

# Life-Changing Decisions: Exploring Proximal and Distal Motivations behind why American Parents Adopt Domestically or Internationally

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## Abstract

10 The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore American parents' proximal and distal  
11 motivations for choosing domestic and international adoption from the distinctive viewpoint of  
12 adoptive parents own words and perspectives using the lenses of culture and social exchange  
13 theory. The findings from this study revealed three primary factors that were found to  
14 influence adoptive parents' motivations to choose domestic or international adoption: (1)  
15 unique cultural influences on domestic and international adoptive parents' adoption  
16 motivations; (2) shared similarities and discrepant differences between adoptive parents'  
17 motivations who adopted domestically or internationally; and, (3) perceived intrinsic and  
18 extrinsic costs and rewards that influenced parents' adoption motivations. A conceptual  
19 decision-making model is introduced to illustrate the complicated calculus behind American  
20 parents' motivations to choose either domestic or international adoption. Suggestions for  
21 adoption regulation, adoption process, and recruitment efforts for both domestic and  
22 international adoptions are discussed.

**Index terms**—parents, adoption motivations, domestic adoption, international adoption

## 1 Introduction

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

## **37 2 a) Social Exchange Theory**

38 Social exchange theory offers a promising lens for understanding the primary motivations of adoptive parents  
39 who choose to adopt domestically or internationally (Hollingsworth & Ruffn, 2002). According to social  
40 exchange theory, people will begin or maintain a relationship when they believe that the rewards they gain

## 5 II. RESEARCH METHODS AND DATA ANALYSIS

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41 from the relationship are greater than the costs (Ries, 1994). Specifically, parents who adopt domestically  
42 or internationally commit their time, money, love, and other resources in exchange for the perceived rewards  
43 associated with adopting a child. These perceived rewards can include choosing children with the characteristics  
44 the parents prefer, raising them according to the parents' value and belief systems, and receiving social and  
45 emotional benefits following adoption, such as increased status and love (Hollingsworth & Ruffin, 2002).

### 46 3 b) Cultural Lens Perspective

47 For purposes of the current study, using a cultural lens perspective can also provide insight into the motivations  
48 of adoptive parents. Many factors influence an individual's cultural lens, such as racial or ethnic background,  
49 heritage, language, family background, religious beliefs, income level, personal experiences, values, community,  
50 national, and global norms, among others. A person's cultural lens acts as a filter to uniquely shape their  
51 view of what reality looks like to them ?? Specific to the current study, the authors propose that adoptive  
52 parents' adoption decisions are uniquely shaped by their cultural filters, which are uniquely influenced by  
53 their identification with specific values, norms, practices, realities, experiences, languages, and heritages. In  
54 turn, adoptive parents' adoption behaviors and personal decisions may reciprocally influence their individual  
55 cultural filters. Further examination and focus on adoptive parents' cultural filters can provide insight into  
56 the development of their adoption motivations and subsequent adoption behaviors (Sue, Sue, & Micro-training  
57 Associates, 2003; Bandler & Grinder, 1975).

### 58 4 c) Motivations of Adoptive Parents

59 Relatively little research has focused on explaining why more American parents are motivated to choose to  
60 adopt internationally rather than domestically (Malm & Welti, 2010; Zhang & Lee, 2010). Barriers to such  
61 research include the difficulty of studying motivations for adoption behaviors (Kirton, 2000) and the lack of  
62 nationally representative data on adoptive parents (Malm & Welti, 2010). Some potential factors impacting  
63 parents' adoption motivations include institutional structures in domestic adoption and international adoptions  
64 (e.g., waiting times, costs, potential interference from birth parents) and use of different types of adoption agencies  
65 (Hollingsworth & Ruffin, 2002; Hellerstedt et al., 2008). Characteristics of adopted children, including physical  
66 and psychological characteristics, health issues, health insurance costs, age, gender, race, and culture represent  
67 additional factors that can impact adoptive parents' motivations to adopt domestically or internationally (Riley,  
68 1997; Hollingsworth & Ruffin, 2002; Lee, 2003; Ishizawa et al., 2006; Zhang & Lee, 2010; Kreider, 2011; Placek,  
69 2011). Regardless of the type of adoption parents choose, adoption represents a significant family decision for the birth  
70 parent, adoptive parent, child being adopted, and other siblings already within the family system. Thus, to  
71 reiterate, the purpose of this exploratory study was to better understand the motivations underlying parents'  
72 pivotal decisions to adopt.

## 73 5 II. Research Methods and Data Analysis

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

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

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

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

100 international adoption. This conceptual model represents a unique contribution of this study to the adoption  
101 body of knowledge. and experiences all converge at the proximal individual cultural filter level to shape adoption  
102 behaviors and decisions. Some adoptive parents reported that having previous personal experience as an adopted  
103 child influenced their adoption motivations. For example, one adoptive father, who adopted six children from  
104 the foster care system, described that his prior adoption experience provided him with both an understanding  
105 and a motivation to bond with his adopted children.

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

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

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

120 National culture can influence parents' motivations to adopt in different ways, such as through public attitudes  
121 and norms, national adoption policies and laws, and adoption agencies' decisions regarding whom they will  
122 and will not permit to adopt. One adoptive mother shared some insightful thoughts from a national cultural  
123 perspective about American adoption agencies in the 1990s, and how these adoption agencies influenced their  
124 decision to adopt internationally rather than domestically. She and her husband were living in Kenya at the  
125 time and were planning to adopt a child. Initially, they wanted to adopt an American child. However, the  
126 American adoption agencies that they contacted would not allow them to bring an American child to Africa. As  
127 a result, they abandoned their desire to pursue domestic adoption and adopted an international child from Kenya.  
128 laws. For example, the Hague Adoption Convention instituted the regulation to protect the rights of adoptive  
129 parents and children and subsequently increased the costs and waiting times of international adoptions in an  
130 attempt to provide greater oversight. These increased adoption costs and waiting times provided the motivation  
131 for some adoptive parents to not adopt internationally. However, for one international adoptive mother, the  
132 most important motivation to adopt internationally rather than domestically was the waiting time, a factor also  
133 affected by law and policy. She summarized her experience:

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

## 137 **6 b) Similarities Between Parents' Motivations to Adopt**

138 Domestically or Internationally Domestic adoptive parents and international adoptive parents indicated several  
139 similar motivations behind their decisions to adopt a child (Figure 1). The results of this study indicated that  
140 saving a child from an unpleasant environment, being unable to have a biological child, cultural factors, religious  
141 beliefs, a general desire to do something noble, and having the ability to provide for a child were the common  
142 major motivations shared between domestic and international adoptive parents. Among these similarities, more  
143 international adoptive parents than domestic adoptive parents reported religious belief factors and wanting to  
144 save a child from an unpleasant environment as one of their adoption motivations, while more domestic adoptive  
145 parents than international adoptive parents \* "-8" means that eight international adoptive parents families  
146 mentioned that a part of their motivation to choose international adoption over domestic adoption was because  
147 of the fact that there would be no interference from the birth parents. "-10" means © 2018 Global Journals  
148 Global culture associated with adoption is mainly guided by international adoption policies and reported that  
149 having the ability to provide for a child was one of their main motivations to adopt a child. that although  
150 ten interviewed international adoptive families thought that the higher adoption costs were a disadvantage of  
151 international adoption; they insisted that international adoption was the better choice for them.

152 Saving a child from an unpleasant environment: Both domestic and international adoptive parents considered  
153 saving a child from an unpleasant environment as the most frequently mentioned adoption motivation. Among  
154 all participants, nine domestic adoptive parents and eleven international adoptive parents emphasized that  
155 their motivation to adopt was influenced by this factor. Adoptive parents often described these unpleasant  
156 environments in terms of family drug issues, foster care situations, and oppressive social policies in the original  
157 country. For example, one mother articulated that saving a child from a poor quality of life was her primary  
158 motivation: I wanted to save a child from a terrible life. I did not realize that there were children here [in  
159 the United States who] would not be adopted. . . To me, it felt like that I could actually save a child here  
160 [domestically] from something terrible.

161 International adoptive parents in this study generally believed that, when compared with children adopted

## 7 C) DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PARENTS' MOTIVATIONS TO ADOPT DOMESTICALLY OR INTERNATIONALLY

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162 domestically, children in international adoption had worse environments and more limited access to resources.  
163 This was one of the primary reasons why these parents chose international adoption.

164 Inability to have biological children: Based on the previous literature, infertility, singlehood (i.e., a state of  
165 being unmarried), a same sex relationship, and a partner or individual being too old to have children were the main  
166 reasons articulated for why parents were unable to have their own biological child. Six domestic adoptive parents  
167 and six international adoptive parents in this study reported that infertility was a major adoption motivation.  
168 For example, one mother and her husband chose to adopt a child domestically because they did not want to  
169 spend money on costly infertility treatment. In addition, an international adoptive mother talked about how  
170 advancing age influenced her adoption motivations: This is the second marriage for both of us. We both were  
171 already older, and we had no children from our previous marriages. He [my husband] always wanted children.  
172 We talked about it for a long time. We were thinking. "If we did not have somebody to sort of share our life  
173 with, what is the point?" Finally, we decided that we wanted to have [an adopted child] to complete our family.  
174 We just wanted to have [a child] to share with us, and we wanted to watch [a child] grow up.

175 General desire to do something noble: A general desire to do something noble as defined in this study is the  
176 desire to do something that most other people would not do. Two domestic adoptive parents and two international  
177 adoptive parents shared this motivation.

178 For example, one husband found that the adoption research he had studied facilitated his desire to do something  
179 noble, in this case to correct a perceived imbalance.

180 You realized that an [adoption] market exists, and there was a big imbalance in the market. It was bad. I also  
181 felt like that if I was starting to adopt these lowest demanded children, it brought them up [from the bottom of  
182 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  
183 feel good about working in the direction that [is] correcting the imbalance.

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

187 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  
188 him. He was chosen for us. It [religious belief] played a part in our decision making process. . . . It was just like  
189 "a given" to us to adopt.

190 Even though there was no direct evidence from this study to support extrinsic religious beliefs as a motivation  
191 to adopt, previous research has indicated that extrinsic religious beliefs can also affect individuals' motivations  
192 (Maurer School of Law, 1953; Jones, 2002; Westerlund, 2012). We suspect this is also the case with parents'  
193 decisions to adopt a child. Extrinsic religiosity was subsumed within the concept of culture in this study. Ability  
194 to provide for a child: This motivation emerged from the interviews with both domestic and international adoptive  
195 parents. Six domestic adoptive parents and four international adoptive parents stated that their motivation to  
196 adopt was due to their ability to provide for a child. For example, one mother was living in Zambia for many  
197 years before she adopted a child from there. She insightfully explained, We saw the opportunity to give an even  
198 better life to a child that would most likely not have the same opportunities that even a child without a family  
199 growing up in the American world [would have]. . . . I am sure that living in this culture here in Zambia and  
200 seeing the "culture" of poverty and orphans did drive us to the desire to help in that way to provide a home for  
201 a child.

202 Previous positive experience as adoptive parents: One domestic adoptive parent and one international adoptive  
203 parent each declared that their previous positive experience as adoptive parents directly drove them to adopt  
204 another child. When asked how the previous adoption experience influenced their most recent adoption, this  
205 father explained, Our first adopted child is the most amazing baby. She is still a super child who is really easy  
206 going all along. She has been automatically helpful and interesting to be a good kid, but our [biological] sons are  
207 not like her. She is such an incredibly good baby, so it made us feel that we can do this [adoption] again.

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

### 218 7 c) Differences between Parents' Motivations to Adopt Do- 219 mestically or Internationally

220 Waiting time: As discussed previously with regard to national cultural influences, four domestic adoptive parents  
221 indicated that a shorter waiting time was an advantage that motivated them to choose domestic rather than

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222 international adoption. At the time of these parents' adoption pursuits, the path to domestic adoption had the  
223 shorter waiting time. This adoptive couple carefully explained why this was an important consideration:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 268 8 d) Cost and Its Influence on American Parents' Motivations

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

## 278 9 Adoption application and process:

279 Avoiding the complicated adoption process with international adoptions was a consideration for four of the  
280 domestic adoptive parents in this study. They generally believed that the application and process of domestic  
281 adoption were much easier when compared to international adoption. In a different way, five international

## 10 E) REWARDS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON AMERICAN PARENTS' MOTIVATIONS

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282 adoptive parents in this study also expressed that the international adoption application and process were a part  
283 of their adoption decision considerations. For example, one woman, a single mother, articulated her perspective,  
284 "Domestic adoption is too hard for me because I am a single mother. International adoption is much easier for  
285 me. They did not care if I am single. It is hard to adopt a child domestically when you are a single parent, but  
286 it is not an issue in international adoption." Interference from birth family: Interference from birth parents and  
287 birth family members was a major consideration for all adoptive parents. Three domestic adoptive parents and  
288 more than half of the interviewed international adoptive parents (eight families) felt that interference from birth  
289 families was a disadvantage in domestic adoption. When talking about the disadvantages of domestic adoption,  
290 three families who completed foster care adoptions mentioned that the potential for interference from the birth  
291 family was a major concern for them. For example, this adoptive mother explained, Personally, we were satisfied  
292 with this [foster care adoption], but, specifically in foster care, sometimes you have to interact with the birth  
293 parents and it was not always a positive experience. If someone was looking for a closed adoption with little or  
294 no interaction with the birth parents, this [foster care adoption] may not be the best option.

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

301 The disadvantage in our situation specifically through foster care is that there is no guarantee that the children  
302 will be free for adoption. We effectively parented our children for many years. There was a real risk that they  
303 would be removed from our home permanently. This is a high emotional risk that many prospective adoptive  
304 parents do not want to take. . . You may foster several children who return to their parents before finally being  
305 able to adopt a child. Two international adoptive parents also considered emotional involvement a disadvantage  
306 in international adoption. For example, this mother explained, "I would say that there was a great deal of worries  
307 and concerns. We worried about the children before they arrived, when they arrived, and also if they did not  
308 arrive. You wanted to make sure that before they arrived they had been well cared for." Risks and concerns:  
309 International adoptive parents not only worried about whether their adoption would be a successful adoption, but  
310 they also had concerns about adopted children's inaccurate information about birth families and health records,  
311 as this mother explained,

312 The cost is very high and the risk is always high because you do not know the issue of the child. It's really  
313 the huge risk. Most of the time, the paperwork from overseas is not accurate, so there is a huge risk on anything  
314 about their birth parents, or their biological parents. There is nothing, no information [about their biological  
315 parents].

### 316 10 e) Rewards and Their Influence on American Parents' Motivations

317 Preferred characteristics of adopted children: Seven domestic adoptive families reported that they had preferred  
318 characteristics of adoptive children in mind before adopting. Most domestic adoptive parents reported that health  
319 status and age were the most preferred characteristics of adoptive children. About half of the adoptive families  
320 (six families) said that they cared about the adopted child's age, and four of them clearly stated that they wanted  
321 a baby (a child younger than one year). The reasons that they wanted a younger child varied. Some of them were  
322 looking for an experience with a baby, while others thought that a younger baby would be healthier and would  
323 have experienced minimal trauma. More international adoptive parents than domestic adoptive parents in this  
324 study indicated that their preferred children's characteristics influenced their adoption motivation and decision.  
325 Almost 87 percent of international adoptive parents in this study indicated they had specific requirements for  
326 adopted children's characteristics, such as health status, gender, age, race, and culture. Only two international  
327 adoptive families had a preference for an adoptive child's race, and only one family had a preference for an  
328 adoptive child's culture.

329 Financial rewards from foster care adoption: Two foster care adoptive parents indicated that the financial  
330 rewards of foster care adoption motivated them to adopt a child, as this mother, an adoptive parent of four  
331 children, articulated, It was very expensive to adopt a child. We went to the foster care system simply because  
332 we could not afford to adopt in other ways [international adoption or private domestic adoption]. The . . . foster  
333 care system actually paid us to go through the adoption process, so we got the monthly stipends. When we  
334 adopted a child, they paid all the costs for the adoption. The kids have Medicare until they are eighteen-years-old.  
335 We adopted our first child from the . . . foster care system because they guaranteed us that our adopted  
336 children could go to the colleges in [their home state]. Therefore, with all those benefits, we chose foster care  
337 adoption.

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

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

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

354 IV.

## 355 11 Discussion

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

## 372 12 V. Cultural Influences

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

## 377 13 a) Similarities and Differences in Domestic and

378 International Adoptive Parents' Motivations Prior research literature regarding adoptive parents' adoption  
379 motivations has indicated that saving children from an unpleasant environment was one of the most common  
380 motivations (Lovelock, 2000; Melosh, 2009; Malm & Welti, 2010; Zhang & Lee, 2010). Other similar motivations  
381 between domestic and international adoptive parents stem from being unable to have biological children, a desire  
382 to provide a sibling for their child, cultural reasons, the intention to illustrate personal liberty, the desire to do  
383 something noble, the choice to take a stand against the population explosion, prior connection to the child, or prior  
384 exposure to adoption (Simon & Altstein, 2000; Tyebjee, 2002; Bausch, 2006; Vandivere et al., 2009; Malm & Welti,  
385 2010; Zhang & Lee, 2010). The results of this study provided qualitative evidence to support previous research  
386 findings about shared adoption motivations between domestic and international adoptions, such as the desire to  
387 save a child, being unable to have biological children, and religious beliefs (Momaya, 1999; Lovelock, 2000; Tyebjee,  
388 2002; Melosh, 2009; Malm & Welti, 2010). The lens of cultural perspectives suggests that people's perceptions and  
389 behaviors are processed through individual cultural filters. Individual cultural filters can be influenced by family,  
390 community, national, and global cultural influences, among others (De Genova, 1997; Sue, Sue, & Arredondo,  
391 2003). The results from this study were consistent with the previous research, but emphasized the  
392 importance of individual cultural filters in processing and developing the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations to  
393 adopt domestically or internationally. This notion of cultural filters can also help provide insight into how the  
394 adoptive parents, both domestic and international, shared many similar motivations but why different parents  
395 ultimately chose different paths to adoption, according to their own unique circumstances. path, domestic or  
396 international, would be the best a path the authors propose was religious belief, and laws and policies. These  
397 motivations were shared by both domestic and international adoptive parents, though it is interesting to note that  
398 the specific circumstances for each family determined which road to adoption highly influenced by their cultural  
399 filters.

## 16 IMPLICATIONS

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

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

410 New emergent adoption motivations: Though this study presents some findings consistent with previous  
411 research, it also revealed several new emergent adoption motivations not stated in previous literature, such as the  
412 ability to provide for a child, the desire to continue parenting, the desire for more children, contextual emotional  
413 experience, and receiving requests from other people to adopt a child. As discussed above, the researchers propose  
414 that these new emergent adoption motivations were shaped by proximal and distal family, community, national,  
415 and global cultural influences that were processed through adoptive parents' individual cultural filters, thus  
416 accounting for the unique and varied adoption decisions that were made. Furthermore, the researchers propose  
417 that culture as a contextual influence was highly impactful in the development of these emergent adoption  
418 motivations (e.g., adoption policies, recent social norms, and popular attitudes towards adoption). Interestingly,  
419 some of the most common motivations cited by previous studies, such as saving the children from the plight of  
420 wars, poverty, social upheaval, and oppressive social policies (Lovelock, 2000 Lee, 2010). Unique to this study,  
421 these factors were specifically identified as extrinsic and intrinsic costs and rewards associated with the adoptive  
422 parents' adoption experience. Domestic adoptive parents' decisions were more likely affected by extrinsic costs,  
423 such as adoption waiting times, adoption expenses, and emotional involvement, and extrinsic rewards, such as  
424 religious beliefs and financial rewards. In contrast, international adoptive parents were generally more concerned  
425 with intrinsic costs and rewards. Specifically, international adoptive parents were greatly influenced by their  
426 desire to experience lower interference from the birth family and to achieve an easier adoption process, preferred  
427 children's characteristics, emotional and religious rewards, travel opportunities, and increased opportunities to  
428 experience another culture. This study revealed that adoptive parents generally confirmed that they experienced  
429 greater perceived rewards than costs during their adoption experience. Overall, they were satisfied with the  
430 adoption process and outcomes and wanted to adopt again, which is consistent with the findings from previous  
431 research (Zhang & Lee, 2011; Malm & Welti, 2010). These findings added perspective to the proposed notion of  
432 an individual cultural filter and its use in weighing alternatives in the adoption process. Adoption expectations  
433 were ultimately met through the parents' adoption decisions, thus resulting in positive emotional experiences  
434 associated with the adoption process.

## 435 14 VI.

## 436 15 Adoption Decisions

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

## 448 16 Implications

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

457 Understanding specific extrinsic and intrinsic motivations, costs, and rewards can also provide social workers,  
458 policymakers, and professionals with tools to facilitate the adoption process more smoothly and successfully.  
459 Many families and professionals understand that adoption is not for the faint of heart, and the decision to adopt

460 represents the start of an emotionally, relationally, and financially significant journey for any adoptive parent or  
 461 family. Therefore, providing practitioners with frameworks to understand adoptive parents' motivations, such as  
 462 the one outlined in this study, can potentially help professionals support adoptive parents through the decision-  
 463 making process and ensure a smoother journey to adoption overall. Moreover, nonprofit organizations or the foster  
 464 care system can use the interview data collected from this study to attract potential adoptive parents and inform  
 465 them about future adoption opportunities that align with their motivations and considerations. It may also be  
 466 helpful for policymakers and professionals to understand domestic and international adoptive parents' concerns  
 467 about adoption processes and applications as adoption policies and laws are amended in the future. Ultimately,  
 468 there are thousands of children who need to be adopted. As more professionals, policymakers, and prospective  
 469 adoptive parents understand parental motivations to adopt and make informed decisions, then hopefully the  
 470 adoption process can become smoother to help as many children as possible be welcomed into loving, stable  
 471 families.

## 472 17 VIII.

## 473 18 Conclusion

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

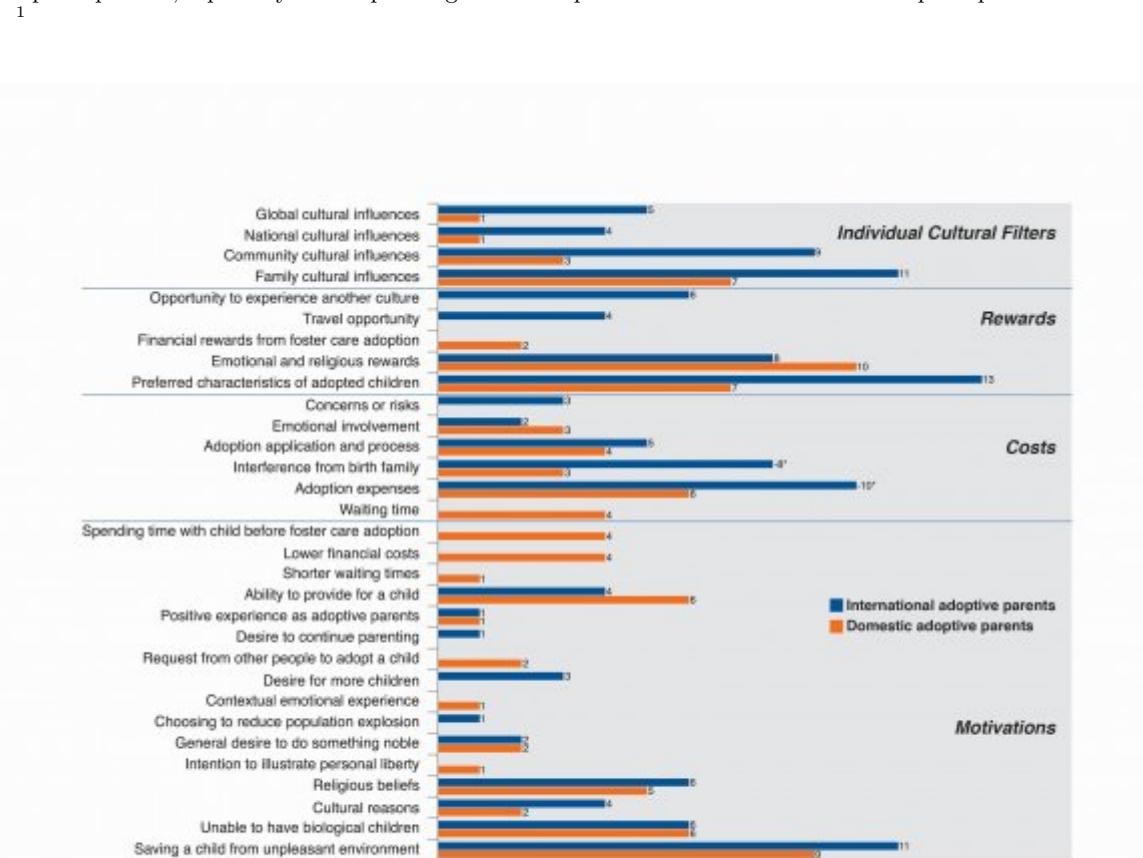


Figure 1:

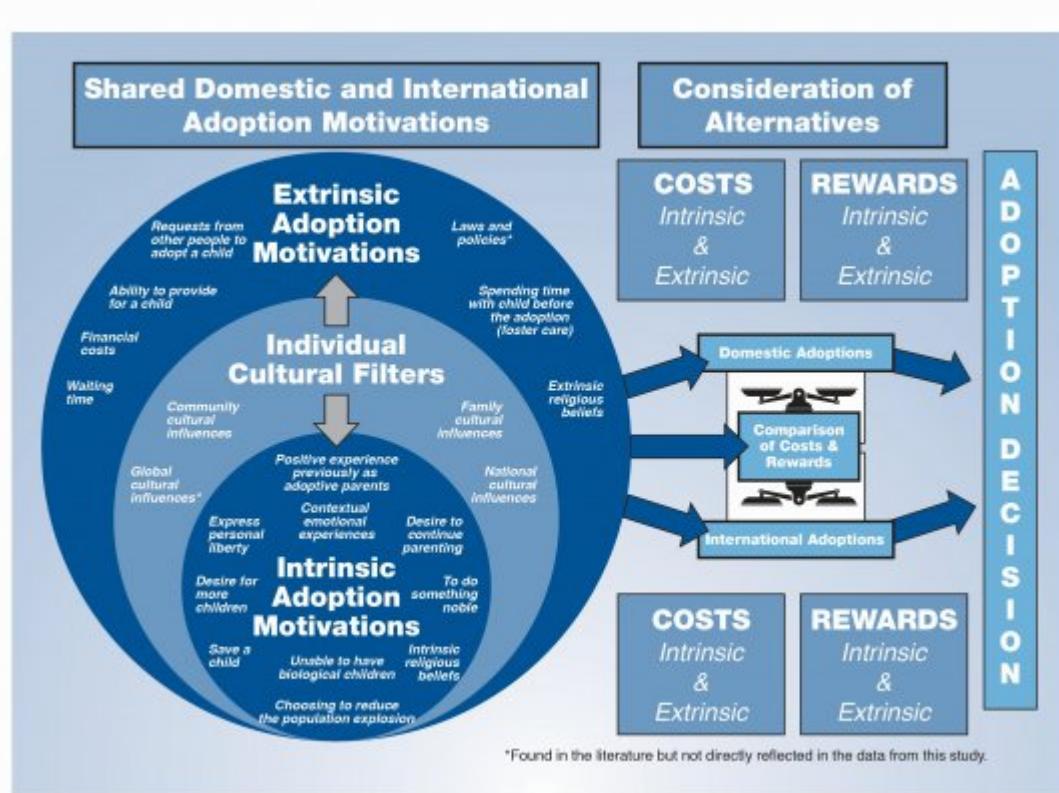


Figure 2:

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	14	3	22
\$80,000-\$99,999	1	7	1	7
\$100,000-\$119,999	4	26	4	22
Above \$120,000	4	26	6	36
Education				
Level Some high school/ High school graduate/ GED	14	0	14	6
Technical school/ Some college or associate's degree	33	27	33	25
Bachelor's degree Graduate degree		27		38
Religious affiliation* Evangelical Protestant	7	46	8	53
Churches				
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

Figure 3: Table 1 :

## Demographic Variables

## Children Adopted Domestically (Total nu

	N	%
Age		
<1	7	21
1	4	12
2-5	13	38
6-10	7	20
11-17	3	9
Gender		
Female	17	50
Male	17	50
Race/Ethnicity		
White	22	65
Hispanic or Latino	2	6
Black or African American	7	20
Asian	0	0
Biracial	3	9
Health Status		
Healthy	26	77
Birth mother with health issues	7	20
With health issues	1	3
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		
Dominic Republic		
Guatemala		
India		
Korea		
Russia		
Taiwan		
Uganda		
Zambia		

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Figure 5:



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