2000

The use of drawings for rapport building with international adoptees and parents

Sharon Jean Mellor

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THE USE OF DRAWINGS FOR RAPPORT BUILDING WITH
INTERNATIONAL ADOPTEES AND PARENTS

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Sharon Jean Mellor
June 2000
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ABSTRACT

The influx of children adopted into the United States from other countries has increased the need for social workers experienced in practice techniques that assist in building rapport between the parents and children in these newly formed families. This study explored the use of employing the kinetic family drawing as a tool to build rapport between parents and children. This was an exploratory multiple case design. Six families participated in the process of drawing a picture of their family engaged in an activity together. It was anticipated that the drawings would be an effective tool to build rapport between parent and child.

This study found that the process of meeting with a family to draw pictures of the family engaged in activities together, stimulated rapport for all families interviewed. The process of drawing together also provided an effective setting for the researcher to observe family dynamics and create a forum for dialogue on topics of interest unique to families of international adoptees. Two dominate themes of discussion were interest in the adopted child's culture of origin and questions regarding loss of the child's birth parents.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

As a result of the influx of children to the United States from countries previously part of the communist block, there has been a surge of renewed public interest in international adoptees and their parents. For some time there has been controversy over the advisability of foreign adoptions. The sensational stories of children with attachment disorders from Romania have fanned the flames. There has also been concern that child abuse may be occurring in some of these newly formed families. Newsweek and Time have discussed the pros and cons of international adoptions. Some of the key issues include the fact that the children have often been in traumatic situations such as minimal institutional care, and through the ravages of war. They have been separated from all that is familiar. In addition to the children's concerns, the new parents sometimes feel pressure from family and friends and need the assurance that they chose a good child.

It is challenging for the parents of the adoptee to communicate with the child since often there is a language barrier. After the initial honeymoon phase the adoptive parents and child may also experience frustration and a sense of rejection even though they both may want to bond with each other. In order to assist in this process, the social worker needs to work with the parents and the child alone. To gloss over the problems or to focus on the problems of the child, is not conducive to a successful
long-term placement. The understanding and expertise of a professional may be needed as the family maneuvers through this awkward phase. If there are problems to be addressed it is best if they are detected early.

During 1990 to 1993, according to estimates provided by Adoptive Families of America, about 2,800 children were adopted from Romania and came to the United States. Many of these children came from orphanages and group care settings. Understanding the effects of institutionalization may provide insight into some of the issues that adoptive families may face. Most studies indicate that early institutionalization can result in attachment difficulties as well as delaying emotional, social and physical development. These children may also have a greater risk for problems during adolescence and adulthood.

Adoptive parents may have difficulty accepting the discrepancy between what they had thought was an ideal child and the reality of the flesh-and-blood child who has come into their home. The child may arrive with physical challenges as well as unexpected emotional problems. Sometimes the arrival of a child may awaken the parents own unresolved attachment issues. Depending on the training and expertise of the social worker he/she may help by referring the parents to resources that will be of assistance.

Social workers need tools to communicate with both the parents and the children. Communication with the child may be limited due to language barriers as well as resistance on the part of the child. Techniques to disarm this and to
transcend language differences are needed.

Projective drawings have been used for many years by clinicians. The process of inviting the children to draw a picture of themselves and a picture of their family has been used as a tool for diagnosis. The use of projective drawings as a diagnostic tool has been a topic of debate; however, the usefulness of drawings as an assessment of general well-being and as a tool to build rapport between therapist and child is an accepted practice.

The goal of social workers is to assist in strengthening fragile emotional bonds between adoptees, siblings and parents. Practice techniques are needed that have potential for building communication between the family members, and the use of projective drawings may be a useful practice technique with this population.

**Problem Focus**

We have all heard the phrase—"love is not enough." In the case of adopting older children this could not be more true. Knowledge of adoptive issues and pitfalls, as well as training in parenting skills are as important as the desire to love and provide a home for a child. Providing education and guidance for the parents during this process is important. As any parent who has been involved in older adoptions will testify, these children come with baggage, unresolved grief and loss, and often a history of neglect or abuse. New parents can feel powerless and misunderstood by clinicians and social workers as they grapple with forming a
new family. It is a unique challenge to become parents to children whose experiences have taught them that parents and families are temporary. Legal adoption cannot erase the past. Many adoptees and parents have expressed what they describe as a sense of "strangeness." This awkwardness concerns both the child and the parents and contributes to an emotional distance that is uncomfortable in the home.

These children need to resolve issues of loss and trauma before they can move on to new attachments. Some may need assistance processing what has occurred in their past. Unfortunately, adoptive parents often know little of the background or previous attachments of their new child, making it difficult for them to understand the child’s behavior.

Increasing parental understanding of the child’s developmental stage will assist in this attachment process. The age of the child at the time of adoption plays an important role. The child’s cognitive understanding of adoption is determined by the developmental stage he/she is in. The way grief is processed is also partially determined by the child’s developmental stage.

Nurturing and understanding are essential in building attachment. Methods of enhancing the parent’s understanding of the child’s world are needed. For often the child speaks a different language making communication more difficult.

One possible means of communication is art. Some therapists believe that a child can communicate his emotions through drawings of family and self, and that the drawings
can act as a mirror of the child's inner reality. Even though the use of projective drawings as a diagnostic tool is debatable, drawings are thought to be an effective means of building rapport with the child who is still too young to verbalize his emotional perceptions.

It is useful for the child to experience the presence of the therapist as a non-judgmental, accepting person who wants to really know the child but will allow the situation to unfold naturally. Perhaps self and kinetic family drawings can be used between parent and child for the same purpose. In the process of drawing, the child feels that he can share himself with the parent, and the kinetic family drawing enables the sharing of how he experiences the family. If these drawings stimulate questions for the parents, they may seek professional counsel which serves as a means of facilitating early intervention.

Social workers could use kinetic family drawings with the families of international adoptees as a tool to strengthen the parent child dyad and facilitate communication. This qualitative study explored the use of family portraits as a means of building rapport between the international adoptee and the parents.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

There have been many studies looking at the effect of adoption on the functioning of children. Psychiatrists and others have noted that adopted children and teenagers make up a disproportionate number of their patients (Bower, 1994). In the Netherlands it has been observed that there is an over representation of children from other countries in residential treatment who have been adopted (Hoksbergen, 1988).

Adopted children are thought to be at higher risk for problem behavior for many reasons, such as, exposure to negative experiences, genetic and biological factors, and problems dealing with personal identity. A number of studies have addressed the issue of whether children adopted by non relatives are at higher risk of developing behavioral and emotional problems than are children raised by relatives. Studies comparing the effects of adoption, growing up in institutions, or being reunited with the biological mother, have shown that adopted children have better outcomes (Tizard and Hodges, 1978; Bohman and Sigvardsson, 1980 as cited by Verhulst, 1989).

Research has not substantiated a correlation between interracial adoptions and adjustment problems. It is not yet clear whether the life-long adjustment of the transracially adopted child is different from that of a same race adopted child. Some researchers report that the crucial issue is the age at which the child is adopted.
Studies by Versluis-den Bieman and Verhulst (1995) have demonstrated that international adoptees are at a higher risk for developing later problem behavior than children of the same age from the general population. They stress that parents and professionals should learn as much as possible about the child’s background and functioning prior to adoption. Verhulst, Altlhaus, and Versluis-den Bieman (1992) also showed that the majority of international adoptees functioned quite well according to their parents’ reports. The importance of counseling during the early stages of adoption to introduce adequate intervention was stressed, for it was found that parents who knew something of the child’s early experiences helped create a more responsive environment and increased awareness of possible need for professional assistance.

Most international adoptees are not newborns, therefore, these children know at a young age that they are adopted and it is believed that early knowledge of adoption seems to enhance the adolescent developmental process. Brodqinsky (1984) reported that by seven years of age most adopted children could differentiate between birth and adoption as different modes of entering a family. Fahlberg (1986) suggests that by the age of 7, loss can be cognitively understood.

Children who are adopted after two to three years of age must face the process of integration into a new family. A history of poverty, neglect and loss cannot be erased by adoption (Elbow and Borgman, 1986). Their life experience
is usually very different from their new family which may contribute to a sense of separateness.

Some adoptive families describe a sense of strangeness that is experienced in their interactions with the older adoptee. This sense of strangeness can reinforce emotional distance and this is difficult for the parents, since spontaneous emotional interactions are part of how parents measure a successful parent-child bonding. In addition to physical strangeness there is a strangeness of everyday cognitive reactions and expectations regarding family roles (Hoffamnn-Riem, 1986). Older children must also undergo a process of desocialization before they are capable of assimilating the new patterns of another family (Hoffamnn-Riem, 1986).

In spite of all these hurdles, Triseliotis (1993) found many children quickly overcome developmental, linguistic and behavioral difficulties. Disruption rates for transracial adoptions are about the same (20-25%) as those for intraracial adoptions, and it is apparent that most adoptees do become attached to their new parents (Barth, 1988, Johnson, Shireman & Watson, 1987).

Attachment is defined by Beverly James (1994) as “a reciprocal, enduring, emotional, and physical affiliation between a child and a care giver.” The theory of attachment has been explored by Spitz (1947), Harlow (1959), Ainsworth (1969) and Bowlby (1982). These researchers have developed a theoretical base of knowledge dealing with the attachment between mother and child. Basic concepts of attachment
theory and loss of attachment described as trauma, have also been addressed by relatively current literature. Ainsworth, Wittig, Rajecki, Lamb, Obmascher, Rutter, Parkes, Stevenson-Hinde and Sroufe have been involved in research that supports the theory that attachment is essential to social and emotional development and that issues of attachment lie at the root of many emotional disorders (as cited by Bowlby, 1988).

Play therapy and the use of drawings have been used as therapeutic tools when dealing with attachment issues and have also been used as assessment tools. Drawing tests were used to assess intelligence in children as early as 1930. In the late 1940's projective drawings such as the Machover Draw-A-Person Test (D-A-P) and the Buck House-Tree-Person Test (H-T-P) were used to assess personality. Koppitz proposed a developmental scoring system for children's' human figure drawings and compiled a list of indicators for emotional difficulties (Buck, 1966; Groth-Marnat, 1984; Koppitz, 1968).

The work of Web (1991) and Gil (1991) demonstrate the power of using art as a means of communication. "Over time the drawings of a house, a tree, and a person each created on separate sheets of paper have become meaningful projective tests to help understand the inner structure of the individual" (Buck, 1981). Burns and Kaufman (1972) hypothesized that the kinetic family drawing, a picture of the family doing something together, sheds light on the child's object relations. Clinicians, Morton Chethik (1989)
and Nancy Web (1991) have also used parental education, therapeutic intervention and projective drawings for children with attachment issues.

Many clinicians believe that drawings may be a method for assessing self-expression, understanding and personal growth during the therapeutic process (Sikelianos, 1986). However, for personality assessment, drawings are best interpreted in combination with other assessment techniques rather than viewed as a primary diagnostic instrument (Buck, 1966; Groth-Marnat, 1984).

Opponents of using projective drawings as diagnostic tools have analyzed the D-A-P in numerous ways such as testing the reliability of the global aspects of the drawings (i.e. overall quality as a drawing), structural aspects (use of heavy lines and frequent erasures), or specific features of the drawing (eye emphasis, talon-like fingers, etc.).

Joiner, Schmidt and Barnett (1996) found that individual projective drawing indices such as size, detail, and line heaviness were reliably assessed but did not prove to be valid indicators of emotional distress among child and adolescent psychiatric inpatients. Joiner, Schmidt, Barnett (1997) state that while "drawings may be useful rapport-building devices, they are not useful measurement devices."

Martin (1983) believes that the bias inherent in the raters interpretation of projective drawings renders their use for the assessment of personality unethical, even when used in support of other data. Many clinicians believe that
literature addressing the interpretation of projective drawings should provide only general guidelines and that interpretations should be viewed with caution. 

Yama (1990) used the D-A-P to evaluate refugee children from a non-English speaking culture. Projective drawings were obtained from Vietnamese children who were evaluated when they entered a residential placement program in the United States. The dependent variable was adjustment, which was measured by the number of foster-care placements that had occurred for each child at a point in time five years after entry into the program. The D-A-P was used because it was believed that its interpretation would be similar across cultures and would not be distorted by the process of translation between two languages. The assumption was made that projective techniques produce responses and tap aspects of the personality thought to be independent of cultural differences. "Results showed that ratings of overall artistic quality, figure bizarreness, and estimated client adjustment all varied linearly as a function of number of foster-care placements." Yama suggested that projective drawings could provide a useful index of overall adjustment when better sources of information are not available. Paterson and Janzen (1994) defend the use of projective drawings with school children even though they acknowledge that bias may occur in the interpretation. Other researchers Sue and Sue (1987), Holtzman, (1980) and Lindzey (1961), were cited as addressing issues using projective techniques in cross-cultural research.
It is apparent that researchers do not agree over the use of projective drawings as a diagnostic tool, however, using art as a means of communication has been acknowledged for a long time. Drawings are especially useful with young children and with older children who have a difficult time expressing themselves verbally. Older adoptees are an example of a group that may experience difficulty talking about thoughts and feelings and may find drawing a comfortable way to express themselves.

Since international adoptees often speak a different language, this may be an example of the axiom, "a picture is better than a thousand words." Communication is essential to building understanding, and understanding is essential in building new healthy attachments.

The majority of current articles on international adoptions address the pros and cons of becoming an adoptive parent or evaluate the impact of adoptions as a factor contributing to childhood and adolescent problems, rather than addressing how to enhance, build or support the adoption. Few suggestions are made other than learning as much as possible about the child’s culture and past experiences. Few researchers have addressed ways to enhance and strengthen attachment and communication with this population. This research project tried to bridge that gap.

Hypothesis

Drawings may be helpful in building communication between parent and child. This study proposes that when the parent and child draw together it will build understanding
and rapport.
CHAPTER THREE

Method

This study is based on multiple case research methodology as described by Miles and Huberman (1984) and as interpreted by Colin Robson (1994) and on grounded theory as described by Rubin and Babbie (1997). It was anticipated that parents would report that understanding and rapport would be increased by using art as communication. However, the focus of the study changed as other meaningful themes were brought to light. The comments and observations of the parents during the discussion focused on topics of special interest related to international adoptions.

As a participant observer, the researcher took notes during the session. Even though synthesizing and organizing the data was subjective due to the informal observational method, the exploratory nature of the study would have been limited by a more formal methodology.

Sample

Six families were studied. Snowball sampling began with an initial phone contact with the leader of the Southern California branch of the Holt adoptive parent organizations. Four families out of the six families interviewed were members of a Southern California based support group sponsored by Holt agency for families who had adopted through Holt. The interviews lasted approximately one hour. The adopted children were from Korea, the Philippines, India and Mexico. Of these five families, three had at least one child from Korea. Three of the 9 children
involved in the study were adopted as infants. The ages of the children ranged from 5 to 17. Family size ranged from 1 child to 12 children. Three parental units had biological children of their own prior to adopting. All children in the study had lived with their adoptive families for at least 2 years. All the children spoke English.

Data Collection and Procedure

The researcher met with the parents and the child in the family home with the purpose of exploring the parent’s response to the kinetic family drawings produced by the children and determining if parents perceived the activity as rapport building. The purpose of the interview was to explore the parents perception of the relationship with their child and to determine if the parents felt the process of drawing together built rapport.

First the parents answered a brief questionnaire, Appendix C. These questions explored the parents’ perception of the parent-child relationship. After completing a picture of the family doing something together the parents and the child described their pictures to each other. Following the format found in Appendix D the researcher encouraged the parents to express what they found significant about the process and about their child’s drawings. The researcher took notes on the informal discussion that developed. Topics of discussion were initiated by parents. A written report summarizing and analyzing the researcher’s observations was developed for each case study.
Protection of Human Subjects

All families within this study remain anonymous. The participants were identified by assigned numbers. Confidentiality was assured to all participants. A consent form (Appendix A) was given to each parental unit. This form clearly outlined the purpose of the study, and assured the participants that at any point in the study they could withdraw consent.

Debriefing statements (Appendix B) were given to the parents, and a list of referral sources was available for parents.
CHAPTER FOUR

Results

This was a multi-case study. Separate written summaries were developed for each of the six families. Using the Basic Information Sheet (Appendix C) as a guide, the basic composition of the family was recorded. The responses to Appendix C, exploring the parent's perceptions of the parent-child relationship, were recorded. A written description detailing literally what the researcher saw in the drawing was reported along with the reaction of the parents. The researcher's observations regarding the family dynamics constitute the final section for each family.

Family Interview Number 1

Basic Information

The Mother and Father have been married fourteen years. They had a blended family of three children. After the children grew up and moved away they adopted two girls, D age 13 and L age 15. Because one of their older children had experienced emotional problems, the parents felt they could be of benefit to other troubled children.

L came directly from Mexico when she was 9 years old. She is now 15 years of age. The adoption was arranged by an agency located in Temecula, California. The process took two years. The agency did not offer further assistance during the adjustment period. The family does not belong to an adoptive parent group, although the parents occasionally are in social contact with the director of the agency. L has attempted suicide several times and has been
hospitalized. The Mother reported that L has learning
disabilities and does not do well in school.

D was adopted from Los Angeles County. D spent her
first three years as a foster child. The parents reported
that Los Angeles County had offered services and financial
assistance, however, they have never requested services from
the county.

The parents reported that art is a way of life for the
family. The Mother paints and does crafts. The girls have
had art lessons. The Mother sometimes draws with L. in
order to assist her in her drawing skills. The Father does
not enjoy drawing.

Responses to questionnaire for L only (Q=question; A=answer)

Q. How well do you and your child get along?
A. Fairly well, not so well ("they are teenagers")

Q. How would you rate the communication between you and
your child?
A. From one extreme to the other based on the child’s
receptiveness. Overall, between good and fair.

Q. Do you trust your child?
A. Not sure

Q. Do you feel close to your child?
A. Yes, for the most part, not sure

Q. Do you feel that your child is becoming attached to you?
A. Yes, very much (L)

Description of drawings

The Father drew a picture of the family in a blue car
going to the movies. He is driving the car. All the
individuals in the family have eyes and are smiling. A smiling sun is outlined in yellow overhead. Father described his picture as being an event that the family enjoys. He reported that he enjoys being able to take his daughters to something they want to do.

The Mother's drawing is of the many animals on the farm; llamas, dogs, cats, chickens and a rooster. The animals have eyes, however, none of the family members have eyes. D is outlined in blue and reading a green book alone in the corner of the page. Father is off to the side and is outlined in blue. L is outlined in red and her clothing is colored in solid red. She is sitting on a black horse in the center of the page holding one end of the red reins with Mother holding the red reins at the front of the horse. Mother is outlined in red and is colored in yellow. Mother described the picture as representing their home life. The horse belongs to Mother, and she controls it as L rides her horse. She described Father as always supportive, helping, assisting and "backing us up." She drew a vine on the house to represent growth.

L drew her sister and herself riding surf boards on a flat blue sea. The parents, shaded by an umbrella, are together on shore with just their arms and heads showing. All the family are outlined in brown. Two gray birds fly overhead. The parents described L's picture as showing how L always wants to have a good time with the family watching her play. Mother expressed that L is physical and focuses on herself, not on the family. She reports that L dreams
about going to the beach since they live in the desert, and the children always want to be someplace else. She noted that L had placed D by her side in the water and that L has expressed that she wants a closer relationship with D. Mother expressed that the girls see themselves having fun outside of the home; whereas she is “home focused.”

D drew a picture of the family in a large heavy boat with a solid black smoke stack which appeared more like a large anchor in the center of the boat. The boat is labeled USSR. The ten humans depicted are uniform small stick figures shown from the waist up with matching brown curls. Blue clouds dominate the sky. The parents questioned D regarding the meaning of the picture. She stated that it was a cruise ship and that the extended family is represented.

Researcher’s observations

The parents made many didactic comments throughout the drawing process. The majority of their comments were instructive. There seemed to be a great deal of tension between the girls and their parents. The girls seldom made eye contact with the researcher or their parents. As the family discussed the drawings, the girls’ affect was guarded and tentative. If corrected by the parents, they would adjust their explanation to be acceptable to the parents.

There were several reoccurring themes in the Mom’s drawing and explanations. Mom’s drawing of L in the center of the page portrays how L is the center of attention in the family. L has a history of self-mutilation and been
hospitalized for attempting suicide. L is in therapy and the parents are considering placing her in residential treatment.

The researcher discussed with the parents her concern regarding D's drawing and advised them to discuss it with a professional. The parents did not see the drawings by D as problematic and they described D as "the good girl" and "a good student" but a "loner."

The parents' response to the drawing process was positive. Both parents expressed that they found the process helpful and recommended art as a "wonderful tool." The Mom felt the drawings reinforced what they already believed to be true about the girls.

Family Interview 2

Basic Information

The parents have been married for 27 years. They have eleven children, ten who live at home. Eight of the children are adopted and three are "home grown." The ages are as follows: a 22-year-old birth son; a 18-year-old birth daughter; a 15-year-old birth daughter; a 12-year-old son from Korea who arrived at 3 months of age; a 10-year-old daughter from Korea who arrived at 4 months of age; a 16-year-old daughter from India who arrived at 8 years of age with multiple birth defects; a 7-year-old daughter from India who arrived at 16 months of age with multiple birth defects; a 7-year-old son from Korea with titanium legs who arrived at 4 years of age; a 6-year-old son from Korea who is mute and arrived at 15 months of age; a 2-year-old son
from California who arrived at 7 weeks of age with multiple birth defects; a 2-year-old son with multiple birth defects who arrived at 7 months of age.

The family has taken advantage of the assistance offered by the agency that facilitated the adoptions. They have been leaders of a large parent support group for 12 years and are actively involved in Holt Adoption Agency activities. When asked if the family enjoy drawing they reported that individual members "doodle" occasionally.

Responses to Questionnaire

Since this is a very large family they chose to fill out the form for only two family members: A, age 7 from Korea and D, age 12 from Korea.

Q. How well do you and your child get along?
A. very well (A); fairly well (D)

Q. How would you rate the communication between you and your child?
A. Good (A and D)

Q. Do you trust your child?
A. Yes, very much (A); yes, for the most part (D)

Q. Do you feel close to your child?
A. Yes, very much (A & D)

Q. Do you feel that your child is becoming attached to you?
A. Yes, very much (A & D)

Description of Drawings

Father drew a picture of the family around the table with himself smiling as he serves the family pizza. He explained that he enjoys providing food for the family. He
indicated who the individuals were around the table by hair color. The children bantered a great deal with the Father as he shared his drawing.

Mother drew a picture of the family playing together in a park. Mother is pictured photographing the family. The three “home grown” children are standing together. Hair color identifies the individuals, as well as special needs equipment and characteristic mannerisms. Father is swinging one child around. As the Mother described the children in the picture, she addressed her comments to the children rather than to the researcher. The children were engaged and responding verbally to the mother’s comments.

A’s picture depicts seven members of the family. Mother and Father are holding hands in the center. Two of his handicapped sisters are in airplanes taking off. He drew himself hanging upside down with a green ball on his foot. All the characters are smiling. His two older bothers are represented on either side of the family.

D drew several detailed pictures of himself. He labeled each figure with a capital letter in order to conveniently describe each picture to us. He insisted on explaining the picture himself. The parents were amused by this and agreed. He is the large figure in the center of the page, standing in front of an airplane taking off for Korea. In another picture he is in Korean traditional costume. He also drew himself as a small child. There is another small picture of himself seeing planets through a telescope. Close to the center there is a picture of
himself with his Mother. The entire family was amused by D’s picture and laughed while D told about his drawings.

Researchers Observations:

The parents were calm and relaxed but animated in their responses to each child’s drawings. The atmosphere was relaxed as family members teased Mother and Father as well as each other. It was clear that the parents are the head cheerleaders and the family members reflect this attitude towards each other. Each child wanted to talk about their own drawings. The children made remarks such as, “good job”, “that’s cool”, or “oh, yea” as their siblings explained their picture.

Each child has a different relationship with Mother, and each child has jobs to perform within the family. These jobs were performed with little prompting by Mother and Father. Each member takes care of other members in the family with no apparent resentment. Unconditional affection was demonstrated by the positive ongoing verbal exchanges.

Two outstanding characteristics of this family were respect for individuality and interest in each family member’s cultures of origin. This family of special needs and vastly different backgrounds appeared to have strong family spirit. The family is actively involved with other families in the adoption community, as well as in their local church, community and school. The children are in dance lessons, martial arts lesson, and church programs. The Korean children are involved in a Korean heritage enrichment program provided by the Korean community. The
older daughter from India expressed that she wishes there was more available for her.

The drawings provided a forum for the researcher to participate in a family event. The drawings demonstrated the varying types of activities that each family member valued and especially cast light on their relationship to the Mother. It was apparent that the Mother shared specific activities of value to each child.

When asked if the parents had learned anything from the pictures, the oldest daughter age 18, spoke up and said, "Our parents don’t need drawings to understand us, they just do. They talk to us and we talk to them." The parents expressed that the process had been fun and they would recommend it to their friends, which they did.

Family Interview No 3

Basic Information

The parents have been married for nineteen years. They have one child age 11. Their child came to their home directly from Korea via Holt Adoption Agency when he was 4 1/2 months of age. The agency assisted them throughout the adjustment period and they continue to attend Holt Adoption Agency activities. They have never been to Korea.

All members of the family have enjoyed drawing individually. They also explained that they enjoy drawing with their son because it is, "relaxing, playful, creative, and a non-electronic activity." The parent’s also enjoy teaching sketching skills to their son.
Responses to questionnaire

Q. How well do you and your child get along?
A. Fairly well

Q. How would you rate the communication between you and your child?
A. Good

Q. Do you trust your child?
A. Yes, for the most part

Q. Do you feel close to your child?
A. Yes, very much

Q. Do you feel that your child is becoming attached to you?
A. Yes, very much

Description of Drawings

Father drew a detailed picture of himself and his wife in a boat rowing on the sea with their son swimming by the side of the boat. The family had vacationed on an island in the Pacific. Dad described how much they had enjoyed the vacation together. In the drawing Father is directing the boat and being supportive of his son as he explores the sea.

Mother’s picture includes three trees and a winding road leading to the faces of D, Dad and herself encased in a large heart. She described the picture as being symbolic of growth, the road of life, and the heart of love which surrounds her family. A smiling octopus is right over her head outside of the heart. She explained that the octopus was from the island and that she was afraid of the octopus, but the family remained safe.

D’s picture is of an island in the middle of a vibrant...
blue sea. The island is a volcano spewing forth fire. Mother, Father and D are small stick figures on the island. The word, "RUN!" is printed in small letters near the figures. Out at sea there is an atomic cloud and in the sky are four jets. An aircraft carrier is on the horizon with a plane taking off. The large round sun has alternate red and yellow rays shaped like small triangles. The parents described Derick's drawing as portraying the island they visited. They explained how they had studied the origin of the islands prior to going on the trip. They reported that D was very interested in military themes but they wondered if D may be exploring what would happen if anything happened to them. The family talks openly about D's birth mother, and the parents believe that the loss of the birth mother is an important theme for D. D was anxious to explain the drawing himself. He told a lengthy action adventure story that grew in complexity as he recounted it. The family was in grave danger, and they are running for their lives. He is the hero and survives bombs, volcanoes, and war.

Researcher's Observations

Both parents are high school teachers and they have taken a teaching role as well as a parenting role with D. Throughout the drawing process they often instructed D on how to behave. D's diet, activities, and social contacts are very carefully monitored by the parents. D is the center of the parents' attention and efforts. The family manages time carefully and according to a predetermined
D appeared free to disagree with his parents. At one point the Mother began describing a dream that D had shared with her. Promptly D expressed discomfort with her sharing the dream. The Mother expressed surprise that D did not want her to tell the dream to the researcher. The dream addressed the topic of loss. A recurring theme in the discussion was the parent's perception that the loss of the birth mother was a concern of D. Another theme was their belief that D was worried about their possible death or illness.

The response of the family to drawing together was positive. They felt that D loved drawing with them. They did not feel that they had learned anything new, but that it had still been a positive shared experience for them. They expressed that they would recommend this exercise to other parents.

Family Interview 4

Basic Information

The parents have been married 19 years. They have three children. A, age 14, is from the Philippines and is their only adopted child. The Father is also from the Philippines. The entire family has visited the Philippines and have roots there. They adopted A through Holt Adoption Agency. The adoption process took six months. Holt Adoption Agency offered further assistance to the family and the family has taken advantage of it. They remain very involved in a support group.
Responses to Questionnaire

Q. How well do you and your child get along?
A. Very well

Q. How would you rate the communication between you and your child?
A. Good

Q. Do you trust your child?
A. Yes, very much

Q. Do you feel close to your child?
A. Yes, very much

Q. Do you feel that your child is becoming attached to you?
A. Yes, very much

Description of drawings

Father drew a picture of the family sitting together watching a movie of a man on a horse. He used brown for the drawing. He explained that seeing movies was a shared family outing that everyone enjoyed. Mom drew a picture of an orange and brown mesa in the background with the family in a gray van traveling to Arizona to see the extended family. She explained that extended family is very important to them. A’s family picture portrays the family at the zoo. The trees in the drawing have green apples, and the rest of the picture is outlined in black. All the members of the family are smiling and are in chronological order.

The parents explained that A’s picture shows one of the many activities they have participated in. The family is very involved in their church, in an adoption support group,
and in international student relations. The family did not address adoption issues at all during the drawing. The entire process was centered about family events.

Researcher’s Observations

The parents had invited two Korean students to join us. This may have contributed to the superficial level of the discussion. The focus of the discussion was on the family unit and activities and never addressed adoption. A appeared quiet and reserved and the family may have been respecting her privacy, and therefore would not discuss these issues with strangers.

The parents were relaxed about their role as parents. They perceive their family as normal with normal teenage children. The reoccurring theme was their participation in the community and in their extended family. Since the parents knew this interview was to center around the adopted child, it seemed unusual that the family did not address these issues.

The parents expressed that they could see that this process could be helpful for some families, especially if the children were younger. They did not learn anything from the exercise but enjoyed the opportunity to help the researcher in completing her degree.

Family Interview 5

Basic Information

The parents have been married for 13 years. They have adopted two children from Korea. K, the son, is 9 years of age and M, the daughter, is 7 years of age. They both
arrived as babies. The family has been to Korea where they were guests of the first lady of Korea. The family has been featured on both Korean television stations and Los Angeles television stations. The Father was also adopted from Korea and is half Korean. The family think that this contributed to the Korean Media interest in their family.

The children were adopted through Holt Adoption Agency and the family has remained involved in Holt Adoption Agency activities; however, they are not formally involved in any support groups.

The family enjoys drawing and coloring together. They expressed that they enjoy the communication that results from the drawing process.

Response to Questionaire
(The parents ranked both children the same for all questions)

Q. How well do you and your child get along? 
A. Very well

Q. How would you rate the communication between you and your child? 
A. Good

Q. Do you trust your child? 
A. Yes, very much

Q. Do you feel close to your child? 
A. Yes, very much

Q. Do you feel that your child is becoming attached to you? 
A. Yes, very much

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Descriptions of Drawings

The Father drew a picture of the family by the beach. There are two boats in the background. Father and Mother are side by side, and the two children follow. The people are drawn in black, and it is clear who each person is due to hair color and dress. The children teased the Father about his drawing, and he responded in a teasing manner. Mother's drawing is of the family in the mountains. Father and K, the son, are outside riding bikes, and Mother and M, the daughter, are inside the house. There are three mountains in the background, three clouds, a stream and two trees. As she explained the activity, the family responded with comments about the trip.

K's picture is of the museum. The family is colored with purple crayons and a large dinosaur is standing by the family. The parent's explained that K is very interested in the dinosaur museum. M's picture is of the family going to the river. The van is outlined in black and dominates the page. Each member of the family is detailed for individuality. The road is solid black with a vibrant yellow dotted line in the center. The van's large head lights illuminate the way.

The Father and Mother said that they had been looking forward to our meeting and dismissed the children from the table to go play while we discussed adoption issues.

Researcher's Observations

The parents expressed confidence in their role as parents. They shared stories of how they met their children
and how they bonded with them. They reported that they have had many discussions with their children regarding their birth parents. While in Korea, the parents had told K how proud they were of the way he behaved with the media. In response K said that he wanted his birth mother to be proud of him and to know that he was O.K. They also told about how M had cried on her 6th birthday as she expressed her concern whether her birth mother had ever thought of her on her birthday. The Mother assured her that she must be thinking of her and must be longing to be with her. The parents had been thinking about the best way to address future disclosures regarding the birth parents. It became apparent that the personal adoption experience of the Father has played a major influence in how the parents process their children's experience.

The parents expressed that the drawing activity provided an opportunity to meet with the researcher, to share their story, and to discuss adoption issues. They also thought their children had fun drawing with them.

**Family Interview 6**

**Basic Information**

This couple have been married for 28 years. They have six children. Three are adopted. B, age 15, is a son from Korea. L, is a six-year-old daughter from India, and A is a four-year-old son from Thailand. The parents have visited Thailand but none of the other countries. They used three different adoption agencies and the adoptions took about one year each. Each agency offered further assistance during
the adjustment process. The family has remained involved in Holt Adoption Agency activities.

The Mother reported that the family has drawn together in the past as a way of “being able to be with each other on a one-on-one basis.”

Responses to Questionnaire

Q. How well do you and your child get along?
A. Very well (L & A); fairly well (B)

Q. How would you rate the communication between you and your child?
A. Excellent (A); good (L); fair (B)

Q. Do you trust your child?
A. Yes, very much (L & A); sometimes (B)

Q. Do you feel close to your child?
A. Yes, very much (all children)

Q. Do you feel that your child is becoming attached to you?
A. Yes, very much (all children)

Description of Drawings

The Mother drew a picture of the entire family with a Christmas tree. She expressed that drawing was an awkward and embarrassing experience for her and repeatedly verbalized concern over the quality of her drawing. The Father declined to participate in the activity and left the room. When the Mother was asked to explain the children’s drawings she teased each child about their drawing abilities.

B’s drawing is vividly colored. Each family member is colored brightly and individually labeled by name. The
background is covered with blue lines and a smiling sun is peaking out from behind one of the three clouds in the sky. All the faces are smiling and B is standing between his older brother and sister. The Mother commented on how much the older brothers and sisters mean to B. L’s drawing has three zones: flowers in a row along the lower edge; the family lined up in a row in order of age; mountains, clouds and a partial sun. She reported that the flowers are for the girls of the family and the mountains are for the boys who like to go hiking. A, the youngest, drew a green foreground with two trees. One tree has large smiling eyes, a mouth and a large star on top labeled Dad. The blue tree behind Dad also has a star and is labeled B, Mom, L, and A. They are shaped in the form of smiling red hearts along the side of the trees. Mom described A’s picture as showing how much A enjoys love. She asked A questions about the picture which appeared to please A very much.

Researcher’s Observations

The Mother teased the children a lot. She was careful not to discuss the children’s past until the children had left the room. The children have been tested for I.Q. and learning disabilities. Parental expectations for their adopted children are based on these test results. There are high performance standards for all family members. The Mother reported that the two youngest children have some learning disabilities.

Food has been a big issue between the Mother and A. A often has refused to eat and this has been an on-going
struggle. During B’s early teen years he lied to his parents about class performance and expectations. Mom reports this behavior has been in sharp contrast to their birth children. The difference between raising birth children and adopted children was mentioned several times in the discussion.

The Mother reports that B wants to identify with Korean culture. She perceived this as a problem since B is half white and will never be accepted as Korean; however, Ben continues to identify strongly with Koreans and has been identified as Korean by his white acquaintances at school.

L expressed that she wishes she could participate in cultural events geared to adopted children from India, however, the Mother does not know of any programs provided by the Indian community. She thinks that the interest of the Los Angeles Koreans in teaching adoptees about their heritage is unique.

The researcher observed that the children seemed to enjoy drawing. All children tried to please their Mother and the researcher, which was awkward since the mother kept saying how “stupid” the exercise was. This was surprising to the researcher since the mother had been so positive about participating during the initial contact stage and over the phone.

When asked if she had learned anything new about the children from participating in the exercise, she responded that the drawings showed family activities that the entire family enjoyed. The mother reported that she felt
uncomfortable drawing and would not recommend the activity to other families.
CHAPTER FIVE

Summary of Data

The process of drawing together was perceived by the parents as a positive, fun experience for five out of the six families. Family No. 1 found the process helpful and recommended art as a "wonderful tool." Five out of the six families reported that they would recommend the exercise to other parents. Family No. 5 expressed that the activity gave them an opportunity to share their adoption story with the researcher. None of the parents expressed that they had learned anything new about their children as a result of drawing together. Two sets of parents expressed that the drawings reinforced what they already believed was true about their children.

Several of the drawings were of imaginative events, however, most of the drawings were of actual family outings that had occurred in the past. When drawings of family events were shared, members of the family would interrupt and reminisce about their memories. In families where a parent would critique the drawing by questioning the child's subject matter or style of drawing, there was not the banter and humor that would be exchanged in families that shared and did not critique the drawings. Parents who reported that they distrusted their child tended to critique their child's drawing.

Topics of discussion included normal parental concerns such as limit setting, school performance, individuation and family vacations; however, there were also topics unique to
interacial adoptions. Two dominate themes were the parent’s and children’s interest in the child’s culture of origin and their interest in the birth parents. The parents were concerned about what information about birth parents was appropriate to share and at what developmental stage it was best to share the information. Concern about how to answer their child’s questions regarding why the birth parent gave them up was discussed in five out of the six families. In two families the children were interested in how the birth parents felt toward them and had expressed concern and worry about the well being of their birth parents. Since the only source of information for the child regarding the birth parents is the adoptive parents, the adoptive parent’s attitude is important when sharing this information.

All the parents shared at least one significant event that contributed to the early bonding with their children. Illness, a hospital stay, and night fears all contributed to the bonding process. Parents reported that sleeping with the child at first seemed to help. All the parents reported that their child had bonded to them.

Exposure to the children’s native culture through camps, trips, and literature were valued by all the parents and the children. Families with Korean adoptees were interested in helping the children keep in touch with their Korean heritage. This was possible because a Korean church in Los Angeles sponsors a program which educates Korean adoptees about their culture by taking the adoptees into
their homes for one to two weeks during the summer.

Three of the parents reported discomfort in response to questions from strangers about their family. Comments that their love of their adopted child was somehow less than the love of a biological child was offensive to them. Having a friend who had adopted or meeting with other parents who were facing similar situations was helpful for these parents.

Analyzing the verbal responses of the parents led to indicators about family dynamics. For example how is humor used by the parents? How supportive vs. how instructive is the parenting style? How free are the children in sharing? How open or closed is the family system? What is valued the most, individuality or sameness? How integrated into the community is the family? Are the parent’s feelings secure about the parent-child bond?

Implications for Social Work

The process of drawing and discussing pictures of the family engaging in an activity together in this study was found to build rapport between parents and children. When families reminisced about positive shared experiences it strengthened family bonds. Reminiscing built a sense of family solidarity. When the child drew a picture of himself/herself in the context of the family, it helped to reinforce family membership.

Balancing the development of identification with the adoptive family and the obvious physical and cultural differences between family members is demonstrated in the
drawings of the children. How these forces blend are reflected in the drawings and in the family discussion following the completion of the drawings.

When the drawing takes a more fanciful direction or the content reveals family dynamics the process of drawing and discussing pictures of the family engaged in an activity becomes a powerful assessment tool for the social worker. The resulting family discussion provides clues and indicators regarding communication style, family dynamics, parenting styles, the children's level of individuation and their sense of ease with their parents.

When the family is engaged in an activity rather than just a interview to talk about the family, it is more likely that the social worker will be able to observe clues about normal family dynamics rather than just "company manners." This is especially pertinent since international adoptees and their parents can experience pressure to prove that they are a viable family and that there are "no problems".

The drawing session also acted as an ice breaker for the social worker to engage in discussions of topics unique to families of international adoptees. Topics of discussion included cultural identity, the children's interest in their birth parents, and questions regarding parenting. Parents who did not have biological children of their own expressed a desire to understand what normal developmental issues are and how to determine how being adopted and racially different affect the normal developmental process.
Limitations

The explorative nature of this study and the multiple case study design has several limitations. First, due to the small number of families considered in this research study, caution should be used in generalizing results to all families of adoptees. Second, many ethnic classifications were not included in this study which further reduces its generalizability. Third, due to the fact that the data was analyzed using subjective methods only, there is a lack of more objective data analysis that would serve to support study conclusions. Fourth, use of only one researcher is a weaker test of study conclusions than would be present with several researchers who could provide the additional strength of interrater reliability.

Future Research

Future research of this issue could be strengthened by including copies of the family's drawings, as these pictures provide a powerful visual illustration of the themes discussed. The addition of these drawings for interpretation by clinicians would also add to the fund of clinical knowledge available to Social Workers. Including adoptive families who are not in support groups would also increase generalizability.

Possible questions to explore in future research regarding adoption would include when and how children should be informed of the psychosocial background of birth parents and how the adoptive parent's conceptualization of the natural mother's abandonment influence the child's sense
of self. Long term studies of children who are integrated into their culture of origin compared to children who do not have an opportunity to identify with the culture of origin would add to the body of research on foreign adoptees.

Other possible questions include the following: 1. How does cultural identity influence the child’s sense of U.S. citizenship as an adult? 2. How does cultural identity impact attachment to the extended family of the adoptee? 3. How does humor relate to parenting style and the child’s comfort level in communicating with their parents? 4. Does parental trust vs. distrust of the child correlate with parental praise vs. criticism of their child’s drawing? 5. Does long term involvement with the adoption agency enhance the quality of family functioning and bonding? 6. Is it of value to have a Korean case worker for Korean adoptees? 6. What role do the older adoptive siblings and grandparents play in the adoptees identification with the new family?

Conclusion

This study suggests that the Kinetic family drawing does builds family rapport and is a helpful tool for caseworkers. It can assist in creating an environment in which the social worker can observe family dynamics and communication patterns. In addition, it can act as an early detector of potential problems offering the social worker an opportunity to make recommendations for intervention.

The Kinetic family drawing is a much stronger assessment tool if the social worker is trained in how to
interpret and use art in therapy. However, this study demonstrated that even without specialized training, the process provided a helpful tool for the case worker. It provided a bridge to address topics of concern for foreign adoptees and their parents, such as loss of the birth parents, loss of culture of origin, loss of heritage and identity confusion.

The hypothesis proposed in this study that understanding and rapport will be built when the parent and child draw together was supported. The findings of this study suggest that the Kinetic family drawing does build family rapport and is a helpful tool for caseworkers.
APPENDIX A

Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in a study designed to explore the perceptions of parents that have adopted children from other countries. The influx of children adopted from other countries has increased the need for social workers to have practice techniques that will assist in building rapport between the parents and children in these newly formed families. In this study both the parent and child will draw a picture of their family doing something together. It is anticipated that the drawings will be an effective tool to build rapport between parent and child. This study is being conducted by Sharon Mellor M.S.W. student at Cal State San Bernardino under the supervision of Matt Riggs, Ph.D., professor at Loma Linda University. He can be reached at (909)-558-8709. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board of California State University, San Bernardino.

The student will meet with your family twice. Prior to drawing, the parents will answer five questions. The same questions will be asked again after the drawings are completed. Each session will take around ninety minutes. The researcher will discuss with you what it was like to draw with your child.

Since children often can express themselves more clearly in drawing than they can verbally, the drawing could make you aware of issues that are troubling your child. A list of agencies familiar with adoption issues will be given after the completion of the final interview. You will be able to keep the drawings. If you wish, at the conclusion of this study you may receive a copy of the report. Please be assured that any information you provide will be held in strict confidence by the researcher and supervisor. At no time will your name be used in any part of the report.

Your participation in this research is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time during
the study. If you should withdraw for any reason we will not use any data received in your interview.

I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and understand, the nature and purpose of this study, and I freely consent to participate. My child has verbally agreed to participate. 

______________ date

________________________ parental signature

________________________ parental signature

______________ please check here to indicate your child's verbal consent.
APPENDIX B
Debriefing and Resources

The influx of children adopted from other countries has increased the need for social workers to have practice techniques that will assist in building rapport between the parents and children in these newly formed families. This study looked at how parents responded to the process of drawing with their adopted child, with the anticipation that the process of drawing together would assist in building rapport. Thank you for participating. Your time and the experiences you have shared have enriched this study. It is hoped that the experience of drawing with your child will have been helpful in building rapport in your family.

If you would like, you may have a copy of the study after it is completed. The results of the study will be available Oct. 1999. If you have any questions regarding your participation in the study, please call me. I may be reached by calling 909-799-3035. You may also contact the faculty supervisor Matt Riggs, Ph.D., professor at Loma Linda University, through the Social Work Department at Cal State, 909-880-5501 or at Loma Linda University, (909) 558-8709.

If you should ever need to talk to someone regarding issues of adopted children, there are several agencies you may find helpful. A list of clinicians and agencies who familiar with issues related to adopted children and their families is attached to this form.

Clinicians

Martha Allen, Superior Adoptions ...............(909) 945-3768
Charlotte Laiva, L.C.S.W .........................(909) 383-9749
Deborah Silverstein, L.C.S.W......................(714) 851-8637

Agencies

Adoption Connection .............................(415) 202-7494
Assoc.of Korean Adoptees .......................1208 N. Brand Blvd.
                                             Glendale, Ca. 92102
Child and Family Resources .....................(817) 685-9463
Bi Lingual Family Counseling ...................(909) 986-7111
The Family Network .............................(800) 888-0242
Holt Adoptions of Portland .....................(503) 257-9903
APPENDIX C

Basic Information Sheet

How long have you been married?__________________________

How many children do you have?__________________________

Are any of your other children adopted?_____________________

Did your child come directly to your home from his/her country of origin?__________________________________________

How long has __________________________been living with you?

When is __________________________birthday?

When did __________________________arrive in your home?

What country is __________________________from?

Have you ever been to the country your child is from?______

If so, when?__________________________________________

Do you speak the same language as________________________?

Who arranged the adoption for you?_______________________

How long was the adoption process?_______________________

If it was an agency did they offer further assistance during the adjustment period?_______________________________

If so, did you ever take advantage of it?___________________

Do you belong to an adoptive parent’s group?______________

Do you enjoy drawing?__________________________________

Do you ever draw with your children?_____________________

If so, what do you like about drawing with your children?______________________________________________________
Appendix D

Questionnaire to be given prior to the family drawing together.

Please circle the answer closest to your impressions.

How well do you and your child get along?
  very well
  fairly well
  not so well
  very poorly

How would you rate the communication between you and your child?
  Excellent
  Good
  Fair
  Poor

Do you trust your child?
  Yes, very much
  Yes, for the most part
  Not sure
  No

Do you feel close to your child?
  Yes, very much
  Yes, for the most part
  Not sure
  No

Do you feel that your child is becoming attached to you?
  Yes, very much
  Yes, for the most part
  Not sure
  NO
Appendix E

Questions to ask the parents by the interviewer after each drawing session.

1. Describe your picture to me.
2. Tell me about your child’s picture.
3. Based on your child’s drawings, do you think your child views your family differently than you do?

Questions the researcher asks herself during and after each interview.

1. How do the parents perceive their role and their effectiveness as parents?
2. How do they perceive the roles and attitudes of other family members?
3. What is the affective manner of the parents?
4. Are there any reoccurring themes in their explanations?
5. Describe the parent’s approach to explaining their child’s picture.
6. How does the researcher’s private observations regarding the pictures differ with the parent’s verbalized observations.

Questions to be asked in the final interview.

1. How did you feel doing the drawings together the first time and the second time?
2. How did your perceive your child’s receptiveness to the process of drawing together?
3. Did you learn anything as a result? Do you think your child learned anything?
4. Would you recommend this exercise to other parents?