In connection with this, the gathered data from the statements of the adopted individuals about their experiences were explored as the sole foundation of the study.

Qualitative researches tend to focus more on the depth of the exploration of the phenomenon rather than how universal it can be (Creswell, 2012). That being said,, the researchers used the non-random, purposive sampling technique which let the researchers pick their participants deliberately considering who were more "information rich" and thus can provide more answers to what was currently unknown about the topic that was studied (Patton, 1990 as cited in Creswell, 2012).

Sampling allows researchers to choose participants that can represent a certain population. However, qualitative researches require a smaller number of samples to supply deep and thorough materials for a study. Thus, this study was composed of eight (8) participants.

The researchers made sure that the following criteria were satisfied: a.) 15- 25 years old; b.) an adopted child - regardless of whether the adoption underwent legal process or not c.) has full knowledge of his/her being an adopted child; d.) the adoption must be open to the parents and family e.) willing and able to narrate his or her experiencesher experiences as an adopted individual.

The participants that the researchers looked for were those who have full knowledge about the adoption. Regardless of whether their experiences are positive or negative, they must be willing to share and

disclose their stories and should be able to express themselves openly.

The researchers used a semi-structured in-depth interview guide to make sure that the flow of the questioning was the same for all the participants. Semi-structured interview was more appropriate to use for the study because its aim was to determine the experiences of the participants specifically on their identity construction, and relationship with others in an open and rich manner. This type of interview guide made the atmosphere lighter and more comfortable during the discussion. This type of interview guide helped the researchers to raise same questions and thus make sure that the interview had the same direction and focus among each of the participants and that the questions were open for rich information. It also reduced the margin for biases of the researchers during the interview. Moreover, the researchers used probes to encourage the participants to elaborate or clarify their answers to really deepen the discussion and know more about the participants' inner thoughts. The interview lasted for 1 to 2 hours per session at least twice per participant.

A pilot interview was done to assess whether the interview guide served the purpose of this study. Modifications and other changes were done to make sure that the guide was accurate and as efficient as possible.

The researchers looked for participants using the "Patanong-tanong" method, which helped the researchers find participants quicker and easier. The researchers randomly asked people if they know of someone who is adopted, and the adoption is open to the family. The researchers also used the snowball method. Snowballing is a method wherein the researchers ask participants to recommend other individuals that could also befit the criteria laid out by the researchers; this could be done by asking directly during an interview or through informal conversations. (Creswell, 2012)

After identifying possible participants, the researchers assessed

whether they fit the criteria of the study. The ones that were deemed qualified were informed about the research. When a participant was a minor, they were interviewed with their families with them. Informed consent and Parental consent forms were given to the participants and their parents or guardians to fill in and sign to make sure that they were fully aware of the aims of this study and what the research is all about and that they were wholeheartedly willing to participate in our research nonetheless. Confidentiality of the data were ensured by the researchers. Establishing rapport and confidence was also of importance. The researchers collected the data through face-to-face interviews for 1-2 times. Two (2) researchers conducted the interview each time - one served as the interviewer and the other collected the data by writing notes and recording the conversation to make sure about the accuracy of the data.

This study used thematic method as a basis for analysis because it offers a profound and thorough explanation of the data which may be complex but will be beneficial to the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researchers took advantage of the "anything goes" (Antaki, Billig, Edwards, & Potter, 2002) characteristic of this method to properly explore and comprehend the phenomenology of adopted individuals.

Aronson (1994) explained the steps of this type of method. Primarily, the researchers inquire about the concepts and experiences that the participants had as adopted individuals. Then, they identify patterns and themes that are common to the participants and all the statements that suit a specific category will be grouped together. The next step is to associate interrelated patterns into sub-themes. Themes are classified by "bringing together components or fragments of ideas or experiences, which often are meaningless when viewed alone" (Leininger, 1985 as cited by Aronson, 1994). The next step is to read related literatures to support the arguments for the themes that emerged. After the themes have

been formed and the arguments had been supported by literature, this is the time when the researcher can formulate theme statements to cultivate and develop a story line. That process was exactly what the researchers followed

## Results and Discussion

With the phenomenological approach, the study produced four major themes using thematic analysis: Finding out about the adoption, Identity Formation, Adjustments and Relationship with other people.

The first theme of this study, Finding out about adoption, tackled how the participants found out that they were adopted, which was either from other people or it was from their adoptive parents. Identity formation showed how the participants saw themselves and how they felt as adopted individuals. Adjustment discussed how the participants dealt with the knowledge that they were adopted and the participants' initial reaction after they had found out that they were adopted. Lastly, Relationship with other people showed what relationship the participants had with both their biological and adoptive family and also with other people.

### FINDING OUT ABOUT THE ADOPTION

Telling the child about the adoption can prevent conflict between the adoptee and the adoptive family. Adoptive parents may be unaware of how children's knowledge about adoption and perception of themselves as adoptees is influenced by their developmental maturity. Due to this, Nickman (1985) suggested that the ideal age to tell the child about the adoption is the age between 6 to 8 years old because by then, they have a better cognitive capacity, more mature verbal expression, increased self-awareness, and the emerging ability to think abstractly about relationships and ideas. However, there are so many ways an adoptee can find out about their adoption – from adoptive parents or accidentally- either way it can result to different emotions.

The results of the study showed that two subthemes emerged: Finding out from other people and Finding out directly from adoptive parents. The first subtheme discussed about the experiences of the participants who found out about their adoption from other people while the later discussed about the experiences of the participants who found out about their adoption from their adoptive parents.

#### Context of discovery

The adopted individual's knowledge about their upbringing can help ease their curiosity about their background, and it can also ease the psychological distress of not knowing (Miall & March, 2005). Both Anna and Missing1000 were intentionally told about their adoption through conversation within their adoptive family. Their situation was explained to them, and they were also told about their biological parents.

*“sinabi lang na iba yung tunay mong magulang tapos pinakita ‘yung mga picture, na ito talaga si papa mo, si mama mo.”- Anna, 20*

*“Sinabi ni mama nong mga 5 years old ako. Ganun lang parang conversation lang. Ah usap lang ng maayos, sinabi lang na gani-na- adopted ako.”- Missing1000, 19*

The reason of Anna's adoptive parents for telling her about the adoption is to prevent the possibility of finding out from other people that she was adopted. In addition to this, they also wanted to avoid the incoming problems that may come with it.

*“ang sabi kasi ng magulang ko ngayon na kinikilala, mas maganda daw malaman ko sa kanila kesa sa ibang tao. Kasi, syempre, normally di ba yung iba pag nalaman, Malaki na . narinig sa ibang tao, nagrerebelde. Mga ganun.”- Anna, 20*

Another respondent named Missing1000 also shared,

*“kasi ang sabi ni mama, habang maliit pa sabihin na mahirap naman na malaman na adopted ng malaki ka na tapos sa iba- sa ibang tao pa malalaman” – Missing1000, 19*

Even though there were parents who chose to intentionally tell their adopted children about the adoption, there were still

some participants who accidentally found out the adoption from other people. According to Brodzinsky(2011), when children learn the language of adoption, they also learn to identify themselves as adopted without knowing what it means. Feelings of anxiety and confusion on their family status also arise as their knowledge of adoption deepens (Brodzinsky, 1993). Some of the participants accidentally knew about their adoption through hearing stories from other people and experiencing being teased that they were adopted. One participant said that:

*“bata pa ako ah ano ko na, parang nakakarinig na ako ng mga iba ibang kwento, ganun.”-Mark, 19*

Also, one participant (Ganda, 18) was teased about her physical characteristics. She somehow had an idea about her adoption through her unmatched characteristics with her adoptive mother and absence of father (single mother) together with constant teasing from her cousins.

*“ampon ka, di mu kamukha mama mo, ba’t maputi daw ako, tapos yung mama ko daw maitim ganun.” ... “feeling ko kasi dati pa ampon na talaga ako..”- Ganda, 18*

There was also an incident that Ganda was teased of being siblings with one of her classmates because of their similar physical characteristics. And she found out later on that they were actually her biological siblings;

*“tapos meron din akong ate, kapatid nun, na kasi ‘yung pins- kinakapatid ko ‘yung ate nun magkaklase sila, yung elem- nung bata pa ko inaasar kami kasi magkamukha daw kami, yun. ‘Yun pala totoong magkapatid kami- grabe ka-smallworld.”-Ganda, 18*

One respondent named Mayad shared that she felt hurt being teased by other children "ampon" even though she did not understand what it meant.

*“iyak lang pero hindi ko alam ‘yung meaning niya kasi pag inaasar ako ng ganun parang ano.. Nabobother ako, pero hindi ko na tinatanong kung anong meaning nun, kasi pang asar nila sa akin, nakakaasar nag iiyak lang ako nun, tapos away-away ganyan”-Mayad, 21*

In addition to this, Mayad found out about the adoption when she had an argument with her baby-sitter,

*“noong grade 6 ako noon, kasi nag-away kami ng matagal na na katulong namin, alam nya rin na ano.. na adopted lang ako, tapos sinabihan nya ko” – Mayad, 21*

### Reaction

According to Heath (2012), adopted individuals are more likely to respond to the knowledge of being adopted with negative emotions that may persist over many years. In this study, six (6) of the participants, only with the exception of Anna and Missing1000 had prior suspicions about being adopted before it was confirmed to them because of subtle clues like being teased when they were younger.

Having suspicions about being adopted can be a confusing phase in an adoptee’s life thus to rectify the situation. Two of the participants, (Mayad and Pink) immediately asked a significant person in their life and asked them directly about the adoption.

*“Umiyak na ako, tapos umakyat ako sa kwarto ng kuya ko, sinabi ko sa kanya, tinanong ko sa kanya tapos sabi ko “Kuya, ano..sabi niya, sabi ng katulong natin ganito.. ampon lang daw ako” – Mayad, 21*

However for Ganda’s case, her adoptive mother had already told her about it but when they had a fight, she asked for reconfirmation from his uncle.

*“ano kasi yung may time na nag away ulit kami ng mama ko tinanong ko sa tito ko, sinabi sa kin e yung tito ko alam nya kasi yun simula nung bata pa ko yung nangyari e yun nga kinuwento nya tapos sinabi nya sa kin, sinabi sa kin ng tito ko yung- yung pangalan ng papa ko” – Ganda, 19*

In Mark’s case, he did not have the courage to talk to his parents about it so he just contemplated on it by himself.

*“Wala akong ginawa, ano lang.. puro isip-isip lang, puro feelings lang na walang ano.. parang naisip ko ano kaya itanong ko ganito ganyan, iniisip ko siya pero alam ko hindi ko kayang gawin na magtanong sa kanila” – Mark, 19*

For the other participants who said that they were teased about being adopted when they were younger, Ron said that initially, he could not accept the act that he

was adopted and he had an experience where his refusal to accept the situation led him to get into fights with other kids.

*“inaaway ko talaga sila tapos di ko talaga tanggap na ampon ako.”*

–Ron, 18

After the confirmation, Dakota, said her initial reaction was that she thanked her adoptive parents but according to her, she it seemed to her like she restarted her life because she felt like something was wrong. Even though Dakota was grateful to her parents because of the good treatment that she received from them, it did not prevent her from having negative emotions about being adopted.

*“Una, nag-thank you ako. Oo, nag-thank you ako sa mama’t papa ko kasi nga wala kasi parang hindi ko naramdaman na adopted ako kasi hindi naman nila pinaramdam kaya ayun.”* – Dakota, 18

*“parang feeling ko nagstart ako ulit sa simula kasi syempre di ba, kapag nung una feeling ko na sila yung parents ko tapos nung nalaman parang sabi ko “oh wait parang may mali.”* – Dakota, 18

Dakota also said that she had a point in her life when she felt like she needed to isolate herself from the people around her. Isolation was also done by Anna but unlike Dakota who isolated herself, Anna generally found it hard to relate with other people when she was younger.

*“kasi dati kapag kay papa, kay mama... ano medyo, ano parang close na close talaga kami as in yung sobrang close tapos nung mga ilang, nung nalaman ko na ‘yun medyo nag adjust ako na maging, parang maging close sa kanila kasi nga parang sa lahat ng paligid ko hindi muna ako nag ano, nag lie low ako sa kanila”* – Dakota, 18

*“tapos nung nalamn ko mga ilang buwan lang din naman yun na nagkaron ng gap kasi inadjust ko pa yung sarili ko”* – Dakota, 18

*“Nakatingin lang ako sa mga kaklase ko ganun lang. Wala. Kaya nung una, nahirapan talaga ako makipag usap sa ibang tao.”* – Anna, 20

Anna found out about the adoption directly from her parents when she was still young however she still found it hard to connect with people that were not a part of

her immediate family after finding out about the adoption.

## SELF - CONCEPT

This major theme discussed how the participants saw themselves as they grew up knowing that they were adopted. The term “self-concept” was used interchangeably in literatures with the terms “self”, “self - esteem”, and “self – identity” (Moniz-Lecce, 1988). However, Manning (2007) referred to it as to the perceptions of competence or adequacy in academic and non-academic (e.g., social, behavioral, and athletic) and these perceptions are formed through one’s experiences with and interpretations of one’s environment, and are influenced especially by reinforcements and evaluations of significant others (Shavelson & Bolus, 1981). According to ACT for Youth Upstate Center of Excellence (2002) the question, “Who am I?” is especially pertinent during adolescence. However, Rosenberg (1991) suggested that adopted children follow different experience course from children who are raised by their biological parents. Other than the question “Who am I?” they also begin to seek more detailed answers to the question ‘where do I come from?’ (Dalton, 2010).

Based on the results, three subthemes emerged: Affective, Behavioral, and Cognitive Self- Concept of the participants. The Affective subtheme discussed the feelings of the participants as adopted individuals; Behavioral subtheme was about what they did knowing that they were adopted; and lastly, Cognitive subtheme tackled the thoughts of the participants as adopted individuals.

### *Affective Self – Concept*

Finding out that they were adopted may trigger from the participants different responses together with bursts of emotion. According to Brown et al. (2001), self-esteem is used to refer to rather momentary emotional states, particularly those that arise from a positive or negative outcome. The

participants expressed different emotions that they felt after knowing that they were adopted. Three participants said that they were happy and felt very lucky because they were treated just like a real son/daughter of their adoptive parents.

*"Masaya tapos kuntento, kuntento naman sa mga ngayon.hanggat masaya tapos lucky lucky." – Missing1000*

*"Sa akin kasi, masaya ako kasi yung nag-ampon sa 'kin wala silang anak so mag-isa lang ako tapos bigay naman lahat ng gusto. Parang hindi mo mararamdaman na ampon ka hmm.. ayun, swerte para sa 'kin"*

– Anna,20

*"Kasi di ko talaga na-feel na adopted ako. Never naparamdam" -Dakota, 18*

On the other hand, two participants expressed negative emotions that they felt for being adopted. They said that after knowing that they were adopted, they somehow felt that something was missing in their lives. According to Child Welfare Information Gateway (1990) the loss of birth parents as a result of adoption may set the stage for feeling of grief for many adopted persons. This feeling of grief may lead to the feelings of emptiness of one's life and feeling of not belonging to their adoptive family.

*"Kasi ano..parang may kulang sa pagkatao mo, hindi mo alam kung sino 'yung tunay mong mama.. tapos...."*

– Mark, 19

*"nandoon 'yun di ba kasi nga parang kulang ka.. may ano.. siguro makikita ko 'yung sarili ko pag nakita ko na 'yung magulang ko na totoo, 'yun talaga 'yun.. ehh, 'yun talaga yun."*

– Mayad, 21

Mark did not confirm the identity of his biological mother while Mayad never had the chance to meet her biological parents. This may be the cause of their feelings of emptiness. Professionals have long postulated that confidential adoptions contribute to greater confusion for adoptees in adolescence (Berry, 1993).

### *Behavioral Self – Concept*

The knowledge of adoption can be a shock for a person and it may cause sudden or

gradual changes in behavior upon knowing that he/she was adopted. According to Child Welfare Information Gateway (1990), adolescents often express their reactions to adoption by rebelling against parental standards. One participant expressed her disagreement towards her adoptive parents' treatment of her and tried to identify with her biological sibling.

*"parang naghigpit masyado 'yung mama ko tsaka papa (Adotive Parents) ko kasi yung ate(Biological) ko, nagsimula nang magrebelde baka daw magaya lang daw po ako sa ate ko tapos gumaya po ako sa ate ko...yung 1<sup>st</sup> sem po ng college namin parang hndi po ako nagapasok, pang midterm po tapos pumapasok po ng nakainom, tapos gumagamit pa ng ano..weeds" – Pink,17*

One participant underwent a change in behavior, although she knew it was not right, after she found out that she was adopted. Anna's attitude shifted from being a child who seldom talked to being an outgoing person.

*"Oo, actually yung teacher ko nga kasi bumisita siya nito lang.. yung teacher ko nung kinder ako, nagulat siya, sabi niya..."*

*"Oh ang laki-laki mo na, at ang daldal mo na ah. Dati halos hindi ka magsalita eh." Yung ganun. Sobrang daldal ko na ngayon eh." – Anna,20*

On the other hand, the other participants (Ron, Dakota, Ganda, Missing1000, and Mayad) reported that they did not notice any changes in their behavior.

*"parang same pa din naman ng ngayon, wala namang nagbago, parang ganun pa rin ano, parang happy go lucky pa din" – Dakota, 18*

*"wala, ganun pa din naman, kung ano ako dati, ganun pa din wala- walang pinagbago sa kin" – Ganda, 18*

These statements showed that the participants had no recollection of any sudden changes in their perception of themselves after they discovered that they were adopted. They described their behavior as the same before and after they discovered it.

Additionally, two participants said that they sensed that there was something wrong happening around them when they

were younger. They said that other kids were not playing with them. These participants had “to buy” their friends just to hang out with them.

*“ay parang binibili ko pa yung kaibigan ko nung bata ako kasi hindi sila nakikipaglaro kasi alam nilang adopted ako tapos ako hindi ko alam so, parang okay anong problema? Parang ganun.” – Dakota, 19*  
*“Oo kasi dati parang walang nakikipag laro sa ‘kin misan kailangan ko pa sila ilibre parang kailangan ko pa bilhin yung mga kaibigan ko parang lang magsama sa ‘kin maglaro. Kaya, yun lang naman yung experience ko.” – Missing1000*

### **Cognitive Self – Concept**

Half of all adopted adults search for identifying information or try to make contact with their birth parents (Curtis & Pearson, 2010; Evan B. Donaldson, 2010; Muller & Perry, 2001). Three of the participants admitted to being curious about the identity of their biological parents; they said that they want to meet them because they have lots of questions pertaining to their adoption.

*“Ahh ano pa ba, yun parang sabi ko, oo nga ano pa ba... na ampon ako..hindi na ako makasalita..ok tapos... tapos ‘yun na cucurious ka kung ano talaga ‘yung ano, bakit? May mga bakit na tanong, bakit niya ba ako binigay? Anong reason.. ganun..” – Mark, 19*

*“sobrang curious talaga ako sa ano, sa mukha nila, kung taga saan talaga sila, kung ilan na mga kapatid ko sa kanila..nakaka curious pero iniisip ko na lang na pag naka graduate na ako, nagkatrabaho siguro meron pa rin naman sigurong way para makilala ko sila..” – Mayad, 21*

*“Kasi iniisip ko lahat bakit ganto yung nanay ko? Bakit ganto yung tatay ko? Bat ganun? Bakit sila?Iniisip ko lang na ayun nga, bakit ganun? Bakit ako? Sila iba....Kasi parang lagi ko nga iniisip na ano yung feeling na totoong magulang mo yung kasama mo?” - Anna, 20*

The participants had this wishful thinking that they want to meet their biological parents to ask about their

adoption as their way of accepting that they were adopted.

### **RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER PEOPLE**

Multitudes of issues may arise when children become aware that they have been adopted. Children may feel grief over the loss of a relationship with their biological family and the loss of the cultural and family connections that would have existed with those parents (Patricelli, MA, 2007). This discussed the participants’ relationship with their biological family, adoptive family and with other people.

Based on the results of the study, three subthemes emerged: relationship with their adoptive family, relationship with their biological parents and relationship with other people, specifically with their friends. In these subthemes, participants discussed the way they showed their affection and the way they were treated by their parents and other people.

#### *Relationship with their adoptive family*

According to Child Welfare Information Gateway adopted children and youth are not confused about who their parents are. They understand the different roles adoptive and birth parents play in their lives. They recognize who gave them life and who cares for them on a daily basis. Participants’ open relationships and conversations with their adoptive family helped strengthen their foundation for building a good relationship.

The results revealed that they had a good relationship with their adoptive family. Data showed that all the participants seemed to be satisfied and even proud of their adoptive parents with the exception of Pink. This seemed to be the reason why they expressed gratitude by trying to behave in a way that they thought would please their adoptive parents. If they were given a chance to choose, the majority of the participants said they will choose to be with their adoptive family than with their biological family.

*"Proud pa ko na sya yung naging nanay ko." – Ganda, 18*

*"Never ko naman naramdaman sa pamilya ko na ampon lang ako."*

*–Mayad, 21*

*"Ayos naman,masaya.. Masaya naman." – Missing1000*

One of the participant revealed that she felt lucky because her adoptive parents did not have children and she didn't feel a gap from being an adopted child.

*"Sa akin kasi, masaya ako kasi yung nag-ampon sa 'kin wala silang anak so mag-isa lang ako tapos bigay naman lahat ng gusto. Parang hindi mo mararamdaman na ampon ka hmm.. ayun, swerte para sa 'kin.'" – Anna, 20*

Also, one of the participants revealed that he didn't do anything bad that would displease his adoptive parents; he did not become rebellious, and he had a sense of belongingness and said that *"I have a 'Normal Family'."*

*"Okay naman siya, walang ano.. hindi ako nagrebelde, kasi nga hindi nga nila alam na parang ganun..parang ano.. masaya, okay naman. Pag nandoon ako sa amin, sabay kami.. normal lang, normal family, naga joke joke, naga kulitan, ganyan.." – Mark, 19*

In addition, some of the participants stated that they have "Utang na Loob" towards their adoptive parents. According to Dancel, 2005, When we Filipinos think of ourselves as inadequate, it might also be due to our un-ending *utang na loob* and our ever-present *hiya* "In addition to the informality, *utang na loob* is incurred implicitly and is an indebtedness that is not easily and readily assumed. Filipinos find this kind of indebtedness as something rather uncomfortable. Often, it is only in dire circumstances that a Filipino will entreat another for help. It is the feeling of *hiya* (which arises out of the beneficiary himself and not from any external source) that compels the beneficiary to repay the *utang na loob* (Dancel, 2005)."

It seemed that "Utang na Loob" affected their relationship because oftentimes, they tended to prioritize their adoptive parents' wishes over their own as

their way of repaying their adoptive parents for the things that they have done for them.

One of the participant revealed that, she tended to prevent her negative feelings towards her adoptive parents because of the feeling of *utang na loob*.

*"Ah okay, yung parang normal lang na parent na ang mag ano, na relationship, yung sobrang close ganun tapos nalaman ko mga ilang buwan lang din naman yun nagkaroon ng gap kasi inadjust ko pa yung sarili ko..Pero pag may tampuhan syempre 'di ko na maisip na dapat hindi ako nagtatampo kasi nga ano, Malaki yung utang na loob ko sa kanila ganun". – Dakota, 18*

On the other hand, one of the participants revealed that she pleases her adoptive parents by prioritizing their wishes for her such as in choosing her course in college. She considered their decision because of her *utang na loob* that her adoptive family are the ones sending her to school.

*"yung course ko po kung ano 'yung gusto kong piliing course.. parang iniisip ko gusto kasi ng papap ko ganito, ganito., parang kinokonsider ko talaga 'yung opinion nila kasi sila 'yung nagpapaaral sa akin, tapos 'yun 'yung gusto nila kasi sila 'yung nagpapaaral sa akin, tapos 'yun 'yung gusto nila sa akin tapos parang masam 'yung loob nila na hindi ko susundin 'yung ano kaya parang kung ano 'yung gusto nila 'yun po talaga 'yung sinusunod ko kaya parang hindi ko po naranasan 'yung freedom parang ganun... tapos kasi parang isisipin mo inampon ka na lang nga tapos mag iinarte ka, parang ganun po. " – Pink, 17*  
*"pero sa akin kasi utang na loob ko yun diba? Inampon nila ako utang na loob yun e, tapos nag ampon sa 'kin, 'di rin basta-basta hind rin.. hindi rin yung pinapahirapan din ako, kaya okay naman din yung buhay ko ngayon sana," – Mayad, 21*

### *Relationship with their biological parents*

It was also shown that most of the participants developed a good relationship with their biological parents. The state of having a good relationship with their biological family seemed to be the reason

why they are well adjusted to their lives. They can easily accept whatever situation they have and it seemed that they can handle situations well.

In one of the participants' case it seemed easier for him to develop a good relationship with his biological father because of the financial help that he gets from his father, unlike other adoptees who were not able to receive any support from their biological family.

*"Beso beso lang, 'yung totoong father ha.. tapos pag nagbibigay siya ng pera, thank you thank you lang normal lang tito lang talaga hindi niya alam nag tthank you ako sa kanya siya alam ko na siya 'yung father ko, normal lang"*

–Mark, 19

Also, two of the participants (Ganda and Dakota) developed a good relationship with their biological parents. One of them (Ganda) saw their relationship like that of friends and there was no awkwardness between them; the other one (Dakota) revealed that she didn't have negative feelings, and she's contented and not complaining whatever the reasons are behind her situation.

*"magkaibigan kasi kami-saktong-close na-parang hi (Ganda), ganun.. ganun ganun hello ganun parang naglolokohan kami ganun"* –Ganda, 18

*"Hmmm, sa may yung tunay kong parents, hindi naman talaga ako nagtanim ng galit na "Ah bakit niyo ako inadopt, ay bakit niyo ako pina adopt?"* –Dakota, 18

However, two of the participants stated that they were not able to form a good relationship with their biological parents due to some reasons. To most participants, it seemed that they are not able to accept their situations easily, and it affected their relationships towards their biological parents.

According to Grotevant, (Adoptive Families: Longitudinal Outcomes for Adolescents) when children were involved in adoptive kinship networks involving contact with birthfamily members, child adjustment was related not only to qualities of relationships within the adoptive family but also their relationship towards their

birthfamily and some members involved in contact.

One of the participants' case revealed that she was annoyed of his mother (biological) because of leaving her (the participant) behind. It seemed that this participant developed negative feelings towards her biological mother due to the abandonment that she experienced from her when she was young.

*"Kahit masama sa loob ko na magpakita siya, nung grade 6 ako, tinanggap ko naman eh. Kahit masakit, ang hirap eh. Kasi nabigla talaga ako eh. Tapos ayun binigyan ko siya ng chance na pumunta siya sa bahay, binibigyan niya ako ng kung ano-ano. Tapos bigla niya akong kukunin? Hindi pa ba sapat yun? Na Makita niya rin ako di ba? Parang galit syempre parang bakit ngayon ka lang nagpakita, ang laki ko na."*

–Anna, 20

*"Okay.. parang. Hindi po ako close sa kanila"* – Pink, 17

### *Relationship with their friends*

Some of the participants reported that they have a good relationship with their friends. Citing what one of the participants said, *"Sa friends talaga, wala sa family ko eh.. sa friends na lang ako naga lapit kasi parang pag sa family hindi nila naiintindihan."* It has been said that it is better to open up with a friend rather than with the family because sometimes the family will never understand what they feel but friends will do. The participants seemed to compensate their feelings of loneliness and the feelings that they need to be accepted for what they are through building a good relationship and opening themselves to other people, from which they can gain comfort and encouragement.

According to Micheletta and Waller of the University of Portsmouth's, Department of Psychology, primates are more responsive to the actions of friends than relatives. Friends rather than family are more likely to affect how we behave and develop, according to scientists who have been studying the behavior of macaque monkeys (Gilani, 2012).

*"..nacucurious lang sila ayun, pero wala naman hindi naman sila umiiwas, ganun.. kaya nga nagcocomfort pa nga sila e, lalo na ngayon mga college na mga classmates naming mga kaibigan ko.. wala, wala naman nagbago, ganun pa rin.. ano nga e may comfort pa silang binigay eh"* – Mark, 19

*"Pag sa friends mo, may naaano akong ano, ide... parang palakas ng loob"* – Mayad, 21

In addition, some of the participants were not good in building a relationship with other people, with their friends and towards their opposite sex and it seemed that these conflicts were usually caused by their past experiences of being an adopted child. This may be the reason why they tended to have difficulties in building good relationship towards other people.

Streep (2004) said that they are more likely to limit themselves to trust others and they tend to be particular in choosing their friends. The nature of attachment to our caregivers in childhood—whether it's secure or insecure, and, within the insecure category, anxious or avoidant—determines how trusting we are, because these early attachments provide the working model of how we see the world and the people in it.

*"Nahirapan pa ako mag adjust kasi hindi ko po alam kung sino yung pagkakatiwalaan ko sa kanila, kung sino ba 'yung marunong magtago ng sikreto, or 'yung kasi 'yung mga nakikipag plastikan sa akin or pagtalikod ko iba na 'yung inano ko.."* – Pink, 17

*"Ayos naman. Kunti na lang kasi yung mga kino (consider) na mga loyal friends."* - Missing1000, 19

One of the participants revealed that she had difficulty in building trust. She tends to generalize the situation that everyone will leave her behind, just like her birth parents did, which caused her to have difficulty in building relationship towards other people.

*"Ah, sa ibang tao.. Syempre pag nagkaroon ka ng... 'pag adopted ka talaga tapos alam mo, mahirap makipag relasyon kaagad kasi iniisip mo iiwan ka rin nun. Yun talaga yung*

*una mong maiisip, kahit ako, 'yun yung una kong naisip. Baka iwanan ako."* – Anna, 20

## COPING AND ADJUSTMENT

Adopted individuals do not have the identical life experiences; some adoptees' experiences are practically matching those of non-adopted individuals while others are significantly dissimilar. (Nickman, et al, 2005 as cited by Heath, 2012). This theme discussed the way the participants dealt with the knowledge that they were adopted.

Adjustment is one of the usual concerns faced by adopted individuals. In fact, a lot of studies have been conducted about it. Some research suggested that there are no significant differences between the behavioral adjustment of adopted and non-adopted individuals (Borders, Black, & Pasley, 1998; Elonen & Schwartz, 1969; Norvell & Guy, 1977; Stein & Hoopes, 1985 as cited by Brand and Brinich, 1999) while some argue that there are significant differences between adopted and non-adopted individuals especially in areas that measure social, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive functioning. (Netherlands: Verhulst, Althaus, & Versluis-den Bieman, 1990a; Norway: Andresen, 1992; Sweden: Bohman, 1970, 1971; Bohman & Sigvardsson, 1979, 1980, 1990; U.S.A.: Brodzinsky, Radice, Huffman, & Merkler, 1987; Brodzinsky, Schechter, Braff, & Singer, 1984; Lindholm & Touliatos, 1980; Sharma, McGue, & Benson, 1996, 1998; Zill, 1985b as cited by Brand and Brinich, 1999)

Based on the results of this study, the participants had different ways of dealing with their situation. Anna and Mark who used to be shy made an effort to reach out to the people around them and socialize more.

*"Ayun makipag kaibigan sa ibang tao– Anna, 20*

*"parang nakikipag kapwa na rin ako ngayon"* – Mark, 19

On the other hand, Pink became more skeptical of the people around her as a means of guarding herself.

*“nahihirapan po ako mag adjust kasi hindi ko po alam kung sino ‘yung pagkakatiwalaan ko sa kanila, kung sino ba ‘yung marunong magtago ng sikreto, or ‘yung mga kasi ‘yung mga nakikipag plastikan sa akin”-Pink, 17*

Dakota and Pink also resorted to what they called “Soul-searching” and tried to find themselves. After finding out that they were adopted, Pink and Dakota claimed to have somehow felt lost.

*“Hmmm. Sabi nila soul searching daw kung meron man nun. Pero yun na rin kasi parang nagrestart ako sa una hindi ko alam kung anong gagawin ko.”*

– Dakota, 18

Mayad and Dakota mentioned that they tried to change the way they behaved after finding out that they were adopted. It showed that even though adoptive parents did not directly ask them to act in a certain way, adopted individuals tended to feel like it was their responsibility.

*“Parang nagpakabait ako nun, lalo na nalaman ko na ampon ako... parang nakakahiya na ganito ako mag asta pero ampon lang pala ako.” – Mayad*

*“ang hirap mag-adjust kasi parang dapat, dapat maging mas mabait ako sa kanila kasi nga may utang na loob ako dun ‘eh. Yun yung feeling.” – Dakota, 18*

Up until the date of the interview, most of the participants still had questions and unsolved issues with being adopted; however, some of the participants like Dakota claimed that things with her parents went back to normal. Ron said that after some time, he just learned how to accept things as they were because nothing can be done about it in the first place.

*“pero after nun nung ilang months parang bumalik ka rin sa dati.”*

*“wala, parang tinanggap ko lang talaga na wala naman talaga akong magagawa yun nung kasi nung bata ako nagalalit talaga ako nun pero nung highschool parang wala na din parang nasanay na lang ako” – Ron, 18*

## Conclusions and Implications

This study shows the participant’s lived experiences specifically: how they found out about their adoption, their

identity, their relationship with other people and their adjustment.

In conclusion, adopted individuals experienced teasing from other people that they were adopted even if they have no confirmation about their adoption and 6 of the participants found out about their adoption through other people.

It is also shown that the participants have positive relationship with their adopted parents; it is shown here that seven of the the participants seem to be satisfied, proud for their adoptive parents. In which seems to be the reason why they expressed their gratitude by trying to behave in a way that they think will please their adoptive parents. If they were given a chance to choose, the majority of the participants said they will choose to be with their adoptive family than with their biological family, but oftentimes they considered their feeling of *utang na loob* towards their adoptive parents, sometimes they prioritizing the wishes of their adoptive parents for them to be able to please them, they do that to satisfy the feeling that they need to pay back for what they’ve done for them.

In addition to these, some participants have a good relationship towards their biological parents but some doesn’t have. Oftentimes, those participants are tend to perceived their birthfamily as their friends and this is one of the reason why some of them are well adjusted on their lives, they can easily accept whatever the situations they have and it seems they can handle situations well, just like some of them, they not tend to become rebellious towards their biological parents.

On the other hand, some participants are not able in developing relationship towards other biological parents, because for what had happened to them, one of the participant doesn’t accept her birthparents, due to to this this maybe the reason why the participant are not able to develop a good relationship, oftentimes, this can be the reason why there are misconceptions in committing into a relationship towards opposite sex, and why there are difficulty in trusting other people. In relationship towards

their friends, some participants revealed that they have a good relationship, some doesn't have. Those participants who have good relationship tend to well adjusted on their lives, but sometimes, they are just compensating the feelings of emptiness and loneliness that is why they are able to form a good relationship towards their friends.

On the other hand, they have ambivalent feelings towards their biological parents. It is revealed that the participants have a misconception that adopted individuals should react negatively upon finding out that they were adopted but in contrast the participants acted differently from their idea of adjusting. It is showed that the adjustment issues faced by the participants were subtle.

The outcome of this study can be helpful to the participants in a way that sharing their experiences as an adopted individual may enhance their own understanding of themselves specifically their identity and how they relate with other people.

The result of this study can provide adoptive parents a deeper understanding on what their adopted child is going through so that they can help them adjust to the family and make them feel that they belong. It can also help them to educate other members of the adoptive family on building understanding and empathy within the family. This study can also help the adoptive parent's support their adopted children develop a sense of who they are and where they come from.

To the people who opt to adopt, this study may help them to have additional knowledge about adoption specifically on the case of disclosure. Through this, they can have better insight on whether they will tell the child about the adoption or not and what could be the possible outcomes.

To the psychology students, to have a wider knowledge about the experiences of adopted individuals that can help them to look at the adopted individual in clinical contexts in which their chosen profession require.

To the counsellors, this study may help them to have deeper knowledge about the difficult experiences as well as the positive experiences of an adopted individual. The result of this study may serve as a guide to produce a module on understanding adoption to be implemented by them. Through this, they can help them adjust in the society that they belong and build their own sense of identity as an individual.

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