# TRANSNATIONAL ADOPTEES' IDENTITY, BELONGING, AND THE ROLE OF SPORT

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Abstract

This study examines how, and if, sport could influence transnational adoptees' identity formation and sense of belonging. Transnational adoptees' identity and belonging development is complex, dynamic, and contextual. For example, some transnational national adoptees are racialized individuals within a white society and feel a lack of belonging to either group. Three facets of identity were identified: pre-adoptive identity, the adoptee identity, and ethnic identity. Each identity facet was found to develop uniquely; a singular plot can not be used to understand the development of all the facets. Sport was found to offer transnationally adoptees a space to develop essential network connections, provide opportunities for ethnic identity exploration and cultural connection, and provide a reprieve from conflicts and tensions. However, pre-existing dynamics and social exclusion were also reproduced. The stories that emerged offer insights into how the context of sport influences transnational adoptees' navigation of belonging and identity.

**Key words:** Identity development, Belonging, Sport, and Transnational adoptees

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## A Note from the Author: Where this began

September 2022, I am in my first graduate-level course, and the professor has just asked us about our research interests. I want to do something regarding children's development and the role of sports, but I know this is too vague. After the entire class was finished sharing, the professor noted how almost everyone's project had a personal connection to them and how this demonstrated how our own experiences shape and inspire our work as qualitative researchers. I realized that this connection was what my project was missing, prompting me to begin reflecting on my journey thus far as a runner, a gymnast, a coach, a Chinese-Caribbean woman, and so on. It was in this reflection that I realized that one fundamental aspect of myself that would be both interesting and challenging for me to study is what it was like being an adoptee, specifically within the context of sport.

## Mapping Out the Project

Belonging is the subjective experience of commitment, loyalty, and common purpose resulting from being included and accepted into a group and is identified as a fundamental need for people (Crowley, 1999, as cited in Walseth, 2006; Maslow, 1943). A person's sense of belonging has been strongly associated with the formation of one's identity (Kim et al., 2010, as cited in Reynolds et al., 2016). One's ethnic identity is understood to be continuously constructed and co-constructed based on an individual's sense of belonging to a group; this process involves being accepted, rejected, included, and excluded (Kim et al., 2010, as cited in Reynolds et al., 2016).

Developing one's sense of belonging and identity is particularly unique for transnational adoptees. "Transnational adoption is the process where parents in one country adopt a child born

in another" (Brocious, 2017, p.321). Globally, most transnational adoptions are also transracial (McGinnis et al., 2009, as cited in Brocious, 2017). Transracial adoptees are children whose race differs from their adoptive families and, thus, are raised in racially non-homogeneous families (Barn, 2018; Goss, 2010). Thus, when discussing the development of a sense of belonging and identity for transnational adoptees, it is also essential to acknowledge this subgroup's experience. In this project, I refer to the subgroup of transnational adoptees who are also transracial, as transracial/national adoptees. Conversely, transnationally adopted children adopted by parents who share their ethnoracial identity will be referred to as cisracial-transnational adoptees.

For transnational adoptees, identity development is a complex, dynamic, and contextual process, and their identities are represented as multifaceted (Darnell et al., 2017; Kim, 1981, as cited in Reynolds et al., 2016). Moreover, their understanding and perception of their identity changes throughout their lives and is influenced by their families, the surrounding society, and their associated communities (Reynolds et al., 2016). On another note, many transnational adoptees experience multiple exclusions; they are unable to fully participate in the mainstream white society, being perceived as foreign, and they may be excluded from their associated racialized community due to a lack of cultural similarly, and they may be othered within the context of their adoptive families. In turn, these exclusions lead to a lack of belonging to either group (Tuan, 1998, as cited in Goss, 2010; Park Nelson, 2010).

This isolation which transnational adoptees experience could be reduced via sport, which has been shown to foster a sense of belonging (Nakamura, 2019). Sport has been shown to provide racialized and immigrant groups and youths with social support, reduced isolation, and an opportunity to develop their identity in the context of sport (Forsdike et al., 2019; Walseth, 2006). These populations have been found to develop connections not only within the sport with

other members (i.e., other teammates and club participants) but also to the wider community. This sense of belonging may be fostered in sport through feelings of reciprocity, self-imaging or seeing themselves reflected in other sport participants, and having a place of refuge (Walseth, 2006).

In this thesis, I explore the experiences of transnational adoptees within the context of sport; specifically, I examine if sport could be a site for the development of their sense of belonging and identity. In the following chapters, I provide a review of relevant literature, including research focusing on identity and belonging of transnational adoptees, and on sport and belonging among marginalized populations. This is followed by an outline of the research question and study rationale; the theoretical framework, methodology, specific data collection and analysis techniques; the results; and discussion and conclusion.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this section, I first examine the experiences of transnational adoptees and review available research about their sense of belonging and identity development. This scholarship has three major themes, as reflected in the discussion below: 1) adoptees' facets of identity; 2) the role of the parents; and 3) the role of community. Within these three sections, I highlight the experiences of transnational adoptees. Next, I review scholarship on sport operating as a site to develop sense of belonging and identity. The review highlights how sport facilitates belonging, personal development, and connection within and beyond the sports team, focusing on populations whose experiences may overlap with transnational adoptees.

## Transnational Adoptees, Belonging, and Identity

Transnational adoptees' identity is conceptualized as multi-faceted, and its development has been understood as a very complicated process (Simmons, 2016) that is dynamic and contextual, changing throughout one's life (Darnell et al., 2017; Reynolds et al., 2016). "The process of identity development is largely impacted by family socialization, as identity formation is highly contextualized within a family environment, community, and larger society" (Grotevant, 1987, as cited in Reynolds et al., 2021, p. 87). This is illustrated in the following subsections, beginning with a discussion of the experiences of adoptees, then expanding to examine the broader contexts (parents, racialized community, and white society) and its impacts.

### *Adoptees' Facets of Identity*

"Adoption is an important factor in most adopted persons' lives, not just as children and adolescents, but throughout adulthood" (McGinnis et al., 2009, p.4). The experience of being adopted can unsettle the construction of transnational adoptees' identity, leading to an "identity issue by default" (Darnell et al., 2017, p.160; see also van Wichelen, 2019). Their divided

identity includes the challenge of “constructing identities and places of belonging out of bits and fragments" (Kim, 2010, p.12, as cited in Heijun Wills, 2012). This section explores three fragments of transnational adoptees’ identity frequently examined in the current literature: 1) pre-adoptive identity, 2) adoptee identity, and 3) ethnic identity.

Pre-adoptive Identity

Many transnational adoptees have little knowledge and/or evidence of their pre-adoptive life (Darnell et al., 2017; van Wichelen, 2019). The circumstances in which many transnational adoptees become adoptable, such as being either abandoned or taken to an orphanage, result in their origin stories being surrounded by mystery (Darnell et al., 2017). For example, the actual date of their birth may be inaccurate, which may become a source of frustration (Darnell et al., 2017). The emphasis that the literature places on pre-adoptive narratives illustrates that identity development may not be a linear journey, recognizing adoptees’ past as necessary for constructing their current identity. Some transnational adoptees have expressed that the lack of knowledge about their past impacts their sense of self, feeling as if they have no context from which “to gauge a center” (Darnell et al., 2017, p.161). This can result in having trouble developing and understanding their identity. Exploring who they are is a natural part of maturing and growing up for all young people (Darnell et al., 2017). However, unlike their peers, transnational adoptees may have a difficult time as they lack crucial information about their pre-adoptive story (Darnell et al., 2017). It is unclear how adoptees’ sense of identity and belonging may be impacted as they grow up if they are unable or have no desire to explore and/or construct this aspect of their identity.

To construct their pre-adoption narrative, explore their birth story, and have a lived experience in their country of origin, many adoptees travel back to their birth country (Brocious,

2017; van Wichelen, 2019). Making a return journey has become more common for transnational adoptees, as globalization and the internet have allowed for "increased mobility and proximity" to their birth country (van Wichelen, 2019, p. 347). From this experince, some adoptees express that this journey allowed them to find belonging by forming a deeper understanding of themselves and/or solidifying their identities as citizens of their adoptive countries (Brocious, 2017; Kim et al., 2010, as cited in Goss, 2010). For others, the journey did not necessarily result in a sense of belonging to their birth country or emotional closure; instead, they experienced intense emotions due to the forced confrontation of their pre-adoptive and adoptee identities (van Wichelen, 2019).

### Adoptee Identity

Adoptee identity refers to how adoptees perceive and understand their adopted status (Darnell et al., 2017). Although adoption is perceived positively in North America, it is still a "marginalized family model that is stigmatized" (Darnell et al., 2017, p. 155; see also Fisher, 2003). This "hidden stigma" (Darnell et al., 2017, p.164) is rooted in the perception of adoption being the last alternative to parenthood and, thus, is seen as second best (Fisher, 2003). When conceptualizing the formation of the adoptee identity, it is vital to acknowledge the existing stigma attached to adoption, as some adoptees may experience internalized stigma. As a result, adoptees may keep their adoptee status a secret and may not want to acknowledge or explore this aspect of their identity (Darnell et al., 2017). However, some transnational adoptees have identified their status as an adoptee as "fundamental to their sense of self" (Darnell et al., 2017, p. 160). Their adoptee identity becomes a source of pride, empowerment, and self-esteem, critical to counteract social or internalized stigma associated with adoption (Darnell et al., 2017).

This outlook stems from the perspective of being chosen by their parents and viewing their history as an experience they survived (Darnell et al., 2017).

### Ethnic Identity

The third facet of adoptees' identity explored in the literature is ethnic identity. Ethnicity and race are significant aspects of identity for those who are adopted across cultures and color (McGinnis et al., 2009). Ethnicity is defined as the cultural patterns and beliefs of a group, and ethnic identity is an individual's subjective identification with the group (Root, 1998, as cited in Reynold et al., 2016; Quintana, 1998, as cited in Simmons, 2016; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004). transnational adoptees' ethnic identity is unique, resulting in the conceptualization of its development as a complex journey (Baden, 2002; Mohanty & Newhill, 2011, as cited in Brocious, 2017). To develop their understanding of ethnic identity within their lives and in relation "to the broader social self," exploration has been identified as a crucial aspect of the resolution of ethnic identity (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004, p. 12). Resolving one's ethnic identity has been suggested to operate on a spectrum, ranging from identifying with the ethnicity of their birth to identifying with the ethnicity of their adoptive parents (Baden, 2002, as cited in Brocious, 2017), highlighting the individuality of the formation of adoptees' ethnic identity. However, this conceptualization of the formation of ethnic identity differs from the understanding that the process is fluid, contextual and dynamic. Instead, this process is thought to have an endpoint where ethnic identity is resolved (Brocious, 2017; Umaña-Taylor, 2004). All the reviewed literature examined the transracial/national adoptees' ethnic identity development.

Transracial/national adoptees' ethnic identity formation differs from other transnational adoptees as transracial/national adoptees occupy a middle space between their white ethnicity and their racialized experience; transracial/national adoptees may not feel connected enough to

their racial identity but do not appear racially white (Reynolds et al., 2016). Baden's (2012) model of *reculturation* describes transracial/national adoptees' ethnic identity journey from identifying with their white familial culture when they are younger to "exploring, (re)discovering, and reclaiming their birth culture" (Baden, 2012, as cited in Reynolds et al., 2021, p.88). This exploration and discovery of their racial identity is understood to happen more often at key developmental transitions in their lives (Baden, 2012, as cited in Reynolds et al., 2021), for instance, as they become more independent from their family (Baden, 2002, as cited in Brocious, 2017; Reynolds et al., 2016). However, during this exploration, due to a lack of "a cultural similarity," some transracial/national adoptees may be isolated from and disregarded as potential members of their racialized communities (Goss, 2010, p. 54; see also Brocious, 2017). These multiple exclusions that transracial/national adoptees experience from the white community and the racialized community add to the complex process of forming their ethnic identity (Tuan, 1998, as cited in Goss, 2010). And yet, transracially adopted children do seem to show a healthy sense of ethnic identity (e.g., Huh & Reid, 2000).

*Role of Parents*

Parental Relations and Influence

When discussing transnational adoptees' sense of belonging and identity, it is important to discuss the way in which transnational adoptees define their relationship with their parents (Darnell et al., 2017). Some adoptees define their parents as their adoptive parents, expressing that their strongest sense of identity and connection is to their adoptive parents (Darnell et al., 2017). Many of these children rely on their adoptive parents to help them understand and construct their pre-adoption story and, thus, their pre-adoption identity (Darnell et al., 2017) and their ethnoracial identity (Reynolds et al., 2021). Other adoptees feel a stronger connection to

their biological parents and may feel isolated and disconnected from their adoptive family and support network (Darnell et al., 2017). To combat this potential isolation, some transnational adoptees reinvent themselves to fit into their new familial context, ignoring their pre-adoption identity and treating identity as something that must be performed (Heijun Wills, 2012). As a primary source of support, parents are influential in adoptees' identity development and sense of belonging. The way in which adoptive parents discuss critical topics such as race and culture impacts and shapes transnational adoptees' sense of belonging and ethnic identity.

Parental approach on race, ethnoracial identity, and impact on belonging

Adoption professionals used to recommend that parents be 'colourblind' when parenting their racial child (Brocious, 2017), and this continues to be a common approach among transracial adoptive parents (Reynolds et al., 2021). Although the intention was integration, this advice led parents to disregard their child's racial and cultural differences in favour of assimilation (Scroggs & Heitfield, 2001, as cited in Brocious, 2017; Vonk & Massatti, 2008, as cited in Brocious, 2017). The neglect to discuss and/or acknowledge adoptees' racial identity and experience results in them having to navigate the world as a person of colour unprepared (Reynolds et al., 2021). Eventually, transracial/national adoptees must acknowledge their adoptee identity and racial status as they visually stand out in their families (Goss, 2010; Reynolds et al., 2021). When parents ignore their child's racialized experience or racial identity, an "(un)spoken separation between the adoptee and his or her family" is created (Goss, 2010, p.53). This disconnect and separation persists in discussions of race, as transracial/national adoptees may feel as if their parents do not completely understand their experiences as visible minorities (Hübinette & Andersson, 2012; Reynolds et al., 2021; Baden, 2013). Reynolds et al. (2021) found that the outsider position of transracial/national adoptive parents, coupled with a lack of

conversation around race and ethnicity, results in transracial/national adoptees' perception of having a superficial and inauthentic connection to their birth culture.

However, this does not mean that transracial/national adoptees cannot develop a healthy sense of identity and thrive in a family of a different racial background than their own (Simmons, 2016). Some adoptees identify openness to discussion regarding adoption and racial differences as vital for a healthy sense of identity and closeness with their family (Simmons, 2016). When examining adoptees' sense of belonging, it is important to also look at how they operate in the wider community, as the way in which they navigate this space shapes the formation and perception of a sense of belonging and identity.

*Role of Community*

This section begins by discussing the multiple exclusions that transnational adoptees may experience, then examines their experience of community belongingness through connections with other adoptees.

Multiple Exclusions and Isolations

Transnational adoptees are consistently associated with their birth culture by the mainstream white community despite their lived cultural experience (Baden et al., 2012; van Wichelen, 2019). As visible minorities who are inserted into white society, they are perceived as foreign and misplaced (van Wichelen, 2019). In addition to being seen as racially other in white society, they may also experience feelings of displacement if they embark on the return journey to their birth country (Heijun Wills, 2012). When returning to their birth country, transnational adoptees are seen as foreigners and are ethnically othered (Heijun Wills, 2012). Thus, adoptees find themselves in a space of "unresolvable liminality" between the two societies (Callahan, 2011, p.20, as cited in Heijun Wills, 2012).

Adoptees' occupancy within this middle space is greatly apparent when examining the experiences of transracial/national adoptees. Like other transnational adoptees, transracial/national adoptees are also raised in a white society. However, transracial/national adoptees' familial culture aligns with white society, and thus, they may feel a higher degree of isolation and disconnect from their respective racialized communities (Goss, 2010). Despite this, they are still unable to have full membership in their family's society and community due to their racialized features (Goss, 2010). As they cannot hide their status as adoptees, transracial/national adoptees have a heightened self-awareness of not blending in with their families, something with which they are confronted daily (Goss, 2010; Reynolds et al., 2021). As a result, they experience an overall lack of belonging to and alienation from either group (Tuan, 1998, as cited in Goss, 2010). This concept is predominantly understood in the context of racialized adoptees in white adoptive families; the experience of other adoptees who do not fit into this sub-group has not been established. In general, transracial/national adoptees operate within a middle space between their white ethnicity and their racialized experience (Reynolds et al., 2016). Nonetheless, adoptees have been able to foster a sense of belonging by finding and forming a community of their own.

### Connection to Community

Belonging to a group is strongly tied to one's identity and is being continuously "constructed and co-constructed" through the relationship between adoptees and their surrounding communities (Reynolds et al., 2016, p. 230). Developing relations with other adoptees, the adoptee community, and broader immigrant communities are understood as beneficial connections for transnational adoptees (Brocious, 2017; Reynolds et al., 2021; Simmons, 2016). Adoptees have identified connections and relationships with other adoptees as

their largest support network (Goss, 2010; Reynolds et al., 2021). As transnational adoptees occupy a middle space, they make up a unique community, recognize commonality between members, and can provide each other with a sense of normalcy, understanding, and belonging (Brocious, 2017; Goss, 2010; Kim, 2010, as cited in van Wichelen, 2019).

In addition, developing a connection to one's birth culture has been found to help transnational adoptees explore their backgrounds (Simmons, 2016). This aligns with findings that associate increased feelings of belonging and understanding of their racial identity with first- or second-hand exposure to a diverse population (Barn, 2018; Ferrari et al., 2017).

## Sport, Belonging, and Identity

The sporting experience of transnational adoptees have not been explicitly studied by scholars. Thus, in what follows, I examine sport, belonging and identity for marginalized individuals and youth/adolescents, who may share similar experiences with transnational adoptees. Mirroring the themes observed in the research on transnational adoptees' identity and belonging, I begin with a discussion of how sport facilitates belonging, followed by how participants experience personal development, develop a sense of connection within sport teams, and finish with experiences of connection beyond sport teams. This project focuses on organized sport at any level (including recreational sports, school organized teams, and competitive sports), where an organizing body coordinates the team, club, and members.

### *The Facilitation of Belonging*

Sport has been identified as a site where marginalized people may be able to foster belonging (Walseth, 2006). Walseth (2006) identifies three primary reasons for belonging to develop within sport. The first reason is reciprocity, or the support from other members of the sport within and outside the sporting space (Walseth, 2006). The social and emotional support

athletes receive enhances their sense of belonging (Joseph, 2014; Rabadán, 2022). Self-image was the second reason for the development of belonging in sport and contributes to identity construction (Walseth, 2006). The space of sport provides an opportunity for teamwork and collaboration, which may increase members' sense of belonging (Forsdike et al., 2019; Walseth, 2006). Finally, Walseth identifies sport as a 'place of refuge,' where the sporting space allows individuals to pursue their interests (2006).

*Identity Formation*

As previously stated, Walseth (2006) identifies self-image as a reason for the development of belonging in a sporting context. Self-image is understood to play an important role in the construction of identity. As identity is understood as contextual and dynamic, the site of sport has the potential to develop various facets of one's identity.

Individuals who are members of a sports team may develop a shared identity through a common problem or goal, resulting in an increased sense of belonging, especially when the athlete feels valued (Forsdike et al., 2019; Walseth, 2006). However, the formation of identity may vary (Yerashotis, 2022). For instance, when examining immigrants, sport was effective in connecting participants back to their birth country and as a space to explore their racial ethnicity (Middleton et al., 2022; Rabadán, 2022). These findings were consistent with the literature examining socially marginalized youths, where scholars found that sport increased youths' social capital, resulting in a stronger sense of identity, self-direction, empowerment, and confidence (Anderson, 2009; Bailey, 2008). However, this was not translated into competitive sports (Holt & Sehn, 2008). Competitive youth sport was found to be less suited for teaching exploration and identity work, for fostering peer relationships and acquiring social capital (Holt & Sehn, 2008). This illustrates that although sport can facilitate identity formation for some groups, some

factors/characteristics must be considered when using sport as a site for belonging, as they may hinder development.

*Connection Between Members*

Sport can serve as an environment where individuals foster connections to others, creating a sense of community. Walseth (2006) defines 'reciprocity' as support from other members of the sport within and outside the sporting space. Scholars have found that adolescent athletes' sense of belonging and social capital increases through social activity, relationship building, and giving/receiving social and emotional support (Bailey, 2008; Walseth, 2006). On another note, immigrants have preferred for sports where the sporting space is limited to other immigrants or co-ethnic participants because they can consistently meet other people who share their interests and lived experiences (Institute for Canadian Citizenship, 2014; Lenneis et al., 2022).

The potential to gain and receive support from members is part of sports' appeal to immigrant populations (Rabadán, 2022). As newcomers, immigrants have turned to sport to find a community and create social networks (Fielding, 2017). Sport is utilized as a valuable social event that brings members of the immigrant community together, strengthening the sense of connection to their country of origin as well as to each other (Fielding, 2017; Joseph, 2014; Middleton et al., 2022; Rabadán, 2022). The sense of community is a result of the consistency and structure of sport (i.e., planned meetings, practices, and games), which allows for "the re-articulation of immigrant communities" (Rabadán, 2022, p.221).

Scholars have found that this has resulted in the members reducing "the sense of their dispersion in a vast region" (Rabadán, 2022, p.226; see also Joseph, 2014). This is illustrated by Joseph (2014), who found that sport was an effective site for connection in diasporic

communities when examining international cricket tournaments in the Afro-Caribbean community. Joseph (2014) found that during a cricket tournament, local English-Caribbean men would attend to support the Canadian-Caribbean athletes to be able to connect with others in their community, to discover their past, to discover and connect with distant families, and to reminisce about their experiences in the homeland. This suggests that sport has the potential to connect immigrant communities globally, which in turn may facilitate a connection to their culture and traditions.

Sport operates as a safe space for immigrants to create a home space where they can reconnect, regenerate, and maintain their home culture (Joseph, 2014; Middleton et al., 2022). The cultural significance sport may have for immigrant communities permits and facilitates the exploration of participants' ethnic and racial identities. Joseph (2014) suggests that using sport as a cultural form allows participants to revisit their roots through constructing an authentic cultural environment. Sport has provided immigrant communities a safe space for building relationships with members, maintaining social networks, and regenerating their culture, resulting in the development of their sense of belonging.

*Wider Social Network*

In addition to building connections within the sport, sport can facilitate belonging within a wider social network. Sport can promote and facilitate interactions and strengthen connections between immigrant and their new communities (Middleton et al., 2022; Rabadán, 2022). It has been identified as a space where immigrants can learn to be at ease when engaging in intercultural interactions by providing participants with a sense of cultural safety (Middleton et al., 2022). As previously discussed, participants can forge a powerful shared identity through common goals, allowing them to bond over shared interests and "build connections through the

ability to just play the game" (Middleton et al., 2022, p. 169). This suggests that sport is a site where people can build social networks beyond their socially ascribed groups.

Involvement in sport also increases immigrants' sense of belonging and inclusion within their new country and serves as an opportunity for immigrants to familiarize themselves with the dynamics of the external community (Institute for Canadian Citizenship, 2014; Robinson et al., 2019; Woodhouse & Conricode, 2016; Yerashotis, 2022). Namely, immigrants can observe social relations and the nuances that are representative of the Canadian community, increasing their confidence to participate in the wider community (Institute for Canadian Citizenship, 2014; Robinson et al., 2019; Yerashotis, 2022). Thus, in addition to connecting immigrants to other social groups, sport also acts as a space to learn about the wider community. On another note, the space of sport provides immigrants the opportunity to exhibit patriotism towards their nation (Nakamura, 2016). Nakamura (2016) found that during North American Chinese Invitational Volleyball Tournament, athletes would "claim belonging within the nation" (Canada or the United States) (p.146), identifying themselves as Canadians and participating in patriotic behaviour, a powerful and significant claim, as "the nation is not automatically inclusive" (p. 150; see also Middleton et al., 2022; Yerashotis, 2022)

*Barriers to Belonging*

Although sport has been a place where sense of belonging can be developed, it must be noted that people have also perceived and experienced exclusion from sport, feeling like an outsider and isolated (Forsdike et al., 2019). Specifically, in Canada, sport can be a predominantly white heteronormative space where discrimination and prejudice may emerge, thus making it difficult for marginalized people to participate. For instance, Sandrin and Palys (2022) found that in hockey, which is predominantly a white sport, racialized players experience

racism at all levels, which prevents the players from fully accessing the sport. In addition, racialized athletes may not be protected by the governing bodies from incidents of discrimination and exclusion (Sandrin & Palys, 2022). The rules and regulations of the institution of sport reflect and represent Canada's mainstream white society, not minority populations (Nakamura, 2002). Through neglecting the needs of minority populations, sporting spaces become inaccessible and inhospitable for participants (Nakamura, 2002).

On another note, historical divisions and tensions may inform some groups' reluctance to accept members from other minority communities. Joseph (2014) found that members resisted letting in individuals from other groups due to the possible disruption of the regeneration of their culture. As a result, those who were permitted to participate in the league were required to conform to the team's expectations and deviation would result in their exclusion (Joseph, 2014). Scholars remind us that although sport has been known to be a space to foster belonging, sporting contexts may also be where exclusionary and discriminatory practices manifest (Spaaij, 2015, as cited in Middleton et al., 2022; Yerashotis, 2022).

*Summary and Study Rationale*

Previous literature examining transnational adoptees, belonging, and identity has highlighted how the development of their identity is dynamic, contextual, and influenced by their families (i.e., parents) and their associated and surrounding communities (Darnell et al., 2017; Kim, 1981, as cited in Reynolds et al., 2016). In addition, the literature has illustrated how they experience multiple exclusions from white society and their racialized community and consequently feel a lack of belonging to either group (Goss, 2010; Simmons, 2016; van Wichelen, 2019). This isolation could be reduced via participation in sport, which has been shown to increase a sense of belonging for both youth and minority populations through the gain

of social capital (Bailey, 2008; Forsdike et al., 2019; Walseth, 2006). The utilization of sport as a safe space for identity formation and cultural form for racialized groups suggests that it offers meaningful opportunities for nurturing identity and belonging for adopted youth, whose complex identity formation and sense of belonging operate within a space between their birth culture and their adoptive culture.

Although there is a good deal of research examining the separate topics of 1) identity and belonging of transnational adoptees and 2**)** sport and belonging, there is currently no research bridging the two fields despite current literature suggesting that sport may offer meaningful opportunities for transnational adoptees. Through this research, I bridge the literature examining adoptees, belonging, and identity and sport, belonging, and identity by exploring the development of transnational adoptees' identity and sense of belonging, and the role sport may play in this process.

## Research Question

In this Master of Science Thesis Project, I explore and answer the question:

1. *How do transnational adoptees form their multifaceted identities and sense of belonging?*
2. *How, if at all, does sport participation shape transnational adoptees' senses of identity and belonging?*

Through these questions, I explore the experiences of transnational adoptees regarding their sense of belonging and identity. Specifically, I examine how transnational adoptees navigate the journey of developing multiple identities and their sense of belonging as teenagers/young adults. As this study assumes that an individual's sense of belonging and identity are interconnected, it will examine these experiences accordingly. This gives insight into how adoptees experience this complex, dynamic, and contextual process. I examine their experiences as young people, as this is a time when they begin questioning who they are and where they belong (Darnell et al., 2017; Heijun Wills, 2012). Furthermore, I examine how the sport may play a role in facilitating this journey of development. Through this question, this study contributes to the existing literature by examining how adoptees experience identity exploration and development within and through the context of sport.

# Chapter 3: Theoretical Approach and Methodology

The research question informed the selection of theory and methodology, which offer a framework for examining transnational adoptees' navigation of multiple inclusions and exclusions throughout their developmental journey of identity, sense of belonging, and the role of sport. Specifically, Putnam's (1995, 2000) understanding of social capital informs the study. In what follows, I discuss the theoretical framework which guides this project, including 1) epistemological assumptions and 2) a description and rationale for using Putnam's (1995, 2000) concept of social capital. Then, I provide a rationale for using a qualitative research approach, namely bibliographic narrative inquiry, followed by an overview of the steps taken in employing this methodology, including ethical considerations.

## Theoretical Framework

### *Epistemological Assumptions*

Epistemological assumptions determine what knowledge counts within the study and provide meaning to data collected within qualitative research (Cresswell & Poth, 2017). This project is grounded in the epistemological assumption experiences and their subjective meanings construct knowledge. This assumption best aligns with a social constructivism paradigm, which conceptualizes individuals as developing subjective meanings of their experiences (Cresswell & Poth, 2017). These meanings are formed through social interaction and "cultural norms that operate in individuals' lives" (Cresswell & Poth, 2017, p. 24).

In addition, drawing on relevant literature, the project conceptualizes transnational adoptees' identities as multifaceted and divided (Heijun Wills, 2012; Simmons, 2016). I consider identity formation to be a dynamic and contextual process where identity shifts over time and is unique to the individual (Darnell et al., 2017; Kim, 1981, as cited in Reynolds et al., 2016).

Furthermore, this project assumes that identity formation and sense of belonging are interconnected and co-constructed through a complex journey of lived experiences. Finally, this project assumes that transnational adoptees experience multiple exclusions and inclusions, such that they operate in a space between the different groups from which they are simultaneously excluded and included.

*Theoretical Framework: Social capital*

Social capital informs this project. Three pivotal authors are often referenced when discussing social capital: James Coleman, Pierre Bourdieu, and Robert Putnam (Bailey, 2005). Across all three scholars' work, the common understanding of "social capital that emerges is concerned with the role of social networks and civic norms, and is closely linked with concepts of trust, community and civic engagement" (Bailey, 2005, p.75). However, there are also important differences between their respective conceptualization and understandings of social capital.

Coleman understands social capital as a resource made up of different parts of the social structure that can help people succeed or meet their goals due to the support and/or opportunities these networks provide (Coleman, 1988, as cited in Bailey, 2005). Coleman's conceptualization of social capital primarily focuses on the micro-level benefits of social networks, overlooking the broader implications of social capital. Bourdieu, on the other hand, suggests that the different forms of capital can be transformed and exchanged, following the conservation of energy theory, where the total social energy (labour-time input compared to output) remains constant across the transformations. He conceptualizes social capital as the accumulation of "actual or potential resources which are linked to membership in a group," providing each member "the backing of the collectively owned capital" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 21). Consequently, social capital becomes the

property of the individual, which "depends on the size of their network of connections he can effectively mobilize" and their status in society (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 21).

Contemporary popular discussion of social capital utilizes Putnam's (1995, 2000) conceptualization. Putnam et al. (1993, as cited in Walseth, 2008) understands social capital as being made up of trust, reciprocal support, norms of cooperation, civic engagement, and social networks, and within more recent work (Putnam, 2000) emphasizing the importance of social networks. It is within these works that he distinguishes two types of social capital (Putnam, 2000): 1) bonding social capital (or exclusive) social capital referring to the trust, reciprocity, and connections within a group reinforcing the exclusive identities within the group; 2) bridging social capital (or inclusive) referring to the connection between different social groups (as cited by Tonts, 2005). Putnam (2000) explains that bonding social capital is effective in strengthening "specific reciprocity and mobilizing solidarity" (p.20) while "bolstering our narrow selves" (p.21). In contrast, bridging networks benefit the access and/or transfer of resources and opportunities between different networks and "can generate broader identities and reciprocity" (Putnam, 2000, pp.20-21). Furthermore, bridging and bonding are not mutually exclusive categories; instead, they should be understood as "more or less" dimensions, allowing different forms of social networks and friendships to be compared (Putnam, 2000, as cited in Walseth, 2008). This perspective allows for a nuanced understanding of social networks: "Many groups simultaneously bond along some social dimensions and bridge across others" (Putnam, 2000, p. 21).

The current literature on social capital has found that shared identity is strongly associated with social capital (in its various conceptualizations) and with inspiring feelings of belonging and solidarity (Claridge, 2020). This connection has specifically been observed when

examining membership within sport (Bailey, 2008; Holt & Sehn, 2008). For example, sport operates as "nodes for local and regional social networks," forming the basis for creating and expressing social capital (Tonts, 2005, p. 147; see also Darcy et al., 2014). Sport is understood to be a site where individuals may develop and invest their social capital (and other forms of capital) to (further) develop social connections and relationships and receive a variety of benefits/returns (Maguire, 2019). Scholars have suggested that sport can foster bridging social capital, connecting various social networks while also creating bonding social capital through shared common purpose and commitment (Tonts, 2005; Harris, 1998; Walseth, 2006). However, not all sports will have the same investment return, as "sports themselves are also marked by the struggle to gain and maintain status," where some sports may be more culturally valuable and thus would be more attractive to those who want to increase their social standing (Kay & Laberge, 2002, as cited in Maguire, 2019, p.126). Tonts (2005) also points out how social capital generated by sport is often fragile and can lead to social exclusion and marginality due to social identities (e.g. race and ethnicity) or an unwillingness to participate in sport.

Social capital, as conceptualized by Putnam, provides an appropriate and research-informed framework to understand the effects of partial membership (i.e., multiple exclusions and inclusions) on transnational adoptees' experiences. Furthermore, this theoretical framework allows for the examination of how sport may play a role in constructing transnational adoptees' sense of belonging and identity. Although Putnam (2000) focuses on the macro-level benefits of social capital, I balance this with a focus on agency, which stems from one's identity development, using the methodology of bibliographic narrative inquiry.

## Bibliographic Narrative Inquiry

For this study, I use bibliographic narrative inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Narrative inquiry centers the voices of the participants and emphasizes agency by capturing their stories and lived/told experiences in detail (Creswell & Poth, 2017). In doing so, knowledge is co-constructed because the "researcher writes and records the experiences of people's lives" (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 70). When constructing narrative stories, temporal change must be clearly conveyed, as it emphasizes the tensions, transitions, disruptions, and consequences within the stories (Creswell & Poth, 2017). As a result, this methodology is well-suited for this study. Specifically, this study uses the elements of a story to map out and examine the experiences of participants into a journey that is complex, dynamic, and situated in a broader context. This methodology "may shed light on the identities of individuals and how they perceive themselves" (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p .69) and offer deeper insights into how transnational adoptees may understand, navigate, and develop their multifaceted identities.

Other studies have examined transnational adoptees' experiences using other methodologies, such as phenomenology, which examined commonalities between participants' experiences (e.g., Brocious, 2017), and grounded theory, which linked structure with social processes (e.g., Benoit et al., 2018; Simmons, 2016). However, I employ narrative inquiry in this study because the emerging stories provide insight into the journey of transnational adoptees' identity development and sense of belonging, and the potential role of sport in said journey.

## Methods

### *Ethical Approval*

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Board at York University.

*Recruitment*

The inclusion criteria for research participants were as follows: 1) participants age 16+; 2) transnational adoptees who have Canadian citizenship; 3) have participated in any level of organized sport (e.g., recreational, school teams, and competitive). Exclusion criteria for participants were: 1) younger than 16 years old; 2) non-English speaking; 3) adoptees who are not transnationally adopted; and 4) those who refuse to give informed consent for participation. Participants were recruited via snowball sampling, purposeful, and direct recruitment. Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling method where the researcher initially contacts some potential participants, and these participants are then asked to refer other potential participants to the study, ultimately having a chain effect (Parker, 2019). Snowball sampling is an efficient and cost-effective strategy to access participants who are difficult to find or are in similar situations (Polit-O'Hara & Back, 2006, as cited in Naderifar et al., 2017). This type of recruitment is a form of purposeful sampling where the researcher "selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 157). My insider position as a transnational adoptee facilitated access to participants in two primary recruitment environments: known contacts and social media platforms.

Known contacts. Transnational adoptees whom I knew were contacted through social media (Instagram direct messenger or Facebook messenger) with information about the study (refer to Appendix B). Potential participants also received the poster (refer to Appendix C) with a QR code to a Google Form where they could find more information about the study and submit their contact information (refer to Appendix D). They were also asked to share the poster and information with other transnational adoptees who may be interested in participating.

Social Media. I contacted social media groups: a) dedicated to connecting adoptees; or b) affiliated with community sport centres in the Greater Toronto Area (refer to Appendix E). All group pages were available to the public, but I had to gain administrators' permission to be able to post on their pages. Thus, I direct messaged or emailed administrators/creators of the group asking for approval to post about the study on their page (refer to Appendix B). The message included information about the study and the poster (refer to Appendix C). The Adoption Council of Ontario and the Reddit forum r/TransracialAdoptees responded to the approval request. No response was received from the other groups contacted. The Adoption Council of Ontario was the first to respond and promptly posted the recruitment poster on their social media platforms on my behalf, including Instagram, Facebook, and X (formerly known as Twitter). These posts resulted in a total of 72 respondents, surpassing expectations. Due to the high number of responses, I closed recruitment and did not advertise on R/ TransracialAdoptees or any other social media platform.

Contact information for recruitment was collected via a Google Form. Only I had access to the information as it was password-protected. In addition, data were encrypted in-transit and at-rest (Understand the basics, n.d.). The data were stored on Google Drive, which has a server based in Canada (Beauharnois, Quebec). The information collected via the Google Form was used to contact the participants and was deleted once they were contacted.

In total, ten people were recruited to participate in the study. Five individuals were known contacts, three were referred via snowball sampling, and two were recruited through social media groups. Recruiting from known contacts was effective. Although there was a high response rate by recruiting through the social media platforms of the Adoption Council of Ontario, when I contacted potential participants, there were two primary issues: 1) no response was received from

the potential participant; or 2) a participant did not attend the scheduled interview. In cases with no response, I sent a follow-up email to potential participants before contacting the next potential participant. In the cases when participants were absent, I emailed potential participants ten minutes after the interview start time to inquire if they were having technical difficulties and assisted to the best of my abilities (e.g. sending a new Zoom link and offering to reschedule the interview). These issues occurred only with respondents recruited from social media platforms.

## Data Collection

Prior to participation, the research participants were given and signed an informed consent form (Appendix F), which includes: 1) a description of the purpose of the research, potential risks, what participation entails, and the confidentiality measures; 2) acknowledgement of voluntary participation and the right to withdraw; and 3) my contact information. The participants were emailed the informed consent form 24 - 48 hours before their interview. Participants who chose to do the interviews over Zoom were asked to sign and email the form back to me prior to the interview. Participants doing in-person interviews were asked to sign two copies of the informed consent form at the beginning of the interview (one copy for them and one for myself).

### *Semi-structured Interviews*

Two in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant. Each interview lasted one hour and was audio-recorded. Interviews were done in-person or over Zoom, depending on participants' preference. Participants who chose Zoom were requested to have their video on, but only the audio was recorded. All participants consented to the interview being audio-recorded. Notes taken during the interviews acted as reminders to revisit key points mentioned by the participants. These notes ensured that follow-up questions were explored after

the participant had finished answering the previous question, and they allowed me to be fully present in the conversation. When beginning the analysis, the notes were also referenced to provide a preliminary idea of potential themes and narratives from the data. Field notes were recorded after each interview, providing details of observed actions, behaviour and mood, as well as my own feelings were not captured on the audio recording. In addition, these field notes served as a tool to remain conscious of my own biases, values, and experiences throughout the analysis.

The first interview (interview #1) focused on participants' experiences as transnational adoptees growing up/living in Canada. The second interview (interview #2) focuses on participants' experiences in sport as transnational adoptees. There was approximately a four-week gap between interviews, during which time I completed a preliminary analysis of the data and reflected on the first interview, following O'Toole's (2018) procedures for implementing a double interview approach. Both interviews utilize a pre-constructed interview guide (Refer to Appendix A) that consists of open-ended questions related to transnational adoptees, identity development, sense of belonging, and the role of sport. The semi-structured interview questions permit participants to narrate their experiences, leaving space to "offer new meaning to the topic of study," as well as allow the collection of data guided by existing constructs within the literature (Galletta, 2013, p. 2).

In narrative inquiry, data are primarily collected through interviews, but other forms of data collection can also be utilized (e.g., journals, photos, documentation). As this study involved two semi-structured interviews with each participant, other forms of data collection were not practiced. Moreover, semi-structured interviews are considered a central element of narrative

inquiry and are a typical form of data collection as they support narrative thinking and facilitate the emergence of stories (Kim, 2015).

*Benefits and Risks*

The participant may have benefited from the project through the opportunity to reflect on their experiences via the interview and subsequently gaining useful knowledge about themselves and their identity formation and development of sense of belonging within the context of sport. In addition, they received a $10 gift card from Starbucks as compensation for their time. Since participants were asked to discuss topics that may cause discomfort including experiences of exclusion and isolation, participants were provided with contact information for mental health support services after each interview via email (refer to Appendix G).

*Data Collection Experience*

Nine participants completed both interviews. One participant completed only interview #1. We had scheduled interview #2, but the participant did not attend due to technical difficulties. An email was sent to reschedule the interview, but the participant did not reply. The participant was sent the $10 Starbucks gift card as per the informed consent form. The data collected from interview #1 was not included in the study, as data collection was incomplete. However, interview #1 aligns with the themes established by the nine other participants.

Procedural Ethics

At the beginning of the interview, I reviewed the form with the participants, informing them of their rights, the purpose of the study, and what they were asked to do. The informed consent form was reviewed with participants before the follow-up interview to ensure ongoing informed consent. Participants were anonymized for confidentiality in the publications and dissemination of the study. Anonymity was maintained by altering all identifiable information in

the interview transcriptions, the write-up, and the dissemination of research. Participants were given the option to waive anonymity, where their names and other identifiable information were not changed.

All data collected were stored on a password-protected computer and/or securely locked in a filing cabinet. All information shared by participants was held in confidence, and unless they expressly indicated their consent, their names did not appear in any report or publication of the research. I kept a secured computer document that connected participants to their coded information during analysis. This document was kept secure and available only to me, and it was permanently deleted post-analysis to prevent re-linkage of information to participants. In cases where there was difficulty removing identifiable information for participants who wanted to be anonymous, I contacted the participants and reviewed the identifiable information with them via the phone before proceeding.

## Data Analysis

Narrative stories can be analyzed using many strategies, including thematic, structural, performance, and visual analysis (Cresswell & Poth, 2017). The data of this study was analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Reisman, 2008, as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2006) to "explore the underlying ideas, constructions, and discourses that shape or inform the semantic content of the data" (Ussher et al., 2013, p.902).

After completing the semi-structured interviews, I created transcriptions using Silverman's (1995) transcription symbols (as cited in Poland, 1995). Then, I extracted codes and developed themes using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2020; Creswell & Poth, 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

*Thematic Analysis*

Data were analyzed thematically, which involved identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes from the semi-structured interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A theme is an analytic output which "captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). Thematic analysis is not a singular procedure but is understood to be a family of methods that converge and diverge in their processes (Braun & Clarke, 2020). Braun and Clarke (2020) identify three approaches to thematic analysis: 1) coding reliability approach; 2) reflexive approach; and 3) code book approach. Reflexive thematic analysis was used within this study, which involves "themes [being] developed from codes and conceptualized as patterns of shared meaning underpinned by a central organizing concept" (Braun et al., 2014 as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2020, p. 39). This approach acknowledges the researcher as part of the code creation process, understanding that coding is inherently a subjective process that requires a reflexive researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2020). The phases of the reflexive approach reflect Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2020).

Initially, I reviewed the transcripts and field notes, becoming familiar with the data and taking notes of possible codes (*phase 1*) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Then, the data were analyzed through the process of descriptive open coding. There was no pre-existing code frame; rather, the data informed the creation of categories and were purposely organized (*phase 2*) (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2020). These codes were sorted, forming candidate themes and subthemes, which were then re-examined to determine if the coded data extracted formed a pattern and if the candidate themes reflect the meanings evident in the overall data set (*phases 3 and 4*) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In narrative inquiry, research codes are formed relating to 1)

themes, 2) the chronology, 3) the plot or 4) three-dimensional space model (Creswell & Poth, 2017). In this study, the research codes were formed using the plot structure approach, where the text data were analyzed for the five elements of plot structure (characters, setting, problem, actions, and resolution) (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The themes were further refined and defined, "determining what aspect of the data each theme captures," and what the "essence" was for each theme (*phase 5*) (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92). The themes which emerged constructed transnational adoptees' journey of identity development, sense of belonging, and the role of sport.

## Rigour

"The goal of quality and rigor in qualitative research is to minimize the risk of bias and maximize the accuracy and credibility of research results" (Johnson et al., 2018, p. 145). Narrative inquiry requires the centring participants' voices to take precedence to fully utilize the benefits of the methodology (Pino Gavidia, 2022). Furthermore, centring the voices of participants aligns with the social constructivist paradigm's assumption that knowledge is created via experiences with subjective meaning. To establish rigour within the study I engaged in member checking and reflexivity.

### *Member Checking*

Member checking is a strategy where research data are returned to a participant "to validate, verify, or assess the trustworthiness of qualitative results" (Birt et al., 2016, p. 1802). Furthermore, member checking provides participants "the opportunity to confirm or deny the accuracy and interpretations of data, thus adding credibility to the qualitative study" (Candela, 2019, p. 620). Member checking occurred three times throughout the analysis.

Participants received research data in three forms: 1) all interviewees were emailed the transcript of both of their interviews to allow them to clarify or amend the data collected prior to the start of data analysis; 2) participants were emailed an abstract of the study outlining the identified themes to determine if the interpretation of the results resonated; and 3) participants were emailed the completed results and discussion chapters to verify and validate the qualitative findings. Two participants responded when the transcripts were sent (Rebecca and Mary), two responded to the abstract (Samantha and Mary), and one responded to the results and discussion chapter (Samantha). If a response was not received, the data were used as sent. This strategy of member checking is not just a tool to ensure rigour but also part of the ethical procedures employed in this study.

*Reflexivity*

A primary strategy to add rigour (Jootun et al., 2009) and ensure the quality of the qualitative study is reflexivity (Berger, 2015). Reflexivity is critical in the research collection, analysis, and process of narrative inquiry to ensure "the critical narrative emerges" (Hickson, 2016, as cited in Pino Gavidia, 2022, p.4). Reflexivity is a process of self-evaluation, self-awareness, and self-reflection of researchers' positionality and the explicit acknowledgement that their position may impact the research process and outcome (Berger, 2015; Pino Gavidia, 2022). As narrative inquiry is based on social constructivist assumptions, researchers must be reflexively aware of their roles to ensure their understanding reflects data collection, not "fact telling through interpretation" (Pino Gavidia, 2022, p.4). A strategy for reflexivity in narrative inquiry research is composing "extensive field notes of who we are and how others see us within particular moments of interaction" (Pino Gavidia, 2022, p. 3). As previously mentioned, the field notes were used as a tool to ensure I was reflexive throughout the study, as it is vital that

qualitative researchers recognize how our experiences and assumptions impact our access to the space/population, the researcher-researched relationship, and our interpretation of the information in a study (Berger, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2017). I aimed to enhance the study's rigour by engaging in reflexivity throughout the research process. I paid particular attention to my positionality as a transnational adoptee and how it may influence the study (Berger, 2015).

### Positionality

As a transnationally adopted person who has participated in sport as an athlete and a coach, I am an insider both within transnational adoptee communities and sporting communities. My status as an adoptee provided me access to this community and may have allowed participants to be more open and provide a greater depth to their stories and recollections, assuming I understand the intricacies of the context (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Due to my experience in the sporting world as a recreational athlete and coach, I was familiar with the relationship dynamics within sport (e.g., teammates, family, and coaches). Yet, on both levels: 1) I am also an outsider to the participants as I am a cisracial-transnational adoptee; and 2) my sporting experience as a coach and athlete revolved only in the recreational and school sporting spaces. Thus, while there were aspects from the interviews which resonated with my journey, I was acutely aware of my positionality and differing experiences. Throughout the interviews, analysis, and write-up, I was cognizant of my own feelings surrounding my adoptee identity and experiences within sport. As a transnational adoptee, I am personally invested in this study as my experiences of sense of belonging and identity have been complex, dynamic, and contextual. My knowledge of being a transnational adoptee, athlete, and coach may have enhanced the depth and extent of understanding the study participants' stories (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). However, being

an insider has the risk of "blurring boundaries; imposing [my] own values, beliefs, and perceptions by a researcher; and projection of bias" (Berger, 2015, p. 224).

In the following chapters, the theoretical framework and methodological approach informs the creation of the complex and layered journey of transnational adoptees' learning, searching, and developing their understanding of identity and belonging. This narrative requires nuance as participants experience simultaneous inclusions and exclusions, resulting in their accumulation of social capital being fraught with tensions.

# Chapter 4: Results

"Narrative stories are lived and told" (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000, p.20, as cited in Cresswell & Poth, 2017). Key patterns identified within the data assist in constructing a chronology of how adoptees navigate their multiple identities, set within their personal and social context and "include key themes of the lived experience" (Cresswell & Poth, 2017, p. 73). Within the narratives overlapping, intersecting, and conflicting themes demonstrate the complexity of the adoptee journey (Goss, 2010). This chapter is split into two sections: 1) themes which emerged from the journeys of developing the three identity facets; and 2) themes regarding the participants' experiences of belonging within the context of sport.

## Prologue

For transnational adoptees, the journey of identity and belonging is split into numerous paths. As they navigate through their childhood and young adulthood, they simultaneously construct the multiple facets of their identity and construct and understand where they belong. This complex process is created from networks' multiple inclusions and exclusions, where their belonging can be sought, bestowed, imposed, and rejected. Throughout their life, the networks they are surrounded by or have access to change. Consequently, these evolving networks continually shape their understanding of identity and belonging. The context of sport has the potential to provide transnational adoptees with a sense of belonging and enhance relationships with other networks.

## Main Characters

*Table 1. Demographic of participants*

| ***Name*** | ***Age*** | ***Raised in*** | ***Backstory*** | ***Sport participation (level)*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Eden | 23 | Ontario | Chinese transracial/national adoptee | Dance (competitive)<br>Karate (n/a)<br>Rowing (college varsity)<br>Swimming (competitive) |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | adopted at 10-11 months old | Volleyball (school) |
| Hannah | Early 20s | Newfoundland Ontario (12 years old+) | Chinese transracial/national adoptee<br>adopted at 11 months old | Figure skating (competitive) |
| Heather | Early 20s | Ontario (Toronto) | Bengali cisracial-transnational adoptee<br>adopted at 6 years old | Basketball (school)<br>Soccer (school)<br>Volleyball (school)<br>Badminton (school)<br>Flag football (school)<br>Bengali Dance (recreational) |
| Maya | Early 20s | British Columbia | Black-American Transracial/national adoptee<br>middle childhood adoption | Volleyball (school)<br>Volleyball (recreational)<br>Soccer (n/a) |
| Mary | 23 | Ontario | Chinese transracial/national adoptee<br>adopted at 11 months old | Ringette (league)<br>Ultimate Frisbee (n/a) |
| Rachel | 23 | New Brunswick | Chinese transracial/national adoptee<br>adopted at 1 years old | Softball (competitive)<br>Basketball (school)<br>Gymnastics (recreational)<br>Jazz and lyrical dance (competitive)<br>Soccer (competitive)<br>Soccer (school) |
| Rebecca | 23 | Ontario (Toronto) | Chinese cisracial-transnational<br>adopted at 1 years old | Volleyball (school)<br>Gymnastics (recreational)<br>Swimming (recreational)<br>Ballet (recreational)<br>Soccer (recreational) |
| Samantha | 23 | Ontario | Chinese transracial/national adoptee<br>adopted at 11 months olds | Ringette (league)<br>Skiing (n/a)<br>Golf (recreational)<br>Skating (recreational)<br>Soccer (n/a) |
| Teigan | 23 | Ontario | Chinese transracial/national adoptee<br>adopted at ~1 year old | Dance (competitive)<br>Chinese folk dance (recreational)<br>Soccer (league)<br>Rugby (school) |

Identity Facets: The journey


*Figure 1. The three facets of the multi-faceted identity of adoptees*

This project conceptualizes identity as multifaceted and divided and ties its formation to sense of belonging. I identified three facets of identity: 1) pre-adoption identity; 2) adoptee identity; and 3) ethnic identity (Canadian ethnic identity, ethnoracial identity, and the familial ethnocultural identity) (refer to Figure 1). These facets are separate, and develop uniquely, where there is not one universal plot structure that can be used to understand the developmental journey for all these parts. This section examines each facet's unique development.

All participants primarily referred to their adoptive parent(s) as 'parent(s)', 'mom/mother,' or 'dad/father,' and their biological parents as 'biological parent' or 'birth parent.' Therefore, these titles are used accordingly moving forward.

*Pre-adoptive Identity*

The pre-adoptive identity is how participants understood who they were before they were adopted. There are gaps (i.e., plot holes) of personal knowledge and understanding within the pre-adoptive identity. As a result, these gaps are then filled by assumptions and information provided by parental figures and the wider network, creating a limited third-person narrative within this chapter (refer to Figure 2). The construction of this facet is not linear but iterative where new information can be continuously introduced throughout one's life, altering their understanding of this time.

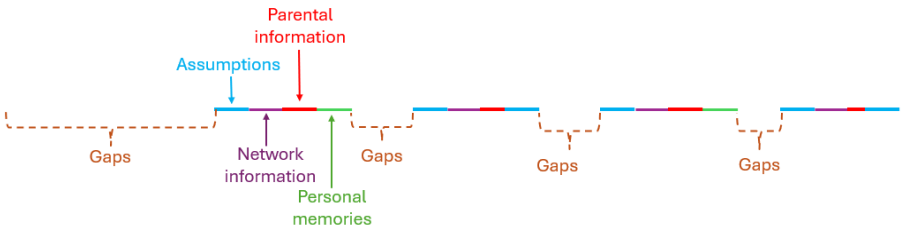


*Figure 2. The construction of the pre-adoptive identity*

### Gaps (Plot-hole)

The beginning of the story starts as a question in large part because the pre-adoptive identity is shrouded in mystery and unknowns. Birth parents were a common plot hole that participants had to navigate when thinking about their pre-adoptive identity. Six participants knew little about their lives before arriving at the orphanage. For example, participants did not know information that may be taken for granted, such as birthdates, birthplace, and/or any information about their biological parents. Only two participants revealed that they had some information about their lives before they were adopted; one participant was left with a letter that included their birthdate, and the other participant's parent hired a private detective to find information. However, this did not completely address their questions, as faith and trust in these sources shaped how/if they take up this information. For instance, Samantha "doesn't want to think too much about logistically if this is true," avoiding thoughts that may challenge her belief.

The perspectives of the participants, their parent(s), and the wider community constructed participants understanding of their pre-adoptive identity, but the point of view of their biological parents were missing. Two participants shared that as they became adults, they began to wonder about this missing perspective in their story, such as why they were put up for adoption (Rachel). For instance, when reflecting on her birth parents, Samantha noted, "I just don't even know that, that side of the story of like, did they want to keep me or like, yeah, what was their intention there?"

The gaps within the pre-adoptive identity create tension within the narrative, but these tensions can be alleviated by making assumptions and gathering knowledge to fill these gaps.

### Assumptions

Participants created their own understanding of their pre-adoptive identity, filling in the missing information with imagined truths in a variety of ways, such as who their biological parents were and their motivations. Two participants chose to assume a positive narrative where the birth parents were motivated by good intentions, though this choice and assumption were not easy or straightforward, as evident in the quotes below:

> […] my birth parents, my biological parents, must have kept me for a little bit, um, not giving me up right away (sniffles). So, and my mom also holds that to her heart too, like she likes to believe that they wanted to have me just for a little bit, or they were maybe trying to keep me, but maybe they got caught or something like that**.** So, that, that's what I know is that I was kept for a little bit, that's what I want to believe, and that's what I want to believe. (Samantha)

> Maybe it's naive to just choose to believe the more positive narrative, but it is what like is more comfortable for me. I also think that regardless of if you know biological parents in China, um, if it was just like abandonment or… whatever, it's like, hold on, maybe I should rephrase that, but like if biological parents in China, um, even if they didn't have that specific want of like a better life, it's like, hold on, sorry … um… like even if it's not as altruistic as I believe, it's like the outcome is still. I like my life here. It's like, I think that people don't necessarily always do bad things to be like, I'm going to abandon this, you know, human being. I think that there's a lot of complicated emotions for the parents in China. Um, maybe it wasn't as altruistic as I'm believing, but I don't think it's as, um,

> malicious maybe it's not the right word, but the only word I can think of right now as others believe and I'm not going to tell them that they're wrong, obviously, but I think it's just very complicated and I choose to believe the more positive one. If that makes sense. (Hannah)

As illustrated by the emotion expressed by Samantha in the quote above and Hannah's difficulty with articulating her thoughts in a sensitive and empathetic way, it was challenging or maybe "naïve" to choose a positive narrative in light of the many unknowns that remain; both Hannah and Samantha emphasized that it is a choice to believe in a positive narrative. They recognize that less positive truths are possible but choose to construct the character of the biological parents in a positive light. They also hint at or even explicitly name the broader social context that informs the assumptions created about the biological parents. Understanding the social context of China, as told by her parents, has been a part of how Rebecca understood her pre-adoption story since childhood. The context and networks surrounding participants inform their assumptions and provide information necessary for constructing the pre-adoptive identity.

### Externally Constructed

Supporting characters serve as external resources of concrete fact, offering stability and clarity in understanding the pre-adoptive identity. Participants relied on the recollections and/or constructed understandings of people within their network to assist them in piecing together the puzzle of their pre-adoptive identity. The two primary characters who provided support in this way were the participant's parents and the adoptee network, specifically other adoptees adopted at the same time and place (i.e. their adoption group).

Participants' parent(s) informed their foundational understanding of their pre-adoptive identity. Parent(s) were considered the primary people whom the participants turned to when

navigating their pre-adoptive identity, as they not only had a firsthand account of the adoption story (e.g. the process of adoption, meeting for the first time) but also contained secondary information from the orphanages (e.g. when/where participants were found, their crib-mates, and their health). To assist and reinforce the storytelling of their pre-adoptive identity, parents utilized tools, such as artifacts and documentation, to support their recollections. These artifacts became treasured items which connect participants to their pre-adoptive story, holding a great deal of sentimentality and meaning (Samantha; Hannah)

Relying on their parents as guides to navigate and construct their pre-adoptive identity, participants infuse their perspectives with their parents' opinions and biases. However, this does not mean that the perspective they initially develop is static; rather the amount which they resonate with the assumptions provided by their parents may change over time. Teigan explains that their parents,

> raised [them] with this idea that it's solely like a good thing to be adopted and that I was like, saved almost, um, and that, you know, my life would have been like, terrible if I hadn't been adopted and all that stuff.

As they learned about the social context, their perspective shifted away from the understandings which parents had initially instilled in them.

Accessing multiple sources of information supports the development and expansion of the pre-adoptive identity beyond parentally provided information. Developing their understanding comes from accessing other points of view of the pre-adoption facet beyond the parent, the most effective resource being the adoptee network. For instance, bonding with her adoption group, Eden was able to gain access to different perspectives of the shared pre-adoptive experience, shaping her pre-adoptive identity with contextual details:

> Within the last year or a couple of years of speaking to the other kids in my group, apparently like I was the only one who was tied down when I was sleeping and I don't quite know why that was, but it was fine.

Although Eden's access to her adoptive group did not answer all of her questions, she was still able to develop a fuller understanding of her pre-adoption experience. Transnational adoptees' construction of their pre-adoptive identity differs as the information provided to them may vary. By comparing and sharing their knowledge, they can fill in gaps, enrich their understanding, and reinforce their pre-adoptive identity. Likewise, the knowledge, opinions, and biases of surrounding networks and contexts significantly influence and contribute to developing the adoptee identity.

*Adoptee Identity*

The adoptee identity is how/if participants perceive themselves as an adopted person. The foundational understanding of the adoptee identity is shaped by how parents discuss this aspect and by the perceptions of the wider community. As participants grew up, they constructed their own understanding of their adoptee identity, either building upon or restructuring their foundational understanding (refer to Figure 3). A plot diagram maps out the development of the adoptee identity. Although presented linearly, this can be an iterative process, particularly between rising action and self-conceptualization, where the participants' understanding of their adoptee identity can consistently change and evolve.

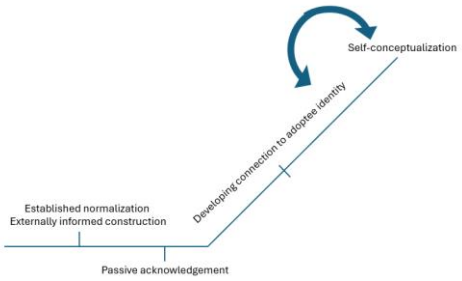


*Figure 3. The adoptee identity construction.*

### Acknowledgement and Established Normalization

The adoptee identity for most participants was established as a part of their identity early on in their lives, describing this facet as "common knowledge" (Rachel) and "naturally" developed (Eden). The normalization of this facet removed or limited possible tension when discussing their adoption with their parents and, instead, provided comfort to their conversations. Parents' willingness to answer, "whatever [they] needed to know" (Hannah) and directness were significant contributors to this perception of an otherwise stigmatized facet of identity. Eden likened her development of understanding her adoptee identity to a biological child's understanding of reproduction, suggesting this development as a natural unfolding:

> Um, I think it's just always been kind of, like, part of my life. I don't know, I can't think of a time when they like, would reveal information and I'd be like, wow, that's crazy. I think it just came naturally the same way, like, you know, when you're a biological child to someone, they're like, oh, like you were in my tummy or whatever, like, I think that's just something that, um, has always kind of been present as like fact in our family. (Eden)

Five participants who were transracial/national adoptees suggest that the visibility of their adoption made acknowledgement of their adoptee identity inevitable, such that it was not a secret that parents could hide (Rachel). Hannah even suggested a level of obligation on her parents to be "upfront about [her] being adopted" "because of the transracial thing."

However, not all participants experienced ease surrounding their adoptee identity. Teigan experienced a lack of consistent open discussion regarding her adoptee identity, creating a distance between them and this facet, such that the adoptee title did not feel natural (Teigan).

> Um, I think I hadn't even really heard the term adoptee even though it made sense I just never had anyone I had no grown ups when I was a kid say that I was an adoptee, um, my parents never talked about being adopters, so it just didn't feel like natural.
>
> [...]
>
> I don't have, like, the greatest memories of, um, kind of figuring that out. Um, and it's not like they were, like, trying to hide it from me. I think it was just, um, that. I didn't have a great understanding of what adoption was exactly.

Teigan's experience illustrates how reconnecting to the adoptee identity becomes effortful as they search, learn, and construct their understanding separate from their parent's conceptualization. The differing experiences of Eden and Teigan suggest that the effort required to construct one's understanding of the adoptee identity can eased through ongoing discussions, ultimately acknowledging and normalizing this facet. More extensive forms of acknowledgement of transnational adoptees' adoptee identity reinforce the normalization that daily discussion establishes, such as the celebration of the adoption day.

*Annual Acknowledgement (Adoption Day)*

The adoption day is an annual celebration of the day a person is adopted. This acknowledgment can contribute to the normalization and destigmatization of adoption and the adoptee identity, such that Eden did not perceive this as "atypical until later on in [her] life." The adoption day operates as a familial event which participants' families use to reinforce their bond, celebrating in various ways. For instance, Hannah's family reminisces about her adoption story

by rewatching the vlogs: “Um, so we used to watch those [the family vlogs] on my gotcha day. Um, they made always it like a very, uh, important thing,” whereas for Rachel, her family do not explicitly reminisce about the adoption story but dedicate the day to spend quality time together: “Yeah, I usually just spend it [adoption day] with my parents. Sometimes we go out to eat and, like, usually I just, like, spend that day with mom and dad.” The familial aspect of the adoption day is central to many participants celebration, thus provides an opportunity to connect with their nuclear family and reinforce their sense of belonging within the family network. Acknowledging, normalizing, and strengthening their membership within the families influence how transnational adoptees interact with the perceptions, questions, and biases of those beyond their nuclear family.

### Externally Informed

The adoptee identity was commonly the subject of confusion and curiosity, as adoptees and adoptee experiences are not widely understood. As a result, the interactions participants experienced beyond their nuclear family influenced their understanding of their adoptee identity.

#### *Awareness of Otherness*

Being subjects of curiosity often forces adoptees to consistently acknowledge their adoptee identities, whether they resonate with this aspect of themselves or not. This is particularly true for those with visible adoptions. The visibility of their adoption forced participants to confront their adoptee identity within their extended families and the wider community.

Within the extended family context, the participants recalled how their adoptee identity rose to the surface, distinguishing them as other and creating feelings of distance. Mary recognized that her extended family made efforts to include her within the context but was aware

that her membership had a metaphorical asterisk next to it: “I think everyone does have the, the mentality that, like, my parents were, like, very, very kind and adopted these girls, and we are lucky to have been adopted and that kind of thing”. The emphasis Mary places on the perception of her parents as altruistic and herself as lucky suggests that her membership was contingent on her parents’ ‘altruism’ which distinguished her from the other members whose membership was matter of fact. As a result, her feelings of connection and membership within the family were weakened.

The differential treatment that transnational adoptees experience when navigating the wider community also contributes to their awareness of otherness. For instance, Eden recalls how her status as an adoptee impacted how she and her family navigated the airport:

> I will say whenever we would go traveling, um, the airport security, or not security, the airport customs people would always stop my nuclear family and not the other nuclear families... Um, and they would ask for our birth certificates and our adoption papers and wanted to confirm that my parent wasn't, like, bringing us anywhere illegally. Um, which, like, I mean, I don't know. We had the same last name. We had valid passports... I was like, oh, that's kind of like the, like, that's just how you do travel. You know, you bring your adoption papers, you bring the proof that you're the children of your parents, which most people don't do when they travel with their kids anyways, but I like, I think during that time I would get annoyed as a kid because I'd be like, oh, like we got in line first, but now we have to leave later. Um, and it would annoy me that it would kind of slow us down and that like. The customs agent wouldn't automatically, like, trust us, you know?

The interaction between Eden's adoptee identity and airport customs illustrates how adoptive families are othered and treated as suspicious due to not aligning with social assumptions of family. Having to navigate the community's lack of understanding resulted in Eden quickly learning her family was "other" in the context of the wider community and had to acknowledge her adoptee identity when her family traveled.

In contrast to Mary's and Eden's experiences, cisracial-transnational participants were less likely to experience being forced to acknowledge their adoptee identity. Their belonging within the familial context is not challenged due to racially matching their parents: "They're Asian as well, so like I never felt like I was really, like not their child, like, I know it's like, by blood, I'm not, but like I just felt like I always belonged" (Rebecca). However, other visible distinctions, such as having an older parent (Heather), may lead to questions about a person's adoptee identity. Questions surrounding the adoptee identity result in transnational adoptees taking up roles as teachers and spokespeople tasked with educating curious people about being adoptees.

*Teacher and Spokesperson*

There is a curiosity surrounding the participants, where adoptees are the subjects of various questions, being cast as involuntary spokespeople. For example, Teigan noted, "I think if people did ask me about it, um, it wasn't other adoptees. It was, uh, people who weren't adoptees or weren't Chinese who were curious about it." Samantha likewise shared the following encounter:

> Someone on my ringette team was asking me on Monday night, she was like, can I ask you about your adoption? I was like, yeah, actually. Sure. Thanks for thanks for asking

> first of all (chuckles), if you can ask me about it, because there's a lot of unsolicited statements and questions that get thrown at us.

Samantha's gratitude towards her teammate for asking permission to discuss her experience as an adoptee illustrates how the adoptee identity is not treated as a personal matter but rather as an anomaly open to questioning. Labour is placed on the adoptees to become educators and spokespeople representing adoptee communities, where no question seems to be off-limits. However, over time, these questions became tedious, and participants came to anticipate the questions, learning how to navigate this confrontation of their adoptee identity. Hannah explained:

> It's like bingo, where you know that they're going to ask questions…some people who didn't, or like just ask about my background, I would say like, um, you know, I'm Chinese adopted by white people. I don't speak Chinese. I was adopted when I was 11 months old. I don't know who my parents are. I don't really want to. My sisters also adopted, but she's not my biological sister. And it was just kind of like, you know, I knew what they were going to ask. (Hannah)

Similarly, May described how these conversations typically unfolded:

> It usually kind of goes like, Like, "oh, did you grow up here?" And I'm like, "oh, no, like, I was actually born in China". And then they're like, "oh, really? Cool." And it's like, "yeah, I'm just adopted from China", and then I just kind of go on, like, I, like, that part of, it was very short. And I don't remember a lot. And then I just say, like, very young. And then I came to Canada around, like, I usually say a year old. And then... And then that I grew up in Ontario after that.

The continuous need to answer predictable and repetitive questions suggests there is an energy drain. Moreover, the quotes illustrate the tediousness and invasiveness of such inquiries. To reduce others' confusion, four participants feel that sharing their adoptee identity when introducing themselves is necessary to reduce the confusion of others. For example, Mary admitted,

> Um, yeah, I guess at, like, any time I'm introducing myself, or not, like, every single time, but, like, if there's ever a question about, like, where I grew up, where I was born, I usually always sneak that in, just so people aren't confused.

Similarly, Eden also observed the confusion in new acquaintances:

> Oftentimes, um, that's something that I explain pretty early on when I meet somebody because they are confused. Um, but I never have taken it badly or felt offended by that. I just, I mean, I think people are just naturally curious and, or confused or whatever, so, I try to, you know, explain.

Again, these practices illustrate how participants exert effort to help others come to understand their adoptee identity. However, it should be noted that although participants answered questions and discussed their adoptee identities, many explained that they understood people's curiosity and did not perceive these questions as malicious despite their invasiveness.

Surrounding networks and contexts contribute to transnational adoptees' foundational understanding and development of their adoptee identity, influencing how they connect, understand, and navigate this aspect of their identity.

## Navigation Within Self

### *Passive Acknowledgement*

Although participants knew they were adopted, this did not necessarily mean they felt connected to their adoptee identity. Even when conceptualizing what it means to be an adoptee, transnational adoptees may perceive this facet as less significant. Six participants describe their adoptee identity as a passive facet with little significance or meaning attached to identity. Rachel, for instance, stated, “I feel like, like, I was like, oh, okay, like it doesn't really like that's not something that like defines me like It's like, fine. Like, I don't know. I just kind of carried on.” Eden also noted

> I would say, yes, I would describe myself as an adoptee if asked, do you identify as an adoptee? But I wouldn't ever, like, it would never come to my mind to describe myself as an adoptee, like, just outright, you know, and bring it up myself.

Having the adoptee identity facet as a passive facet suggests a possible flat point on their journey of developing their adoptee identity, where there is no explicit conflict or motivator. Being in spaces that challenge transnational adoptees to reflect and/or connect with different networks facilitates the development of their connection to their adoptee identity.

### *Developing a Connection to Adoptee Identity*

The connection to one’s adoptee identity is a complex, interactive, and ever-evolving process (refer to Figure 3). Developing this personal understanding requires participants to reflect and introspect, allowing them to disconnect from societal perspectives and form their own conceptualization. Thus, two participants felt more connected to their adoptee identity when they entered spaces that challenged them to question and explore their adoptee identity beyond the pre-constructed social and familial understanding.

> I think it was like Fall of 2020 where I talked to my therapist a lot and we kind of talked more about my adoption and I think around then is when I like really connected with the term transracial adoptee. Yeah, like, you know, it's something I always knew but I really felt more connected to it around then I guess. (Hannah)

However, utilizing networks and resources to inform personal conceptualizations should not be dismissed. Connecting with different networks offers access to diverse perspectives and worldviews, which enrich and inform this re-conceptualization of the adoptee identity. For instance, Teigan credits the development of their understanding of their adoptee identity to connecting to virtual adoptee networks. They state how the virtual adoptee community educated them on the adoption system and provided them the specific language to describe their adoptee identity (e.g. transnational adoptee), expanding their limited understanding of this facet of their identity. Specifically, Teigan stated:

> Within the past couple years that I heard other adoptees start to use the term adoptee to describe themselves, and I was like, well, that does make sense, um, and specifically, I learned about the terms like transnational and transracial adoptee… Through learning a lot, uh, from other Transnational, transracial adoptees, um, who are themselves kind of now, like, I don't want to say like activists, but they, they like to, they educate about it, um, through learning from them and stuff like that, I think I have a better understanding of myself.

As their surrounding network did not guide the navigation of their adoptee identity, Teigan found the virtual space to be a crucial and informative platform for discovering and constructing their adoptee identity. The virtual adoptee community may be an asset for adoptees' conceptualization and understanding of their identities. Teigan's curiosity and motivation to learn about and

connect with their adoptee identity contrasts with their initial desire to distance themselves from this aspect of themselves, actively avoiding acknowledging it.

*Avoidance*

To minimize being perceived as "different from everyone else," Teigan "actively avoided" conversations about their adoptee identity. As people of colour in a predominantly white community, Teigan expressed already feeling "other" and feared that acknowledging their adoptee identity would further set them apart. Despite being friends with another adoptee, Teigan and the other adoptee had an unspoken agreement not to discuss their adoptee identities. The fear that motivated this avoidance suggests a tension between Teigan's adoptee identity and their membership within the Canadian community. This avoidance was unique to Teigan and stood out as an outlier within the group of participants. Teigan's journey from attempting to conform to their surrounding Canadian context to exploring their adoptee identity illustrates the intersection between their adoptee identity and their multiple ethnic identities, influencing how they interact and connect with their various networks.

*Ethnic Identity*

Ethnic identity is the personal sense of belonging that stems from an individual's connection to the shared culture of an ethnic group, influenced by their perceptions of inclusion and exclusion within the groups (Kim, Suyemoto, & Turner, 2010, as cited in Reynold et al., 2016). Three major parts form participants' ethnic identity: 1) ethnoracial identity; 2) Canadian ethnic identity; and 3) familial ethnocultural identity (refer to Figure 4). The navigation of transnational adoptees' ethnic identities is depicted as a colour gradient wheel to illustrate the various ethnic identities which emerged for participants. The representation of these parts as different colours was inspired by Rachel, who proposed this visualization when discussing her

cultural and ethnic identity and explained how she felt as if she was navigating within the "fade-y bit" between the colours (refer to Figure 4). This understanding of ethnic identity captures the interconnectedness between these distinct parts, allowing for an accurate representation of the dynamic development and navigation.

The interaction and integration of the three parts of transnational adoptees' ethnic identity create internal conflicts, making navigation and exploration challenging. This process includes an effort from both the individual and their surrounding network to connect to these multiple parts. Ultimately, participants operate within a middle space, constantly shifting between feeling more connected (moving closer to) and more disconnected (drifting away) from different parts of their identities throughout their lives due to barriers of connection (refer to Figure 4).

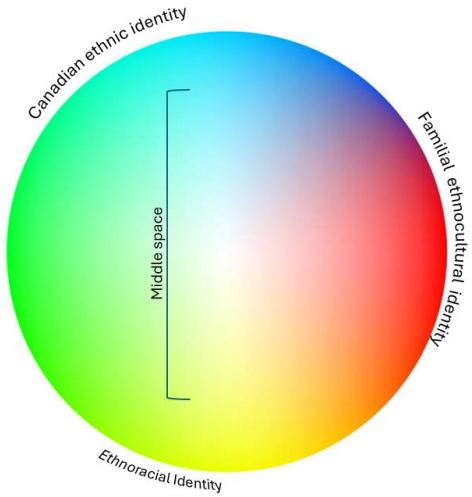


*Figure 4. Ethnic identity and the dynamic navigation.*

## Ethnoracial Identity

Cultures of ethnoracial minorities operate as a subculture within the dominant Canadian culture (James, 1996), and connecting to minority communities and cultures is less accessible. Ethnoracial identity is defined as an individual's connection to their racial community and associated ethnicity, including their attachment to cultural practices, beliefs, and values. All participants were people of colour, and eight were from non-western countries. The exploration

and development of the ethnoracial identity may be facilitated by engaging in ethnocultural activities. Many participants, especially those who were transracial/nationally adopted, expressed a disconnection from their racial communities and culture, making it challenging to develop their ethnoracial identities.

*Experiential Disconnection*

Despite visually being a part of their racial community, participants observe an experiential disconnect separating themselves from the rest of the community. Tegan recalls being "aware of the difference between [herself] and people that live [in China]" when they traveled back to their birth country when they were twelve. Travelling back to China made them aware of their lack of knowledge about living in China, Chinese cultural customs, and present Chinese customs, which resulted in feeling disconnected from their ethnoracial identity. The participants' awareness of experiential disconnect includes citizens of their birth country and their racial community within Canada. For instance, Hannah reflected:

> I look like these other people who are like East Asian. But I didn't have the same experiences growing up. Um, like I look Chinese, I am Chinese, but you know, I look East Asian, so people assume that I have, I was raised by like, you know, immigrants or people who are my biological parents and would have like, have brought cultures from, or like traditions from China and East Asian countries over, but I was raised within a white household. Like, just traditionally very, like, you know, Euro Canadian Um, and it was just, like, a little bit weird to, like, acknowledge that, like, I look like these people, but I didn't have the same upbringing. (Hannah)

Teigan and Hannah's awareness of the experiential disconnection suggests an internalized expectation of "naturally" being able to connect with other members of their racial community,

both local and international. Thus, the inability to meet these experiential expectations can then be understood to create internal conflict and tension, resulting in feelings of disconnection, isolation, and alienation from the community to which they are 'supposed to' belong. Furthermore, this observed disconnect is exacerbated when other people reflect these internalized expectations by making assumptions due to participants' visual presence in the racialized community. Teigan explained,

> being in Chinatown or going to Chinese restaurants there, um, sometimes someone will speak to me in Mandarin at first and I'm like, I, sorry, I don't really speak that, um, and so I think that's just kind of always a jarring reminder to me that, like, I probably would have spoken that language had this exact scenario not been.

The disconnection between participants' experiences and assumed commonalities within their racial community suggests a perception of being a false member, impacting their ethnoracial identities. This awareness of being different from other members of the racial community may be highlighted by how participants' knowledge of the racial culture is influenced by their parents.

*Parental Influence on Ethnoracial Identity*

Many participants suggested a superficial quality in their connection to their ethnoracial identities, noting an absence of personal and familial significance due to their families being outsiders to the culture (Reynolds et al., 2021). For example, Hannah stated:

> My parents learned [Chinese culture] to the best of their ability to teach to us, but there's nothing that I have that went back, like, you know, my parents and grandparents and great-grandparents always did it. It was like something that my adopted parents learned to teach us versus my best friend who has similar traditions that she's done and just an integral part of the family for generations.

The distance created by the missing significance is perceived as irresolvable by Hannah, where "it always feels like no matter what [she] learn[s] it always feels second-hand. Like nothing that [she] learned really feels [hers] about Chinese practices and culture and everything".

Although her parents tried to facilitate and construct ethnoracial identity by teaching her about her Chinese culture, Hannah's ethnocultural identity was not rooted in her family network. The distance observed was measured by perceiving other community members as the standard against which participants compare their experiences, as reflected in Teigan's words: "I'm not I'm never going to be exactly on par with someone who was raised by like Chinese parents or who lived in China for a long period of time." Understanding their own ethnoracial identity in comparison to other members constructs and reinforces the perception that participants' ethnoracial identity, and even membership within the community, are lesser than or even less authentic.

Parental positions in relation to the participants' ethnocultural identity also influence cisracial-transnational adoptees' ethnoracial identity development. Cisracial-transnational adopted participants experienced their racial culture within their family dynamics, reducing the explicit effort to connect and develop this aspect of their identity. However, the level of connection that cisracial-transnational adoptees experience varies greatly, reflecting their parents' connection to their ethnoracial identity. For instance, Rebecca describes her culture as "very traditional," explaining how her childhood was rooted in traditional practices. Thus, she felt a strong connection to her ethnoracial identity. Heather described how her mother blended traditional aspects of their racialized and Canadian cultures, suggesting that her mother also operates in some form of a middle space between the two cultures. The parents of cisracial-transnational adoptees function as bridges connecting the adoptee to their racial community and

culture, supporting the development of their ethnoracial identity.

*Bridges*

Relationships and connections with people who share adoptees' ethnic backgrounds can benefit their ethnoracial identity development (McGinnis et al., 2009; Reynolds et al., 2021). Samantha describes how she is able to relate and feel connected to Uncle Steve, see her ethnoracial identity reflected in him, and feels reassured in her ethnicity by these commonalities. Having a member of her family network who shares her ethnoracial identity not only reinforces Samantha's connection to her ethnoracial identity, but also is suggested to provide some relief from being disconnected from her families' differing ethnoracial identities:

> It's [ethnoracial identity], just stereotypically and also a little bit harmfully connected to family, and because when you talk about culture, you're, I, I just always hear it in the context of family and that's not necessarily mine/our case for, for a lot of international adoptees it's not necessarily our case when we talk about culture. So, it's just nice that I, at least I have, I got one person that like. You know, it can relate, culture and family.

These connections do not necessarily need to be in the form of a family member or an elder. Two participants developed connections to their ethnoracial identities through their friendships with peers who are a part of their racial communities. Eden and Hannah describe how they engaged with Asian culture as their friends would actively include them in their cultural practices, such as going to Chinese restaurants and using the lazy Susan to share the dishes (Hannah). In addition to being included in cultural activities, Eden found that her connection to her ethnoracial identity required less active effort during her college years due to living with her friends. Being "around more Asian people in her day-to-day life," in addition to being included in cultural practices, deepened her connection to her ethnoracial identity as she was able to learn

about their experiences as Asian Americans. These bridging characters may also connect transnational adoptees to their ethnoracial identity by including them in ethnic exploration activities, like cooking (Eden and Samantha), which they are able to pursue independently.

*Exploration and Ethnic Exploration Activities*

Interest, curiosity, and/or ability to develop a connection to one's ethnoracial identity is not as strong during childhood. Teigan and Heather describe how their parents offered opportunities to connect to their racial culture via cultural activities (e.g. cultural dance classes), but as the participants were not interested, a strong connection was not formed.

The curiosity and desire to explore their racial culture were suggested to be developed over time and are self-driven by participants. Participants explained that there were no external forces or pressures urging the development of this facet and that it was their choice to pursue a connection. This is reflected in Mary's and Teigan's descriptions:

> Yeah, like I would say nothing is really propelling me to connect. Other than myself. So, like, if I want to connect, if I want to go learn Chinese or research stuff, then I'll go ahead and do that, but I would say nothing is, like, there's no one like poking me. (Mary)
>
> [I] kind of had more of an emphasis on Chineseness again, as I decided I wanted to become more connected with it and learn more about it, um, and that it was something I, like, shouldn't have to be ashamed of, um, and yeah. (Teigan)

A common mode through which participants engage with their ethnoracial identities is ethnic exploration activities. Ethnic exploration activities are accessible activities that support the development of ethnoracial identity (Brocious, 2017). Activities such as cooking, language, and media were used as either a window or bridge into participants' ethnoracial identity.

Teigan utilized media and social media to allow them to "get glimpses into what life is like both in China or what life is like, um, as a Chinese Canadian from other Chinese Canadians." Using media and the internet as an accessible window through which they are able to examine the experiences of their racial community without having to physically be present allowed Teigan to begin to develop their own ethnoracial identity. Other participants utilized ethnic exploration activities as bridges into racialized spaces and networks, where they actively interact with cultural practices. Samantha described how her passion for food extended into a passion for making Chinese cuisine, acting as a mode through which she developed a connection to Chinese culture.

However, if the activities become too challenging, participants could lose interest or be unable to continue participating, halting the development of connection. For instance, Mary and Tiegan both started learning the languages of their racial culture but decided to stop or pause the pursuit of acquiring the language. Although neither shared how this activity facilitated or hindered their connection to their ethnoracial identity, Mary did share that "[she doesn't] remember anything she learned," suggesting that her participation in this activity had little to no impact.

The ethnic exploration activities allow participants to begin to develop a connection to their ethnoracial identities while also developing a potential bridge, which they can use to connect to the racialized networks when they are ready. Having access to their racial network supports their membership and connection to their racialized community, facilitating the development of their ethnoracial identities. While access to racial communities and culture may be limited, hindering transnational adoptees' ethnoracial identity development, the dominance of Canadian culture supports the development of their Canadian ethnic identity.

Canadian Ethnic Identity.

Despite Canada being considered a multicultural country, English and French values, beliefs, norms, and perspectives continue to play a central role in defining Canadian culture and society (James, 1996). Thus, I define Canadian ethnic identity as the personal connection that individuals experience regarding the dominant Canadian cultural practices and beliefs rooted in a white norm established by English and French assumptions.

*Inevitable Formation*

Being surrounded by and automatically participating in Canadian culture makes forming one's Canadian ethnic identity almost inevitable for the participants. Rachel describes it as "not really as noticeable when [she is] practicing it because it's just, like, normal for everyone else. So, like, [she] just feel[s] like [she's] just doing normal things," demonstrating an ease with which she forms her Canadian ethnic identity, due to the dominance of the Canadian culture. However, Teigan does note how the development of their Canadian ethnic identity is not indicative of a feeling of "intrinsically connected" to the culture but rather is a product of circumstance. Despite the inevitable formation of the Canadian ethnic identity, participants felt compelled to align with the surrounding Canadian cultural context to underscore their membership, as their ethnoracial identities contrast with Canada's white norm.

*Effort and Pressure to Conform*

Participants and members of their surrounding network try to reinforce the participants' Canadian ethnic identity to enhance their sense of belonging, suggesting that this aspect of their ethnic identity is not fully naturalized. Participants make an effort to align themselves with the white norm, reinforcing their sense of belonging within the Canadian context. For Samantha and Teigan, this resulted in them distancing and dismissing their ethnoracial identities, which

inherently conflict with the surrounding white norms of their communities. Samantha recalled how her desire to fit into and assimilate into her surrounding white community manifested in how she perceived her appearance:

> I would take some pictures of myself, and I'd be like, oh, wow, I could probably pass as half Asian, like, I would say these things and it doesn't help that the schools that I went to, the city that I live in, it's not that predominantly Asian, it's not predominantly Asian at all, um, and Chinese at all, so I was always surrounded by white people.

Samantha altered her self-perception to align with the white norm, emphasizing and reinforcing her membership and sense of belonging within the Canadian context. Her racialized features and ethnoracial identity differentiate her from the rest of the predominantly white community, creating a conflict in her sense of belonging within this context. Similarly, Teigan avoided engaging with her ethnoracial identity so as not to exacerbate her being seen as different within the community. She limited the development of her ethnoracial identity to preserve her sense of belonging within Canadian culture, illustrating that embracing her ethnoracial identity conflicted with the internal pressure and desire to fit into the white norm of Canadian culture. Furthermore, participants' surrounding networks make explicit efforts to confirm and reinforce participants' membership within the network by promoting their Canadian ethnic identity. For instance, Samantha's father insisted on her Canadian-ness to facilitate and solidify her sense of belonging within Canada and their family, deepening her separation from her ethnoracial identity:

> When I was really young, it doesn't help, but my, my dad, I know his intentions, but my dad was really trying to like, so his intentions were to welcome me into Canada, to welcome me into the family, to blah, blah, blah. Kind of did the opposite. He didn't mean to, I know that, he didn't mean to, but kind of did the opposite, he did stuff where like,

> he's like, Ugh, you're not Chinese, you're like, you're Canadian, look, you play ringette, you skate, you ski, you eat cheese, like whatever, like, you're like, you're totally, you know, you're, you're, you're Canadian, and like, blah, blah, blah, and he would do the opposite, he's like, your name's Samantha Lambert, like, that's, like, you're, like, look, look at your mom and dad, you're Canadian.

Samantha's father's effort to reinforce her membership and Samantha and Teigan's effort to align themselves with white norms suggest that transnational adoptees' sense of belonging within the Canadian context is not inherent.

However, Teigan identified other motivational factors that could also contribute to the pressure to conform to Canadian culture. First, they highlight how fear of discrimination contributed to them distancing themselves from their ethnoracial identity by referring to their racial identity as "Asian" rather than "Chinese" due to "xenophobia and racism." Second, they suggest the role of internalized whiteness or the "process of sub/conscious internalization of negative stereotypes and racism that define people of colour as inferior" (Goss, p. 44, 2010); Teigan stated,

> I think I had this idea of like it being more aspirational to have like white friends and stuff like that and so I was worried if I was like hanging out with like a bunch of other Asians people would just be like, oh, she can't make friends like outside of that group.

For some participants, then, the context of Canadian culture created an environment where participation and a desire for acceptance emerged, and an effort was made to conform to the surrounding community culture.

However, two participants who had access to their racial culture via the wider community or their families (cisracial-transnational adoptees) did not discuss the same compulsory pressure

to conform to the white norm. While Canadian culture does remain present, the pressure to conform may be reduced due to the other cultural avenues through which one can participate and connect. This appears relevant only in diverse neighborhoods where access to racialized communities and networks was available. When one moves away from a diverse community, it is more difficult to connect to the ethnoracial identity, experiencing the surrounding white norm and subsequent pressures. As Rebecca explained:

> When I was at university… there's no Asian grocery store. So, like, I kind of cook, like, just, like, like, more Canadian, um, foods, like North American style… I feel like that kind of makes me feel like I'm drifting away from my, my Chinese culture because I don't have things around me to, like, remind me of my culture. I'm not, like, practicing things, like, from my culture either. Um, but yeah, I don't think I really feel, like, disconnected from, like, Canadian culture […] I don't feel like I really lose it. Because we're, like, surrounded by it.

Canadian culture's dominance ensures that this facet of identity is continuously developed across Canada, as it is the dominant culture nationwide. This differs from adoptees' familial ethnocultural identity, which is constructed and reinforced within the familial context.

### Familial Ethnocultural Identity

The familial ethnocultural identity refers to participants' connection to the cultural practices, beliefs, values, and traditions shared and transferred within their family network. The distinction between Canadian ethnic identity, ethnoracial identity, and familial ethnocultural identity became evident as participants noted that their familial culture did not always align with broader Canadian culture or their racial community's culture. Participants' family ethnocultural identity is understood to be just as significant in how participants perceived themselves,

especially since this shared identity facet reinforced their membership within their family. Although participants' connection to this facet fluctuated over time, fewer challenges were encountered while navigating and conceptualizing this facet.

Participating in the cultural practices and traditions passed down through the family strengthens participants' bonds within their familial network. For instance, Eden's and Samantha's development of a connection to Jewish and Scottish culture also reinforces their connection with their families due to this shared cultural participation. In Eden's case, she identified her bat mitzvah as…

> …a good example of when I felt very connected with my, I guess, Jewish identity and, and that part. Um, and I think my family was very proud, and it was important to them as well, so it further reinforced the importance to me.

Samantha spoke of her family's clan name and described the significance of traditions:

> …our kilt, like our, our guild or, um, like, it's like the plaid-like looking thing, and that's everything we all have a little bit of, oh, the tartan that we all have a little bit of the [clan] tartan. Like I have a piece of fabric like all of us have that. So anyways, it's hard to not like associate yourself when that's when, like, that's what you grew up with.

As participants grew up and became more independent, how they engaged with their familial ethnocultural identity changed, becoming "a smaller piece of the pie" (Eden). This underscores the familial context's vital role in shaping and maintaining participants' connection to their familial ethnocultural identity. Sometimes, one person/member is critical to how a person interacts with their familial ethnocultural identity. Thus, when this member is no longer present, the person becomes more distant from this culture, as in the case of Mary, who felt "disconnected [from Dutch culture] most of the time, and I think it would be even less so going

forward now that my Dutch grandmother has passed." The shift Eden and Mary experience further illustrates that their familial ethnocultural identity is intertwined within their family network, as when the familial aspect is removed, the connection becomes weaker.

Like the other forms of identity, familial ethnocultural identity is dynamic. It can shift and evolve to allow new aspects of the familial culture to be added, changing how members interact and uptake their family's culture. For example, when Hannah's family discovered their Indigenous roots, it transformed her perception of her cultural identity and led her "to embrace more Indigenous, uh, heritage." For Samantha, this dynamic nature of the familial culture allowed her to integrate her ethnoracial identity, constructing bridges that fostered unity and alignment between these two parts of her ethnic identity:

> I think I've always thought about it as like, I'm joining a white family. And I've always talked about it too, like that, where I'm like, white family, white, white, white, everyone's white, blah, blah, blah. Like, but that quote [the kid isn't joining a white family, my family now has a Chinese person in it] really like shifted my perspective and I'm kind of like, it's making me want to feed, you know my mom dumplings and stuff like that because I feel like I haven't really shared I've shared that with myself and David and like other people and through my art, but I don't think I've kind of reversed it circled it back and shared it with my family because, I don't know why but I just-- That so that perspective shift like, no, you now have a Chinese person in your family.

Samantha takes up the role of connecting her familial ethnocultural identity and her ethnoracial identity, actively working to incorporate these two aspects of herself. She illustrates how her dual membership in her racialized culture and her familial culture should be reflected in the familial culture, suggesting that her ethnoracial identity and familial ethnocultural identity overlap. The

development of participants' familial ethnocultural identity involves participation in familial events. These gatherings effectively build and strengthen family bonds, enhancing their sense of belonging within the family context.

### Building Bonds in Family

The familial context is a prominent space where individuals navigate feelings of belonging. Spending time with family members strengthens bonds and reinforces participants' sense of belonging within the family. Four participants recalled spending scheduled time with their extended family as children, developing strong connections. For example, Eden stated:

> I'm pretty close with my extended family, and I think that's largely because, like, when I was young, and the way I was raised, um, I had, uh, like, we, we always went to my grandparents' place, and they would have a bunch of their kids and their, their grandkids over. So, um, I, I've always been quite close with the extended family.

The effort to spend time together and include participants in familial activities reinforces participants' relationships with their extended family. Rebecca's cousins' conscious effort to include her reassured her of her membership within the group despite a significant age gap.

When living together, nuclear families are provided opportunities for unscheduled time together, where connections can be fostered easily. Mary recalled how she and her sister used to visit each other's rooms whenever they wanted, making bonding effortless due to accessibility for connection. However, once she moved out, the way they interact and bond with their nuclear family shifted, having to now consciously schedule time to connect with their nuclear family, as illustrated by Rebecca:

> And even when I'm home, I barely see my parents. So, it's really important for us to like, even like, sit down at dinner time and like, before I go to bed, usually like, we'll talk. We'll have fruit together, and stuff like that.

Rebecca's experience of changing how she approached spending time with her parents further underlines the importance of time spent together to reinforce connections and nurture relationships. The bonds participants foster with both extended and nuclear family members secure and solidify their sense of belonging within that specific family context. However, if the participant enters a familial space where bonds are weaker, they are likelier to feel alienated or perceive themselves as outsiders within their family contexts.

*Familial Disconnection*

Despite the familial context being an assumed automatic place of belonging, the participants' experiences did not align with this presumption. This distance and disconnection are a result from not feeling strongly connected to the family network by not having developed close relationships. This was particularly evident in the experiences of transracial/national participants, who were acutely aware of their ethnoracial identity in contrast to their family's differing ethnocultural identity. Mary highlights this awareness during a wedding:

> They were singing like sweet Caroline, which is like, like the whitest song ever. And every, all the aunts and uncles were like "bum bum bum", and I was like, oh my God, what am I doing here? Like it was, it was nice, and like they're having a good time, but it definitely like hit me, that was like, wow, this is like the whitest wedding ever.

The contrast between expecting to belong and feeling like an outsider creates tension. For Samantha, who also experienced feeling her "non-whiteness" when surrounded by extended

family at a baseball game, knowing she was loved by the other members did not resolve the tension, suggesting that this alone was not enough to connect her to her extended family.

The distance and disconnect that participants experienced were not only the result of a quiet observation but were sometimes the result of experiencing microaggressions from other family members. For instance, Mary's family commented how "lucky" she and her sibling were to be adopted, framing their parents as "altruistic." This reflects the social stigma around adoption, as it cheapens her membership within the family by tying her belonging to her parents' altruism rather than her being an equal and valued member of the group. The questioning of membership within the family, driven by social stigma, was illustrated by Heather's experience of overt exclusionary behaviour from her cousin's father. He rejected Heather's place within the family, resulting in them no longer having a relationship.

On another note, as participants grew older, they began to question and challenge the assumption of belonging. During Teigan's childhood, they did not think about how connected they were with their nuclear family but accepted it as an immutable fact that they belonged. However, they note how "[they] haven't had that feeling in a long time." Later, they discuss feelings that their parents did not fully grasp the magnitude of their experiences with discrimination as a racialized person and how race became a source of conflict in their household. This suggests that this lack of understanding may have contributed to the distance and disconnect, weakening their connection with the parents.

The experiences of exclusion and inclusion from all three parts of ethnic identity result in participants operating within a middle space between their various ethnicities.

## Middle Space Occupancy

As participants move between their ethnoracial identity, Canadian ethnic identity, and familial ethnocultural identity, they navigate through an ethnocultural middle space (refer to Figure 4). Understanding this middle space can be confusing, as many participants expressed discontentment and confusion while navigating their multiple inclusions and exclusions. However, by connecting with others who occupy the middle space, navigation may become easier.

### *No Clear Check Box*

When thinking about how to define culture and ethnicity, participants needed to think this answer through as it was not as clear-cut. Three participants commented that defining and distinguishing culture and ethnicity differs for adoptees. For other people, there is a common correlation between family, ethnicity, and culture (Samantha), where ethnicity and culture can be used interchangeably (Rachel), and these concepts fall within the same category (Eden), but for adoptees, these three concepts may not align. Participants were included and excluded from the racial and Canadian communities and their associated cultures, making the conceptualization of their ethnicity and cultural membership complex.

When defining their ethnicity and culture, Eden and Hannah drew upon checkbox surveys to determine an answer. These surveys were useful as they offered a distinct set of answers, often allowing only one answer, compelling respondents to make a definitive choice. For adoptees, this approach may not be as effective in providing clarity on how to define their ethnicity and culture, as it creates the challenge of being unable to reflect the true complexity of their multifaceted identities:

> I guess ethnicity, I mean, when you do the checkboxes, like, because they always have you do the checkboxes, I always check off race, Asian, ethnicity, Jewish. Um, because those are like, or religion, Jewish, race, Asian and then ethnicity… ethnicity, I sometimes will pick some Asian, like Asian or Jewish depending on what's like available for the boxes, um, but yeah, I've always been like the line between race, ethnicity, religion and all of that, especially ethnicity seems to encapsulate like kind of the culture side of things in a way. So. Yeah, I guess the most common is I check off Jewish, even though I probably feel more connected to me at my Asian side at this point. Um, but I think it's the way that I was raised. Um, so I would check that off, I think. (Eden)

Eden's process of answering the question illustrates the great deal of mental effort and reflection required to summarize her ethnicity, race, and religion simply. Despite this mental effort, the answer still was not completely reflective of her identity at the moment.

Hannah's observation that the checkboxes do not allow for the complexity of the adoptees' multifaceted identities further underscores the problem of oversimplification:

> Oh, um, on a survey I checked East Asian. Right. Um, other than that, I'd say, uh…. uh, transracial adoptee, Chinese to white. I guess, cause they don't have that option on surveys. But, you know, my understanding of ethnicity is a combination of like, heritage, race, and culture. And I feel like Chinese adoptees have a very unique intersection between those three things. So let's say, Chinese transracial adoptee into a Euro-Canadian family, Euro-Canadian Indigenous family.

The problem that the checkboxes bring to light is the complexity that participants must navigate. A single simple answer impossible if an accurate representation is required, as their ethnicity and culture are made up of various parts, making them a part of multiple communities. However, it is

important to note that while participants experienced multiple inclusions, they also simultaneously experienced multiple exclusions.

*Multiple Exclusions*

Participants' membership in various communities can be contested by the wider communities, as participants are seen as "other" and/or "not true members". Having to contend with these multiple exclusions led Samantha to perceive that each part of her ethnic identity was missing. However, as she grew up, this perception began to shift, understanding that her occupancy within the middle space did not mean her identity was incomplete:

> know that there's no part of me that's missing, everything that I am right now is, that's who I am, like, I'm not missing a part of myself because I wasn't raised in China, I'm not missing a part of myself because I don't know Mandarin or whatever, everything that I know and that I don't know is, is what I am right now, so that's how it's changed, I feel like I'm in a kind of, like, I'm in a good, I'm in a, I'm in an okay spot, um, how I, my perception of where I'm from and stuff.

Othering Within Canada

Being people of colour within the context of Canada, participants experience othering in the form of racism and stereotyping. Six participants suggest how feelings of exclusion and isolation result from experiences of being singled out as a racialized person existing in a predominantly white context. Hannah explains that although she never felt explicitly excluded or bullied, she was differentiated from the rest of the class when discussing topics that related to her ethnoracial identity, explaining that "all the heads turn to look at me kind of thing." By the whole class shifting their attention to her, this subtle differentiation underscores how her racialized identity separates her from her peers, which can feel isolating and marginalizing. However,

Rachel reflected on times when her membership within the Canadian context was questioned or tested. She drew upon the common experience of others assuming she could not speak English, recognizing that assumptions are uniquely linked to her racial visibility. Unlike white-Canadian community members, who are presumed to be native-born Canadians, Rachel faces questions that challenge her Canadian identity based on visual presence within the racialized community:

> I've got a lot of experience where like, people come up to me like, while I'm at work and they're like, Oh, you speak such good English. Or like, Oh, like, how long have you been here in Canada? And I'm like, I, like, I'm Canadian too. Like, I've been here my whole life. Like, you know what I mean?
>
> […]
>
> Because, like, everyone just, like, everyone in [my hometown] is, like, uh, Caucasian. So, like, it's not really, like, oh, where are you, like, you know what I mean? Or, like, what's your ethnicity? Because, like, everyone's just, like, white. You know what I mean? So, like, when I get asked, I, I know that it's not just, like, oh, are you from like, which part of town are you from? It's like, where were you born? Or like when they say what's your ethnicity? Because it's like everyone else's ethnicity is the same.

This othering is also present for cisracial-transnational adoptees who live in diverse areas. Heather recalls being afraid of bringing traditional Bengali food to school as this was perceived as alien and other to her peers:

> Because I was always afraid of bringing home, um, bringing to school, like, traditional food, because that's all I was used to. I remember being made fun of because, like, when you're at home, when Bengalis, we like to eat with our hands. And we have, like, we use turmeric for food and everything. So, I remember going to school with, like, yellow

> hands one time. And someone made fun of me. I was like, dude, I don't know. It's just, that's just how our tradition is.

Despite living in a self-described diverse area, Heather's experience illustrates how an underlying established norm continues to marginalize cultural practices that differ from the mainstream.

Participants, specifically those raised in predominantly white communities, have experiences that question, diminish, or exclude their membership within the Canadian context. Their membership within the racialized community impacts and influences how they move throughout communities within Canada, where the white norm has been established.

### Othering from the Racial Community.

Although visibly a part of racialized communities, participants observe a difference in how they practice and interact with the racialized culture compared to the rest of the community, creating an awareness of being other in this context. However, the divide created by the observed experiential disconnect was exacerbated by other community members questioning participants' membership, further isolating them from the racial community. Teigan's membership within the Asian community was questioned due to their membership within the Canadian culture, isolating and excluding them from their racial community. Teigan shares*:*

> I was raised with this idea of like, I was from China, but now I'm pretty much like Canadian or whatever. Um, and that I'm only Chinese in like appearance, but I'm basically like white, which I'm sure we've all heard. Um, from both my adoptive parents and also just from. Asians who weren't adopted who, like, grew up much more connected to their culture and having parents who were also, like, the same race as them.

Teigan's experience was an outlier to the other participants, as other participants did not experience their membership within their racialized community questioned by other members.

*Members of the Middle Space*

Having relationships with others who occupy the middle space may reinforce adoptees' identities within this space by providing connection, trust, and support. Two cisracial-transnational participants who were raised by first-generation immigrant parents of colour existed in the middle space together, being either a partner or a guide through this development. Rebecca and her parents were able to navigate the integration of their racialized culture and Canadian culture together, making this a familial journey of development:

> We just kind of like, shift, because when I was younger, I remember Thanksgiving, like, Thanksgiving wasn't about turkey, stuffing, things like that, it was just like an excuse to kind of get together, but now we kind of do like, we do a turkey, we do stuffing, we do the cranberry sauce, like, things like that, um, and like, we like it, so it's become kind of part of our traditions as well. Yeah. Like, I don't really know how to describe it other than that.

While other members within the space can be team members in ethnic identity development, they can also serve as guides, offering a foundational understanding of ethnic identity. Heather's connection to her ethnic identity reflects her mother's, illustrating the crucial role her mother played in shaping how she took up the multiple parts of her ethnic identity:

> Growing up, um, My mom, she's not very cultural. We're not, we're not so very brown like that. I would say we're very much more modern and western compared to the regular, um, traditional Bengalis…. she kind of kept the brown culture, but then also, um, got influenced by the Canadian culture as well.

As Heather's mother figured out how to balance and interact with her ethnic identities, she provided a model upon which Heather could base her own ethnic identity. Furthermore, Heather's mom's membership within the middle space and the understanding that comes with this creates a sanctuary free from social expectations/assumptions.

## Sport Context

All participants participated in some form of sport; however, the level of sport differed (refer to *Table 1*). This section focuses on their sport participation and is treated as a 'spin-off' of the primary identity and belonging development plot, where the journey is examined within the context of sport, containing unique themes, supporting characters, and plot. "Network connections" can be fostered, established, and/or enhanced within the space of sport, perceived as "A Pause." However, sport also acts as a "microcosm of society" where discrimination and exclusions can be reproduced. Finally, the rigidity of sports structures allows for guaranteed connection and forces interaction but also controls participants' access to connections within the space.

### Network Connection

Joining the sporting space allowed participants to build and strengthen their network connections. Eight participants entered the sporting space during their childhood, an entry facilitated by their parents. Parents were motivated to enroll their children in sport because they wanted their children to acquire skills (e.g., swimming to prevent drowning) or to be a part of community norms. Hannah stated that her parents enrolled her in skating because that was the norm: "you learned skating or swimming, and my parents happened to choose skating." By enrolling her in skating and aligning with the community norms, Hannah's parents placed

Hannah in a position of belonging within the broader community context. This reinforces her membership within the community.

Similarly, enrollment within sport can be used to connect one with communities to which they may not have strong ties, especially participants' racialized community. Teigan and Heather were enrolled in physical cultural activities, specifically cultural dance classes, by their parents as an "ethnic exploration activity." Teigan assumed that their parents enrolled them in the class not only to reconnect them with their racialized cultural practices but also to help them connect with other Chinese children. The dance studio provided Teigan a space through which they could connect with their classmates, and this connection continues to be a motivator as they are currently searching for a new studio to join. The ability to form these connections and explore one's ethnoracial identity is dependent on the accessibility of these spaces. The lack of accessible classes is a barrier that is preventing Teigen's participation.

Sport operates as a social hub where people form new networks, establish new connections, and enhance existing connections.

*New Network*

Sport was a social space through which participants were able to meet and develop connections with new people outside of their existing networks. Rebecca recalls how sport allowed her to connect with a variety of people, noting this as a critical aspect of what made sports enjoyable. While Rebecca emphasizes the connection made within the team, Rachel suggests that the new network that one gains could extend across the entire league:

> Um, in softball, though, there was a lot of teams that were, like, very close. Like, […], maybe a 30-minute drive. So, we played against them a lot. We, like, knew the players.

> And then, like, obviously, like, you, like, follow them on Instagram, and then, like, somehow you get to Snapchat, and then, like... It blows up from there.

The connections made within sport can operate independently from existing networks; thus, participants were able to create completely new connections. For Mary, leaving the "bubble" of her school and entering the new network of sport provided her the freedom to explore other interests:

> I was kind of in the group where like, everyone was really academically driven, everyone had to have one path. But in Ringette and like through other things, people had things, like other things that were important to them.

By immersing herself in a new network and connecting with new people, Mary gained access to fresh perspectives and worldviews, expanding from the single perspective she and her schoolmates shared regarding life paths.

However, a significant challenge that hindered the development of belonging within the group was attempting to enter pre-existing networks. Teigan recalled how the established cliques during her time as a competitive dancer made the experience very isolating, suggesting that this prevented her from developing feelings of friendship with her classmates. Although the activity required them to cooperate, Teigan did not find a meaningful connection beyond the studio, as the cliques protected and maintained their exclusivity. Similarly, although her teammates were kind to her, Eden experienced a lack of belonging due to being an outsider. Her dance teammates were friends from school and thus were already an established network. Participants expressed a stronger sense of inclusion when the structure of the connection had not yet been established, highlighting the impact of pre-existing connections. Mary explains how the development of their team's dynamic was a group effort, making it a collaborative experience where "everyone's

learning to play with each other. You kind of get to learn as you go (Mary)". By developing the group network, members can build connections in tandem with each other. This approach reduced the likelihood of any individual's connection to the group being significantly weaker; all members contribute to the group dynamic, resulting in more cohesive and inclusive relationships among members. After entering and developing connections in a new space, sports become an established space where connection and a sense of belonging are fostered and found.

### *Established Space of Connection*

Sporting teams and spaces in which participants have had previous experience, there was an established level of comfort and familiarity where participants knew they would be able to connect and find belonging.

#### Having an Established Network

Participants explained how having an established network within the group provided them with familiarity and comfort in the dynamic, which could contribute to a sense of belonging and connection. Mary highlights that a previous experience working together gives players an understanding of how to be successful because of their working knowledge of each other's playing styles.

#### A Place to Find Connection

The physical space of sport for participants became a space to find community and connection through a shared goal. Samantha explains that her skills, knowledge, and membership as a ringette player allowed her to join other communities comfortably wherever she goes. Although she may not have any prior connections within the context, the shared goal/interest of the sport requires a level of cooperation and connection between teammates. Samantha specifically cited this shared goal as to why she prefers team sports: "You have this one

collective goal, right? So even if you like. Don't love each other on the ice when the game starts, you're really just, you have this one collective goal.*"* The shared goal of the game allowed Samantha to temporarily bond with people she "may not love."

Beyond the physical space, experience and interest within the sporting context created a common ground upon which participants could foster additional connections. For instance, Mary stated how discussing sports with her co-workers was a great icebreaker.

*Enhancing Network Connections*

When network connections from beyond sport are included, they strengthen these connections and can also enhance the sporting experience.

Friendships

Pre-existing friendships were enhanced when friends would join the sporting space together. The common ground of sport provided opportunities for quality time and bonding, resulting in a stronger friendship, and creating more points of commonality (Rebecca). Sport as a social context was the primary appeal for some participants who were solely motivated by friends' involvement rather than the sport itself. For instance, Rachel states: "I don't know if I ever really enjoyed it [dance] to begin with… I didn't like having to, like, practice the routine, and I didn't like dressing up and stuff like that for dance." Despite disliking the sport, she continued to participate as it guaranteed social time with her two best friends. Similarly, though not particularly interested in volleyball, Eden agreed to join the team as a favour to her friends. She expressed that, compared to her other sporting experiences, she felt a stronger sense of belonging sitting on the bench supporting her core group of friends than her experience actively participating on different teams. This suggests that the comfort and sense of belonging from the pre-existing relationships were translated and contributed to the sense of belonging developed

within the context of sport. Pre-existing friendships offer individuals comfort and security as they navigate the sporting environment; Teigan referred to these friendships as a good "gateway" into the team, "where like you have like a, a kind of safe, like, base if you are still trying to get to know other people and you're able to get to know people together.*"* However, Teigan does mention how this may also lead to people becoming complacent with their connections within the team, where they "stay with that person and not want to, like, talk to other people", resulting in the pre-existing connection becoming a barrier to additional connections. Pre-existing familial relationships were also enhanced in the sporting space.

### Family

Sport is a site in which families can reinforce membership and facilitate connection development within the group. When sport and family ethnocultural identity overlap, Samantha's involvement in sport became evidence of her membership in her family: "Through sports, on my dad's side, I'm definitely a [Lambert]. Like, it is something I say, too, like, all the time, actually, is all the [Lamberts] know how to ski, golf, and skate, in one way or another." Samantha was the only participant who strongly associated her membership within the family with her membership in sports. This demonstrates how sport serves as a site to reinforce membership within a separate network while also providing a space to develop connections with other members.

For six participants, sport was a common interest between themselves and their parents, particularly their fathers. Involvement in the sporting space was a prominent way parents connected to their children. The way in which parents were involved varied. For instance, Hannah shared how her father offered guidance by acting as an unofficial coach, and Rebecca shared how her parents joined adult skating classes because she was struggling. Participants

recognized these efforts as their parents' ways of demonstrating support and interest in their activities.

For sport to be a site to foster connection, participants had to be willing to accept the bids for connection their parents are proposing. For instance, Samantha stated, "Sport and eating, are the things we (her and her father) do together. Um, those are the things we can do easily together." For Samantha, sport is a place where she felt and continues to feel comfortable connecting with her father, with whom she has a complicated relationship:

> I've realized this past year, he, like, he really likes driving me to ringette, so I'll even just, like, I'll just ask him before I let, before I ask David or something like that, or if David had plans to drive me, I'll be like, "I think that dad wants to drive me, so I'm just gonna, gonna let dad drive me" so he just, yeah, he feels like, I feel like that's a way he thinks, he feels like he can support me, um, is through the things that he does.

This illustrates how Samantha and her father found common ground, and her father can support her in a way that is meaningful to him and comfortable for her. In contrast, although Hannah recognizes that her father's efforts and actions always came from a good place and that he encouraged and supported her, sport also acted as a space of conflict between them. This tension emerged when she perceived her father overstepping her boundaries, which could have been counterproductive in developing connections within sport.

### School Network

Participants' foundational understanding of belonging within the school context is translated into the school sporting space. Pre-existing relationships can be strengthened and developed in the sporting space, and conversely, pre-existing relationships can provide a

foundation for the team dynamic. For instance, Rebecca explained that her closeness with her teammates was due to the close connection developed within the school:

> Honestly, because my school was just so small and the teams were so small, I feel like I had a strong connection with, like, all the teammates, especially when half the people were, you know like the people I was in the same class with all the time.

The positive characteristics of the school's dynamic were encapsulated in school sports and allowed for the sense of belonging within sport to be an extension of Rebecca's belonging within school.

However, this also means that if participants' surrounding school environment was exclusionary, they could also experience this within sport. For instance, Teigan describes how her the "cliquey" high school environment and had a social hierarchy translated to the sporting space:

> So there were like more like popular people who are like doing rugby and like less popular people, we're still on the same team, but there wasn't like, um, unless we were out playing another team, there wasn't like, any aspect, there wasn't any like feeling of us being like one team together and we all had each other's backs or anything like that, um, so it was kind of unfortunate, but I don't know. It was, it was an experience.

Despite being classmates and teammates, the existing divide between members was too large, resulting in a lack of connection and cohesion in the team. Race and socioeconomic status were primary factors that informed the hierarchy within Teigan's school; resembling racial and economic elitism that can be seen within Canadian communities and culture. This illustrates how societal discriminatory and exclusionary attitudes and behaviors manifest within the sport.

### Microcosm

Sport acts as a microcosm, reflecting the attitudes and perspectives of the surrounding community and context. Exclusionary and discriminatory practices in the context of sport create or even exacerbate exclusion and isolation (Spaaij, 2015, as cited in Middleton et al., 2022; Yerashotis, 2022). Participants' experiences of discrimination primarily manifested as individual racism (microaggressions) and cultural appropriation.

Participants experienced individual racism in their interactions with other members within the sporting context, where other members' assumptions and stereotypes impacted the experiences of the participants. Those who lived in predominantly white communities more commonly had this experience. This reflects broader issues of racist ideologies within the community and highlights how these discriminatory beliefs are present within the sporting space. Sometimes, the prejudicial and discriminatory attitudes in the sporting environment were subtle and/or unintentional. Participants may not have initially recognized the discriminatory attitudes and behaviours, but they retrospectively came to understand these instances as such. Mary was often mistaken for the only other Asian player on her team. However, she does state that "[she] didn't take the situation too seriously," the coach's failure to respect and acknowledge Mary's individuality isolates and disconnects Mary and the other Asian teammate from the rest of the team. Microaggressions may also originate from teammates and/or competitors, resulting in exclusion and isolation. When these aggressions come from within the team, the discrimination subtly weakens the connection between the participants and the transgressors, as demonstrated by Hannah's hesitancy when thinking about her relationship with teammates who made racist comments*:*

> I don't think so, to be honest, just because, I don't know, I'm more conscious now and I still value all the friendships that I made there and I still try to keep in contact with them so I can't see a reason why it would be any different… Um, maybe I wouldn't get as close with the British girls because sometimes they would make; I think they were trying to be funny, but… Sometimes they made, like, racist comments that I only, like, realize that now. Like, thinking back, I'm like, oh, that's weird. Like, even in the moment, I was like, okay. And then, like, brushed it off.

Sport reproduces racial stereotypes, normalizing and embedding offensive practices within the institution. For instance, Teigan discusses how cultural appropriation was a common practice in dance. The normalization of these discriminatory attitudes and practices creates an uncomfortable environment for minorities, leading to feelings of isolation and disconnection:

> I would be vocal about [cultural appropriation], like if I had a, we have, we have one of our ballet teachers who had like these kids do a dance called Japanese and they like dressed up as like Japanese kids or whatever and I was like, 'That, I don't like, that's messed up, like you shouldn't, um, that's not, that wasn't like cultural appreciation or sharing, like that's fully just appropriation,' um, and like no one really got that and that teacher was upset because someone told her that I had said that about her dance and like, um, even people within my friend group, no one really like sided with me or like, um, defended me or like, um, uh, they kind of were just like they didn't get they either didn't get it or they just like didn't agree with me

When such practices are accepted as normal parts of the culture, participants might not only feel disconnected from the context due to the practice itself but may also face the consequences of isolation and exclusion if they decide to voice their discomfort.

Participation and engagement with Western sports have been conflated with Canadian culture and identity, and this is a space where participants' Canadian identity could be reinforced. Samantha shared how her father used her engagement in sport as evidence of membership within Canada, thus conflating her participation in sport and her Canadian ethnic identity as one and subsequently disconnecting her from her ethnoracial identity. Other participants found that sport served as a 'pause' in how race and racism shaped their everyday lived experiences.

### A Pause

The space of sport was found to pause the tensions surrounding their multifaceted identities, especially the effort that navigating the multiple parts of their ethnic identity requires. Samantha describes race as being "dropped at the door," suggesting that the sport itself was at the forefront of her experience rather than her race. Two other participants found that their race was not a defining feature that shaped their sporting experience. Rachel stated that some of her teammates did not realize that she was not white or adopted. This suggests that while participants typically experienced multiple exclusions based on their multiple ethnic identities, sport operated as a space where they were able to make connections on the common goal and interest of the sport. However, the development, maintenance, and continuation of the connections formed within the sport are often influenced and disrupted by the organizational structure of the sporting institution.

### Rigid Institution

The structure of organized sports often limits players' agency, controlling the connections that participants develop and the networks to which they have access.

*Forced Cooperation*

Participants shared how the institution of sport required their cooperation with their teammates. Due to the required cooperation, close proximity, and frequent contact, resolving conflict and tension is necessary. This was highlighted by participants' frequent utilization of the phrase "have to" to describe conflict resolution; specifically, "have to cooperate," "have to get through it," "have to be in the same class," and "have to just get over it [the conflict]." "Have to" suggests participants felt obligated to find a resolution not necessarily due to personal desire but due to the external pressures of the sporting space:

> And then moving towards, um, like competitive dance. Um, you know, one of the first dance studios I went to was very isolating and it was kind of like, cliquey and like, um, I never really developed any feeling of friendship with any of the people that I was dancing with aside from like, we're in the same dance together so we have to like co-operate and do this dance, um, but I didn't really talk to them outside of it. (Teigan)

Participants share how the structure of the sporting space requires them to move on from conflicts quickly to maintain harmony within the space. As a result, participants prioritize the need for resolution by suppressing or separating their personal feelings from the space of sport. For instance, Teigan discusses how quick resolution to conflict was required to maintain their friendships due to physical proximity and limited alternatives for social engagement, denying their ability to reflect and re-evaluate these connections.

> We were all in that same friend group, so we could only, like, be mad at each other for so long before, like, you have to be in the same class again and do the same dance together again, like, there wasn't space to, like, take a step back from certain people or decide that I didn't like certain people or didn't want to be friends with them.

Other teammates may echo and reinforce the expectation to cooperate, emphasizing the importance of prioritizing the game. For instance, Heather shared how her teammates remained neutral during a conflict she was having with a teammate, preventing further division and conflict within the team. Furthermore, the teammates became sources of pressure to prioritize the game and remove the conflict from the sporting space:

> We kind of had a little beef between us, but then at the same time, people knew about it and instead of picking sides and what whatever they--- they kind of made us like talk-- like not talk about it-- but just forced us to get past it and play the game and that just made me read like You know, you know how females are, we're just very petty, and we like to win. We like to be, like, above everybody, like, the other person. But then, like, all these girls, they just didn't care. They're like, you know what? Play the damn game, who cares about this fight? We're not picking sides. You're not wrong. You're not wrong. You know what, whatever, just play. (Heather)

Although Rachel also acknowledges the obligation to resolve conflicts within the team, she suggests that this requirement does not necessarily cheapen the sense of belonging or connection. She compares the sporting structure to a family, where members understand the importance of healthy conflict resolution and that despite the presence of disagreement, a positive, supportive environment can still be created:

> Yeah. I think it's just more so like that like you're like part of the family and that you get along with each other and like, there can be disagreements, but like, you know, how to work through them without it being like, like a whole disaster kind of thing. And just like being, like, feeling like they want you there and that they want to be there.

Participants are required to cooperate and prioritize the game, regardless of the strength of their connections within the team. On the other hand, the structure of the sporting organization may disrupt a formed team network where there are strong connections, forcing the players to separate.

*Access Control*

The structure/organization of the sporting institution can influence participants' maintenance of connections within their sporting space. For instance, participants describe the formation of the teams changing every season. Removing the established connections may result in disconnection for the individual as their established network (team) has been removed. Teigan describes their removal from their initial soccer team to be placed on a new team as a loss. Her experience highlights how the institutions' creation of new teams may also result in the disconnection from established teams and groups:

> Um, I think, I think it's... Partly tough because each year, like, you don't play with the same people, like they would, like, scramble us up and put, like, new teams together, um, and so I think maybe, like, people kind of feel that loss of, like, oh, I'm not with my same team anymore, and now I get to know these, like, new people, um, it's weird because I did have one of my friends just, like, From outside of sports, just like a friend of mine on that team as well, but it's so like, it didn't… it wasn't enough to create a sense of belonging overall with the team. Um, and I think… I found the people on the first team that I was on a lot more friendly and welcoming and willing to like and get to know each other. Like, there wasn't. There weren't these separate groups that would go off and not talk to each other. Whereas on the second team, people were still like, nice to each other, stuff like that, um, but they had more of that energy of, like, the people that I knew at my

> schools or whatever, who were a bit more like, exclusive and less open-minded about talking to each other.

Though Teigan illustrates the difficulty of being disconnected from a team, the forced separation may also be a point of hope, where an individual who may not feel connected to a current team could find a connection to a new team. For instance, Samantha alternated between two teams every year where she felt a strong connection and belonging to the first and disconnect and conflict in the second. During a particularly bad second year, the knowledge of the endpoint was a source of reassurance for Samantha:

> I always stayed the same, so, um, yeah, so there was that year where I didn't have any of my close friends, um, and I just didn't, I was connected to maybe like one or two people but it wasn't like the rest of the team like we didn't feel like at least I didn't feel like we were a solidified group and there was a lot of like bullying but not to me like it was really weird so it was like the energy wasn't even like -- I oh-- I want to be a part of like, oh my god I just have to get through this year.

She describes "just hav[ing] to get through this year," suggesting that the end of the season was the resolution to the negative experience. The connections developed within sport may be anchored to the space, thus when participants are no longer able to participate (or participate at the same level), the access to the connections may be hindered.

### Membership Expiry

Two participants discussed how membership within a sport space can end as an individual ages. Samantha discusses how her network with sport dispersed as they moved on to different life stages (post-secondary school and work); thus, they needed to connect beyond sport to maintain their friendships. Although she did stay involved in ringette, she states that this end

was inevitable, and the conclusion of this chapter in her life (with her teammates) was natural and unavoidable.

Hannah discusses the end of her sporting career, choosing to leave sport due not being at a level where "it was, like, financially feasible to keep competing. Yeah. Um, so I retired." Hannah discusses the difficulty of leaving sport behind and losing this connection:

> We [her and her dad], like, sat in my car. Or, like, the rental car or whatever and I think I cried for, like, almost an hour and a half. And he was just, like, very supportive of, like... Because people tend to not talk about, like, retiring from sport as much. But, um, you know, it's definitely (tearing up)... It's something that I was leaving behind.

Hannah states that when she was not skating, she was "sad and like missing it, like missing being on the ice" and that going back as a coach and "keeping [her] foot in the door of figure skating was very comfortable for [her]." Keeping sport in her life, even in a new form, allowed her to continue her membership within the space.

## Results Summary

Being an adoptee is not isolated to a singular event but a lifelong series of tensions, explorations, and discoveries (Merritt, 2021). Three facets of the transnational adoptees' identity were examined: 1) pre-adoptive identity; 2) adoptee identity; and 3) ethnic identity. The surrounding networks and context are highly influential in how the unique development of each facet is constructed. Sport provides opportunities to develop and enhance connections to networks/communities and may provide a space free from the tensions and conflicts that transnational adoptees navigate. However, societal discriminatory and exclusionary attitudes and behaviours can emerge within this space, isolating transnational adoptees within the sporting space. Furthermore, organized sport structure dictates the connections participants can develop

and maintain. This study's findings support current understandings of transnational adoptees' identity and belonging development while providing nuance to these understandings.

# Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

In what follows, I situate the results of this study within the current literature on transnational adoptees' sense of belonging and identity development and sport as a site for the development of belonging and identity. I then provide recommendations for different audiences and implications for future research.

## How Transnational Adoptees form their Multifaceted Identities and Sense of Belonging

Participants have supporting and influential characters who are integral to their identity and sense of belonging. Being embedded within different networks provides a sense of community; consequently, experiences of inclusion and exclusion within and from these networks shape their identities.

The three identity facets that emerged from this study reflect identities identified within literature examining transnational adoptees' sense of belonging and identity development (see Chapter 2 Literature Review). However, conceptualizing the navigation of transnational adoptees' ethnic identity as a gradient wheel is novel. The ethnic identity of transracial/national adoptees has been previously understood to operate on a spectrum, from their ethnoracial identity to identifying with the ethnicity of their adoptive parents (Baden, 2002, as cited in Brocious, 2017). Previous understandings of adoptees' ethnic identity conflated the ethnicity of their family and the ethnicity of their adoptive country (e.g., Baden, 2012; Goss, 2010), but this study found that these ethnicities are separate. My conceptualization of the navigation of ethnic identity as a colour wheel allows for the inclusion of various facets of ethnic identity, enhancing our understanding of how transnational adoptees navigate their multiple inclusions and exclusions. This understanding supports the representation of transnational adoptees as a heterogeneous group with a broad range of ethnic identity configurations.

*Supporting and Influential Characters*

The development of adoptee identity and belonging are strongly tied to the contexts and networks of which the individual is a part, in which identity and belonging shift as these contexts change (Darnell et al., 2017; Reynolds et al., 2016). Throughout the development of the different *identity facets*, participants' understanding and navigation of their identities were informed by the networks and characters who surrounded them, specifically in their family, community, and the larger society (see Chapter 2 Literature Review). Examining these relationships is integral to understanding the construction of transnational adoptees' identity and sense of belonging.

Parent(s)

As outlined in the existing literature (see Chapter 2 Literature Review), biological and adoptive parents are key characters in the journey of identity and belonging, where they are influential in all facets of identity development (Darnell et al., 2017).

Participants within this study did not have, or did not recall, the relationship with their biological parents; thus, the biological parent was not a source of influence in their journeys, but more so a mysterious character from their past who is part of the puzzle of their *pre-adoptive identities*. Meanwhile, participants' parent(s) were critical characters in the development of all identity facets, being a primary source of information to construct their initial understanding of identity and belonging. Parent (s) involvement is vital to how adoptees navigate and interact with their multiple facets of identity.

Parent(s) have been previously established as critical engineers in constructing the pre-adoption facet (Darnell et al., 2017). This aligns with my findings, where participants relied on parent(s) to construct this aspect of their identity. Subsequently, this places them in a position of

significant power and influence over how participants understand and engage with their *pre-adoptive identity*.

The foundational lens through which participants within my project perceive their adoptee identities is introduced and constructed by their parent(s), *acknowledging and normalizing* this historically stigmatized facet. Previous literature identifies a dichotomy in how adoptees perceive their identities, categorizing them as either a source of internal stigmatization or as a symbol of pride and empowerment (Darnell et al., 2017). However, participants in my study did not resonate with this duality; instead, they viewed their adoptee status simply as a matter of fact, not associating this facet with shame or viewing it as evidence of survival (Darnell et al., 2017). This neutral perception was found in participants whose parents normalized their child's adoptee identity through open and direct conversations throughout their childhoods.

Although the roles they play within the construction of each facet may vary, acknowledgment and openness are beneficial in supporting participants' complex navigation of their multifaceted identities across all facets. An absence of support can be isolating and create a rift between the transnational adoptee and their parents. This is particularly evident in participants' experience regarding the construction of their *ethnoracial identity*, where race would be a source of conflict if the parents did not acknowledge their racial identity. When parents ignore their child's racialized experience and/or identity, an "(un)spoken separation between the adoptee and his or her family" is created (Goss, 2010, p. 53). The efforts by parents to reinforce participants' *Canadian ethnic identity* while denying their *ethnoracial identity* creates tension between parent and child. As a result, the participants are more likely to be uncomfortable exploring their *ethnoracial identity* and search for guidance and support from other sources and networks. Access to different networks and communities allowed participants

to develop their initial understanding of their identities. Parental and family figures are understood to be adoptees' largest support network when examining their identity and belonging development.

### Teachers and Collaborators

Personal connections highly influence the journey of identity development adoptees make in their various communities, placing greater importance on and influencing their membership within their networks (Reynolds et al., 2021). The connections to other adoptees, the adoptee community, and participating in immigrant communities are beneficial for transnational adoptees (Brocious, 2017; Simmons, 2016) by functioning as informational resources and influencing their own understanding of identity and belonging. Any personal connection with a shared identity facet can serve as a teacher or collaborator. However, the peers who share aspects of the participants' identities are particularly significant in navigating their complex identities, where these individuals act as teachers or collaborators.

This reciprocal relationship of the collaborator is particularly evident between members of the same adoption groups and the construction of the *pre-adoptive identity*. The adoption network, particularly the participants' adoption group, occupies a unique position where aspects of their pre-adoptive identities overlap due to their shared experiences at the orphanages/ nurseries. Thus, forming connections within one's adoption group provides an opportunity to mutually enhance their understanding of their shared identity facets through information exchange. The collaborators still act as connectors to the facet and community, but both parties are enriching their understandings of their identities.

Sharing information and opportunities to deepen their understanding of their multiple facets of identity is particularly beneficial for their ethnoracial identity development. McGinnis

et al. (2009) recommend teachers and mentors who share racialized identity with adoptees for transracial adoptees' ethnoracial identity development. Such relationships provide guidance and support for adoptees navigating their complex, multifaceted identities.

### Wider Community: Multiple inclusions and exclusions

Participants' sense of identity and belonging was informed by the various communities surrounding them, such as racialized, Canadian, adoptee, non-adoptee, and sports groups. A critical factor in shaping participants' understanding of their multifaceted identity and sense of belonging within these groups was how/if they were included and/or excluded.

#### *Inclusions*

Due to their multiple identities, transnational adoptees are members of multiple communities. Establishing connections with communities is crucial for developing adoptees' sense of belonging.

Participants were immersed in Canadian culture, so they could connect and participate easily, and little to no facilitation was needed for the development of their Canadian ethnic identity. However, parents and surrounding networks would make an effort to reinforce participants' connection to either their Canadian cultural identity or their familial ethnocultural identity.

In comparison, their inclusion and participation in the adoptee community and the racialized community requires effort. As previously mentioned, *teachers and collaborators* are prominent gatekeepers who facilitated participants' inclusion, specifically acting as bridges to connect to their ethnoracial identity. However, due to the diasporic nature of some of these communities, specifically the adoptee community, person-to-person connection may not have been possible, resulting in isolation and disconnection. Thus, with the rise of the internet and

social media platforms, virtual forums were found to be valuable spaces to access these communities. Online communities have been understood as spaces for emotional support and validation for adoptees (Gleason, 2010), but these digital forums can also serve as information hubs, offering vital knowledge that can guide the development of adoptees' understanding of identity and development.

In addition to their own efforts to connect with various communities, participants also encounter perceptions and assumptions from the wider community that place them within specific groups. While participants may be assumed and perceived to belong to one group, this can result in feelings of exclusion and isolation from others.

*Exclusions*

The multiple exclusions from communities, especially when navigating their ethnoracial identity, create and/or exacerbate feelings of alienation (Goss, 2010) and are a barrier to the development of their multiple facets of identity. Exclusion and othering were prominent within the different parts of the ethnic identity. Being racialized people within the context of Canada, specifically those who live in predominantly white areas, they are othered by their experiences of racism and microaggression. These experiences harmfully put their membership within the Canadian community into question, disconnecting them from Canadian culture. This conflicts with their personal network that includes and reinforces their membership within the Canadian community, more specifically, the white community. Yet, despite being visibly a part of the racialized community, an individual-level observation and self-awareness of being other were found to contribute to their perception of belonging, even if there is no explicit othering taking place. The lack of cultural similarity and experiential disconnect between participants and their racialized community was a significant element in their disconnection.

Much literature examines transracial ethnic identity experiences (e.g., Brocious, 2017; Goss, 2010; Simmons, 2016; Reynolds et al., 2016; Reynolds et al., 2021), but there is a very limited understanding of cisracial experiences. It is important to distinguish between the two subgroups when examining ethnic identity as the development of this facet differed the most. The literature has demonstrated the multiple tensions and conflicts which transracial/national adoptees must navigate when constructing their ethnic identities (Reynolds et al., 2016; Reynolds et al., 2021), placing them within a middle space between their "white identity" and their socially ascribed identity (Twine, 2001, p.215 as cited in Goss, 2010, p. 8). However, the findings from this study found that cisracial-transnational adoptees also occupy the middle space, but the way in which they navigate this is different for they are guided by their parent(s) who may be operating in a similar middle space. Further research focusing on the development of cisracial-transnational adoptees' ethnic identity development is needed.

The transnational adoptee identity has been presented as multifaceted, dynamic, and contextual. It is also an entity that has "identity issue[s] by default" (Darnell et al., 2017, p.160; see also van Wichelen, 2019) being constructed from "bits and fragments" (Kim, 2010, p.12, as cited in Heijun Wills, 2012). While transnational adoptees' identities do include tensions and conflicts that the participants of this study navigated, I am critical of the view that this is a result of the transnational adoptee identity being incomplete. Instead, I propose that although transnational adoptees are a part of multiple communities where they experience inclusions and exclusions, this creates a completed, multilayered identity.

## What is the Role of Sport?

### *Network Development Opportunity*

Sport primarily functions as a social site for participants, where connections can be fostered and socialization and co-operation are expected. Supporting existing literature that understood sport as a site that formed community and fostered connection and belonging (Walseth, 2006; Joseph, 2014). Participants were able to create and establish *new network connections* and enhance existing network connections, establishing that sport can support the development of networks which are vital for transnational adoptees' development of identity and belonging.

Sport also provided the opportunity for participants to connect with their racialized communities and culture. This supports previous understandings that sports can facilitate bonding between community members (see Chapter 2 Literature Review). However, it is unclear if sport also supported a connection between participants and their birth country. This suggests that cultural sports may be a significant space in which transnational adoptees could develop and explore their ethnoracial identity by making critical network connections, but this should be explored more in future research.

### *Community Connection Opportunity*

Sport as a site to develop connections extends beyond the sporting space, being known to strengthen members' connection to the wider community (see Chapter 2 Literature Review). However, as most participants were adopted as infants or children and were raised in Canada, enrolling them in sport did not operate as a site to learn about Canadian culture, as has been found in other immigrants (see Chapter 2 Literature Review). Instead, sport functioned as a space in which participants reinforce their membership in the eyes of the Canadian community due to

the conflation between sports and Canadian culture. These findings, however, may change if participants were older when they were adopted.

*Pauses and Barriers*

On another note, sport also operated as a space that could provide a reprieve from the tensions surrounding transnational adoptees' ethnic identities. The common goal provided participants with an opportunity to bond over shared interests and "build connections through the ability to just play the game" (Middleton et al., 2022, p. 169), resulting in race not being at the forefront of their experience. However, it is important to recognize the constant presence and significance of race even when its role may not be consciously detected by individuals.

However, as sport can operate as a microcosm of society where discrimination and prejudice may emerge (see Chapter 2 Literature review) it can result in the sporting space being exclusionary and/or isolating. Although participants did not experience barriers to accessing the space due to policies, rules, or regulations, experiences of racism created an uncomfortable environment. Experiences of racism create a divide within the team, negatively impacting the network formed by isolating participants from their teammates and/or weakening the connections.

Ultimately, sport was not found to directly impact participants' identity formation and belonging. However, it offers transnationally adopted youth a space to build essential social networks, provides opportunities for ethnic identity exploration and cultural connection, and may provide a reprieve from conflicts and tensions.

Social Capital

Social networks and associations foster trust and cooperation among individuals contributing to the community's overall well-being (Putnam, 1995). As discussed above, these

social networks and the reciprocity and support that membership provides are critical for developing identity and belonging for transnational adoptees. The site of sport was found to foster bonding social capital between participants and their teammates by having a collective aim/goal (Tonts, 2005; see also Harris 1998; Walseth, 2006; Putnam, 1995). The nuance that Putnam (2000) allows within his conceptualization of bonding and bridging as "more or less" dimensions supports the understanding of transnational adoptees' experiences of multiple inclusion and exclusion from their communities.

When examining the decline of social capital within America, Putnam (1995) expresses skepticism regarding concerns that electronic networks would contribute to the decline of social capital. However, although online networks are not a replacement for in-person connections, participants' utilization of virtual spaces to create connections is not devoid of value, especially when other opportunities to connect are limited.

## Recommendations

The findings from this study suggest that adoptive parent(s) should educate themselves on the multiple identities and communities to which their child belongs. As parents are key characters in the formation of transnational adoptees' identity and belonging, becoming familiar with and educated about their multiple identities will be beneficial in helping support their child's development. Furthermore, this study suggests that acknowledging their child's multi-faceted identity through open and direct conversation is critical. Recognizing all facets of their child's identity not only supports the transnational adoptee but also is beneficial to the relationship between parent(s) and child. Finally, providing the opportunities for transnational adoptees to form network connections is also encouraged.

The way in which transnational adoptees connect with their multiple communities can differ and take many forms. This study suggests that involvement and connections within these communities can benefit and support identity and belonging development. However, transnational adoptees who are unable, or not comfortable, making these connections may consider engaging in other ways such as ethnic exploration activities and online communities.

Within the sporting space, coaches should prioritize developing connections between members and fostering team cohesion, addressing exclusionary social groupings. Furthermore, adults in positions of authority within the sporting space should be aware of the potential for racist attitudes and behaviours that may emerge, which can isolate and alienate racialized individuals.

## Limitations

There are several limitations within this study. The findings of this research focus on transnational adoptees, examining the experiences of cisracial-transnational adoptees and transnational adoptees, and thus should not be generalized to domestic adoptees or other forms of adoption.

The methodology of snowball sampling resulted in the majority of the participants being Chinese adoptees who are in their early twenties. Moreover, I am an insider, which grants easier access to this population. This narrow age range and racial identity may not fully capture experiences of adoptees who do not fall within this population. In addition, the majority of participants were adopted when they were infants. All participants identify as gender minorities (8 identifying as women and 1 identifying as non-binary) and people of colour. It should be noted that due to all participants identifying as people of colour (8 were from non-western countries and 1 from North America), findings regarding ethnoracial identity may not be

representative of other transnational adoptees. There were only two cisracial-transnational participants, and both grew up in diverse cities; thus, the findings applicable to cisracial-transnational adoptees may not fully capture the diverse experience of this understudied group.

This study's utilization of social capital as the theoretical framework resulted in a lack of intentional analyses of intersectionality. The focus on social networks within social capital (Putnam, 2000; Putnam, 2004) limited exploration and discussion of participants' intersectional experiences and identities. For example, while the two semi-structured interviews resulted in a detailed conversation, participants' racialized gendered identities and experiences were not explicitly examined despite all participants identifying as racial and gender minorities.

## Implication of Findings and Contribution

Through this project, I hope to bring two separate areas of literature into conversation to better understand how to support transnational adoptees' identity and belonging development. Although sport was not found to directly foster transnational adoptees' sense of belonging and identity, the opportunities the space provides suggest that sports participation indirectly benefits their development.

As there is no previous study examining the experiences of adoptees within sport, future research may explore various research questions, further bringing these areas of study together. For instance, future research may study topics related to the long-term impacts of sports participation for adoptees, identity, belonging, social networks, access/participation, racial/ethnic socialization, coaching practices, the role of cultural sport participation, and adoptive family practices.

On a more general note, I also encourage greater exploration of intersectionality. Here, a more critical theoretical framework for examining intersectionality and belonging would be

significant in capturing and examining transnational adoptees' complex and multifaceted identities and experiences. I would also recommend future research examining more cisracial adoptees' experiences as there was no current literature, and there were only two cisracial-transnational adoptee participants within this study. The lack of literature regarding this population provides an opportunity for a variety of topics and methodologies to be utilized. Finally, I encourage centring the voices and experiences of adopted youth/people to enhance understanding and awareness of their lived experiences, which can inform how policies and practices can support this community as they navigate various challenges.

## Epilogue

Throughout my life, I have been embedded in close networks of people who supported and normalized my adoptee identity. Thus, I did not feel compelled to examine what 'being an adoptee' truly means to me, though admittedly, this was an aspect of myself that I did not, or maybe did not want to, examine too closely. I recognize that this ambivalence is in part due to not having to continually think about my adoptee identity due to my status as a cisracial-transnational adoptee, where I could move through social spaces with my family unambiguously. This research allowed me not only to be able to connect and bring forward the voices of my community, centring their stories but also allow me to deeply examine and form what being an adoptee means to me.

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Appendix A

Interview #1

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study. Before we get started, there are a few things we need to go over. You should have received the informed consent form a couple of days ago, and I will go over it now with you, please let me know if you have any questions.

The purpose of the research is to examine the role of sport in the development of transnational adoptees' sense of identity and belonging. Participation will involve two interviews (~1 hour each) that will be about your sense of identity, your sense of belonging, and experiences in sport. If you consent, the interviews will be audio-recorded. Participants who choose the Zoom option will be asked to have their camera on, but only the audio will be recorded. You will be asked to discuss topics that may cause discomfort including experiences of exclusion and isolation. To mitigate this, participants will be provided with contact information for mental health support services. You may benefit from your participation in the project through the opportunity to reflect on your experiences and subsequently gaining useful knowledge about yourself and your experiences regarding your identity formation and development of sense of belonging within the context of sport through reflection and discussion during the interview. In addition, you will receive a $10 gift card from Starbucks as compensation for your time. If you stop participating, you will still be eligible to receive the $10 Starbucks gift card for agreeing to be in the project, even if you withdraw without completion of the research. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible. Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer, to stop participating, or to refuse to answer questions will not influence the nature of the ongoing relationship you may have with the researchers or study staff or nature of your relationship with York University either now, or in the future. Unless you choose otherwise all information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. Do you have any questions about any of this?

[for in-person interviews]: Could you please sign these two copies of your informed consent form? One copy is for you the other is for me. once these are signed can start the interview.

So, just to outline how the interviews will proceed for this first interview, first, I want to know some basic information about you, then, we will discuss your adoption experience. Throughout the interview, I will be taking some notes, but they are not indicative of positivity or negativity, they are just for myself. I am going to ask about you family members, is there a title which you prefer I use for your adoptive parents and your biological parents?

*Interview Guide #1*

1. Where were you adopted from?
    a. What age were you adopted and brought to Canada?
2. Do you use the term "adoptee" to describe yourself?
    a. If yes, could you tell me about when you took ownership of this status [or when you became aware of claiming the status]?

    b. If not, how do you refer to yourself if not “adoptee”?
3. If you were to describe your life in chapters up until now, what would the chapters be? [what would be the key events? Who are main characters?]
4. Could you tell me about what you know about the time before you were adopted?
    a. Could you talk about how you came to know this information [who told you, how did they tell you, at what age did you find out]?
        i. Has your understanding/perception of this chapter of your life changed from when you first learned about it compared to now?
    b. Were there any events that shaped your understanding of that part of your life?
5. Could you describe your adoptive parents [familial structure, race, and age]
    a. How would you describe your relationship with your parents?
    b. How would you describe yourself in the context of your family? [could you talk about a time where you felt like you belonged in the context of your family? Could you talk about a time where you felt out of place in the context of family]
6. How would you describe your ethnicity?
    a. Has this perception of your ethnicity changed throughout your life?
7. How would you describe your culture?
    a. Has this changed from your childhood? [what have you resonated with? How much you resonated with?]
        i. Could you talk about a time when you felt connected to the culture? [what part of this enhanced the feeling of connection and belonging]
        ii. Could you talk about a time you felt disconnected from the culture?
8. How would you describe your social network during high school and elementary school?
    a. How would you describe yourself during these times?
    b. Could you talk about a time where you felt like you belonged during this time?
    c. Could you talk about a time when you felt excluded or isolated [what part of this contributed to feelings of exclusion and isolation]
    d. Was there a “go to group or person” when you are feeling alone? [who are they? Why do you think they are your go to person? Did this person change?]

Interview #2

Thank you for coming back for the second interview. Before we get started today, I want to go over a few things to ensure ongoing informed consent. So, the purpose of the research is to examine the role of sport in the development of transnational adoptees’ sense of identity and belonging. Participation involves two interviews; this is the second interview that will be about 1 hour. The interviews will be audio-recorded if you have consented. Participants who choose the Zoom option will be asked to have their camera on, but only the audio will be recorded. You will be asked to discuss topics that may cause discomfort including experiences of exclusion and isolation. To mitigate this, participants will be provided with contact information for mental health support services. You may benefit from your participation in the project through the opportunity to reflect on your experiences and subsequently gaining useful knowledge about yourself and your

experiences regarding your identity formation and development of sense of belonging within the context of sport through reflection and discussion during the interview. In addition, you will receive a $10 gift card from Starbucks as compensation for your time. If you stop participating, you will still be eligible to receive the $10 Starbucks gift card for agreeing to be in the project, even if you withdraw without completion of the research. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible. Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer, to stop participating, or to refuse to answer questions will not influence the nature of the ongoing relationship you may have with the researchers or study staff or nature of your relationship with York University either now, or in the future. Unless you choose otherwise all information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. Do you have any questions about any of this?

To outline how the interviews will proceed for the second interview, first, I am going to focus on your experiences in sport, then I will go back to adoption at the end. Throughout the interview, I will be taking some notes, but they are not indicative of positivity or negativity, they are just for myself.

*Interview Guide #2*

1. Tell me about your sporting experience [What kind of sports did you participate in? What level did you participate in? What was the organization? Was it club, high school, recreational? How long were you a member of the team?]
    a. How did you get started in the sport? [What was the appeal of this/these sports]
    b. How would you describe your time in the sport? [was it a positive experience? Negative experience? Why?]
2. Can you tell me about your relationships with other team members?
    a. Tell me about a time where you felt like you belonged to the group [what made this story stand out?]
    b. Tell me about a time where you felt isolated from the other members? [what made this story stand out?]
3. How do you think that sport impacted your ability to make connections with others? [
    a. Can you tell me about a time where you made a strong connection with a teammate?
    b. Can you tell me about a time where you were not able to make a connection with a teammate?
4. Would you consider the team to be diverse? In your opinion, is this an impactful aspect of the relationship between members?
5. In your opinion, what are the important components in sport teams to result in feelings of belonging?
6. What does sport mean to you? [did it take on a greater meaning beyond the sport itself?]
7. As a transnational adoptee, what do you think were the benefits and drawbacks of

participating in sport? [How do you think sport helps you grow personally?]
    a. Did either translate into the other aspects of your life?
8. In the first interview, you discussed your close relationship with your sibling/mom/dad/cousin/friends – did sport ever play a role in the development of this relationship?
    a. If yes, could you tell me about a time where you felt like sport strengthened your relationship with the individual?
9. In the first interview, you told me about times where you felt excluded, has this ever happen in a sport context?
    a. Has this experience impacted your participation within sport?
10. Did sport play a role in how you navigated feelings of not belonging?

Appendix B

Recruitment Messages

*Email (Known Contacts)*

Hey [insert name of person],

I hope you are doing well.

I wanted to reach out because I am currently working on my Master's thesis where I am studying adoptees' experiences and was wondering if you would be interested in participating. Participating in the study would involve two interviews (which can be done in-person or over Zoom), each interview lasting ~1 hour, and you would be compensated with a $10 Starbucks gift card. I have attached the recruitment poster below that has a QR code to the google form where you can find more information about the study and submit your contact information. Please let me know if you're interested or if you know anyone else who may be interested.

Thanks so much,

Bliss

*Email (Adoptee Groups/Organizations)*

Hello [insert name of person/ organization here],

I hope you are well.

My name is Bliss Wong, and I am a Master of Science candidate from York University. I wanted to reach out to you because I am currently working on my master's thesis where I am studying Transnational Adoptees sport experiences and was wondering if you would be willing to advertise my study on your [website/social media page/platform] as I am currently recruiting participants. Participation would involve two interviews, each lasting ~1 hour (in person or via Zoom), and all participants will be compensated with a $10 Starbucks gift card. I have attached the poster for the study below that has a QR code to the google form where potential participants can find more information about the study and submit their contact information.

As your [group/organization/community] includes many Transnational adoptees, I would appreciate your assistance. Please let me know if you're interested or if you have any questions regarding the study.

Thanks so much for your consideration.

Kind regards,

Bliss Wong

*Email (Community Sport Centre Groups/Organizations)*

Hello [insert name of person/ organization here],

I hope you are well.

My name is Bliss Wong, and I am a Master of Science candidate from York University. I wanted to reach out to you because I am currently working on my master's thesis where I am studying Transnational Adoptees sport experiences and was wondering if you would be willing to advertise my study on your [website/social media page/platform] as I am currently recruiting

participants. Participation would involve two interviews, each lasting ~1 hour (in person or via Zoom), and all participants will be compensated with a $10 Starbucks gift card. I have attached the poster for the study below that has a QR code to the google form where potential participants can find more information about the study and submit their contact information.
As your [group/organization/community] includes a variety of people who have participated in organized sport, I would appreciate your assistance. Please let me know if you're interested or if you have any questions regarding the study.
Thanks so much for your consideration.
Kind regards,
Bliss Wong

*Direct message (For Known Contacts)*

Hey [insert name here]! I hope you're doing well. I wanted to reach out because I am currently working on my master's thesis where I am studying adoptees' experiences and was wondering if you would be interested in participating and/or connecting me with other adoptees. Participating would involve two interviews, each lasting ~1 hour (in person or via Zoom), and you will be compensated with a $10 Starbucks gift card. I have attached the study's recruitment poster below that has a QR code to the google form where you can find more information about the study and submit your contact information. Please let me know if you're interested or if you know anyone else who may be interested. Thanks!

*Direct message (Adoptee Groups/Organizations)*

Hello [insert name of person/ organization here], I hope you are well. My name is Bliss Wong, and I am a Master of Science candidate from York University. I wanted to reach out to you because I am currently working on my master's thesis where I am studying Transnational Adoptees' sport experiences and was wondering if you would be willing to advertise my study on your [social media page/platform]. Participation would involve two interviews, each lasting ~1 hour, and all participants will be compensated with a $10 Starbucks gift card. Attached is the poster that has a QR code to the google form where potential participants can find more information about the study and submit their contact information. As your [group/organization/community] includes many transnational adoptees, I would appreciate your assistance. Please let me know if you're interested or if you have any questions regarding the study. Thanks!

*Direct Message (Community Sport Centre Groups/Organizations)*

Hello [insert name of person/ organization here], I hope you are well. My name is Bliss Wong, and I am a Master of Science candidate from York University. I wanted to reach out to you because I am currently working on my master's thesis where I am studying Transnational Adoptees' sport experiences and was wondering if you would be willing to advertise my study on your [social media page/platform]. Participation would involve two interviews, each lasting ~1 hour, and all participants will be compensated with a $10 Starbucks gift card. Attached is the poster that has a QR code to the google form where potential participants can find more information about the study and submit their contact information. As your

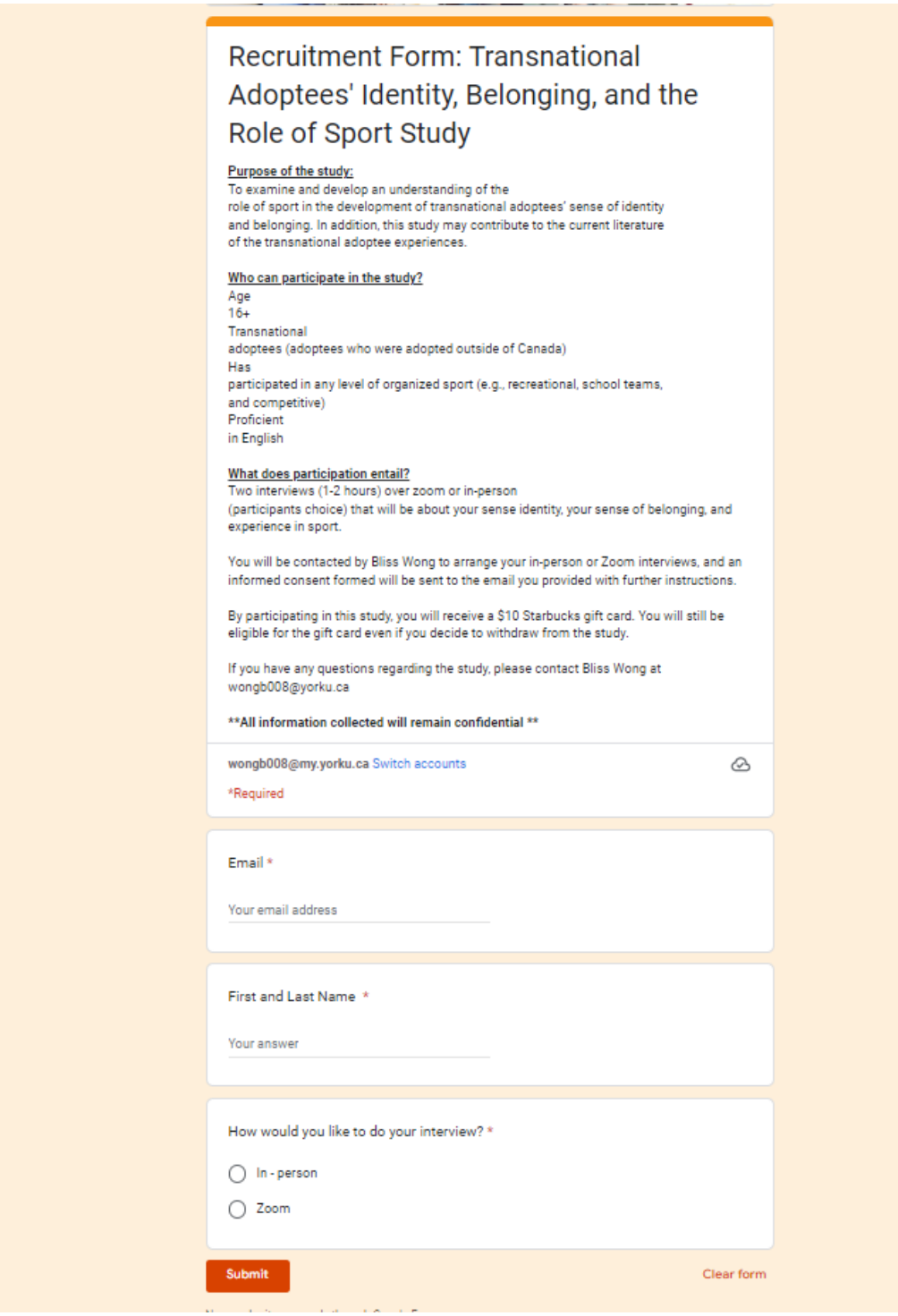
[group/organization/community] includes a variety of people who have participated in organized sport, I would appreciate your assistance. Please let me know if you're interested or if you have any questions regarding the study. Thanks!

Appendix C

Recruitment Poster

Appendix D

Google Recruitment Form



Recruitment Form: Transnational Adoptees' Identity, Belonging, and the Role of Sport Study

**Purpose of the study:**
To examine and develop an understanding of the role of sport in the development of transnational adoptees' sense of identity and belonging. In addition, this study may contribute to the current literature of the transnational adoptee experiences.

**Who can participate in the study?**
Age
16+
Transnational
adoptees (adoptees who were adopted outside of Canada)
Has
participated in any level of organized sport (e.g., recreational, school teams, and competitive)
Proficient
in English

**What does participation entail?**
Two interviews (1-2 hours) over zoom or in-person (participants choice) that will be about your sense identity, your sense of belonging, and experience in sport.

You will be contacted by Bliss Wong to arrange your in-person or Zoom interviews, and an informed consent formed will be sent to the email you provided with further instructions.

By participating in this study, you will receive a $10 Starbucks gift card. You will still be eligible for the gift card even if you decide to withdraw from the study.

If you have any questions regarding the study, please contact Bliss Wong at wongb008@yorku.ca

****All information collected will remain confidential ****

wongb008@my.yorku.ca Switch accounts

*Required

Email *

Your email address

First and Last Name *

Your answer

How would you like to do your interview? *

- In - person
- Zoom

Submit

Clear form

Appendix E

Social Media Groups Contacted:

the Adoption Council of Ontario

Contacted via email provided on their affiliated Facebook page.

info@adoption.on.ca

Reddit forum: r/TransracialAdoptees

Sent a private message to the administrators of the page. Approval granted due to my membership of the

Pan am Sport Center

Contacted the media, communications, and multimedia manager at the time of recruitment. Email listed on Pan am Sport Center Directory.

Toronto Athletic Club

Contacted the front desk. Email listed on organization affiliated Facebook page.

frontdesk@torontoathleticclub.com

Appendix F

Informed Consent Form

**Date**:

**Study Name**: Transnational Adoptees' Identity, Belonging, and the Role of Sport

**Researchers**: Bliss Wong, Faculty of Health, Bethune College Room 326, wongb008@yorku.ca. Master's year 1, MSc Kinesiology and Health Science, Graduate Supervisor: Yuka Nakamura.

**Purpose of the Research:** To examine the role of sport in the development of transnational adoptees' sense of identity and belonging. The data from this research is anticipated to be presented in presentations and written papers. You will be given the option to be anonymized in the write up for confidentiality. If you choose to, all identifiable information will be altered in the interview transcriptions, the write up, and the dissemination of research to maintain your anonymity.

**What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research**: Two interviews (~1 hour each) over Zoom or in-person (participants' choice) that will be about your sense of identity, your sense of belonging, and experiences in sport. The interviews will be about 4 weeks apart. If you consent, the interviews will be audio-recorded. Participants who choose the Zoom option will be asked to have their camera on, but only the audio will be recorded. In addition, you will receive an inducement in the form of a $10 eGift card from Starbucks as compensation for your time. The eGift card will be sent to the email which you provided when registering for the study. All contact information that is gathered during the study will be permanently destroyed on October 10, 2024.

**Risks and Discomforts**: The participant will be asked to discuss topics that may cause discomfort including experiences of exclusion and isolation. To mitigate this, participants will be provided with the following contact information for York University's mental health support services after each interview via email: a) York University Psychology Clinic (phone: 416 650 8488; email: yupc@yorku.ca), b) Student Counselling & Development (phone: 416 736-5297; website: https://counselling.students.yorku.ca/), c) Good2Talk (phone for support in Ontario): 1-866-9255454; website: https://good2talk.ca/), and d) What's Up Walk in Clinic (website: https://www.whatsupwalkin.ca/)

**Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You**: The participant may benefit from the project through the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and subsequently gaining useful knowledge about themselves and their experiences regarding their identity formation and development of sense of belonging within the context of sport through reflection and discussion during the interview. In addition, they will receive a $10 gift card from Starbucks as compensation for their time.

**Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal**: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer, to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions will not influence the nature of the ongoing relationship you may have with the researchers or study staff or nature of your relationship with York University either now, or in the future.

If you stop participating, you will still be eligible to receive the $10 Starbucks gift card for agreeing to be in the project, even if you withdraw without completion of the research. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

**Confidentiality**: Unless you choose otherwise all information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. The principal investigator will keep a link that

identifies you to your coded information, but this link will be kept secure and available only to the principal investigator and/or selected members of the research team. Any information that can identify you will remain confidential.
The data will be collected using an audio recording device and hard written notes. Your data will be safely stored on a password protected laptop and hand-written records will be locked in my filing cabinet at home. Audio-recordings will be safeguarded on the passcode protected laptop of the principal researcher, where they are the only person to know the passcode, and only research staff/research team members will have access to this information. Written records will be shredded with a strip-cut shredder, and the audio-recordings will be permanently deleted via the "recycling bin" feature on the laptop and "empty bin" to permanently delete the files from the laptop. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

*The researcher(s) acknowledge that the host of the online survey (e.g., Qualtrics, Survey Monkey etc.) may automatically collect participant data without their knowledge (i.e., IP addresses.) Although this information may be provided or made accessible to the researchers, it will not be used or saved without participant's consent on the researcher's system. Further, "Because this project employs e-based collection techniques,* data may be subject to access by third parties as a result of various security legislation now in place in many countries and thus the *confidentiality and privacy of data cannot be guaranteed during web-based transmission."*
*This study will use Zoom to collect data, which is an externally hosted cloud-based service. When information is transmitted over the internet privacy cannot be guaranteed. There is always a risk your responses may be intercepted by a third party (e.g., government agencies, hackers). Further, while York University researchers will not collect or use IP addresses or other information which could link your participation to your computer or electronic devices without informing you, there is a small risk with any platform such as this of data that is collected on external servers falling outside the control of the research team. If you are concerned about this, we would be happy to make alternative arrangements (where possible) for you to participate, perhaps via telephone. Please contact Bliss Wong for further information.*
*Recordings (audio) will be saved in a password protected file to research team members' local computer, not the cloud-based service.*

*Please note that it is the expectation that participants agree not to make any unauthorized recordings of the content of a meeting / data collection session.*

**Questions About the Research?**
If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact the principal investigator, Bliss Wong either by email at wongb008@yorku.ca, or the graduate supervisor, Dr. Yuka Nakamura either by telephone at 416-736-2100, extension 22372 or by e-mail (nakamura@yorku.ca), or York University's Kinesiology and Health Science Graduate program either by telephone at 416-736-5728 or by email at kahs@yorku.ca. This research has received ethics review and approval by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Director, Research Ethics in the Office of Research Ethics, 3rd Floor, Kaneff Tower, York University (e-mail ore@yorku.ca).

**Legal Rights and Signatures**:
I *(fill in your name here),* consent to participate in *(insert study name here*) conducted by *(insert investigator name here)*. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

**Signature** _____ **Date** _____
Participant

**Signature** _____ **Date** _____
Principal Investigator

**Additional consent (where applicable)**

You must seek additional consent by including check boxes or requesting additional signatures for the following:

1. **Audio recording**

☐ I consent to the audio-recording of my interview(s).

2. **Consent to waive anonymity. Participants are given the option to waive anonymity, please only sign here if you choose to waive anonymity.**

I, _____consent to the use of my name in the publications arising from this research.

3. **Consent to use of quotes**

I consent to the use of quotations in any final reports/ publications of the research? Y / N

Appendix G

Post-interview Email

Hi [insert name here],

Thank you so much again for your participation in my study!

I have attached the list of York University's mental health support services below.

List of York University's mental health support services:

a) York University Psychology Clinic (phone: 416 650 8488; email: yupc@yorku.ca)

b) Student Counselling & Development (phone: 416 736-5297;
website: https://counselling.students.yorku.ca/)

c) Good2Talk (phone for support in Ontario): 1-866-9255454; website: https://good2talk.ca/)

d) What's Up Walk in Clinic (website: https://www.whatsupwalkin.ca/)

Kindest regards,

Bliss