The Overrepresentation of Adoptees in the Troubled Teen Industry – Contributing Factors & Concerns

Sophia R. Manning | January 17th, 2025 | John Jay College of Criminal Justice

Scope & Overview

Current research suggests that approximately 137,000 children and adolescents under the age of 18 are placed in some kind of extra-judicial residential treatment or congregate care facility annually in the United States. Of these 137,000, approximately 57,000 are privately placed by their parents or guardian rather than through court order or by foster care authorities (Chatfield, M. M., 2019). These facilities, including residential treatment centers, therapeutic boarding schools, wilderness / outdoor programs, and other congregate care facilities, comprise what is colloquially known as the Troubled Teen Industry (TTI). Despite accounting for only 2% of the general population, adoptees comprise between 25 – 30% of residents in these facilities (Brodzinsky, D. et al., 2016).

The purpose of this study is to explore the reason for the overrepresentation of teenage adoptees in adolescent residential treatment programs. It is guided by a few questions, with the primary one being:

1. What dynamics exist in the adoptive home that might account for this overrepresentation?

Other probing questions include:

- Are the people who become adoptive parents more likely to have a parenting style that would align with sending their kid to treatment?
- Does adoptee status play a significant role in a teenager's mental and behavioral state, and is this role proportionate to the overrepresentation of adoptees in the TTI?

Methodology

To conduct research that seeks to explain this overrepresentation, I have utilized several different data gathering methods. I began with a literature review, where I examined the current research on the overrepresentation of adoptees in the TTI, as well as contextual research on the TTI and on adoption as an institution, with a special focus on adoption trauma. There is very limited academic research on the adoptee population in the TTI, but there is a lot of informal discussion of it online on sites such as Reddit. I developed a lot of this project through cyber ethnography in the subreddit r/troubledteens, a forum where survivors and other interested parties discuss the TTI. There, I observed user interactions and posts to gauge the attitudes people had towards the overrepresentation.

I began this semester with the idea of my central data gathering method being a quantitative survey that could be used to assess the opinions and perspectives of adoptees who went to treatment and their feelings toward their adoptive parents, dynamic in the home, and experiences in treatment. As I began my literature review and interviews, I used my questionnaire as a focal point. However, the more work that I did in the field, the more qualitative data I gathered outside of just the actual survey.

I conducted three in-depth but informal interviews with three of my friends from treatment, all of whom are adopted. We all lived together at a residential treatment center in Montana in 2020. In these interviews, I asked for their opinion on the reason for this

overrepresentation, as well as posed the questions I had come up with for the questionnaire and asked for their help and guidance in building the survey. I created the survey on the platform Qualtrics. After the questionnaire was finalized, I obtained moderator permission to post it in r/troubledteens. I also distributed it to my personal connections in the TTI and encouraged those I knew to send it to their connections as well. After posting the survey, I did a final interview with one of the respondents to it. All names have been changed to ensure confidentiality.

I included my academic email in my post on r/troubledteens, and New York City based lawyer Dawn Post reached out to me. She is a child's rights lawyer and activist who specializes in broken adoptions. She has done pro-bono work this year for youth who were abandoned by adoptive parents at Atlantis Leadership Academy, a TTI facility in Jamaica that was shut down after allegations of severe abuse and neglect. We met for coffee to discuss our perspectives on this overrepresentation.

Analysis

As I began this research, I began to see a few major themes emerging. First, there is the issue of money in regards of financial access to both the TTI and adoption. Stemming from this is the idea of both the TTI and adoption as forms of human trafficking. There is also the biosocial layer of adoption, which sits at the core of this research: the idea that there are different dynamics at play in adoptive families that ultimately lead to the overrepresentation of adoptees in the TTI. There are also concerns about the expectations adoptive parents have for their children and how this affects the family dynamic and welfare of the child.

Financial Access to TTI & Adoption

In our interviews, all three of my friends pointed to money being a relevant player in the reason for the overrepresentation. TTI programs are expensive, with monthly costs ranging anywhere between $5000 - $15,000 or more (Kushan, C. 2017). Access to the TTI is a class issue, as is adoption. In the U.S., there are four primary forms of adoption: Private, independent, intercountry, and adoption from the child welfare system. Adoption from the welfare system may be almost or entirely free of cost, and prospective parents may be able to obtain adoption subsidies from the state to offset the cost of raising a child. However, adoption is generally very expensive. Adoption through a private agency can cost anywhere between $30,000 – $60,000, adopting independently through an attorney anywhere from $25,000 - $45,000, and adoption through an international agency between $20,000 - $50,000 (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2022).

Right off the bat, my friend Sadie identified money as the primary reason that there are more adoptees in treatment. When asked directly for her opinion on the reason for the overrepresentation, she said:

> I think it's because parents have the money to be able to do it, and they feel like a sense of, like, giving up and stuff ... they feel as if they tried everything and nothing's working. So they can't save you, so they want somebody else to save you.

When I asked if she thought that the dynamic of “giving up” would differ in a nonadoptive household, she said yes, but again highlighted money as being the core difference.

> So it's like, if you got the money to be able to adopt, you probably got the money to ship them away. Because this was, like, 10 to $15,000 a month or something. I don't know.

Sadie was adopted as an infant, a few days after birth; her biological mother was financially unstable and using meth during her pregnancy. As we discussed money in relation to the TTI, Sadie shared that she had recently found out that her biological family had sought kinship custody when she was born.

> I don't think I would have been sent away [by my birth family] because my sisters and my grandma from my birth dad's side, they all, like, really wanted me. They were fighting for me against my parents fighting for me, basically, which I found out recently ... and I'm pretty sure my parents got me or something to do just because, like, I don't know... they have more money or something.

This theme was consistent across my interviews. When I interviewed my friend Jess, she also discussed class as an issue and money as an important element when considering the overrepresentation. She also specifically cited her adoption benefits, which her parents withheld from her, and also received while Jess was not in the home. The involvement of state money is another complex layer of this issue.

> **Jess: S**omething else I also actually just recently found out. My parents were receiving well, while I was in treatment, my parents were receiving $10,000 [a month]. Uh-huh. Correct me if I'm wrong. That placement was only $7,000.
>
> **Sophia:** It was 7 or 8. Wow. That is crazy. So they're, like, actively making money and not having to house or feed you.
>
> **Jess:** Yes. And my parents, I don't know what benefits they got, but all I know is that I was used... my parents got my adoption benefits, like, um, extended until I was 21. I have never received a single paycheck. I have never received money from them. I have never, like I've, I've been homeless on the streets and called my mom, and she said, don't ask me for anything.

Jess was adopted when she was an infant by a young, single mother. When Jess was 5, she was removed from the custody of this woman due to her drug use and homelessness. The woman's mother gained kinship custody of Jess and had her for another 2 years before giving her back up for adoption. Jess was then adopted by her "forever family," who had her for all of 8 years before sending her to an RTC. Between the ages of 14 and 15, she spent 10 months at that RTC. After coming home, she was sent back less than a year later. She then spent 23 months at our RTC for the second stint and was finally released 3 days before her 18th birthday.

Human Trafficking

One emergent theme of this research has been the idea of the TTI and adoption / foster care being forms of human trafficking. Standard definitions of human trafficking denote it as the unlawful transportation or coercion of people to exploit them for profit, usually through labor or sex trafficking. However, broader definitions explain it as "stealing freedom for profit" (Polaris. 2024). Indeed, the confinement of teenagers to TTI programs has staggering financial incentive for program owners.

When I met with attorney Dawn Post, I broached this idea of TTI programs as a form human trafficking, drawing a parallel to adoption and foster care also being forms of human trafficking. She readily affirmed this stance. She has done extensive work in the field of youth law and advocacy and has specialized in broken adoptions - that is, adoptive children who are returned to foster care or otherwise no longer living in the care or custody of the parents that adopted them. She is also an expert in adoption subsidy misuse – this is what happened with Jess. It is not uncommon for adoptive parents to retain adoption subsidies after their adoptive child is returned to foster care, runs away, or even after a child has died (Sarkar, S. 2024).

Ms. Post has spent much of her career working with and advocating for youth in foster care. She is very familiar with the TTI and has been highly critical of the state funneling foster kids into the industry. In one of the articles she has written on the matter, she notes that "States pay anywhere from $300 to over $900 a day to warehouse the youth that they have taken custody of in these residential facilities" (Post, D. J., 2022).

It was interesting talking to Ms. Post about her work with foster youth in the TTI, because my research has focused more on the private placement of adoptees into TTI programs, rather than through the state or foster care authorities. She shared that while for much of her career she has focused on the foster care angle, she has spent more time this year exploring and advocating against the disproportionate representation of adoptees in treatment due to private placements as well. In March of 2024, Ms. Post was contacted by a member of Paris Hilton's 11:11 Media Impact, a charitable arm that seeks to address institutional abuse in the TTI. She was asked for her legal and child welfare expertise in assisting a group of teenagers who were abandoned by their adoptive parents at a TTI facility in Jamaica called Atlantis Leadership Academy (ALA). Ms. Post traveled to Jamaica to represent the boy's pro-bono and help to find them placements. Of the eight teenagers removed from ALA, three were left in the permanent custody of Jamaica after their parents declined to retrieve them. All three were adopted and also happened to be the only three of color (Post, D. J. 2024). The abandonment should not come as a surprise – indeed, as Ms. Post came to learn, "one of the 'success stories' that ALA shared with prospective parents was one in which ALA warehoused an adopted youth until he was 18, dropped him off in Miami with some money, and told him never to contact his adoptive parents again" (Post, D. J., & McFarland, M. J., 2024).

It is very difficult to collect specific data on these programs due to the lack of transparency or oversight. A study from 2023 determined the average per-night cost of a

wilderness therapy program is $558, with an average enrollment fee of $3194 (Wilder, J., 2023). Of my survey respondents, 6 reported attending a wilderness program. If the average program's duration is 8 – 14 weeks, then the roughly 11-week average stay costs $46,160, or $16,785/month. That means that for this study alone, roughly $276,960 was paid by 6 households for only their wilderness programs.

Finding average prices for a stay at a Residential Treatment Center (RTC) is even more difficult. 10 of my respondents attended an RTC. The RTC that I attended, along with my three interviewees, was $8,000/month. This is on the low end of pricing – RTCs often run closer to 10 or 12 thousand a month, or more.

12 respondents to my survey reported a collective 302 months spent in treatment, with an average stay of 25.2 months per person.

What kind of program(s) did you attend? Please select all that apply 12

Q26 - What kind of program(s) did you attend? Please select all that apply - Selected Choice	Percentage	Count
Wilderness Program	50%	6
Therapuetic Boarding School	67%	8
Residential Treatment Center	83%	10
Residential Psychiatric Facility	33%	4
Psychiatric Evaluation Center	8%	1
Other (please specify)	8%	1

This spread shows that most residents attended more than one program. This makes predicting an average total cost difficult, because of the variety of programs and pricing. Wilderness programs are typically more expensive than RTCs or Therapeutic Boarding Schools (TBS), as are inpatient psych programs like a psychiatric evaluation center or residential psychiatric facility. With this in mind, I will use a conservative estimate of $10,000/month to determine overall cost. This means

that the average total cost of treatment for each of my survey respondents was approximately $252,000, or a yearly cost of $120,000. That's over 3 million in revenue for 12 respondents. Some of these costs may be covered by insurance, but more often than not parents are paying predominantly out-of-pocket for treatment.

This summary, taken from a study done out of the University of Utah, helps to provide a sense of scale in terms of how profitable this industry is. It should also be noted that while the researching institute officially recognizes 72 programs operating in Utah, due to the cottage industry nature of operations in the TTI, there are likely more facilities that fit the bill but fail to identify themselves as such to the state (Tannert, J. 2016). Utah is the state with the most TTI programs in the country, due largely to weak regulations and the age of medical consent – Utah is considered a "parent's rights" state, which means parents can make medical decisions on behalf of their child. Between 2015 and 2020, 34% of teenagers who crossed state lines for treatment went to a facility in Utah (Miller, J., 2023).

Summary

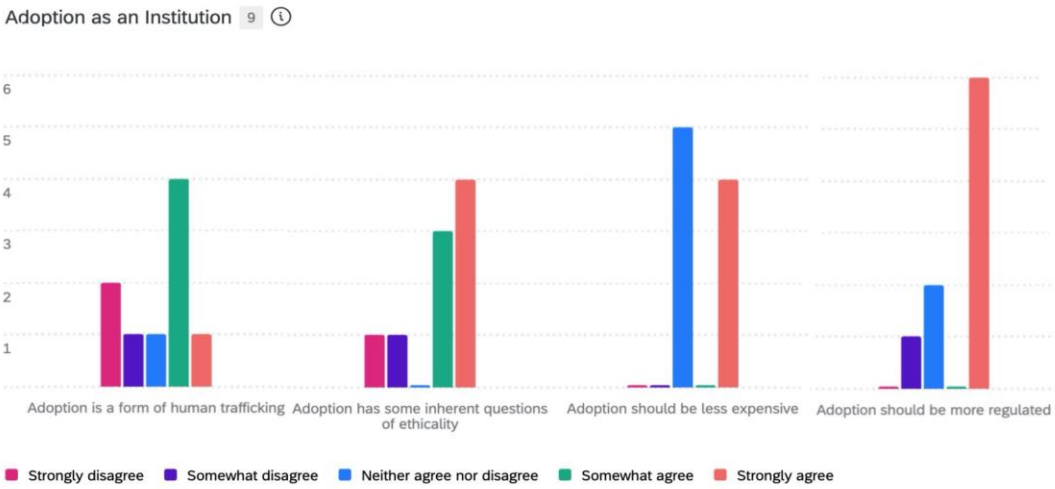
Utah is home to 72 Family Choice and Behavioral Healthcare Interventions Industry programs. These programs provide varying levels of residential treatment for teens and young adults and are primarily funded by families "out-of-pocket," i.e. the industry is not health insurance-driven. The industry generates an economic impact in Utah by bringing in revenue from out-of-state clients, over 90 percent of industry revenue comes from outside of Utah, and through the travel expenditures of clients' families.

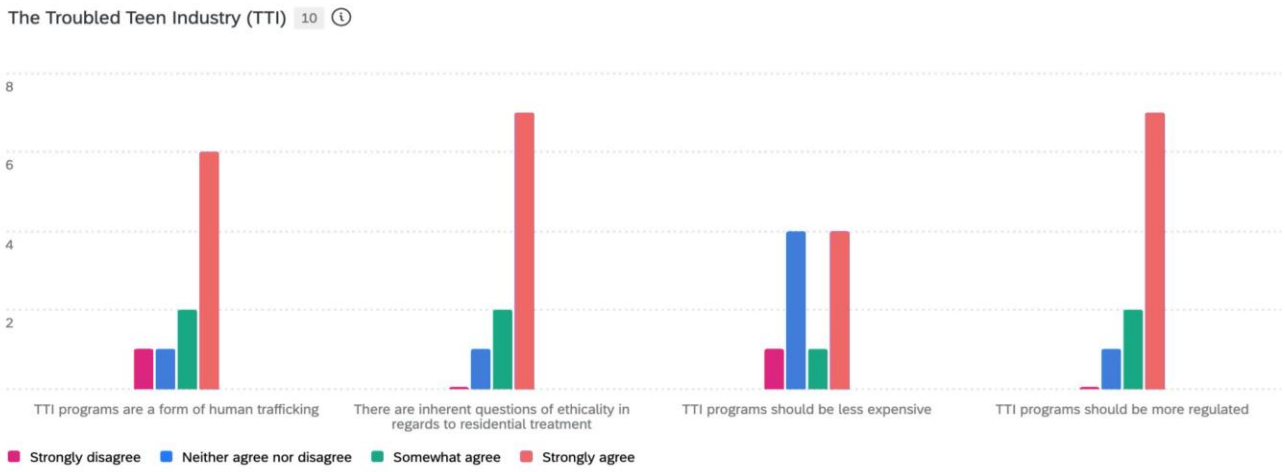
The total 2015 economic impact of the 59 programs that provided operational data to the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute for this analysis included over:

- 6,400 Jobs,
- $269 Million in Earnings,
- $423 Million in State Gross Domestic Product (Utah GDP), and
- $22 Million in State and Local Tax Revenue.

Because the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute was unable to collect data from approximately 18 percent of programs, these estimates represent a lower bound of the industry's total economic impact.

As my research developed, I began to see parallels between the TTI and adoption as an institution. In my questionnaire, I tried to draw this parallel and assess my respondent's perception of it.





It should be noted that this project was the first time I've used Qualtrics, so my questionnaire is not as technically consistent as it would be on a more experienced pass. There were 9 responses to the first set of questions, and 10 for the second. Under the TTI portion, I neglected to add a "somewhat disagree" option, which makes the data slightly less easy to parallel. Still, the pattern is recognizable across both sets of questions – respondents generally perceived the TTI and adoption in similar ways in regard to ethics, cost, and regulation needs. Defining adoption as a form of human trafficking appears to be the most divisive – it is the area that is least consistent with the rest of the responses.

Biosocial Aspect

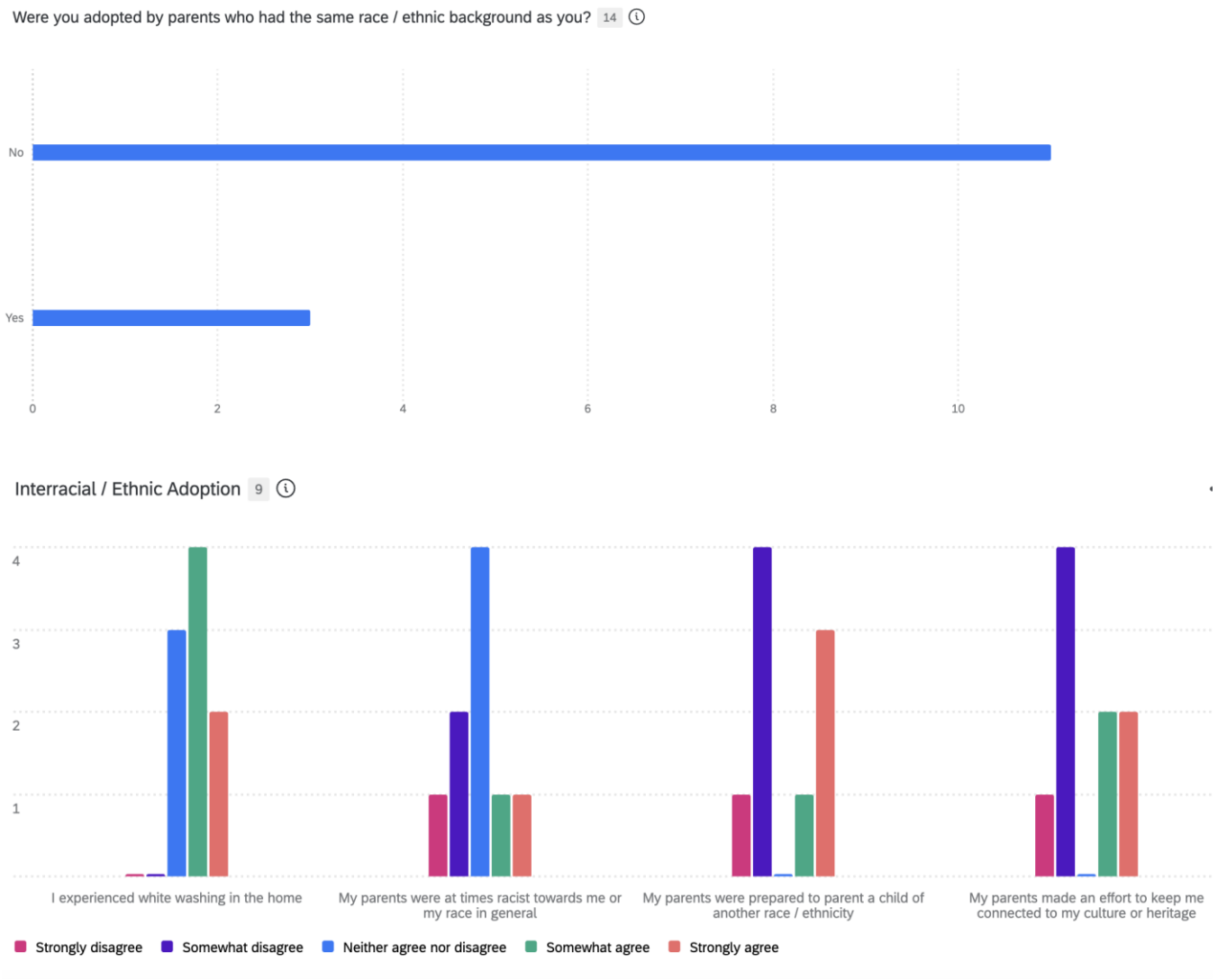
The existence of the overrepresentation of adoptees in TTI programs suggests that there is a dynamic in adoptive households that differs from nonadoptive ones. All four of the informants I interviewed discussed the relevance and importance of connection between an adoptive parent and their child.

> **Jess:** I think that it's kind of almost like giving birth and having your own kid is like a needed, um, aspect of having a correct child parent relationship. So I feel like when adopted parents, they just have a hard time connecting to their kid because this is not... it's not a piece of them. I wasn't a piece of my parents. I have different personality traits. Um, it's nature versus nurture, but there's a lot of nature in there.

> **Ora:** There's this level of disconnect between an adopted parent and child, and I think that is widened the more that you can't see yourself in your child, both physically and, you know, like, personality wise.

These quotes are from two of them. They explained that this disconnect was an important contributing factor to the overrepresentation, and that it is easier for adoptive parents to let go of parenting their children.

Another complicated element at play is that of race. In my questionnaire, only 3 out of 14 respondents had adoptive parents that matched their racial or ethnic background. When considering the importance of “seeing yourself” in your child, the racial disconnect may be an important factor. While exact numbers are difficult to gather, statistics suggest that between 77 – 84% of adoptive parents are white (Zill, N. 2017; Marr, E. 2017).



Perhaps even more concerningly, statistics show that transracial adoptions make up between 21 and 28% of adoptions (Allon, K. et al., 2020; Marr, E. 2017), compared to 79% of the adoptions recorded in my questionnaire. While it would be presumptuous to attribute the adoptive parent-child disconnect solely to racial differences, it is clearly a very important layer to the complex experience of identity and connection in relation to adoption.

Adoptive Parents' Disposition & Expectations

One of my primary theories for this overrepresentation is that there is a dynamic in the adoptive home that differs from a nonadoptive household. I believe that part of this difference is due to the dispositions of parents who are more likely to adopt. While there is not necessarily a concrete way to measure this, I attempted to measure the perceptions that my respondents had towards their adoptive parents in regard to their standards, expectations, and dispositions.

This table tracks the answers of respondents on a scale of 1 – 5, with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree. The majority of responses fall between an average of 3 and 4, indicating mostly neutral positions, leaning towards agreement.

My adoptive parent(s)...	Average
Displayed narcissistic tendencies	3.20
Did not like talking about my status as an adoptee	2.10
Did not like to acknowledge I was adopted	1.90
Spoke poorly of my biological parents or the nature of my being put up for adoption	3.30
Expected me to conform to their idea of who I should be	4.10
Had higher standards for me than what is normal	3.30
Expected me to be grateful for them adopting me	3.10
Lied or withheld information about my adoption / adoptive parents	3.60
Had a savior complex	3.60
Showed me off / used my adoption as a token of their virtue	2.70
Did not like having their authority challenged	4.50
Were willing to work with me and my concerns	3.20

Frequently brought up my status as an adoptee	3.20
Would not have adopted me if they could have a biological child	4.60
Encouraged me to explore my identity or status as an adoptee	3.10
Encouraged me to reach out to my biological parents / family	3.30

The most agreed upon statement was [My adoptive parent(s)...] "Would not have adopted me if they could have a biological child", with 9 out of 10 respondents responding "Strongly agree." This is a widely acknowledged concern in the world of adoption – that adoption caters more to prospective parents, who may be struggling with infertility or are otherwise unable to have a biological child, rather than the child they are adopting.

This sentiment was echoed in the troubled teens subreddit, where there is a wealth of informal discussion of this overrepresentation. Included is a comment from one sub member discussing the overrepresentation:

> Personally, I think adoption in our country is very parent focused. It's about adults finding a way to complete their families. Our trauma that is inherent to the process of adoption is overlooked and misunderstood. In my case, I'm also a different race than my adoptive parents. Never once in treatment was this explored.

The focus on the adoptive parents, or parents in general rather than the child, has alarming implications inside the TTI.

I felt that my parents were the real clients of the program, not me

Strongly Disagree	**0**	(0 Responses)
Somewhat Disagree	**0**	(0 Responses)
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	**2**	(2 Responses)
Somewhat agree	**1**	(1 Responses)
Strongly agree	**7**	(7 Responses)

This was one of the most well-agreed upon questions in my entire questionnaire. The simple truth is that parents are not paying to be told they are the problem. The TTI is for-profit – it exists to make money, not to provide therapy or healing to the teenagers it claims to serve. Parents are the ones paying for the program, not the teens, therefore programs will do whatever it takes to continue collecting a paycheck, even if it is at the expense of children.

While there are a variety of reasons that teens may be sent to treatment, there are a portion who are experiencing abuse in the home and then being sent away as punishment for speaking out, or to cover up the abuse or allegations entirely. I witnessed this first-hand in treatment.

> **Phoebe:** Thats something I'll never forgive [our therapist] for, how she ignored the literal evidence of my parent's abuse and tried to convince me and get me to admit that I was a pathological liar when like... it takes one google search to try to find my father's mugshot and they don't just put kids into foster care for no reason.
>
> **Sophia:** Yes, [our therapist] and the program absolutely gaslit the hell out of you ... It was the same with Jess's parents too, they were abusing her and [our therapist] gaslit her about that too.
>
> **Phoebe:** ... my parents were the clients, they're not paying 8k to be told that they're abusive and that they're the problem, they're paying to get me to admit I'm lying and admit that they're good parents, and the only way I'll get out is if I just go along with it.

Phoebe attended the same RTC as I did. She is not adopted, but I am including her perspective because it is important. Phoebe's parents were physically abusing her, and she and her sister were removed from the home by child welfare authorities and placed into foster care. After regaining their custody, her parents sent her to treatment for continuing to speak out against the abuse. Jess shared a similar story, and there are plenty of others who do too. After being sent to treatment, teens are gaslit about their experience in the home. They may be forced to lie about or recant their experience of abuse, because programs will punish them for not buying into their parents' lies or living up to their wishes and conforming to their standards.



The statement [My adoptive parent(s)] "Expected me to conform to their idea of who I should be" was also largely agreed upon. The manifestation of these expectations can look like a lot of different things, from anything such as strict academic standards and behavioral discipline, or rigidity regarding identity and expression in general.

In my questionnaire, I did not touch at all on the dimension of queer identity and how that impacts family dynamics or the likelihood of a TTI placement. However, this is an important angle to consider, and in a more long-term study I would like to research it more. One of the friends I interviewed, Clarke, is FTM transgender. We met in the girl's group at the RTC we

attended. His parents were not supportive of his gender identity, and thus the program was not either. Our therapist and the staff would deadname and misgender him, and we were expected to as well. Clarke's adoptive parents had a biological son as well as an adopted son. When deciding to add a third child to their family, they knew they wanted a daughter.

> **Clarke:** For me, a big thing ... it didn't mesh well, it kind of plays into my adoption in a way because [my parents] have 2 sons. And initially, they did want a daughter. But me, I have always kind of known since, like, as long as I can remember that I didn't identify with my, like, with being a female. And so and I only found out [what that meant] until much later on, and there was a lot of, I guess, homophobic and transphobic, like...
>
> **Sophia:** Attitudes, maybe?
>
> **Clarke:** Yeah. But that's, like, putting it lightly. There were a lot of different kinds of rejection I faced, within the home, and when I was in treatment.
>
> **Sophia:** Yeah, that makes sense.
>
> **Clarke:** And so I couldn't even really explore what that meant to me or what like, I couldn't even really explore what it... what it might mean to me, like, trans or how my gender identity plays into things or what my sexuality means. Like, I didn't have that time because I was in, you know, treatment, not just in a natural, it's...
>
> **Sophia:** Such a hostile environment.

As demonstrated in Clarke's case, queerphobic attitudes in the home can contribute to placement. When you hear about "gay conversion camps," what people are referring to are TTI facilities – private, for-profit programs that cater to the "rehabilitative" wishes of the parent, not the child (Golightley, S. 2023). While the RTC we attended was not overtly queerphobic, nor did it market itself as such to parents, the underlying attitudes towards queer identities, especially when paired with the disapproval of parents, created an incredibly hostile environment.

Custody & Parenting

One of my theories for the overrepresentation is the idea that adoptive parents may be more comfortable with an out of home placement because of their familiarity with the transferal of custody – adoption by nature involves the exchange of money and the custody of a child, as does the TTI.



Only 2 out of 10 responded in the negative. This suggests that the perception that adoptive parents have regarding their responsibility to a child might be different than a non-adoptive parent might have.

> **Ora:** ...my mom calls it outsourcing parenting. So... I grew up with a nanny.
>
> **Sophia:** Oh, okay. Wow. That's such an interesting...
>
> **Ora:** Yeah. Like, that's right there. It's just super interesting dynamics. Like, you want to adopt a child, but then you don't really want to raise it. So, you get a nanny. You're already comfortable with outsourcing parenting. That's what she calls it.
>
> **Sophia:** Wow. Yeah.

> **Ora:** So I think that this just wasn't such a reach, but I think that she just didn't... I don't know. I mean, she's a lawyer. She's, uh, my dad's a doctor, so their careers always came first. Um, but I just don't... I think that's sort of the trail of, like, you know, you get into the adoption agencies, so you're comfortable with this sort of world.

I interviewed Ora after we connected on Reddit, and she had some really valuable insight. This idea of outsourcing parenting really stood out to me. Arguably, all TTI programs employ this outsourcing of parenting simply by gaining the custody of teens from their parents. The idea that this outsourcing begins at home, whether through attitudes regarding the responsibility to a child or through the more literal hands-off approach of parenting with a nanny, seems to be a crucial element to understanding the overrepresentation.

Summary

The overrepresentation of adoptees in the Troubled Teen Industry has many complex and overlapping factors. Financial access to both adoption and the TTI is likely an important factor to start with, as the money needed for adoption precludes any other dynamics in the home and ultimately is needed to send a child to treatment. This research also suggests that identity and connection are relevant players in the adoptive family dynamic, and that a disconnect occurring due to appearance, personality, or otherwise may contribute to placement. On this front, it is clear that the interracial angle of adoption is hugely important, considering the disparity between interracial adoptions at large and the representation of those adoptions in the TTI. The disposition of adoptive parents should also be considered as it is hugely important in shaping the home dynamics as well as the relationship between the parent and child. Respondents to my questionnaire specifically cited the expectations that adoptive parents have for their child, as well as a parent’s need to remain an unquestioned authority figure as two of the primary dispositions that contribute to the overrepresentation.

Strengths & Limitations

I believe that my methodology was overall sound. I was able to utilize my personal connections in the space to help inform and guide me – the three friends that I interviewed were instrumental in the development of this project. I think that having an insider's perspective on the TTI was also very important for the progression of this project. I, as the researcher, have been able to explore and unpack my own experiences throughout the course of this project, and it has really helped to guide me.

The cyber ethnography I've conducted on Reddit in r/troubledteens was also a cornerstone of my research – it served as a launch pad for my survey and was a source of inspiration and guidance. Despite the dearth of formal research on the overrepresentation of adoptees in TTI programs, there is extensive discussion of it in r/troubledteens, and a large community of adoptees who went through it themselves. I have been able to observe different forums on the subject and was able to conduct an interview with an adoptee that I met in the comments of the post where I distributed my questionnaire. My presence in the subreddit outside of specific relation to the overrepresentation has also helped me to stay focused on the space in general, which has allowed for me to really immerse myself into this research.

A clear technical limitation is my unfamiliarity with Qualtrics. As mentioned, this project is the first time I've used it, so it was a learning curve for me while building the questionnaire. I also had several people who began the survey but did not complete it to 100%. Rather than only including those who completed it entirely, I chose to recognize the data collected by any number of responses regardless of completion. I made this decision because the sample size was already small, and I felt that analyzing their responses was valuable. However, this does contribute to a lack of consistency in percentages across questions. In a more long-term study, I would control for this better.

The biggest limiting factor of this research is the time and resources available as I've conducted it. This originally started as a semester-long project to fulfill my undergraduate capstone course, but I believe that with the proper time and resources there is a full thesis worth of research that could be conducted. I hope to continue this research, be it through finding a research position with my college or eventually going to grad school.

Recommendations for Further Study

I would be hard pressed to say that my research question is entirely answered by this project. However, the data gathered is supportive of the guiding questions in regard to the importance of dynamics at play within the home. Primarily, the data gathered by this study supports the idea of adoptive parent-child connection being hugely important and often hindered, as well as how influential money is in this space. While not explored fully in this report, I also gathered a lot of data on the perceptions of adoption trauma and what that means for identity, connection, and wellbeing.

There is a plethora of untapped data here. In a future study, there is so much that could be analyzed. I would recommend some sort of comparative analysis against non-adoptees in treatment, as well as potentially gathering the perspectives of the adoptive parents of teenagers who went to treatment. There is just so much to explore on every front. Examining the racial angle of this overrepresentation, focusing on adoption subsidy misuse, understanding the importance of connection and identity and expectations, gauging the personality differences in adoptive versus nonadoptive parents and their children... if I had more time, I could pull together a much more well-rounded project. Alas, time being what it is, I will delegate that for further study.

Conclusions

The Troubled Teen Industry is dangerous, abusive, and unethical. There are well documented cases of abuse and neglect in the industry spanning back decades, and institutional abuse continues to this day (Chatfield, M., 2019; Kopsick, L. L., 2022; Golightley, S. 2020, Szalavitz, M., 2006). This research is precluded by the abusive nature of this industry and the urgent need to regulate the facilities within it. With that in mind, understanding the overrepresentation of adoptees in the TTI is incredibly important. This representation shows that adoptees, as well as foster care youth, are a group who are more likely to experience victimization in this industry. Understanding the factors that contribute to this victimization is essential in correcting it and repairing the harms that are occurring and have previously occurred. It is imperative that further research is conducted, and that advocacy work continues to secure the rights of teenagers who were never given a choice about their custody – in, and out, of the Troubled Teen Industry.

References

Allon, K., Gosciak, J., Spielfogel, J. (2020) "The Multiethnic Placement Act 25 Years Later: Trends in Adoption and Transracial Adoption." Washington, DC: Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation Available at https://aspe.hhs.gov/pdf-report/mepa-transracial-adoption.

Brodzinsky, D., Santa, J., & Smith, S. L. (2016). Adopted Youth in Residential Care: Prevalence Rate and Professional Training Needs. *Residential Treatment For Children & Youth*, *33*(2), 118–134. https://doi-org.ez.lib.jjay.cuny.edu/10.1080/0886571X.2016.1175993

Chatfield, M. M. (2019). Totalistic programs for Youth. *Journal of Extreme Anthropology*, *3*(2), 44–71. https://doi.org/10.5617/jea.7015

Child Welfare Information Gateway (2022). *Planning for adoption: Knowing the costs and resources*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau. https://www. childwelfare.gov/pubs/s-cost/

Golightley, S. (2020). Troubling the 'troubled teen' industry: Adult reflections on youth experiences of therapeutic boarding schools. *Global Studies of Childhood*, *10*(1), 53–63. https://doi.org/10.1177/2043610619900514

Golightley, S. (2023). 'I'm Gay! I'm Gay! I'm Gay! I'm a Homosexual!': Overt and Covert Conversion Therapy Practices in Therapeutic Boarding Schools. *The British Journal of Social Work*, *53*(3), 1426–1444. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcad049

Kopsick, L. L. (2022). *Removing the Blindfold: Survivors' Stories of Academic and Social-Emotional Learning Within the Troubled Teen Industry*. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Kushan, C. (2017). *The Troubled Teen Industry: Commodifying Disability and Capitalizing on Fear*. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

Marr, E. (2017). U.S. Transracial Adoption Trends in the 21st Century. *Adoption Quarterly*, *20*(3), 222–251. https://doi.org/10.1080/10926755.2017.1291458

McSherry, D., Miranda Samuels, G. E., & Brodzinsky, D. (2022). An introduction to the adoption and trauma special issue. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *130*(Pt 2), 105691–105691. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2022.105691

Miller, J. (2023). *How Utah became the leading place to send the nation's troubled teens*. APM Reports. https://www.apmreports.org/story/2022/04/05/how-utah-leads-nation-troubled-teens

Miranda Samuels, G. E. (2022). Epistemic trauma and transracial adoption: Author(iz)ing folkways of knowledge and healing. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *130*, 105588. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2022.105588

Pace, C. S., Muzi, S., & Madera, F. (2022). Emotional-behavioral problems, attachment and verbal skills in late-adopted adolescents: The role of pre-adoption adversities and adoption variables. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *130*, 105188. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2021.105188

Post, D. J. (2022). *The true face of residential care failures*. The Imprint. https://imprintnews.org/opinion/the-true-face-of-big-residential-care-failures/200874

Post, D. J. (2024). *Adopted. abandoned. but not forgotten.* Kentucky Lantern. https://kentuckylantern.com/2024/09/03/adopted-abandoned-but-not-forgotten/#:~:text=ALA%20is%20part%20of%20a,remorse%E2%80%9D%20over%20their%20decision%20to

Post, D. J., & McFarland, M. J. (2024). *Abuse by proxy*. American Bar Association. https://www.americanbar.org/groups/litigation/resources/newsletters/childrens-rights/spring2024-abuse-by-proxy

Sarkar, S. (2024). *New York bill aims to ensure adoption money follows the child*. The Imprint. https://imprintnews.org/top-stories/new-york-bill-broken-adoptions/250675

Szalavitz, M. (2006). *Help at any cost: How the troubled-teen industry cons parents and hurts kids*. Riverhead Books.

Tennert, J. (2016). (rep.). *Economic Impact of Utah's Family Choice Behavioral Healthcare Interventions Industry*. Salt Lake City, Utah: Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute.

Polaris. (2024). *Human trafficking*. National Human Trafficking Hotline. https://humantraffickinghotline.org/en/human-trafficking

Wilder, J. (2023). *How much does wilderness therapy cost?*. All Kinds of Therapy. https://www.allkindsoftherapy.com/how-much-does-wilderness-therapy-cost

Zill, N. (2017). *Analysis of data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study of the Kindergarten Class of 2010-2011. National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education*