

Clark University

Clark Digital Commons

Undergraduate Student Research Festivals

Academic Spree Day 2021

Apr 26th, 12:00 AM

Meaning Making and Understandings of Family in Adopted LGBTQ+ Emerging Adults

Arai Long

Clark University, along@clarku.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.clarku.edu/asdff>

Long, Arai, "Meaning Making and Understandings of Family in Adopted LGBTQ+ Emerging Adults" (2021).
Undergraduate Student Research Festivals. 25.

<https://commons.clarku.edu/asdff/asd2021/asd2021/25>

This Open Access Event is brought to you for free and open access by the Conference Proceedings at Clark Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Student Research Festivals by an authorized administrator of Clark Digital Commons. For more information, please contact mkrikonis@clarku.edu, jodolan@clarku.edu, dlutz@clarku.edu, larobinson@clarku.edu.

Coping and Meaning Making in Adopted LGBTQ+ Emerging Adults

Arai Long '21 (Sponsor: Abbie Goldberg, PhD)



CLARK
UNIVERSITY

Introduction

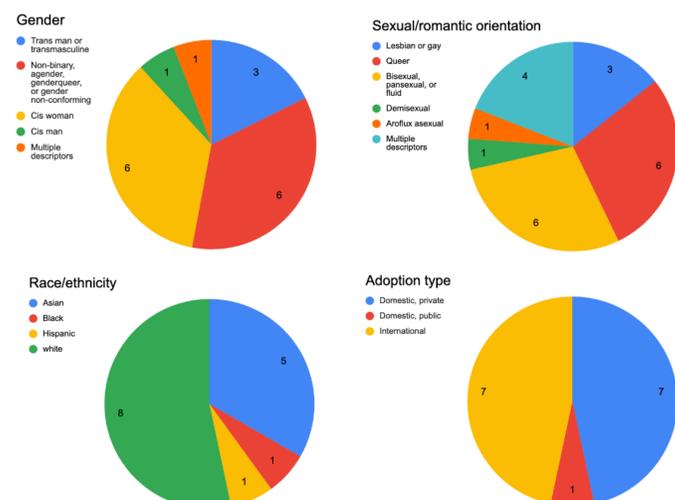
- “**Meaning making**” is a psychological model that examines how people cope with extremely stressful or traumatic events (Park, 2010; 2013).
- Adopted people and queer people are vulnerable to trauma because they have come to know, intimately, **what it means to feel “other,”** and thus, both groups may experience minority stress (Meyer, 2003).
- The current study drew on the model of meaning making to explore how adopted queer people cope with their experiences of oppression and make meaning of their traumas.

Research question: How do adopted LGBTQ+ emerging adults in the U.S. make meaning of their life experiences and understand their unique positionalities?

Method

- **Semi-structured virtual interviews** (average length: 1 hour and nine minutes)
- Utilized **thematic analysis** (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to explore qualitative data
- **Intersectional, feminist, and critical discourse theories:** These approaches seek to facilitate healing through self-determination and liberation, and to situate the data within systems of power

Sample



$N = 15$
Age: 18 to 27
($M = 21.5$)

Findings

- 1) Barriers and Burdens to Meaning Making**
 - a) A shared isolation:** All participants described some degree of separation between themselves and others who are also both queer and adopted, and all participants confessed that the researcher was the only or one of the only other queer adoptee(s) that they knew.
 - b) Role as “bridge,” educator, and advocate:** Many participants described occupying a role within their family that involved having to engage in emotional and political “heavy lifting” in order to be understood, to advocate for others, and/or to attain physical safety.
 - c) Grappling with gratitude, guilt, and indebtedness to adoptive family:** Many participants described feelings of significant gratitude, guilt, and/or debt to their adoptive families. For some participants, this was related to the narratives that their adoptive parents communicated about their adoption, but not all individuals expressed this sentiment.
 - d) Not belonging within adoptive family:** A few participants described instances, either one-time or long-term, in which they were explicitly excluded, ignored, rejected, and/or exotified by their adoptive family members.
- 2) Supports and Communities**
 - a) Art and performance:** Many participants discussed their art as critical for filling their need for support and community. To them, art was meaningful as a way to connect with others who shared in their need to create, to express themselves and process their emotions, and to portray their stories in order to *be* the representation that the American artworld has historically excluded or otherwise lacked.
 - b) Religion and spirituality:** A few participants described how they had come to redefine their religion or to begin practicing a spirituality that helped them feel more comfortable with their cultural or sexual identities. Participants who described religion as salient in adulthood have been able to find comfort and a sense of belonging in a variety of ways through embracing new beliefs or challenging—and even queering—the beliefs they were raised with.
- 3) Meanings Made and Perspective Gained**
 - a) Personal:** Many participants shared about the ways they have grown as individuals and in their comfort and confidence with their own identities.
 - b) Relational:** A few participants specified relationship-oriented lessons that they had learned or skills they had acquired through struggle (e.g., experiencing houselessness, being disowned by their biological parents).
 - c) Professional:** Most participants also discussed future plans or current jobs that were closely tied to their experiences of adoption, queerness, or both identities (e.g., social work).

Conclusions

- These individuals explained the many structural and emotional barriers that complicate their experiences further, and demonstrated the **seemingly infinite ways in which they must think critically, self-reflect, and hold multiple and sometimes opposing realities to be true.** Participants were able to cope with their experiences of oppression and to make meanings across personal, relational, and professional domains.
- Given the complexities of **ambiguous loss**, participants demonstrate the potential **benefits of openness in adoption** for all members of the adoption triad.
- **Adoptee voices and needs must be centered and amplified** in conversations about adoption (in academic, legal, and all other spheres), rather than the voices and needs of adoptive parents and agencies.