Ads for Forever Families:

How Public Service Advertising Portrays Adoptive Children and Teenagers

Abstract

There is a dearth of research in mass communication regarding family adoption, which may hinder meaningful progress to help policymakers, academics, content creators, and families. The current study adopts a qualitative approach to identify the persuasive appeals, dominant frames and media representation of adoptive parents and children in the PSAs that promotes adoption. This research informs social work professionals about how media portrait family adoption, and allow them to strategize how to shape future communication.

Keywords: Framing, Adoption, Media Representation, Qualitative Content Analysis

Each year, more than 20,000 children age out of the foster care system in the United States (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017), with many of them losing vital resources that help them stay afloat, including access to financial assistance and housing (Fowler, Marcal, Zhang, Day, & Landsverk, 2017; Dworsky, Napolitano & Courtney, 2013). Without the resources that come with families or safety nets, the outcomes for many children who age-out of foster care are far worse than those who are adopted or reunited with family and include struggles with mental illness, homelessness, and unemployment (Doyle, 2007). While finding an adoptive home can be a lifeline for teens in the system, teenage adoption is uncommon. Less than ten percent of adoptions in the United States are of teenagers, with most families opting to adopt children who are five years old or younger (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017).

To encourage greater public awareness of children and teenagers in the foster care systems throughout the United States, organizations like AdoptUSKids have partnered with non-profits like The Ad Council to create nation-wide public service advertising campaigns to inform the public about the need for adoptive families for kids in foster care (AdoptUSKids, 2018). This exploratory study looks at public service advertisements with the intention to unpack prevailing frames, portrayals, and situations that are perpetuated in the ads themselves. The issues of framing often can lie at the heart of how we perceive an issue, and by looking into the framing utilized by adoptive organizations, we can better understand how the media portrays who is needing adoption, who can adopt, and what kind of people are these adoptive parents supposed to be. As the need for adoptive homes continues to rise, the issue of whom we are allowing to participate in the act of adoption should be a question that is asked by both social scientists and

social workers alike. If representation is key to participatory culture, it should be no different for adoption as well.

To take a closer look at the how those in foster care and in need of adoption are presented to the public this study examines adoption-related public service advertisements through a qualitative textual analysis with findings expected to reveal major frames used in PSA that promotes adoption, offer basic concepts to further study audience perception of the framing, and develop testable message framing in future experimental studies. Because of the exploratory nature of the study and the current gap in the literature surrounding this topic, textual analysis provides a way to dive into the content, allowing for a multitude of paths when searching for meaning, as opposed to a traditional content analysis. Using grounded theory as a framework for study, this research hopes to inform future studies regarding, representation, messaging, and effects of public service advertising and other media related to adoption.

The implications of this study span the academic and practical realms, with the results having the potential to not only expand the current scholarship but to also encourage better practices by content creators and policy writers, and better inform viewers of the tools used in public service advertisements and to the realities and of adoption, which may or may not be reflected in the elements show in the PSAs themselves.

<div align="center">**LITERATURE REVIEW**</div>

Public Service Advertising

In the United States, public service advertising has its roots in the conflicts of World War I and World War II, with governmental organizations like the Committee on Public Information (O'Barr, 2012). Since then, the role of public service advertising has continued to grow with organizations like The Ad Council running high-profile campaigns that garner nationwide

audiences and have won national advertising awards, all while working to bring about public awareness for important public issues, including gun safety, suicide prevention, and LGBTQ acceptance (The Ad Council, 2019).

Staring in 2004, The Ad Council has been actively working on a campaign related to adoption from foster care. Distributing ads to more than 28,000 media outlets across the media spectrum nationwide (The Ad Council, 2011), the advertisements specifically focus on the everyday worries potential adoptive families have, and work to show those considering adoption that they are "perfect" parents just the way they are. By using their connections in the media industry and coordinating a massive grassroots push to bring these ads to the public, the adoption from foster care campaign had received over $300 million worth of advertising exposure, with nearly $130 million from just television (The Ad Council, 2011). Results from this specific campaign have been prolific. In just 18 months, 2,400 families cited the ads a reason they started the adoption process and nearly 7,000 families who had already registered for home studies switched to work with AdoptUSKids, the Ad Council's partner for the campaign. Along with an increased number of adoptive parents entering the system, the ads contributed to 14,000 phone calls and 4.5 website visits, which were increases of 336% and 42% respectively, all within the 18-month time frame (The Ad Council, 2011).

Public service advertisements function as an important piece of social marketing, which was first defined in the 1970s as the "design, implementation, and control of programs calculated to influence the acceptability of social ideas and involving considerations of product planning, pricing, communication, distribution, and marketing research" (Andreasen, 1994; Kotler & Zaltman, 1971). This definition has developed over time, with the main differences focusing on the adaptation of commercial techniques to effect social change (Andreasen, 1994). Within this,

modern public service advertising uses the same techniques as commercial advertising to focus on pressing issues.

For public service advertising to be effective, compared to more traditional campaigns, personal relevance can have a significant effect on the efficacy of the piece itself (Darley & Lim, 1991). This idea of personal relevance with adoption though can be a challenge. According to the latest census data, there are over 116 million households in the United States, and just over 2 million adopted children living in said those homes (United States Census Bureau, 2010). This large gap between homes with and without adopted children has the potential to lower the personal relevance of the issue to the viewer.

While relevance can be a significant factor in effectiveness for public service advertising, the eliciting of empathy can also cause the same reactions. The Lazarus model, which concerns the emotional responses stimulated from internal and situational conditions, was used to show this phenomenon in public service advertising, which researchers were able to show that the response to ads followed the same patterns, and that empathy and caring can be triggered by the exposure to ads (Lazarus, 1991; Bagozzi & Moore, 1994). The prevalence of either empathy-inducing or relatable content would be a sign that the ads are not only effective but could outline potential reasonings behind the type of content shown.

RQ1: What are the persuasive appeals used in the public service advertisements to promote family adoption?

Framing Theory

Issue framing theory serves as a useful theoretical framework for investigating family adoption. The original definition posited by Entman (1991) argued that to frame is "to select some aspect of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such

a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (p.52) for the item described. Message framing has emerged as a dominant model in media effects research (Price & Tewksbury, 1997). Media, health, and advertising researchers take note of framing effects because the manner in which information is presented may, in fact, influence consumers' decisions and judgments toward an issue (for a review of framing research, see Levin & Gaeth, 1998).

Framing theory refers to a process where individuals create a conceptualization of an issue or change their thinking about an issue (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Within this, framing can be applied in studies both qualitative and quantitative, providing researchers with the ability to look at how lenses can change consumer perception. Framing studies are diverse and can be found in areas as ranging as environmental communication to political communication to studies using critical cultural theories (see Jang, 2013; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; Pennington, 2018). While varying topically, each study uses framing as a way to explain how messages are shown and how that interacts with peoples' perceptions. In this study, framing was used to examine the major themes present in adoption public service advertising. With this framework in mind, the first research question is asked in this study:

RQ2: What are the overall themes that are prevalent in the adoption PSAs?

Representation in Media

Representation matters because it portrays who society deems worthy of participation. Many studies on representation have looked at the issues of the overrepresentation of minorities and the underrepresentation of whites in the media as criminals, as well as the disparities in representation based on gender (Dixon, Azocar, & Casas, 2003; Gilliam, Iyengar, Simon & Wright, 1996; Armstrong, 2004; Armstrong, 2011).

Media representation is a popular field of research in the area of mass communication. With a wide range of topics using a multitude of theoretical frameworks, the work in this field is robust and only continuing to grow (see Dixon & Linz, 2000; Pena, Hancock & Merola, 2009). Often looking at marginalized populations, this research is often done from a feminist or postcolonial theoretical framework, allowing the researchers to look at the underlying factors for the lack of representation in certain areas of the media landscape (Parameswaran, 1999).

For this study, representation is an important issue to look at since the content advertisers distribute to the consuming public can often be the reason for the creation of certain perceptions (Krugman, 1965; Gorn & Weinberg, 1984). These perceptions can either reinforce or tear down negative stereotypes, play into cultural hegemony, or challenge the prevailing schools of thought. Who can adopt? Who needs to be adopted? These are questions that are answered through who is represented. The idea of representation leads to subsequent questions asked in this study:

RQ3: How are the adoptive children portrayed in the PSAs?

RQ4: How are the parents portrayed in the PSAs?

METHOD

The goal of this study was to identify the frames and media representation used in the PSAs that promote adoption. A qualitative approach is used when exploring and discovering the framing and media representation that may lie hidden in the advertising (Bae, 2000). Qualitative research is an accepted approach to study under-research topics in an effort to understand the meaning and symbols translated to individuals (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This process allowed the researchers to identify language used in text and interpret meaning of the text, which provides richness and depth of conversations (Hertog & McLeod, 2001).

Sample

To conduct this study, fifty public service advertisements were analyzed, with the aim of finding themes that were present across the spectrum of content. While analyzing, the videos were watched multiple times, with notes being taken on each pass. Using constant comparison, these notes were used as a reference guide to inform the direction of the research going forward, providing insight on themes that were present in some, absent in others and some that were hidden below the surface but arose when noticed across multiple advertisements. This grounded theory method allowed for the content to be analyzed with as few preconceptions as possible, helping to allow for the freedom to search the content for meanings, overt and covert and make sense of the compiled data when finished.

To gather the data, the content was pulled from multiple sources. To obtain the most recent videos from The Ad Council, the content was downloaded directly from the website. The other videos were gathered from YouTube. Because of the need to gather a wide array of videos, YouTube was a valuable tool. The videos varied in date and topic, with the goal to find as diverse of a sample as possible. To find the videos on YouTube, keywords such as "adoption" and "adoption psa" were entered with a large number of results appearing. Once the results were sifted through, a list of videos emerged that would be added into the sample.

Grounded Theory

This research utilized a grounded theory method, using constant comparison as a way to conduct a textual analysis. Grounded theory works in this application as a way to ensure that the researcher is open to the findings and allow for a more in-depth analysis of the artifacts that would not have necessarily been possible with non-inductive methods.

Grounded theory is a way of study that allows a researcher to take an area of focus and then build out theoretical frameworks based on the findings (Charmaz, 1996). Structurally,

grounded theory centers around multiple distinct research characteristics that work to create a methodology that is academically rigorous but allows for the ability to create and build frameworks specific to the research (Habib & Hinojosa, 2015).

For research on visual artifacts, the grounded method has been used with constant comparison to conduct more studies in recent years, as the medium is now a rich source of information in a wide range of topics. While a relatively understudied medium in the realm of qualitative work, recent studies have provided researchers with tools to conduct studies that previously would have not been possible (Derry et al., 2010; Xiao, Seagull, Mackenzie, & Klein, 2004).

Each video was reviewed and coded, with a main goal being to identify basic visual data, including the race of both the parents and children, the ages of both the parents and children and the perceived wealth and relationship status of the parents. Along with the basic information, another goal behind the study was to find other thematic elements woven into the content. When combining the two, the overall intent was to be able to find patterns in both basic and thematic elements in order to make claims about the types of information present in the videos, and what it says about how the issue of adoption is constructed in the United States. To conduct the constant comparison, memos were taken for each video and referred back to when the next video was being coded. These comparisons will inform the type of information being sought, helping to prioritize areas of more in-depth focus and allow for more thematic elements to be seen that may have not been initially identified.

In regard to the sample size, it is noted that fifty is quite a large number for a qualitative study; however, because of the general length of the samples and the desire for the study to be as thorough as possible, fifty not only seemed possible but entirely appropriate. As for why the

sampling stopped at fifty and did not continue, it was evident that after that point that new thematic elements were becoming difficult to find. At this point of saturation, it made sense to stop the sample collection process and dive back into the content that was already selected for review.

During each pass of a video, the initial notes that were taken typically related to structural elements, including the duration of the video, the name of the ad, and setting. From there, notes became more focused on the content of the ad, looking at the age of the actors, their race, perceived income, family status, etc. Lastly, notes on more underlying thematic elements were taken. Topics in this category include the roles of each parent, their relation to the children, and attitude and/or adjustment level of the adopted child. Constant comparison was an essential tool in this part of the data collection process when one theme seemed to become more apparent or fade away, the notes made helped to realign the priorities of the study, creating a set of themes that seemed comprehensive to the content that was analyzed for this study.

RESULTS

Within the analysis, themes both apparent and inconspicuous emerged from the advertisements. These major parts of the videos were determined through the constant comparison as part of the grounded theory-based data collection and provided insight into how PSAs work to portray children and adults who participate in the act of adoption. Themes that were more visually identifiable were often related to race, class, and gender, with some themes running counter to data that is publicly available. Within the more covert themes, evidence of outdated attitudes, often based on race were seen in ways that seemed innocuous at first but more harmful when taken as a whole.

RQ1: Persuasive Appeals Present

Comedy as a Tool

For the vast majority of the ads viewed for the study, comedy was an important tool used in the advertisements. Each of the ads tells a story of a different aspect of raising a child, with the topics such as homework, haircuts, morning routines, interacting with friends, and traveling being the primary context in which the advertising narrative exists. Within each of these stories, all of the parents make some sort of mistake or act in outlandish – but wholesome and kindhearted - ways, that then allows the narrator to explain that one doesn't have to be perfect in order to be a perfect parent. In one ad, which is titled *Haircut*, the mother accidentally shaves a chunk out of her adopted son's hair and is faced with multiple options for how to remedy the situation, so her son does not feel like he stands out.

These types of situations presented in the ads seem to work to try and quell some worries that potential adoptive parents may have. This content is important to the function of the advertisement as it makes an attempt to connect with the viewer. With a decision as life-altering as adoption, it stands to reason that nerves about expectations could play a large role I whether or not a family decides to adopt a child. The ads that work to undermine the notion of a "perfect parent" aim to de-stress this potentially stressful situation and show that everyone, with their daily mistakes and all, can be a "perfect parent." The ads are also communicating through comedy that adoption should be fun. When dealing with another human life, it isn't hard to imagine that life can get turned upside down quickly. By reminding viewers that ups and downs are a normal part of life, the ads work to tell the viewers that everything, even in the times of struggle, are all right. By breaking down some of the potential barriers and false preconceptions, the ads look to use the thematic element of comedy as a tool to calm nerves and provide validation to parents who aren't perfect but want to adopt.

Heart Touching Storytelling

Juxtaposed with comedy, many ads were designed to encourage empathy or elicit a strong heart-touching reaction from the viewers. This appeal to emotion often centered around the big moments of the adoption process, ranging from meeting the child for the first time, experiencing life as a family, and to the realization that the process was worth it. Unlike the use of comedy, such warm and moving stories usually depict the bitter-sweet moments when parents or children burst into tears after experiencing lots of difficulties at both ends.

Testimonial

Another type of persuasive appeal that we recognized from the PSAs is the usage of testimonial, which has been predominantly utilized in health communication (De Wit, Das, & Vet, 2008). Testimonial evidence usually includes concrete and personal narrative evidence from a first-person account of someone who came to experience a particular condition. For instance, in some of the videos, the adoptive parents would sit in front of the camera and share their own stories on why they decided to choose adoption, how they met their adopted children, or how many changes happened after the new child came home.

RQ2: Themes Present

First-Times

Another story told in the advertisements that used emotion to connect were the stories of parents meeting their new children for the first time, along with other big "firsts." Parents who were shown talking about meeting their child for the first time often talked about initial nervousness followed by elation and comfort. Discussing how they felt their family was becoming more complete, the parents, often shown as a couple, talked about their overwhelming joy, which is an attempt on the part of the ad to form a connection with the potential adoptive

parents, providing them a window to the happiness they will feel. Other firsts shown in the advertisements related to life moments. Whether it was the first breakup or the first date, parents were shown helping the adoptive child navigate seminal events. Showing the fulfillment of the parents and the comfort felt by the child, these ads work to encourage viewers to imagine helping their new child and the joy that comes from that.

Life as a Family

Life as an adoptive family is also a major theme present that uses emotion to encourage participation. In the ads, the adoptive parents are always content as an adopted family, with the act of adoption adding positivity into their lives. In one add, Bubba Watson – a professional golfer – and his wife Angie discuss their experiences as adoptive parents. Throughout the ad, they talk about how adoption has not only made them better but has made their family better all the way around. This message works to send a message similar to the one being sent by the ads talking about how adoption is worth it. By adopting, once can automatically improve their family, their lives, their marriage, and anything else. It is all about comforting and reassuring the viewer that the doubts and worries that are there shouldn't hold them back; adopting is going to drastically and immediately improve their life.

It's Worth It

For the content that talks about adoption being "worth it," the message that is trying to be sent is abundantly clear. For parents wondering if adoption is a worthwhile endeavor, these ads say that it is. While more straightforward than other thematic messages, this is by far the message that is most trying to be reassuring. By addressing a loaded question head-on, the ad content leaves no question as to what is being said. That sort of bluntness can be very impactful, especially for people who are looking for concrete answers to questions that are more abstract.

RQ2: Representation of Adopted Children

Out of the ads that were analyzed, thematic elements present regarding the adopted children varied in topic, ranging from race and age, as well as gender and their emotional status. These themes, while often fairly obvious, send powerful messages about who we as a public consider to be the children in society that are in need of adoption. While this may be seemingly inconsequential, it is important to consider the types of people that typically have to put their children up for adoption. Statistically, children are most often taken into care because of parental neglect, which can come in many different forms (United States Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.). The reality is that children who enter foster care and are in need of adoption often come from poor family situations, which are often judged to be the caused by basic moral and societal failings, which can be used to justify a lack of empathy from the public. The subsequent stereotyping of who is needing to be placed into the system is an important reason why accurate and just representation is present in advertisements.

Race and Gender

Although the measurement is more quantitative in function, examining the racial makeup of the children portrayed in the advertisements is important for representation reasons and to be able to make claims to overarching thematic elements. Often times representation can lead to the erosion or reinforcement of harmful stereotypes that are pervasive in society. Previous studies have shown that racial representation often works to create false narratives within society, often portraying minorities in a negative light (Dixon & Maddox, 2005). This negative overrepresentation has no basis in reality yet is routinely portrayed in the media. This same overrepresentation of minorities that has been shown to be present in general news is seen abundantly in the advertisements that were studied.

Overall, minority children were shown at more than a 2:1 ratio compared to children who were white. Of the minority groups shown, African American children were the most frequently seen. This portrayal seems to follow a pattern regardless of the ad and is more glaringly obvious when looking at the aggregate data. This is extremely problematic; not only does this representation work to continue the misrepresentation of minorities in the media, perpetuating a racist and classist narrative, it also has no basis in statistical fact. According to the latest AFCARS report (2018), a document produced by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, white children make up 44% of children waiting to be adopted, compared to African American children making up 22%. This is an almost complete reversal compared to what is portrayed in the advertisements. This type of overrepresentation of minority children as being in need of adoption and in turn help from the state is problematic as it continues a false narrative that has plagued the news media for years. Gender rates followed national averages at a much closer rate, with boys being shown more than girls, but not by a large amount. According to the latest AFCARS report (2018), males make up 52% of the national foster care population while females account for 48%.

The disconnect between race and gender portrayals and their relationship with federal statistics that are publicly available and easy to access adds to the issue of the misrepresentation of race in the advertisements. If the information is so easy to obtain and, in some cases, followed to near exact proportions, why was it not followed completely? Did the numbers matter to the producers of the advertisements? While questions for future qualitative studies arise from these findings, it is obvious that one major thematic element is the outright overrepresentation of minority children as in need of help through the adoption system, which runs counter to any basis of fact.

Age and Adjustment

More often than not, teenagers have more difficulty being adopted than younger children, with young kids exiting the system at a higher rate than children who are in their teens (AFCARS, 2018). Because of being exposed to the uncertainties of being in foster care for a longer time, adoptive parents often stay away from teenagers, opting to adopt younger kids, who often haven't experienced trauma for an amount of time near what teenagers have experienced. With there being such a need for adoptive families, it would stand to reason that ads encouraging adoption would include teenagers in their commercials, and they were. Children who look to be in their teenage years consistently appeared on ads, highlighting the importance and need for families for teenagers. Moreover, the teenagers shown in the advertisements were represented as model children, unburdened by issues and who interacted with their families as if they were biological children.

When children exit foster care, there is typically a considerable amount of emotional problems that follow them (Clausen, Landsverk, Ganger, Chadwick, & Litrownik, 1998). Because of the trauma that they have endured both before and during care, kids often take their time to adjust to living with a new family. These adjustments can lead to frequent familial problems as the kids work to get used to their new life. This reality of adoption was almost completely swept away by the advertisements, with only two discussing even the idea of the process of bringing a child into a new being one that has ups and downs.

While the purpose of an advertisement encouraging adoption is not to highlight the sometimes-difficult realities of the process, these ready-to-go portrayals of kids, especially teenagers are one that may deceive potential parents who are naïve to the potential histories of the kids they are adopting. This commodification of the child is designed to prevent people from

getting cold feet but can gloss over the reason why the child had to enter care in the first place. Entering into a situation that already has the potential to have a steep learning curve can certainly be made worse when adoptive parents are naïve to the realities of what it can take for children to adjust to a new life. This leads to the formation of a theme that portrays children, specifically teens, as well-adjusted new family members right of the gate.

RQ3: Representation of Adoptive Parents

The portrayal of the adoptive parents in these ads is just as, if not more potentially important than the portrayal of the children. The reason is that at the heart of these ads, the goal is to convince potential adoptive parents to take the next step and adopt a child in need. This sort of personal relevance necessary to entice a consumer relates back to Fishbein's persuasion model (1967). One way to make ads effective is to allow the viewer to see themselves in the ad and increase their salience on the topic. To do this, advertisers work hard to build personas of the individuals they wish to target, creating narratives that allow the desired people to find commonality with the ad and feel encouraged to participate in a way similar to the one being shown. In the case of potential adoptive parents shown in the public service advertisements, the main question about the portrayal of parents also can be asked as who are the ads targeting? From the study, themes relating to relationships, race and economic standing were prevalent, creating a narrative of the model adoptive parents that filled specific roles and statuses depending on the situation.

Relationships

Out of the ads reviewed in the study, the majority of the parents portrayed in the public service advertisements were married. This theme was seen countless times and reinforced the notion that the best family is one where there are two parents in a household and that are in a

committed, more frequently heterosexual, relationship. Out of the ads reviewed for this study, parents that were married were prevalent at a rate of more than two to one. Even if both parents were not shown, the advertisements were sure to include a scene where the viewer would be able to see a wedding band, or another symbol of marriage, ensuring them that the parent was not raising the child on their own. When there was a depiction of a single parent, they were more often portrayed as a mother. This depiction is not only problematic as it fails to realize the potential stable single-parent households have for children in unstable situations while also seeming to signal that if anyone should care for the child, it should be the mother. While a singular single dad did appear in the content reviewed, the lack of a greater presence was noted.

Within the advertisements that depicted married couples as adoptive parents, three advertisements showed lesbian couples as the heads of the adoptive household. What makes this unique, is that many states currently have laws that prevent same-sex couples from adopting, an issue often rooted in religious justifications that have successfully prevented homosexual couples from providing much-needed homes to children waiting to be adopted. In the ads, these couples were portrayed as "normal" and stable, which seemed to be an attempt to diminish the controversy surrounding same-sex couples and adoption. While the attempts made by some of the ads to start the process of legitimizing same-sex couples as more than adequate adoptive parents is promising for the future prospects of same-sex couples, the need to portray them as married or similar to heterosexual couples is firmly rooted in hegemonic power structures that work to disenfranchise and diminish those perceived as "the other."

Racial Makeup of Parents and Family Units

The importance of racial representation of the parents in the advertisements is just as important as the racial representation of the children. This again goes back to how

advertisements aim to connect with their viewers. From the content analyzed in the advertisements, the adoptive parents were more often portrayed as either being of the same race or race adjacent – which in this case is defined as being parents with similar racial qualities, such as skin tone - to the child. In one of the few ads where it was possible that the adoptive parents may have not been the same race as their adopted child, the parents were of a minority group, parenting a child of a different minority group, or were white and parenting a minority child.

One glaring theme relating to what was not present relates to the ads showing interracial families. While there were a few instances where the parents and children were of a different race, there was never a portrayal of a white child being parented by a minority family; however, white families were shown multiple times as the adoptive parents of a minority - more often black - child.

Because of the consistency of the racial portrayals of the families, it seemed apparent that the ads were signaling that it is better to adopt a child of your own race unless you are white. This sort of white savior theme relates back to a continuation of colonialism as it was never the case that a minority parent was shown caring for a white child. This portrayal is highly problematic and does nothing but encourage the continuation of the white savior narrative.

Economic Standing

In all of the advertisements, parents were shown as being solidly in the middle class or upper middle class. Because of the financial requirements that often come along with the adoption process (see Barth & Miller, 2004) the idea to only include people who, in theory, could afford the expenses makes sense. What did seem missing though was the lack of wealthy people shown as adoptive parents. Parents who could easily be identified as truly wealthy only appeared in one ad, and if the viewer is not familiar with the family being interviewed - Bubba

and Angie Watson - there would be no reason to assume that the couple being shown was that much wealthier than any other typical family. While conclusions on this topic would be a bit of a stretch due to the content analyzed, the lack of overtly wealthy people in the public service advertisements was certainly interesting and warrants more studies looking into the subject.

DISCUSSION

Importance of Topic

While it would be unfair to claim that other topics aren't as deserving of study as others, this sub-field is grossly underrepresented and deserves more studies conducted. Adoption while more approachable than its counterpart foster care, still can be a messy issue. Adoptions are often the result of broken homes that leave scars on everyone involved, which have impacts for years to come. A reluctance to look into messy areas like this in the field of communication not only leaves a hole in the body of knowledge but hinders any meaningful progress that can be made by scholars to help policymakers, academics, content creators, and families.

Implications and Future Research

While this study is hardly a definitive guide to the portrayals and representations present in ads related to adoption, these findings do provide a framework from which to build on. With these findings, new studies can be conducted looking at whether these representations are present through a larger number of related ads and whether or not these representations are consistent with the current statistics from state and federal reports, which has so far not been the case.

Adoption is an integral part of the child welfare system and requires participation from the public for it to be successful. To encourage this participation, organizations utilize the media to draw attention to the issue, sending messages to parents considering adoption. Because the

efficacy of the message can be the difference between a child finding a forever home or aging out of the system, it is important to study the messages that are sent out to consumers

From the data, we can see a narrative being woven into the public service advertisements, one that works to portray children in need of adoption as a population mostly made of minorities, and through connection, more in need of services or the need to be rescued, even if this representation has no basis in reality. This type of portrayal has been documented in numerous studies, spanning the breadth of media, propagating harmful stereotypes. Within this portrayal of minorities in need, these ads also depict white parents to non-white children, which is a continuation of a white-savior complex, which is made even more obvious since white children were never seen with non-white parents. These ads also tell an almost universal story of automatic adjustment by the adoptive children to their new lives. This portrayal is neglectful of the reality that many children who are adopted suffer from mental health issues related to the trauma experienced in their lifetime (Austad & Simmons, 1978). This glossing over a justified reality for many children who are adopted presents as a typical way that advertising works, packaging the commodity, in this case, children, in a manner that encourages consumers to participate.

To encourage viewers to place themselves in the advertisements, the PSAs used emotion as a tool to encourage a connectedness to the content on a more human level. This attempt to use emotion as a tool of persuasion or to encourage a sort of bonding to the content was especially prevalent in the ads produced by The Ad Council. By working to make the content more endearing and relatable, it seemed obvious that a goal of the ads was to create a sort of connectedness between the viewer and the content. This use of emotions to create a connection with the viewer is an area that, after this study, warrants more research, setting up the potential to

look into how the use of emotion effects participation attitudes for people looking to adopt. Along with building on this study to see if these thematic elements span more advertisements on the subject, this study could also be used to serve as a framework for how people who have little to no interaction with the adoption system view the children and parents who are involved. Does this portrayal have any effect on how we view certain people groups? Future studies could point us in the right direction on this front.

Finally, this research could be used as part of a study looking into the efficacy of these campaigns. Are there more children adopted when these ads are being aired? Are children or adoptive parents from one racial group than another? With the current state of the literature on this subject, the possibilities for further research are borderline boundless and carry the potential for great impacts on policy, content creation, and public perception. The current base of literature on PSAs can help point researchers in the right direction and help to formulate conclusions for adoptive PSAs.

Limitations

As with any qualitative study, the inability to generalize may be considered a limitation to some in the field. In order to make broader claims, more studies with quantitative methodologies will be required. While this is the case, it should be noted that generalizable results were not the intended goal of this study.

Another limitation of this research is the fact that many of the videos studied came from the same campaign, albeit one that has lasted many years. Because of the specific nature of the content, there is a limited number of organizations that not only work towards adoption but have the resources to produce public service advertisements. Future studies will be needed to see how

these messages span across all media, including content designed for print and online, produced by a wide range of organizations.

Perspective is also a "limitation" of this study. As a qualitative piece of research, it is important for those conducting the study to "immerse themselves in the data." This approach is conducive for detailed insights but also means that one author's findings may be different from another's. This does not mean either is wrong but instead creates a situation where more robust literature can occur, as one's perspective may result in insights not possible to another scholar.

References

AdoptUSKids. (2018, October 8). *Raising Awareness of the Need for Adoptive Families*. Retrieved from AdoptUSKids: https://www.adoptuskids.org/about-us/national-ad-campaign

Allen, R. C. (2005). *Channels of discourse, reassembled television and contemporary criticism.* New York: Routledge.

Andreasen, A. R. (1994). Social Marketing: Its Definition and Domain. *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 108-114.

Armstrong, C. L., & Gao, F. (2011). Gender, Twitter and News Content. *Journalism Studies*, 490-505.

Austad, C. C., & Simmons, T. L. (1978). Symptoms of Adopted Children Presenting to a Large Mental Health Clinic. *Child Psychiatry and Human Development*, 20-27.

Bae, H.-S. (2000). Product differentiation in national TV newscasts: A comparison of the cable All News Networks and the broadcast networks. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media, 44*, 62-77.

Bagozzi, R., & Moore, D. J. (1994). Public Service Advertisements: Emotions and Empathy Guide Prosocial Behavior. *Journal of Marketing*, 56-70.

Barbell, K., & Freundlich, M. (2001). *Foster Care Today.* Washington, D.C.: Casey Family Programs.

Barth, R. P., & Miller, J. M. (2004). Building Effective Post-Adoption Services: What is the Empirical Foundation? *Family Relations*, 447-455.

Charmaz, K. (1996). Grounded Theory. In J. A. Smith, R. Harré, & L. V. Langenhove, *Rethinking Methods in Psychology* (pp. 27-49). London: Sage Publications.

Chong, D., & Druckman, J. N. (2007). Framing Theory. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 103-126.

Clausen, J. M., Landsverk, J., Ganger, W., Chadwick, D., & Litrownik, A. (1998). Mental Health Problems of Children in Foster Care. *Journal of Child and Family Studies,*, 283-296.

Courtney, M., Dworsky, A., Cusick, G., Havlicek, J., Perez, A., & Keller, T. (2007). *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: outcomes at age 21.* Chicago: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.

Darley, W. K., & Lim, J.-S. (1991). *Personal Relevance As Moderator of the Effect of Public Service Advertising on Behavior.* Provo: Association for Child Research.

Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (2000). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd Edition ed., pp. 1-29). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Derry, S. J., Pea, R. D., Barron, B., Engle, R. A., Erickson, F., Goldman, R., . . . Sherin, B. L. (2010). Conducting Video Research in the Learning Sciences: Guidance on Selection, Analysis, Technology, and Ethics. *The Journal of Learning Sciences*, 3-53.

De Wit, J. B., Das, E., & Vet, R. (2008). What works best: objective statistics or a personal testimonial? An assessment of the persuasive effects of different types of message evidence on risk perception. *Health Psychology*, 27(1), 110-115.

Dillard, J. P., & Peck, E. (2000). Affect and Persuasion: Emotional Responses to Public Service Announcements. *Communication Research*, 461-495.

Dixon, T. L., & Maddox, K. B. (2005). Skin Tone, Crime News, and Social Reality Jdgements: Priming the Sterotype of the Dark and Dangerous Black Criminal. *Applied Social Psychology*, 1555-1570.

Dixon, T. L., Azocar, C. L., & Casas, M. (2003). The Portrayal of Race and Crime on Television Network News. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 498-523.

Dixon, T., & Linz, D. (2000). Overrepresentation and underrepresentation of African Americans and Latinos as lawbreakers on television news. *Journal of Communication*, 131-154.

Dworsky, A., Napolitano, L., & Courtney, M. (2013). Homelessness During the Transition From Foster Care to Adulthood. *American Journal of Public Health*, S318-S323.

Entman, R. (1991). Framing: Towards clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication, 43*, 51-58.

Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analyzing Discourse.* London: Routledge.

Fishbein, M. (1967). A Behavior Theory Approach to the Relations between Beliefs about an Object and the Attitude Toward the Object. In M. Fishbbein, *Attitud Theory and Measurement* (pp. 389-421). New York: Wiley.

Fishbein, M. (1967). *A Behavior Theory Approach to the Relations Between Beliefs about an Object and the Attitude Toward the Object.* New York: Wiley.

Fishbein, M., Hall-Jamieson, K., Zimmer, E., von Haeften, I., & Nabi, R. (2002). Avoiding the Boomering: Testing the Relative Effectiveness of Antidrug Public Service Announcements Before a National Campaign. *American Journal of Public Health*, 238-245.

Fisher, P. A., Burraston, B., & Pears, K. (2005). The Early Intervention Foster Care Program: Permanent Placement Outcomes From a Randomized Trial. *Child Maltreatment*, 61-71.

Fowler, P. J., Marcal, K. E., Zhang, J., Day, O., & Landsverk, J. (2017). Homlessness and aging out of foster care: A national comparison of child-welfare adolescents. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 27-33.

Fowler, P. J., Toro, P. A., & Miles, B. W. (2011). Emerging Adulthood and Leaving Foster Care: Settings Associated with Mental Health. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 335-348.

Gilliam, F. D., & Iyengar, S. (2000). Prime Suspects: The Influence of Local Television News on the Viewing Public. *Americal Journal of Political Science*, 560-573.

Gilliam, F. D., Iyengar, S., Simon, A., & Wright, O. (1996). Crime in Black and White: The Violent, Scary World of Local News. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 6-23.

Gorn, G. J., & Weinberg, C. B. (1984). The Impact of Comparative Advertising on Perception and Attitude: Some Positive Findings. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 719-727.

Habib, S., & Hinojosa, R. (2015). Doing Grounded Theory with Video-Based Research. *Journal of Ethnographic & Qualitative Researh*, 42-52.

Hertog, J., & McLeod, D. (2001). A multiperspectival approach to framing analysis: A field guide. *Framing public life: Perspectives on media and our understanding of the social world*, 139-161.

Jang, S. M. (2013). Framing Responsibility in Climate Change Discourse: Ethnocentric Attribution Bias, Perceived Causes, and Policy Attitudes. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 27-36.

Knoblauch, H., Baer, A., Laurier, E., Petschke, S., & Schnettler, B. (2008). Visual Analysis. New Developments in the Inteerpretative Analysis of Video and Photography. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*.

Kotler, P., & Zaltman, G. (1971). Social Marketing: An Approach to Planned Social Change. *Journal of Marketing*, 3-12.

Krugman, H. E. (1965). The Impact of Television Advertising: Learning Without Involvement. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 349-356.

Lazarus, R. S. (1991). Progress on a cognitive-motivational-relational theory of emotion. *American Psychologist*, 819-834.

Levin, I., & Gaeth, G. (1988). Framing of attribute information before and after consuming the product. *Journal of Consumer Research, 15*, 374-378.

O'Barr, W. M. (2012). Public Service Advertising and Propaganda. *Advertising & Society Review*.

O'Keefe, D. J. (1990). *Persuasion: Theory and Research.* Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Parameswaran, R. (1999). Western Romance Fiction as English-Language Media in Postcolonial India. *Journal of Communication*, 84-105.

Pena, J., Hancock, J., & Merola, N. (2009). The Priming Effects of Avatars in Virtual Settings. *Communication Research*, 838-856.

Pennington, R. (2018). Making Space in Social Media: #MuslimWomensDay in Twitter. *Communication Inquiry*, 199-217.

Price, V., & Tewksbury, D. (1997). News value and public opinion: A theoretical account of media priming and framing. In G. Barnett, & F. Bosters (Eds.), *Progress in communication sciences* (pp. 214-257). New York, New York: Ablex.

The Ad Council. (2011). *Adoption Case Study.* New York: The Ad Council.

The Ad Council. (2019). *About Us*. Retrieved from The Ad Council: https://www.adcouncil.org/About-Us

United States Census Bureau. (2010). *Households and Families.* Washington, D.C.: United States Census Bureau.

United States Department of Health and Human Services. (2016). *Child Maltreatment 2016.*

Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Health and Human Services.

United States Department of Health and Human Services. (2018). *The AFCARS Report.*

Washington, D.C.: United States DeUnited States Department of Health and Human

Services.

Wang, X. (2018). Responses to HIV Public Service Announcements: The Mediating Role of

Attitude toward the Ad and Source Identification. *Intercultural Communication Studies*,

114-124.

Xiao, Y., Seagull, F. J., Mackenzie, C. F., & Klein, K. (2004). Adaptive Learning in Trauma

Resuscitation Teams: A Grounded Theory Approach to Video Analysis. *Cognition,

Technology & Work*, 158-164.