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I. Introduction

Adoption, both domestic and international, has proven to be a meaningful pathway to parenthood for many families. Currently, domestic adoption is the most prevalent type of adoption in the United States. The number of children adopted domestically increased from 108,463 in 1996 to 133,737 in 2007, but declined to approximately 114,086 in 2012 (Placek, 2007; Placek, 2011; Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016). International adoption has also become an option for both parentless children from the "sending countries" and childless or otherwise motivated American adults who want to adopt (Herman, 2012). International adoption peaked with 22,989 adoptions in 2004 and declined dramatically to about 5,370 adoptions in 2016 (Intercountry Adoption Bureau of Consular Affairs, [IABCA], 2017). The factors that determine which pathway to adoption (domestic or international) individuals and couples choose are complex, and the choice to adopt is a significant decision for any family to make. The purpose of this exploratory study was to analyze American parents' motivations to adopt domestically or internationally through the lens of culture and social exchange theory.

a) Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory offers a promising lens for understanding the primary motivations of adoptive parents who choose to adopt domestically or internationally (Hollingsworth & Ruffn, 2002). According to social exchange theory, people will begin or maintain a relationship when they believe that the rewards they gain from the relationship are greater than the costs (Ries, 1994). Specifically, parents who adopt domestically or internationally commit their time, money, love, and other resources in exchange for the perceived rewards associated with adopting a child. These perceived rewards can include choosing children with the characteristics the parents prefer, raising them according to the parents' value and belief systems, and receiving social and emotional benefits following adoption, such as increased status and love (Hollingsworth & Ruffin, 2002).

b) Cultural Lens Perspective

For purposes of the current study, using a cultural lens perspective can also provide insight into the motivations of adoptive parents. Many factors influence an individual's cultural lens, such as racial or ethnic background, heritage, language, family background, religious beliefs, income level, personal experiences, values, community, national, and global norms, among others. A person's cultural lens acts as a filter to uniquely shape their view of what reality looks like to them (Sue, Sue, & Micro training Associates, 2003; Defrain & Asay, 2007; University of Washington Medical Center, 2008), and, in turn, uniquely shapes how they think, feel, and make decisions (Sue & Sue, & Microtraining Associates, 2003).

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Specific to the current study, the authors propose that adoptive parents' adoption decisions are uniquely shaped by their cultural filters, which are uniquely influenced by their identification with specific values, norms, practices, realities, experiences, languages, and heritages. In turn, adoptive parents' adoption behaviors and personal decisions may reciprocally influence their individual cultural filters. Further examination and focus on adoptive parents' cultural filters can provide insight into the development of their adoption motivations and subsequent adoption behaviors (Sue, Sue, & Micro-training Associates, 2003; Bandler & Grinder, 1975).

c) Motivations of Adoptive Parents

Relatively little research has focused on explaining why more American parents are motivated to choose to adopt internationally rather than domestically (Malm & Welti, 2010; Zhang & Lee, 2010). Barriers to such research include the difficulty of studying motivations for adoption behaviors (Kirton, 2000) and the lack of nationally representative data on adoptive parents (Malm & Welti, 2010). Some potential factors impacting parents' adoption motivations include institutional structures in domestic adoption and international adoptions (e.g., waiting times, costs, potential interference from birth parents) and use of different types of adoption agencies (Hollingsworth & Ruffin, 2002; Hellerstedt et al., 2008). Characteristics of adopted children, including physical and psychological characteristics, health issues, health insurance costs, age, gender, race, and culture represent additional factors that can impact adoptive parents' motivations to adopt domestically or internationally (Riley, 1997; Hollingsworth & Ruffin, 2002; Lee, 2003; Ishizawa et al., 2006; Zhang & Lee, 2010; Kreider, 2011; Placek, 2011). Regardless of the type of adoption parents choose, adoption represents a significant family decision for the birth parent, adoptive parent, child being adopted, and other siblings already within the family system. Thus, to reiterate, the purpose of this exploratory study was to better understand the motivations underlying parents' pivotal decisions to adopt.

II. Research Methods and Data Analysis

The authors used a cross-sectional design and semi-structured interviews to explore three research questions: (1) How does culture influence American parents' motivations to adopt domestically or internationally? (2) What are the similarities and differences between parents' motivations who choose to adopt domestically or internationally? (3) How do perceived intrinsic and extrinsic costs and rewards influence American parents' motivations to adopt domestically or internationally?

The sample included a purposive sample of parents who had finalized at least one domestic adoption or international adoption. Purposive sampling was used to recruit two separate populations of American parents who had adopted children either domestically or internationally. The demographic descriptions of the adoptive parents and their adopted children are described in Table 1 and Table 2 respectively. The major demographic characteristics of the domestic adoptive parents and the international adoptive parents in this sample were similar. All participants in this study were White. The majority of adoptive parents were aged 30-59, married, middle-income (i.e., $40,000 - $119,999), and had received some level of higher education (i.e., either some college, associate degree, bachelor's degree, or graduate degree).

A one-hour semi-structured interview with 16 open-ended questions (Appendix) and a brief demographic survey were used to collect data. The interview questions were piloted and cognitively tested for accuracy in consultation with several experts in the field of adoption research. The order and wording of the interview questions were revised based on the researchers' and adoptive parents' suggestions in order to make the interview process flow more smoothly. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed by using conventional content analysis (Bernard & Ryan, 2009; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

The interviews were coded by two separate researchers, divided into separate themes using the specific organization determined by the three research questions, and then counted each time the theme was identified in an interview. A third coder reviewed the themes identified by the initial two coders and offered suggestions for tightening the specific themes identified. Because of the specific nature of the research questions asked, few discrepancies were found between the identified themes. All themes were discussed and agreed upon before finalizing the content counts. Upon completion of the theme identification, a model (Figure 2) was developed to conceptualize the process parents themselves described of how they reason through choosing domestic or international adoption. This conceptual model represents a unique contribution of this study to the adoption body of knowledge.

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Table 1: Demographic Description of Adoptive Parents

Demographic Variables	Domestic Adoptive Parents (13 families, 15 participants)		International Adoptive Parents (14 families, 16 participants*)	
	N	%	N	%
Gender				
Female	13	87	13	81
Male	2	13	3	19
Age*				
20-29	0	0	1	7
30-39	6	40	7	46
40-49	1	7	2	13
50-59	6	40	4	27
60-69	2	13	1	7
Marital Status				
Married	14	93	14	88
Single	1	7	1	6
Remarried	0	0	1	6
Income level*				
< $40,000	1	7	1	7
$40,000-59,999	5	33	5	36
$60,000-$79,999	2	13	3	22
$80,000-$99,999	1	7	1	7
$100,000-$119,999	4	26	2	14
Above $120,000	2	14	2	14
Education Level				
Some high school/ High school graduate/ GED	2	0	1	6
Technical school/ Some college or associate's degree	5	33	5	33
Bachelor's degree	4	27	4	25
Graduate degree	4	27	6	38
Religious affiliation*				
Evangelical Protestant Churches	7	46	8	53
Mainline Protestant Churches	1	7	3	2
Mormon	2	13	0	0
Presbyterian	1	7	0	0
Apostolic Christian	1	7	0	0
Christian			1	6
Unaffiliated	3	20	3	2
Number of biological children in each family				
0	5	38	8	57
1	2	15	0	0
2	4	31	2	14
3 or more	2	16	4	29
Number of adopted children in each family				
1	3	23	7	44
2	4	31	5	31
3	3	23	4	25
4 or more	3	23	0	0

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Table 2: Demographic Description of Adopted Children

Demographic Variables	Children Adopted Domestically (Total number. 34)		Children Adopted Internationally (Total number. 22)	
	N	%	N	%
Age				
<1	7	21	9	41
1	4	12	5	23
2-5	13	38	5	23
6-10	7	20	3	13
11-17	3	9	0	0
Gender				
Female	17	50	11	50
Male	17	50	11	50
Race/Ethnicity				
White	22	65	0	0
Hispanic or Latino	2	6	3	14
Black or African American	7	20	7	32
Asian	0	0	12	54
Biracial	3	9	0	0
Heath Status				
Healthy	26	77	13	59
Birth mother with health issues	7	20	0	0
With health issues	1	3	9	41
Original State				
Arizona	2	6		
Florida	13	38		
Georgia	2	6		
Illinois	3	9		
Missouri	1	3		
New York	7	20		
North Carolina	3	9		
Virginia	3	9		
Original Country				
China			8	35
Dominic Republic			1	5
Guatemala			1	5
India			1	5
Korea			1	5
Russia			1	5
Taiwan			2	9
Uganda			6	26
Zambia			1	5

III. Results

a) Cultural Influences on Parents' Motivations to Adopt

The underlying findings of this study are consistent with previous literature (Sue, Sue, & Micro training Associates, 2003; Defrain & Asay, 2007; Riley & Van Vleet, 2011), which indicate that distal global, national, community, and family cultural norms, expectations, perceptions, and experiences all converge at the proximal individual cultural filter level to shape adoption behaviors and decisions. Some adoptive parents reported that having previous personal experience as an adopted child influenced their adoption motivations. For example, one adoptive father, who adopted six children from the foster care system, described that his prior adoption experience provided him with both an understanding and a motivation to bond with his adopted children.

> Because I was adopted, it gave me the understanding of the importance to adopt a child. I would not necessarily say that it was *just* a motivation to adopt, but it helped me understand the importance of adoption. Probably the easiest way to explain is. I was adopted, so I have the bond [with my adopted children] already. They realized that my parents, their grandparents, were not my birth parents. I have the same situation with them. My parents, their grandparents have both biological

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children and adopted children, and they [were] raised the same way. I also have both biological children and adopted children, and I raised them in the same way.

The parents' community culture also influenced people's attitudes to adopt and affected adoptive parents' motivation to adopt a child with specific characteristics or from a specific country. For example, one adoptive mother explained:

> At that time, we [were] not set [on] the country [Uganda]. However, we wanted this adoption because of the community and people living here. In our church, all adoptions are processed through this agency from Uganda. We really wanted our children to have a community of people who worked like us, or who adopted children from the same place that she was [adopted]. It was really the deciding factor that [influenced] from what country we chose [to adopt a child].

National culture can influence parents' motivations to adopt in different ways, such as through public attitudes and norms, national adoption policies and laws, and adoption agencies' decisions regarding whom they will and will not permit to adopt. One adoptive mother shared some insightful thoughts from a national cultural perspective about American adoption agencies in the 1990s, and how these adoption agencies influenced their decision to adopt internationally rather than domestically. She and her husband were living in Kenya at the time and were planning to adopt a child. Initially, they wanted to adopt an American child. However, the American adoption agencies that they contacted would not allow them to bring an American child to Africa. As a result, they abandoned their desire to pursue domestic adoption and adopted an international child from Kenya.

Global culture associated with adoption is mainly guided by international adoption policies and laws. For example, the Hague Adoption Convention instituted the regulation to protect the rights of adoptive parents and children and subsequently increased the costs and waiting times of international adoptions in an attempt to provide greater oversight. These increased adoption costs and waiting times provided the motivation for some adoptive parents to not adopt internationally. However, for one international adoptive mother, the most important motivation to adopt internationally rather than domestically was the waiting time, a factor also affected by law and policy. She summarized her experience:

> We were told the waiting [time] for a domestic adoption could be anywhere from one to seven years. . . . The waiting time to adopt from China was very short, so that was very appealing to us. . . . Our waiting time was exactly six months, but now you cannot adopt a child within such a short waiting time.

b) Similarities Between Parents' Motivations to Adopt Domestically or Internationally

Domestic adoptive parents and international adoptive parents indicated several similar motivations behind their decisions to adopt a child (Figure 1). The results of this study indicated that saving a child from an unpleasant environment, being unable to have a biological child, cultural factors, religious beliefs, a general desire to do something noble, and having the ability to provide for a child were the common major motivations shared between domestic and international adoptive parents. Among these similarities, more international adoptive parents than domestic adoptive parents reported religious belief factors and wanting to save a child from an unpleasant environment as one of their adoption motivations, while more domestic adoptive parents than international adoptive parents reported that having the ability to provide for a child was one of their main motivations to adopt a child.

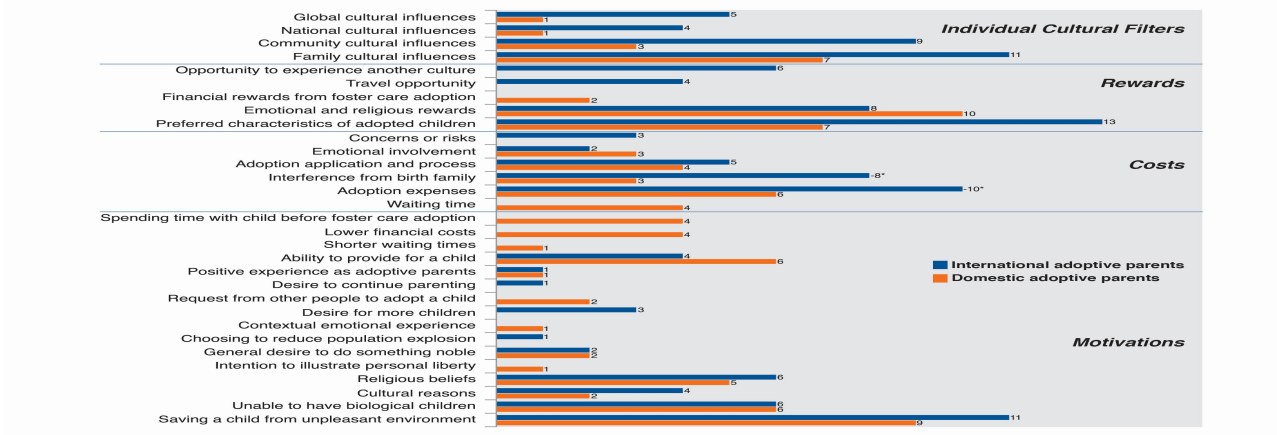


Figure 1: Frequency of Codes

** "-8" means that eight international adoptive parents families mentioned that a part of their motivation to choose international adoption over domestic adoption was because of the fact that there would be no interference from the birth parents. "-10" means*

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that although ten interviewed international adoptive families thought that the higher adoption costs were a disadvantage of international adoption; they insisted that international adoption was the better choice for them.

Saving a child from an unpleasant environment: Both domestic and international adoptive parents considered saving a child from an unpleasant environment as the most frequently mentioned adoption motivation. Among all participants, nine domestic adoptive parents and eleven international adoptive parents emphasized that their motivation to adopt was influenced by this factor. Adoptive parents often described these unpleasant environments in terms of family drug issues, foster care situations, and oppressive social policies in the original country. For example, one mother articulated that saving a child from a poor quality of life was her primary motivation:

> I wanted to save a child from a terrible life. I did not realize that there were children here [in the United States who] would not be adopted. . . To me, it felt like that I could actually save a child here [domestically] from something terrible.

International adoptive parents in this study generally believed that, when compared with children adopted domestically, children in international adoption had worse environments and more limited access to resources. This was one of the primary reasons why these parents chose international adoption.

Inability to have biological children: Based on the previous literature, infertility, singlehood (i.e., a state of being unmarried), a same sex relationship, and a partner or individual being too old to have children were the main reasons articulated for why parents were unable to have their own biological child. Six domestic adoptive parents and six international adoptive parents in this study reported that infertility was a major adoption motivation. For example, one mother and her husband chose to adopt a child domestically because they did not want to spend money on costly infertility treatment. In addition, an international adoptive mother talked about how advancing age influenced her adoption motivations:

> This is the second marriage for both of us. We both were already older, and we had no children from our previous marriages. He [my husband] always wanted children. We talked about it for a long time. We were thinking. "If we did not have somebody to sort of share our life with, what is the point?" Finally, we decided that we wanted to have [an adopted child] to complete our family. We just wanted to have [a child] to share with us, and we wanted to watch [a child] grow up.

General desire to do something noble: A general desire to do something noble as defined in this study is the desire to do something that most other people would not do. Two domestic adoptive parents and two international adoptive parents shared this motivation. For example, one husband found that the adoption research he had studied facilitated his desire to do something noble, in this case to correct a perceived imbalance.

> You realized that an [adoption] market exists, and there was a big imbalance in the market. It was bad. I also felt like that if I was starting to adopt these lowest demanded children, it brought them up [from the bottom of the market]. It was going to equalize things, so I did see it as a good thing. . . . I did feel that a part of us did feel good about working in the direction that [is] correcting the imbalance.

Religious beliefs: Adoptive parents primarily described their religious beliefs in terms of religious or spiritual guidance from God. Four domestic adoptive parents mentioned intrinsic religious beliefs in their interviews. One father explained the impact of his intrinsic religious beliefs on his adoption motivation as follows:

> I guess for us, our life is in our faith. I think that for us it is our faith decision. We felt that we did not choose him. He was chosen for us. It [religious belief] played a part in our decision making process. . . . It was just like "a given" to us to adopt.

Even though there was no direct evidence from this study to support extrinsic religious beliefs as a motivation to adopt, previous research has indicated that extrinsic religious beliefs can also affect individuals' motivations (Maurer School of Law, 1953; Jones, 2002; Westerlund, 2012). We suspect this is also the case with parents' decisions to adopt a child. Extrinsic religiosity was subsumed within the concept of culture in this study.

Ability to provide for a child: This motivation emerged from the interviews with both domestic and international adoptive parents. Six domestic adoptive parents and four international adoptive parents stated that their motivation to adopt was due to their ability to provide for a child. For example, one mother was living in Zambia for many years before she adopted a child from there. She insightfully explained,

> We saw the opportunity to give an even better life to a child that would most likely not have the same opportunities that even a child without a family growing up in the American world [would have]. . . . I am sure that living in this culture here in Zambia and seeing the "culture" of poverty and orphans did drive us to the desire to help in that way to provide a home for a child.

Previous positive experience as adoptive parents: One domestic adoptive parent and one international adoptive parent each declared that their previous positive experience as adoptive parents directly drove them to adopt another child. When asked how the previous

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adoption experience influenced their most recent adoption, this father explained,

> Our first adopted child is the most amazing baby. She is still a super child who is really easy going all along. She has been automatically helpful and interesting to be a good kid, but our [biological] sons are not like her. She is such an incredibly good baby, so it made us feel that we can do this [adoption] again.

Laws and policies: Adoptive parents in this study were generally aware that policies and laws in domestic and international adoptions influenced the adoption process, waiting times, adoption expenses, and the availability to adopt children. For international adoptions, the Hague Adoption Convention and the European Union adoption regulations slowed down the number of children available to be adopted by American parents through increasing the waiting time and costs of adoptions from the participating countries. Additionally, adoptive parents were aware that they could choose other options, such as domestic adoption or adopting from non-contact countries, to avoid the long waiting time and increased financial costs created by adoption laws and policies. This awareness of specific adoption policies by this study's adoptive parents suggests that national, global, and even community culture wield a strong influence on adoption motivations and decisions when processed through an individual's cultural filter.

c) *Differences between Parents' Motivations to Adopt Domestically or Internationally*

Waiting time: As discussed previously with regard to national cultural influences, four domestic adoptive parents indicated that a shorter waiting time was an advantage that motivated them to choose domestic rather than international adoption. At the time of these parents' adoption pursuits, the path to domestic adoption had the shorter waiting time. This adoptive couple carefully explained why this was an important consideration:

> We were looking at both [domestic adoption and international adoption] at the same time. The two biggest influences in my opinion were the cost and the time. The cost I think we could deal with, but it seemed that in every country we looked [at] you would never get a newborn [baby in a short waiting time]. The baby was at least one-month old until you got the baby. My wife was particularly worried about that.

Financial costs: Four domestic adoption families indicated that the motivation to adopt domestically was due to lower financial costs when compared to international adoption. One mother, an adoptive parent of four children from foster care, stated, "We thought about [international adoption] very briefly, but we just simply couldn't afford it. We knew that there were so many [waiting] kids right here, so we just did not need to go that far to adopt a child."

Contextual emotional experience: In this study, only one domestic adoptive parent talked about the contextual emotional experience as a part of her adoption motivations. One mother referred to a previous negative emotional experience associated with a miscarriage. She described how her motivation to adopt grew out of this difficult emotional experience in this way: "The last time when I had the miscarriage, I was in the hospital for a few days. I just said. 'We need to adopt because I just cannot go through this again.' He [her husband] said. 'I agree. I just do not want this either. This is too hard and painful.' This was how we decided to adopt a child."

Requests from other people to adopt a child: Two domestic adoptive parents shared that the request from other people to adopt a child, such as from their adopted children, foster care mother, or birth mother, was an important factor in their adoption motivation. For example, this father articulated how his decision to adopt a child unfolded in this way:

> My children wanted to adopt him. Also, the birth mother wanted us to adopt him legally. It was a sort of a whole group decision. The decision did not just [come from] my wife and me. I think a big part of our [adoption motivations] was simply because of the request of the [birth] mom.

Spending time with a child before the adoption: This motivation was only reported by foster care adoptive parents. In the foster care system, foster children can be placed in a foster home before adoption. Four parents who adopted through foster care reported their motivations to adopt a child domestically rather than internationally were directly related to their experience as foster care parents because foster care adoption provided a good opportunity to interact with children before they actually made the decision to adopt. For example, this mother shared, "You get the chance to actually interact with the children, even foster them before you decide to adopt them or not." Moreover, after spending some time and interacting with their foster children, the foster parents began to experience the feelings of love for their foster children, and this emotional connection created the motivation to adopt them.

Desire for more children: Three international adoptive parents reported that their desire for more children motivated them to adopt. One mother articulated her motivation to adopt in this way, "We just wanted to have a big family. We wanted to have a bigger family. . . . We did not need to create more people. There are so many children [who] still need homes. We just wanted a big family."

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Desire to continue parenting: This adoptive couple reported that they wanted to adopt a child because they wanted to continue parenting.

> We were older, and we did not feel like that we finished parenting, so we looked into international adoption. We were pretty young [at that time]. We were trying to stay young. Ten years ago, we were a lot younger, so we did not want to adopt a child. Now we have adopted children and we just are not done being parents.

Choosing to reduce the population explosion: Previous literature has indicated that choosing to reduce the population explosion was one of the motivations to adopt a child (Simon & Altstein, 2000). In this study, only one couple expressed their concern about existing homeless children in the world as a motivation to pursue adoption rather than to have more biological children.

d) Cost and Its Influence on American Parents' Motivations

Adoption expenses: Both domestic adoptive parents and international adoptive parents in this study were aware of the costly adoption expenses associated with international adoption. The expenses of international adoption include not only the fees for home study, adoption, and agency services, but also include the travel costs and the visa application costs for the adopted child. When talking about the advantage of foster care adoption, this mother stated that the "adoption expense was a very big consideration. We did not have the means to finance a private adoption either domestically or internationally. Our only option seemed to be adopting through foster care." On the other hand, even though the majority of interviewed international adoptive parents (ten families) thought that the higher adoption costs were a disadvantage of international adoption, they insisted that international adoption was the better choice for them overall for various other reasons identified in this study.

Adoption application and process: Avoiding the complicated adoption process with international adoptions was a consideration for four of the domestic adoptive parents in this study. They generally believed that the application and process of domestic adoption were much easier when compared to international adoption. In a different way, five international adoptive parents in this study also expressed that the international adoption application and process were a part of their adoption decision considerations. For example, one woman, a single mother, articulated her perspective, "Domestic adoption is too hard for me because I am a single mother. International adoption is much easier for me. They did not care if I am single. It is hard to adopt a child domestically when you are a single parent, but it is not an issue in international adoption."

Interference from birth family: Interference from birth parents and birth family members was a major consideration for all adoptive parents. Three domestic adoptive parents and more than half of the interviewed international adoptive parents (eight families) felt that interference from birth families was a disadvantage in domestic adoption. When talking about the disadvantages of domestic adoption, three families who completed foster care adoptions mentioned that the potential for interference from the birth family was a major concern for them. For example, this adoptive mother explained,

> Personally, we were satisfied with this [foster care adoption], but, specifically in foster care, sometimes you have to interact with the birth parents and it was not always a positive experience. If someone was looking for a closed adoption with little or no interaction with the birth parents, this [foster care adoption] may not be the best option.

Emotional involvement: Emotional involvement was another area of concern for parents who adopted from the foster care system. While these foster parents were happy that they could have the child with them before they actually finalized the adoption process, they were uncertain whether the adoption would be completed successfully or not. They were uneasy with the fact that if the court or birth parents changed their minds, or someone stepped in, the child could be taken away from them. This adoptive mother validated this emotional cost:

> The disadvantage in our situation specifically through foster care is that there is no guarantee that the children will be free for adoption. We effectively parented our children for many years. There was a real risk that they would be removed from our home permanently. This is a high emotional risk that many prospective adoptive parents do not want to take. . . You may foster several children who return to their parents before finally being able to adopt a child.

Two international adoptive parents also considered emotional involvement a disadvantage in international adoption. For example, this mother explained, "I would say that there was a great deal of worries and concerns. We worried about the children before they arrived, when they arrived, and also if they did not arrive. You wanted to make sure that before they arrived they had been well cared for."

Risks and concerns: International adoptive parents not only worried about whether their adoption would be a successful adoption, but they also had concerns about adopted children's inaccurate information about birth families and health records, as this mother explained,

> The cost is very high and the risk is always high because you do not know the issue of the child. It's really the huge risk. Most of the time, the paperwork from overseas is not accurate, so there is a huge

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risk on anything about their birth parents, or their biological parents. There is nothing, no information [about their biological parents].

e) *Rewards and Their Influence on American Parents' Motivations*

Preferred characteristics of adopted children: Seven domestic adoptive families reported that they had preferred characteristics of adoptive children in mind before adopting. Most domestic adoptive parents reported that health status and age were the most preferred characteristics of adoptive children. About half of the adoptive families (six families) said that they cared about the adopted child's age, and four of them clearly stated that they wanted a baby (a child younger than one year). The reasons that they wanted a younger child varied. Some of them were looking for an experience with a baby, while others thought that a younger baby would be healthier and would have experienced minimal trauma.

More international adoptive parents than domestic adoptive parents in this study indicated that their preferred children's characteristics influenced their adoption motivation and decision. Almost 87 percent of international adoptive parents in this study indicated they had specific requirements for adopted children's characteristics, such as health status, gender, age, race, and culture. Only two international adoptive families had a preference for an adoptive child's race, and only one family had a preference for an adoptive child's culture.

Financial rewards from foster care adoption: Two foster care adoptive parents indicated that the financial rewards of foster care adoption motivated them to adopt a child, as this mother, an adoptive parent of four children, articulated,

> It was very expensive to adopt a child. We went to the foster care system simply because we could not afford to adopt in other ways [international adoption or private domestic adoption]. The . . . foster care system actually paid us to go through the adoption process, so we got the monthly stipends. When we adopted a child, they paid all the costs for the adoption. The kids have Medicare until they are eighteen-years-old. We adopted our first child from the . . . foster care system because they guaranteed us that our adopted children could go to the colleges in [their home state]. Therefore, with all those benefits, we chose foster care adoption.

Emotional and religious rewards: Both domestic and international adoptive parents indicated that they received emotional and religious rewards from their adoption experience. Two domestic adoptive parents shared how religious rewards were reflected in their perceived bonding experiences with God. Half of the international adoptive parents reported that they received emotional rewards from the adoption experience. This adoptive father and mother explained,

> Becoming a parent is a pretty emotional reward. I think that seeing a child who is coming from a life where he or she has been abandoned, or from a very poor country, and then become a child who now can go to school to learn how to read and write is a great emotional reward. Just watching that happen is a huge emotional reward for us.

Opportunity to experience another culture: International adoptive parents believed that traveling to their adopted children's birth countries not only gave them an opportunity to experience another culture, but it was also a good opportunity to get to know their adopted child's original culture. In this study, six international adoptive families indicated that to experience a different culture and to have a multicultural family constituted some of their motivations to choose international adoption. One mother explained her adoption motivations in this way: "[The] Second reason was the desire to have an ethnically diverse family. We love to learn more about another culture and place, and to be able to have our family reflect that."

IV. Discussion

Through the interview process, and following data analysis, a conceptual decision-making model (Figure 2) began to emerge out of how American parents in this sample made decisions about adopting either domestically or internationally. As shown in the results, there were numerous motivational factors for the adoptive parents that impacted the perceived costs and rewards of adoption generally, as well as the specific choice to adopt domestically or internationally. The conceptual model reveals that both domestic and international adoptive parents in this sample shared several adoption motivations when thinking about adopting a child. These shared adoption motivations were divided into extrinsic and intrinsic adoption motivations. Shared domestic and international intrinsic adoption motivations identified by participants in this study included saving a child, the desire for more children, the desire to express personal liberty, positive previous experience as adoptive parents, contextual emotional experience, the desire to continue parenting, the desire to do something noble, the inability to have biological children, intrinsic religious beliefs, and choosing to reduce the population explosion. Extrinsic motivations were generally identified in this study as the externally driven motivations that originate outside of the parents that may be influenced by others, contexts, circumstances, expectations, perceptions, or other experiences. Shared domestic and international extrinsic motivations in this study included waiting time, financial costs, ability to provide for a child, spending time with a child before adoption (foster care system only), extrinsic

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religious belief, and laws and policies. These motivations were shared by both domestic and international adoptive parents, though it is interesting to note that the specific circumstances for each family determined which path, domestic or international, would be the best road to adoption – a path the authors propose was highly influenced by their cultural filters.

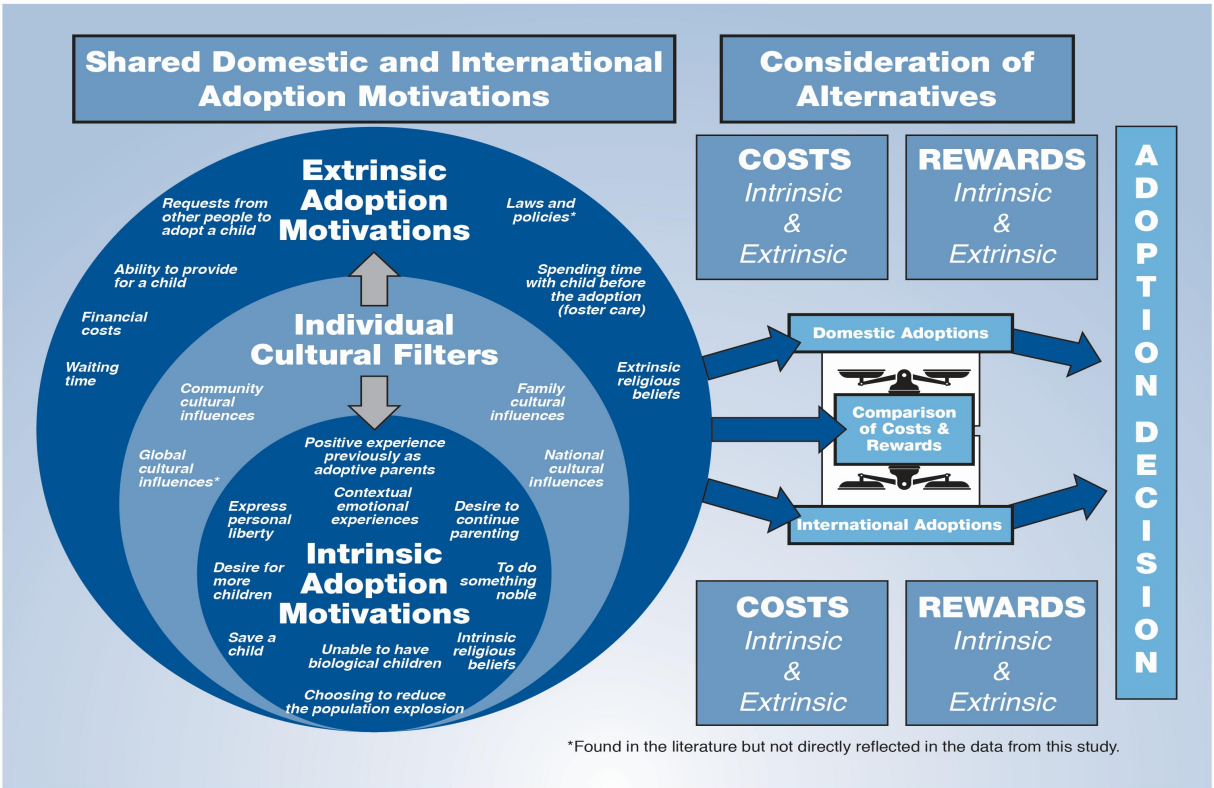


Figure 2: Conceptual Decision-Making Model

V. Cultural Influences

The lens of cultural perspectives suggests that people's perceptions and behaviors are processed through individual cultural filters. Individual cultural filters can be influenced by family, community, national, and global cultural influences, among others (De Genova, 1997; Sue, Sue, & Micro training Associates, 2003). The results from this study were consistent with the previous research, but emphasized the importance of individual cultural filters in processing and developing the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations to adopt domestically or internationally. This notion of cultural filters can also help provide insight into how the adoptive parents, both domestic and international, shared many similar motivations but why different parents ultimately chose different paths to adoption, according to their own unique circumstances.

Not only did this study support exploring domestic and international adoption decisions and motivations through the lens of a cultural filter, it also provided evidence to support social exchange theory as a viable lens to understanding the costs and rewards associated with parents' adoption motivations and decisions. Indeed, the cost-benefit ratio analysis of adoptive parents played a major role in the adoption decision-making process.

a) Similarities and Differences in Domestic and International Adoptive Parents' Motivations

Prior research literature regarding adoptive parents' adoption motivations has indicated that saving children from an unpleasant environment was one of the most common motivations (Lovelock, 2000; Melosh, 2009; Malm & Welti, 2010; Zhang & Lee, 2010). Other similar motivations between domestic and international adoptive parents stem from being unable to have biological children, a desire to provide a sibling for their child, cultural reasons, the intention to illustrate personal liberty, the desire to do something noble, the choice to take a stand against the population explosion, prior connection to the child, or prior exposure to adoption (Simon & Altstein, 2000; Tyebjee, 2002; Bausch, 2006; Vandivere et al., 2009; Malm & Welti, 2010; Zhang & Lee, 2010). The results of this study provided qualitative evidence to support previous research findings about shared adoption motivations between domestic and international adoptions, such as the desire to save a child, being unable to have biological children, and religious beliefs (Momaya, 1999; Lovelock, 2000; Tyebjee, 2002; Melosh, 2009; Malm & Welti, 2010;

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Zhang & Lee, 2010). Having the ability to provide for a child and the positive experiences associated with being adoptive parents represented shared motivations that were uniquely found in this study to influence parents' motivations to adopt a child domestically or internationally.

Additionally, results from the current study were largely consistent with Malm and Welti's (2010) findings. For example, domestic adoptive parents reported that lower adoption costs and a quicker adoption process were two important motivations to adopt, while international adoptive parents were generally more concerned with the desire to experience an easier process and to have a closed adoption. The interview data from this study showed that domestic adoptive parents were more likely to focus on extrinsic motivations, such as the desire for shorter waiting times, and lower financial costs, while international adoptive parents were more concerned about intrinsic motivations, such as a desire for having more children, and continuing parenting.

New emergent adoption motivations: Though this study presents some findings consistent with previous research, it also revealed several new emergent adoption motivations not stated in previous literature, such as the ability to provide for a child, the desire to continue parenting, the desire for more children, contextual emotional experience, and receiving requests from other people to adopt a child. As discussed above, the researchers propose that these new emergent adoption motivations were shaped by proximal and distal family, community, national, and global cultural influences that were processed through adoptive parents' individual cultural filters, thus accounting for the unique and varied adoption decisions that were made. Furthermore, the researchers propose that culture as a contextual influence was highly impactful in the development of these emergent adoption motivations (e.g., adoption policies, recent social norms, and popular attitudes towards adoption). Interestingly, some of the most common motivations cited by previous studies, such as saving the children from the plight of wars, poverty, social upheaval, and oppressive social policies (Lovelock, 2000; Melosh, 2002; Malm & Welti, 2010; Zhang & Lee, 2010) were not generally mentioned by adoptive parents in this study.

b) *Intrinsic and Extrinsic Costs and Rewards in Parents' Adoption Motivations*

In accordance with prior research, adoption applications and processes, waiting times, potential interference from birth parents, cultural and religious reasons, adoptive parents' characteristics, and adoptive children's characteristics were the major factors in the current study that contributed to parents' motivations to adopt a child (Malm & Welti, 2010; Hellerstedt et al., 2008; Kreider, 2011; Placek, 2011; Ishizawa et al., 2006; Riley, 1997; Hollingsworth & Ruffin, 2002; Lee, 2003; Zhang & Lee, 2010). Unique to this study, these factors were specifically identified as extrinsic and intrinsic costs and rewards associated with the adoptive parents' adoption experience. Domestic adoptive parents' decisions were more likely affected by extrinsic costs, such as adoption waiting times, adoption expenses, and emotional involvement, and extrinsic rewards, such as religious beliefs and financial rewards. In contrast, international adoptive parents were generally more concerned with intrinsic costs and rewards. Specifically, international adoptive parents were greatly influenced by their desire to experience lower interference from the birth family and to achieve an easier adoption process, preferred children's characteristics, emotional and religious rewards, travel opportunities, and increased opportunities to experience another culture. This study revealed that adoptive parents generally confirmed that they experienced greater perceived rewards than costs during their adoption experience. Overall, they were satisfied with the adoption process and outcomes and wanted to adopt again, which is consistent with the findings from previous research (Zhang & Lee, 2011; Malm & Welti, 2010). These findings added perspective to the proposed notion of an individual cultural filter and its use in weighing alternatives in the adoption process. Adoption expectations were ultimately met through the parents' adoption decisions, thus resulting in positive emotional experiences associated with the adoption process.

VI. Adoption Decisions

This research adds support that individual cultural filters were used to process family, community, national, and global cultural influences in the development of both extrinsic and intrinsic motivations to adopt a child. As adoptive parents considered alternatives, they also compared domestic and international adoptions by weighing the perceived intrinsic and extrinsic costs and rewards associated with both options. Finally, supported by social exchange theory, they chose the adoption type that provided the greatest perceived rewards and fewest perceived costs. The researchers also found that adoptive parents' adoption decisions were associated with consideration about continuing adoption behaviors. Adoptive parents in this study explained that after the first adoption, they had the desire to adopt more than one child in order to have more children, provide a sibling for their adopted child, or adopt another child who could understand their adopted child. In the interviews, three domestic families and seven international families who had adopted one child indicated that they would adopt another child in the near future. They also addressed that they would choose the same type of adoption as their first adoption.

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VII. Implications

Future studies could apply this study's conceptual decision-making model using a qualitative research framework to explore American parents' motivations for adoption in a larger sample population or use it to continue to explore the connections between individual cultural filters and adoptive parents' motivations, as well as how family, community, national, and global cultures influence individual cultural filters. With well-developed tools and resources, adoptive parents can better process their motivations with clarity and move forward with the decision to adopt. In addition, mixed-methods instruments integrating quantitative data can be used in future research to assess parental motivations and decision-making in the adoption process as well as the cost/benefit outcomes of the adoption process for the family.

Understanding specific extrinsic and intrinsic motivations, costs, and rewards can also provide social workers, policymakers, and professionals with tools to facilitate the adoption process more smoothly and successfully. Many families and professionals understand that adoption is not for the faint of heart, and the decision to adopt represents the start of an emotionally, relationally, and financially significant journey for any adoptive parent or family. Therefore, providing practitioners with frameworks to understand adoptive parents' motivations, such as the one outlined in this study, can potentially help professionals support adoptive parents through the decision-making process and ensure a smoother journey to adoption overall. Moreover, nonprofit organizations or the foster care system can use the interview data collected from this study to attract potential adoptive parents and inform them about future adoption opportunities that align with their motivations and considerations. It may also be helpful for policymakers and professionals to understand domestic and international adoptive parents' concerns about adoption processes and applications as adoption policies and laws are amended in the future. Ultimately, there are thousands of children who need to be adopted. As more professionals, policymakers, and prospective adoptive parents understand parental motivations to adopt and make informed decisions, then hopefully the adoption process can become smoother to help as many children as possible be welcomed into loving, stable families.

VIII. Conclusion

The adoption process will continue to impact thousands of American families. Limited information is currently available to explain how culture influences adoptive parents' adoption motivations, how similar or different domestic and international adoptive parents' adoption motivations are, and how perceived costs and rewards influence domestic and international adoptive parents' adoption motivations. The results of this exploratory qualitative research study using interviews with both domestic and international adoptive parents shed insight into the adoption process that are likely difficult to achieve through quantitative approaches. The findings in this study suggest the theoretical perspective of individual cultural filters can be a viable influential factor behind explaining adoptive parents' proximal and distal motivations to adopt. The findings also show initial support for the proposed conceptual decision-making model to guide future practices related to adoption policy and the adoption process, especially for adoption agencies and professionals who work with adoptive parents and families.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

1. How many children have you adopted?
2. Can you share your adoption story for each child with me? / Can you tell me your adoption experience for each child?
3. Can you tell me how your previous adoption experience influences your most recent adoption?
4. Can you share with us a little bit about how you individually or you and your partner come to the decision to adopt?
5. What are some of the reasons why you chose to adopt domestically and not internationally?
6. Can you help me rank the top three advantages that influenced your decision to adopt domestically rather than internationally?
7. Were there any disadvantages for adopting domestically versus internationally?
8. What are some of the specific child characteristics you were looking for?
9. What role did culture play in your motivation to adopt domestically?
10. In what ways you tried to introduce cultural heritage or history to your adopted child?

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11. Do you think it is better to place a child within his/her native country if possible? (Zhang & Lee, 2010) Why or Why not?
12. Were there any emotional or other benefits or rewards associated with your decision to adopt that we have not discussed?
13. How long did you have to wait from completing the application until you actually bring the child home?
14. How did the potential financial cost would be incurred affect your decision to adopt your child?
15. Were there any emotional or other costs associated with your decision to adopt that we have not discussed?
16. Based on your experience, what suggestions do you have for other people who are considering domestic adoption? (Zhang & Lee, 2010)

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