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

— AP Research HSS 2017 —

Reason of Interest/Purpose

- **13 million** are adopted in the US
- **Interest**
 - Personal experience
 - Curious about dynamic changing with addition of biological child
 - Misconceptions
 - Making children in these families feel comfortable

Research Question/Hypothesis

- Do adolescent and adult perceptions of adoptive families, including approval and assumptions about the family, change when those families also include biological children?
- **Hypothesis**
 - Disapproved
 - Negative Stigmas
 - Importance of physical resemblance

Literature Review

- Australian Adoption Organization (2015)¹
 - **39%** of Australians had heard about adoption
- Dougherty (2006)²
 - Adopted families are **accepted**, but seen as **different**
 - **Physical resemblance** is **not important**
 - People were **unsure** of how to treat a family with adopted children
 - Adopted kids are viewed as **more troublesome**

1. AdoptChange. (2015). Modern families: Attitudes and perceptions of adoption in Australia. *AdoptChange*.

2. Dougherty, B., Sarah. (2006). Revisiting public perceptions of adoptive families: Fifty years since H. David Kirk, PhD. *ScholarWorks*, UMASS.

Literature Review

- Keyes et. al (2008)¹
 - Adopted children are **twice** as likely to develop a behavioral disorder
- Reinoso (2013)²
 - Adopted children expressed wanting to look like their adoptive parents

1. Keyes MA, Sharma A, Elkins IJ, Iacono WG, McGue M. The mental health of US adolescents adopted in infancy. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med.* 2008;162(5):419-425. doi:10.1001/archpedi.162.5.419

2. Reinoso, M., Juffer, F., & Tieman, W. (2013). Children's and parents' thoughts and feelings about adoption, birth culture identity and discrimination in families with internationally adopted children. *Child & Family Social Work*, 18(3), 264-274. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2206.2012.00841.xa

Synopsis of Study

- Lots of research on adoptive families
- None on the addition of biological children
- Two Studies
 - **Study One:** Interviews to explore what it is like to grow up in such a family
 - **Study Two:** Surveys to determine perceptions of adolescents and adults

Methods

- **Study One: Interviews**

- 4 biological
- 6 adopted
- Most grew up in 1970's/1980's
- 10-15 question interview over phone call or email

- **Study Two: Surveys**

- 120 AP Psychology students
- 54 Parents
- IRB cleared
- 25 Question Survey
 - Multiple choice with explanation
 - Multiple choice with Likert Scale

Results - Study One

- 9/10 **Positive** experiences
- **Treatment** was generally equal
 - If different, unintentional
- **Trouble**
 - 2 that were adopted were troublesome
 - One due to divorce
- **Physical resemblance** unimportant
- General **acceptance**
- **Misconceptions** still arose
- **Education** is key

Results - Study Two

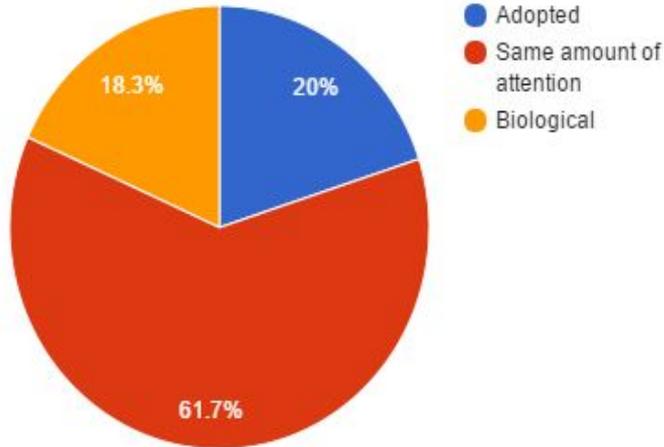
- Adopted Acquaintance: **70%+**
- No pre-existing perceptions/experiences: **50%+**
- Approval/treatment: **80%+**
- Equal love: **80%+**



Results - Study Two

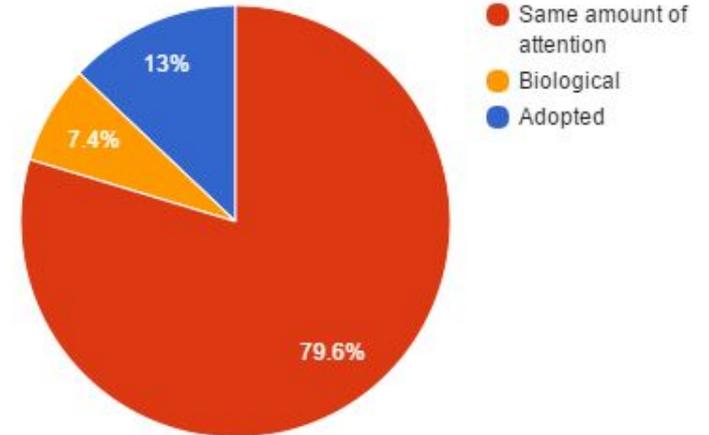
Student

Which child, adopted or biological, do you think receives the most attention from the parents?



Parent

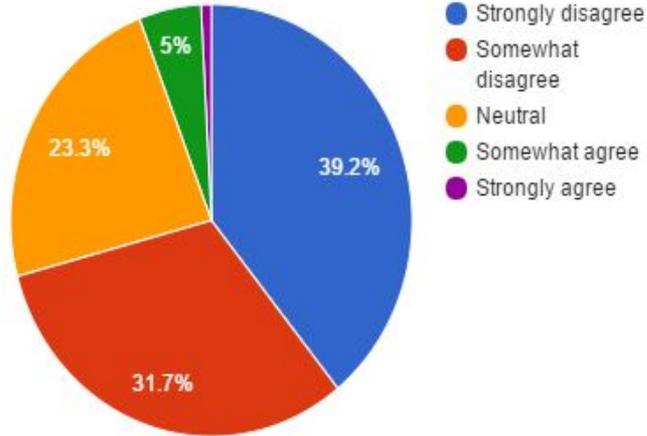
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Results - Study Two

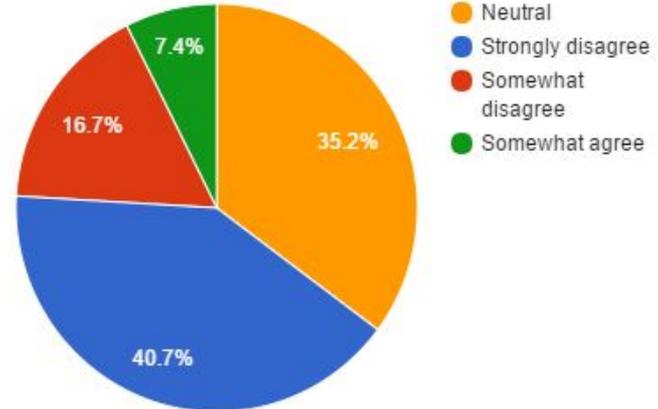
Student

It is important to physically resemble your family. How do you feel about this statement?



Parent

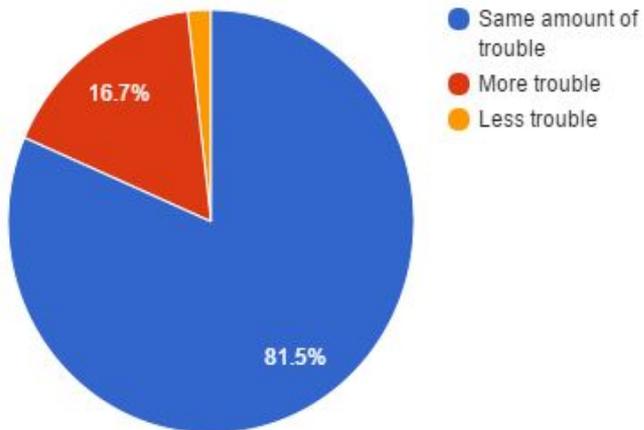
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Results - Study Two

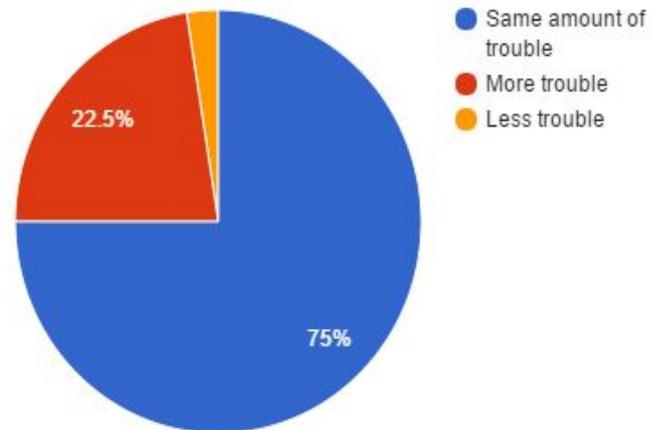
Student

Most parents find that at one time or another they have trouble with the way their children behave. Some people believe that parents of children who are adopted can expect more trouble than parents of biological children. How do you feel about this idea?



Parent

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Discussion

- **Blended families are accepted**
 - Physical resemblance is not important
 - Love is perceived to be equal
- **Misconceptions arise**
 - Differences in attention
 - Perceived amounts of trouble
- **Uneducated**
 - AP Psychology
 - Neutral responses
 - No pre-existing experience/perceptions
 - Interviewee experiences
 - Equal treatment

Further Applications/Implications

- **Educate early on**
 - Reading themes in Elementary schools
- **Make adoption an open topic**
 - Korea: forbidden, secretive
 - USA: close-minded
- **Apply to different demographics**
 - Children vs. older adults

Limitations/Conclusion

- **More participants, wider demographic**
 - AP Psychology students
 - 1 adopted participant in survey
- Blended families
 - Accepted, but misconceptions still arise
- **Education** can help prevent this

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my mentor, my AP Psychology teacher, and all those who participated in my study.