

Adult and Adolescent Views and Perceptions of Families With Both Adopted and Biological Children

Abstract

Previous research found that society's views and perceptions towards adoptive families are generally positive. In other words, people are accepting of adoptive families and their treatment of these families does not differ from their treatment of non-adoptive families. However, certain stigmas about adoptive families, such as adopted children having more behavioral issues, arise despite this acceptance. A similar area of important research that has not been analyzed adequately is blended families that include both adopted and biological children. Moreover, researchers have not applied perceptions about adoptive families to blended families, nor have they done enough research about blended families in general. Through surveys with high school students and their parents, and interviews with people in blended families, this study aimed to see how previous research on perceptions of adoption compared to society's outlook on blended families.

Introduction

Nearly 13 million people are adopted in the US which makes it an area of interest as most people know someone who is adopted. Previous research regarding perceptions of adoption has found that adoptive families are accepted, but viewed as different, meaning that their children are perceived to cause more behavioral issues than non-adopted children and that society does not know how to treat such a family, but has expressed interest in learning how adoptive families would like to be treated (Dougherty, 2006). Keyes et. al (2008), found that while adopted children twice as likely to be taken in to a clinic to be diagnosed with a behavioral disorder, the number actually diagnosed is not much higher.

However, different dynamics arise within an adoptive family when it includes children that are biologically related to the parents such as avoiding favoritism, birth order (adopted or biological child being born first), and physical and cultural differences (American Adoption, 2017). Heijkoop, Semon Dubas & van Aken (2009) found that genetic factors such as personality and physical similarities suggest kinship which could differentiate societal views of blended families from views of adoptive families as there are both adopted and biological children. Also, Reinoso (2013) found that children in adopted families that are of a different race have expressed a desire to physically resemble them.

Question

Do adult and adolescent perceptions of adoptive families, including approval and assumptions about the family, change when those families also include biological children?

Hypothesis

Compared to adoptive families, adolescent and adult perceptions of blended families will change regarding approval and assumptions with an emphasis placed on physical resemblance

Materials

- Computer
- Google Surveys
- Phone
- Microsoft Excel

Methods

Study One

Study one consisted of 10 interviews with adults in blended families to analyze narratives of what it is like to grow up in such a family. It consisted of original questions formulated to apply specifically to blended families. Questions regarding the participant's home environment, treatment from family, friends, and others were included as well as questions regarding any misconceptions they might have faced and if so, what they felt was the best way to deal with this.

Study Two

Study Two consisted of surveys which were conducted with 120 AP Psychology students and 54 of their parents to examine their perceptions of blended families and compare them to the narratives from study one. It consisted of surveys with two parts: the first consisted of multiple choice where the participant was asked to explain why they answered the way they did and the second asked participants to rate statements using the Likert Scale. Both sections aimed to determine perceptions of adolescents and adults and compare them against each other. It also aimed to explore how these perceptions compared to perceptions held about families with just adopted children. The questions that comprised this section were a mix of original and borrowed questions, the borrowed ones coming from Dougherty (2006).

Results

Study One

9 out of the 10 participants had positive experiences to share, meaning that treatment was equal and if not, was unintentional. All participants felt that society was accepting of their situation. Regarding behavioral issues, 2 participants reported such problems with their adopted sibling, but one attributed it to their parent's divorce opposed to the their sibling's adopted status. Of the participants that were of a different race than their adoptive family, none reported that they wished to look like them. All of the participants expressed that they felt accepted, but still ran into misconceptions surrounding their families which they believed could best be dealt with if education regarding adoption could be implemented early on.

Study Two

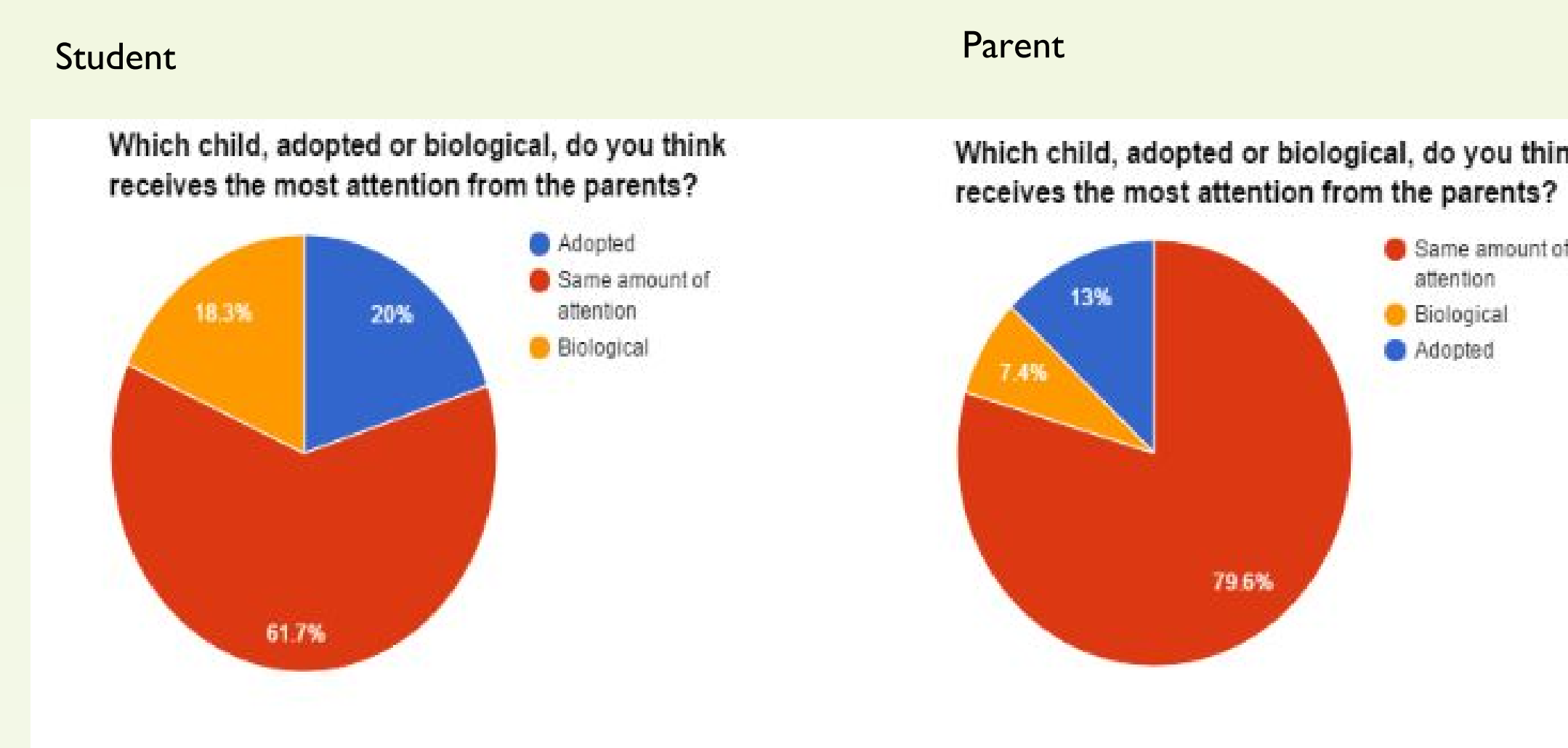


Figure 1. Attention Adopted and Biological Children are Perceived to Receive

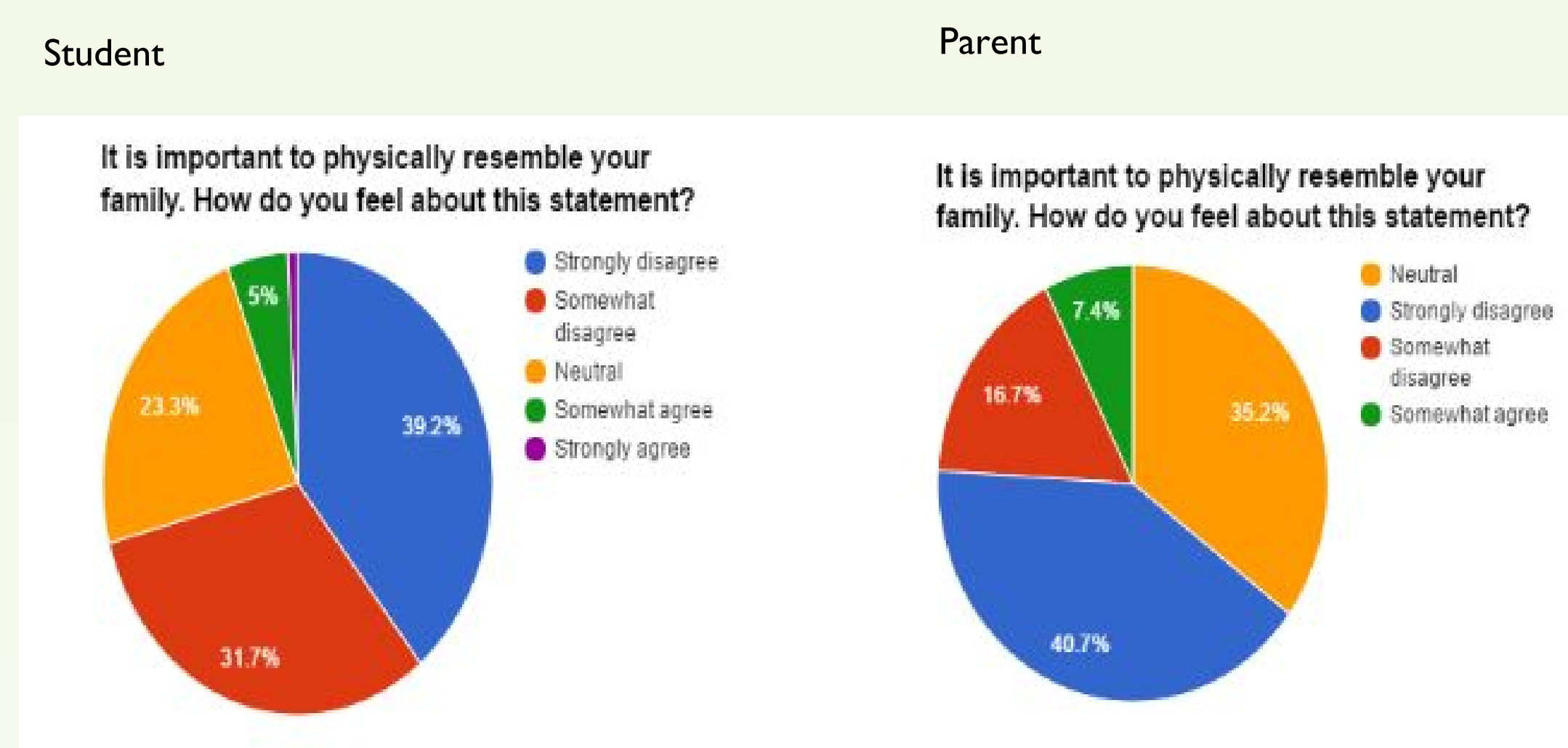


Figure 2. Importance of Physical Resemblance

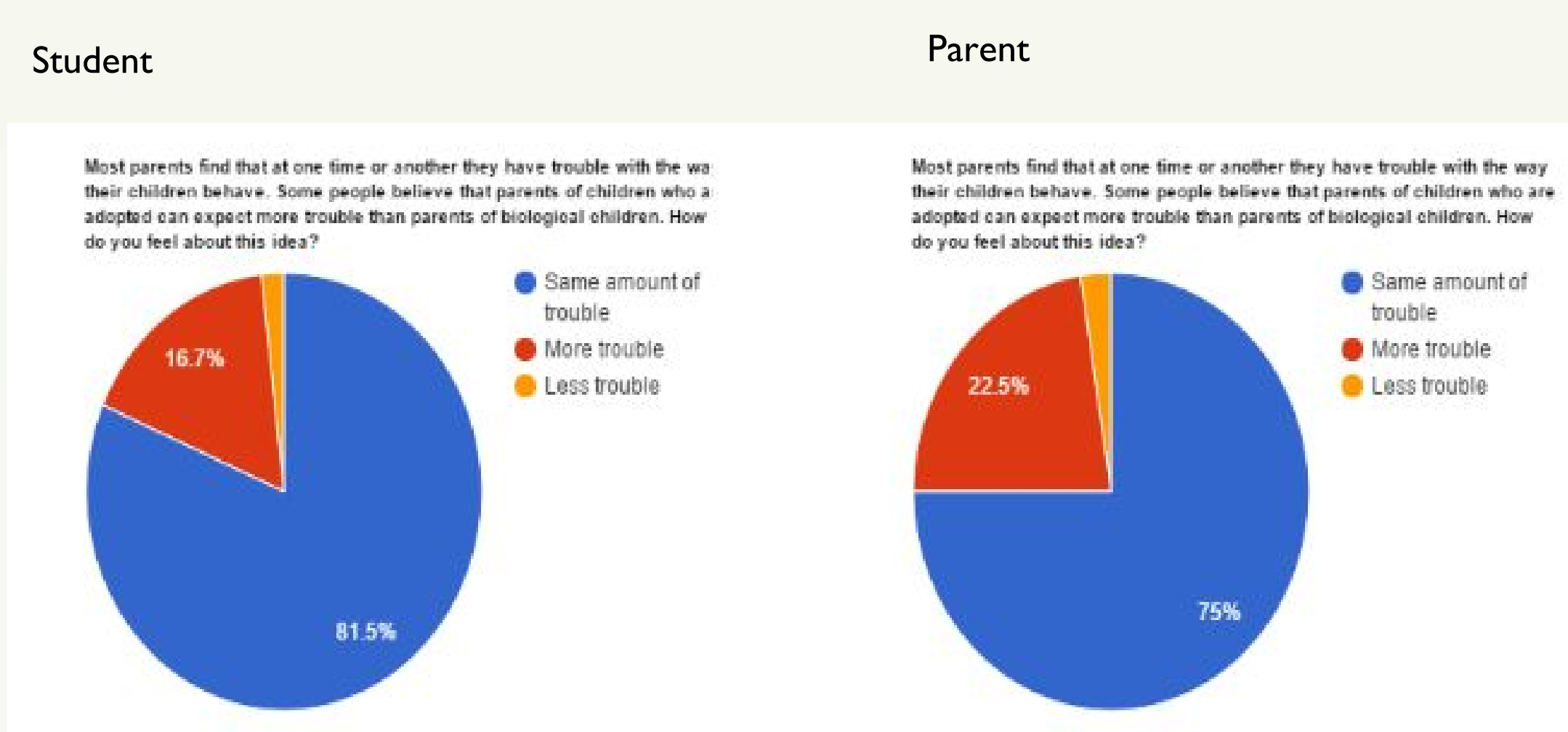


Figure 3. Perception of Trouble Caused by Adopted Children

Discussion

Overall, perceptions of blended families are positive. Study one found that these families felt accepted, received equal treatment from society, and face about the same amount of behavioral issues as other families. However, these families still reported misconceptions which suggests that society is not educated on the topic of education. Regarding study two, it was found that over 70% of participants knew someone adopted, which shows that it is a more widespread topic than previous research has found. Regarding attention, about 60% perceived the adopted and biological child to receive more attention, which means 40% perceived otherwise. Based off of the results from study one, this is a false misconception, but a common one. Overall, physical resemblance was not regarded as important unlike what was hypothesized and what research suggested. Regarding behavioral issues, about 20% perceived adopted children to have more problems which shows it continues to be a persisting misconception.

Conclusion

Families with both adopted and biological children are accepted, but perceived as different than other families. Results from accounts from people who grew up in a blended family suggests that these perceptions, such as amount of attention each child receives and amount of trouble adopted children cause, are mostly false. Application of this research can be used in classrooms to prevent misconceptions arising by implementing education about adoption early on. Future research should explore how different demographics and influences such as media could alter perceptions.

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