



Why do middle-class couples of European descent adopt children from Africa and Asia? Some support for the differential K model

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ABSTRACT

Patterns of adoption behaviour are starkly asymmetric across populations. To better understand this phenomenon we conducted a systematic review of transracial adoption and adoption in general. We found six quantitative studies from the USA (with representative samples comprising a total of 117,000 participants) which had examined sex, race, and SES in relation to differences in behaviours and attitudes regarding both transracial adoption and adoption in general. A secondary analysis of these data found that transracial adopting is predicted by being female, white (as opposed to black), and of higher SES. These data are consistent with group differences in Life History Strategy – the Differential K model – regarding males and females, SES differences, and white and black people, but not with the fact that both transracial adoption and adoption rates in general seem to be lower in Northeast Asian countries. The influence of cultural factors upon these patterns may be addressed by future studies.

1. Introduction

Transracial adoption is an increasingly noticeable phenomenon in Western countries (e.g. Riley, 2017) as is the fact that it is associated with the white ‘upper middle class’ (Tucker, 2018), meaning those in high status, highly educated professions (see Argyle, 1994). There is a large body of research on adoption and transracial adoption in terms of understanding the extent to which traits such as personality and intelligence are genetically influenced, and the long and short-term influence of environment on these traits (e.g. Horn & Loehlin, 2010). A great deal of research is concerned with the psychological consequences of being adopted and how identity is constructed by adoptees, also in the case of transracial adoptions (see Tuan, 2008). However, the reasons for the asymmetric relationship between adopters and adoptees’ race seem not to have been analysed from any systematic theoretical perspective. Why do some infertile couples elect to adopt children from a race other than their own?

Formal adoption by non-relatives was extremely rare in Western countries until well into the twentieth century and only took off, in England, after World War II, with the establishment of the Welfare State (Rossini, 2014). Transracial adoption became more common from the 1960s onwards due to a series of factors: international wars leaving behind orphans, the decline in the availability of adoptees of European descent (whites), and the Civil Rights Movement and the concomitant

increased tolerance of racial mixing. Between 1960 and 1976, 12,000 African-American children were adopted by US whites (Murry, Hill, Witherspoon, et al., 2015, p.431). In 2005 alone, 21,968 international adoptions took place in the USA, 50.8% of which were from Asia and, all together, 76% of which were from outside Europe (Javier, 2007, p.118). As a first attempt to elucidate this issue, we will explore patterns amongst coarse demographic variables, such as race, sex, and socio-economic status (SES), in their effects upon a range of relevant attitudinal and behavioural variables. Given the explorative approach it would be premature to commit to a theoretical model, and we will therefore discuss potential models in the Discussion. However, we hypothesise that Life History Strategy (LHS) may be particularly relevant.

According to Life History Theory, all species and, Rushton (1995) argues, sub-species and individuals, are on a spectrum from a fast to slow LHS. A fast LHS is an adaptation to an unstable ecology. It involves a high level of investment in reproductive activity but a low level of investment in nurture. In a stable ecology, the carrying capacity for the species is reached, so members start to compete against each other. They do this by investing more in nurture and continuously evolve to out-compete each other.

Rushton (1995) brings together a large body of evidence indicating that Sub-Saharan Africans are, relative to the other main races, fast LH strategists, Northeast Asians are slow LH strategists and Caucasians are in the middle but closer to Northeast Asians. This can be seen on

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Table 1
Proportions (%) of adopters and respondents with a certain level of education, significance levels, and effect sizes (ϕ).

| Measure | High school graduate | Some college/associate degree | College graduate or higher | Sign. | Φ | Reference |
|---|----------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|--------|----------------------------|
| Agree: 'Full supporter of adoption' | 23 | | 48 | < 0.001 | 0.26 | Princeton (1997) |
| Agree: 'Adoptive parents get less satisfaction out of raising an adopted child' | 21 | | 13 | < 0.01 | 0.10 | Princeton (1997) |
| Agree: 'Sometimes it is harder to love an adopted child' | 21 | | 17 | n.s. | 0.05 | Princeton (1997) |
| White women who would adopt if infertile | 47.4 ^a | 58.8 | 53.7 | < 0.001 | 0.09 | Bonham (1977) |
| Black women who would adopt if infertile | 35.3 ^a | 41.2 | 59.6 | < 0.01 | 0.13 | Bonham (1977) |
| White adopters who adopt blacks | 14.6 | 29.5 | 52.8 ^c | < 0.001 ^b | 0.05 | Kreider and Raleigh (2016) |
| Black adopters who adopt blacks | 25.0 | 39.7 | 24.5 ^d | | | Kreider and Raleigh (2016) |

^a The weighted mean of "High school 1–3 years" and "High school: 4 or more years" in Table 3.

^b What we have tested is the difference in educational pattern across the races, i.e. controlled for the generally higher level amongst whites.

^c 36% of whites are graduates in the USA, but these comparisons could not be tested for statistical significance.

^d 22% of blacks are graduates in the USA, but these comparisons could not be tested for statistical significance.

numerous measures including twinning, gestation length, age at puberty, average intelligence, and modal personality. Many studies have replicated and extended Rushton's findings. For example, Meisenberg and Woodley (2013) compared races based on assorted national proxies for *K*-strategy and replicated the ordering set out by Rushton. There are also consistent sex differences, in that men tend to adopt a faster LHS than women (see Morbeck, Galloway, & Zihlman, 1996), and social strata differences, in that lower SES tends to be associated with faster LHS (Rushton, 2004).

2. Method

This study involves secondary analyses of transracial adoption based on studies that provide quantitative racial, sex and social class differences based on representative and relatively large samples (> 1000) from the USA. They were identified through a systematic literature review, using the Google Scholar database, which comprises not only peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters, but also student theses and working papers. Apart from comprising the relevant data, the inclusion criteria were that an article was an original quantitative analysis of data from the USA. We decided to focus on one country as this would avoid confounding cultural differences across countries. The first search used "transracial adoption" together with "socioeconomic status". The later string was decided upon because it would lead us to articles which had examined the characteristics associated with adopters but would not be as restrictive as simply using "race." This hunch would seem correct as the articles revealed examinations of racial, gender, sexual orientation, marital status and age differences amongst mothers. This yielded 1750 hits. Of these, 3 were within our inclusion criteria of being an original, US focused, quantitative analysis. Examining their reference lists we found 3 further relevant studies. Additional searches were conducted with "interracial adoption", "interethnic adoption", and "inter-country adoption", which yielded 1290, 350, and 150 hits, none of which were both relevant and new. The studies within our inclusion criteria were:

- (1) Klucsarits (2007) presents a series of seven logistic regression models in order to examine the predictors of the likelihood of adoption amongst 6967 American women aged 18–44. Its data are from the National Survey of Family Growth, Cycle 6. Data were collected for this survey between 2002 and 2003. The sample was composed of 4946 whites, 1526 blacks and 219 Asians.
- (2) Bonham (1977) also consists of women aged 18–44, based on the National Survey of Family Growth and 'The Growth of American Families' collected 1957–1973. The data we draw on are married women who intend to have another child. The white sample was 7208 and the black sample 644.

- (3) Kreider and Raleigh (2016) draw upon the 2010–2014 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year data, including 69,619 white and 115,851 black adoptive parents.
- (4) Chandra, Abma, Maza, and Bachrach (1999) draw upon nationally representative samples of women aged 18–44 from the 1973, 1982, 1988, and 1995 National Surveys of Family Growth (NSFG) in the USA. Chandra et al. focused on the responses of women who had ever been married, and included > 100,000 women across four waves, of which we included data from the last wave in 1995 with just over 37,000 women.
- (5) Raleigh (2012) draws upon the same sample of 69,681, representative of the USA on key variables, from the US 2000 census, meaning it was 75% (52,260) white and 12% black (8361).
- (6) Princeton Survey Research Associates (Princeton, 1997) conducted a telephone survey commissioned by the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute in 1997. It gathered complete responses from 1554 people aged over 18, representative of the US population on key sociological variables, including an oversample of 50 blacks. It reports on race, sex, education level, and a number of other variables. The sample was 1221 whites and 206 blacks, 933 women and 621 men. The levels of education that are compared in the report are college graduates or postgraduates (357) and those who had graduated from high school (544). The remaining participants had not completed high school (218) or had intermediate education, such as some college classes, business, technical, or vocational school (419), or did not specify (16).

All differences were tested with the χ^2 goodness-of-fit test, based on the numbers of participants falling into each category derived from the original reports (see Appendix). Effect sizes were estimated with the ϕ statistic (Agresti, 2012).

3. Results

We first consider level of education, as an index of socio-economic status. Education has a robust relationship with income, and is also probably a more valid index across the sexes, considering that most data herein are reported for females, some of whom may be housewives. Several studies do report both, and we will note whether income and education yield the same effects on the outcome variables. Table 1 shows the higher the education level, the higher is the engaging in and favouring of transracial (and unrelated) adoption.

All studies report income levels, and Bonham (1977), Chandra et al. (1999), Princeton (1997), and Raleigh (2012, Table 4) report similar associations for income as for education, that is, positive attitudes to, and inclination towards, transracial adoption. Klucsarits (2007) does not exhibit this trend for either education or income, possibly because it

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