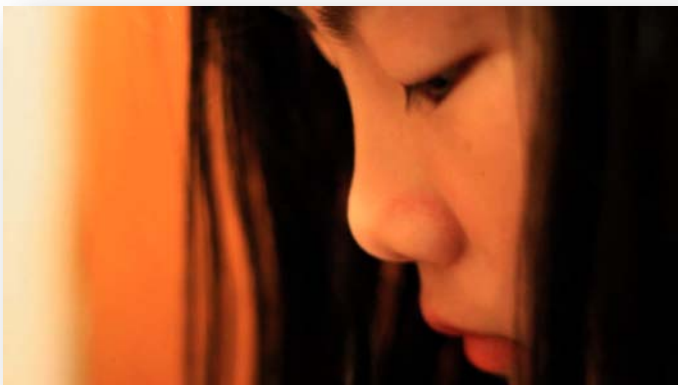


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Thesis

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Adoption is one the richest relationships that exists in this world. Adoption also can be extremely controversial and political, unnecessarily. International adoption is an issue close to my heart as well as large part of who I am as a creative person. This relationship between parent and child affects the way I view the world. Through three short documentaries adoption can be explored, understood, and viewed through the lens of those who color my world. Leo Tolstoy once wrote that “Happy families are all alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” I believe that Tolstoy is correct to my core. Although all happy families are alike, I believe Tolstoy neglected to mention that they might not look alike.



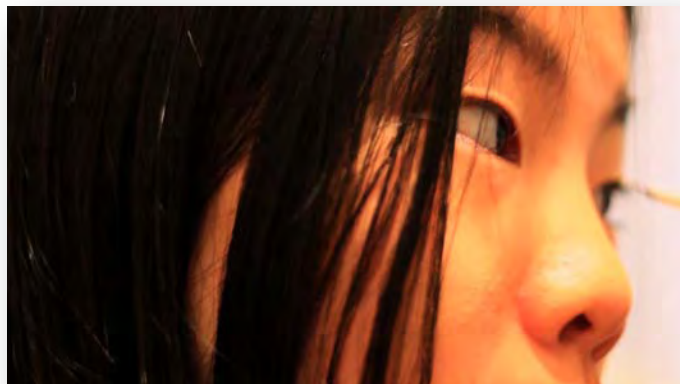
Two important facets of my exploration of adoption include race and adolescence. Race plays a major factor in adoptive families, and can create different issues that are

inevitable. Adolescence is a time period in which many issues surrounding identity (cultural and otherwise) come up. I believe the best place to explore the concept of multicultural families is through private moments between the subject and viewer.

Each short documentary will explore a challenge, beauty, detail, or blessing that uniquely surrounds multicultural families.

The initial video explores self-image of an adolescent adoptee. The subject in the initial video is my younger sister. Narration is accompanied by images that play with depth of field. This video is a sort of diary for my sister, the adopted child, allowing her to ramble freely in a teenage way. The viewer of this video has no interaction whatsoever with her. The audience is given a small glimpse into the self-image issues that go along with being of a different race from the people that surround the adoptee.

The first documentary is five minutes long, and conjures up images with which we are all familiar. Insecurities, dissatisfaction, and coping mechanisms are all ideas often associated with being a thirteen-year-old adolescent. However, the highlighted difference is that fact that these issues stem from adoption and are slightly different for the adoptee than would be for any other teenager. One of the compelling aspects of this video is the insecurity that surrounds returning to the country of the adoptee's birth.



Cultural heritage and “Chinese-ness” is something that accompanies being adopted from China. This can lead to insecurities and issues for young adoptees, as seen in my first video. This issue leads

me into my second short documentary, focusing on the adoptive family and child. The first video highlights, perhaps, isolation and insecurity. However, the second video concerns being part of a whole. The second documentary examines



closely the day-to-day life of a multicultural family. This video emphasizes that familial structure that is at play in an adoptive situation. The adoptee is not alone in her journey, but experiencing it with those that surround and love her. An adoptive family takes on much of the criticisms and strife that accompanies adoption. Georgia O'Keefe painted flowers large and bright so that the audience would take note of something that could be considered mundane. Although the adoptive family may be doing mundane tasks in the video, therein lies the beauty.

The history of an adopted child can become overwhelmingly important in the way that people view that individual. This history cannot be told without the help of others. The second video allows for the parents to tell parts of the history of their child in addition to the story of their family. This view also employs narration paired with images.

In my sister's case, she desires to learn French, play violin, and soccer. Adamant that she is not ready to go back to the place of her birth, she is not interested in learning mandarin or any traditional Chinese activities. As much as her adoptive parents encouraged involvement with her heritage, the adoptee is American. This video explores the feelings that were conjured up when the adoptee was old enough to declare what she wanted, as well as her involvement with "being Chinese" as a younger child. This video also includes a few cultural contrasts between "American-ness" and "Chinese-ness."

My third documentary is from an outside perspective. This documentary highlights a family that is not mine own, but tells a similar story. This family has two boys adopted from Africa. Originally, this film was intended to show many different families that had adopted from other parts of the world, however this family I ended up shooting was so compelling, I was driven to use them as the subject of the film. This film gets into the beauty of adoption, as well as the happiness it brings. This film is a response to some of the politics



of adoption. Adoption can bring up issues of abortion, racism, and culture much to my dismay. I believe those who associate these political agendas with adoption have little or no hands on experience with the relationship. Throughout the process of making these documentaries, I had heard more negativity about international adoption than I had in my entire life. I knew that bigots existed; I just refused to

believe they lived in places I deemed “progressive.” Before I made this film, I felt anger, guilt, and regret. I decided that I wanted to show absolute beauty. I wanted to fight back with happiness and joy. Light will always overcome darkness. It doesn’t matter how big, scary, and dark it may be; the smallest match can always push back the darkness. This film shows despite experiencing despair and loss, a happy family can come together. Although their family is patched together from pain, it is beautiful nonetheless.

My sister is an example as a person who has come from pain and loss. My sister was found as a newborn abandoned. This does not come from a lack of love or want for a child, but from the laws in China surrounding pregnancy and children. China’s governmental policies are an influence on me as a filmmaker. In the 1970’s, the Chinese government was experiencing 1% population growth every year which was a concern. This is a small number, however the country was already very large. The implementation of the one child policy was to limit the country to zero population growth until 2000 (Judith Banister).

China is still an extremely repressive and controlling government. Through my research of China and its human rights violations, I had become inspired to advocate through my films. Pregnancy in China is still a highly contentious issue. Pregnancy is highly controlled and restricted in China to this day. Women are required to have metal IUD’s as well as yearly x-rays to prove their have their contraception in place. Every couple must apply to have children, even if it is their first child. If approved, that couple will only have a small window to get pregnant.

Any pregnancies that are not approved by the Chinese government must be terminated. This leads to many problems within that country. One major problem is that fact that these adopted children have no means of ever reconnecting with their biological families

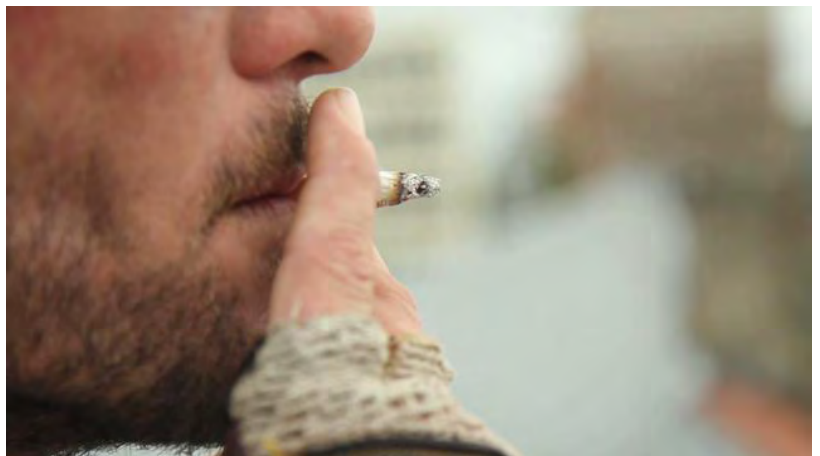
One of the major sources of inspiration for this project is my sister. Adopted in 2001 at the age of 14 months, she has completely changed my view of the world as well as what family means. As an artist, issues surrounding adoption compel me to create. My sister is a highly inspirational figure in my life.



Another major influence on my creative work is Eliot Rausch. Rausch is a filmmaker who has recently gained notice by winning the vimeo film festival in 2010 with *Last Minutes with Oden* (vimeo). Rausch has been a major inspiration to me through his style. He uses narration as well as stunning imagery. I hope to create the same type of emotion in

viewers as Rausch by employing some of the same techniques for capturing film.

Eliot Rausch is unique in his ability to capture the humanity of a subject, which is something I strive for. I desire for the audience to feel something towards the subject.



Another influence on me has been Bill Viola. Viola is a major player on the video scene, as well as the first video artist I was introduced to. Viola uses different substances to create metaphors, often water. Water has been a major source of telling a story or conveying an idea for Viola, and it has inspired me to seek out different object that may be useful metaphors for adoption.

Culturally, we live in a society that is entirely focused on race, and the American family is the building block of that society. Race and family come together in my own experience creating something compelling and emotional. I choose to explore this issue through five short documentaries highlighting the different aspects of adoption.

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