

Adoption: The Long View Transcript

Dr JaeRan Kim and Patrick Armstrong

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Lori Holden, Greeting

This is Adoption: The Long View, a podcast brought to you by Adopting.com. I'm your host, Lori Holden, author of [The Open-Hearted Way to Open Adoption](#) and [Adoption Unfiltered](#). Join me as we take a closer look at what happens *after* you adopt your child and begin parenting them. Your adoption journey isn't over then -- it's just beginning.

In this podcast, you'll hear from a variety of thought-provoking and influential guests as we help you make the most of your adoption journey. Like any trip worth taking, there will be ups and downs and challenges. Here's what you're going to wish you'd known from the start.

Ready? Let's go.

Lori Holden, Intro

When our adoptees are young, we cannot anticipate how, when, and if they will process their adoptedness someday as adults. Such processing may not have been beyond our radar if we've heard nothing to counter common adoption narratives like, "Adoption is no big deal," "Just parent them like they're your own," or "Love will get us through everything."

For adoptees, figuring out their identity with the added layer of adoption and the eventual realization that in order to land in this family, they first had to leave that family, these are aspects of their lives that require extra thought, attention, and integration. An adoptee has underlying currents in their life story that may, or may not, bubble to the surface, but exist nonetheless. If our adoptee does one day dip their toes in that current, oh how we hope it will be a gentle and smooth journey for them. Don't all parents want their child to have an easy time of the big things in life? Some things we parents can't control, but some we can, at least, influence. What might we do to support such processing early in their lives when everything involving separation and attachment is out-sized in the scheme of things?

As we wind down this podcast, which will conclude at the end of this year, I am so excited to welcome two thought leaders to talk with us about the Adoptee Consciousness Model. It was conceived by a team of adoptee scholars, including Dr. JaeRan Kim, here with us today. Many adoptees have related to it, including Patrick Armstrong, also here with us today, who unfurled on social media how the adoptee consciousness model was playing out for him in his own lead up to becoming a parent.

Just like you may already be thinking of ways to support your child in the future, like saving for college, you are going to want to better understand what is in store for adoptees who embark on this journey because today, right now, you are helping to set a foundation for the integration and processing they may eventually do at some stage in their life. What will you one day wish you'd known about setting that foundation now? Let's welcome in, Dr. JaeRan Kim and Patrick Armstrong. Hello, you two.

Dr. JaeRan Kim: Hello. Thanks, Lori, for inviting us.

Patrick Armstrong: Yes. Thank you, Lori. That was an amazing introduction. Thank you so much.

Lori: I am so excited to have you two here today. I've been envisioning all these questions that I want to ask you and how I better want to understand this model myself. Now this is the part where I tell you about yourselves.

Dr. JaeRan Kim, PhD, MSW (she/her) is an associate professor in the School of Social Work and Criminal Justice at the University of Washington at Tacoma, located on the traditional territories of the Puyallup peoples. Prior to completing her doctoral degree, she worked with foster and adopted children and families and with adults with disabilities in residential care.

JaeRan's research is focused on the well-being of adoptees, exploring disability, race, and transnational experiences for adoptees. Her research includes the racial, ethnic, and adoption socialization practices of Korean-American adoptee parents, the use of out-of-home care for adoptees, residential treatment, group homes, and foster care, and adult intercountry adoptees with adoption displacement experiences. JaeRan's research also explores the preparation and training of professional social workers. As a public scholar, JaeRan is passionate about engaging in community-based projects. Her blog, Harlow's Monkey, which focuses on the transracial transnational adoptee experience, is one of the longest running transracial adoption blogs in the United States.

And I can vouch for that because when I started writing at LavenderLuz.com 17 ½ years ago, Harlow's Monkey was already well established, and it continues to be well respected.

Patrick Armstrong (he/him) is a passionate storyteller, critical conversationalist, and proud Asian-American adoptee. He's the host of the award-winning podcasts, Conversation Piece, about the missing pieces of the conversations we're already having, and the Janchi Show, a show that explores and celebrates the experiences and stories of Korean adoptees everywhere. He is also a keynote speaker and moderator, having worked with clients, including Purdue University, the Indianapolis Colts, and Indiana Sports Corp. Patrick currently lives in Indianapolis with his wife, their son, and their cat.

So, all that is to say, JaeRan, you and I worked together on the Inclusive Family Support Model along with Angela Tucker. And Patrick, you and I got to meet in person when Sara and Kelsey and I were there for a book launch in Indianapolis early this year. So, it's such a special treat for me and I'm sure for our listeners to have you both here today to teach us more about the Adoptee Consciousness Model.

So, as we get started, let's bring in the context of why the three of us are here today. JaeRan, would you tell us your two paths to becoming an adoptee and an adoptee scholar?

JaeRan: Sure. So, I was born in South Korea and adopted to Minnesota in the early 1970s when I was about 3 years old, just before my 3rd birthday, and was raised in a white family, very – I'd often describe that I had a very idyllic childhood, kind of your typical midwestern – Patrick, you're nodding your head – and it's like, a very typical supported, loving, adoptive family. But I think the one thing that was really starkly I was aware of from a very early age was that I was the only Asian adoptee in the family and one of very few people of color in my neighborhood,

my church, my school, my community. The adoption part didn't really hit me until I was older. It was more the racial things that I was kind of paying attention to and thinking about.

And so, that kind of leads me to how I became an adoption scholar because I founded the adoptee community when I was in my late twenties. I was 29. I reconnected with a friend of mine. A couple of years later, I went to Korea for the first time. And by this point, I had already been married for – I got married at 20, so I'd been married for about 10 years;

I had 2 kids, and I didn't really have any language to talk about adoption at all until I met other adoptees. And then it was kind of, like, really quick learning because suddenly, everything about my world became about adoption and about adoptees.

And it was these conversations that I was having in the adoptee community that really led me to becoming an adoption scholar; first by becoming a social worker and then by becoming an adoption researcher because I really felt that the conversations we were having in the adoptee community were not being reflected in the research. And so, I really wanted to be part of that. I had the privilege by that point of having had a master's degree in social work. I had some years of practicing in social work and meeting adoptees, both through the kind of the practice side of things as well as just being in community. And I really noticed that there were some foundational aspects about how professionals were talking about and practicing adoption facilitation and adoptive parents and foster parents hoping to become adoptive parents, that their training and preparation just was lacking some pretty key things that adult adoptees were talking about; not kids, but adult adoptees were talking about. And so, I wanted to do something about that. That's really what led me to this the scholarship, going into a PhD program and focusing on adoption as my research.

Lori: Thank you for sharing all that. And I'll be one of those adoptive parents who has benefited from your curiosity and your drive to include adoptee-led research in this area.

Patrick, could you tell us your two journeys here? (1) being an adoptee and (2) being a content creator and podcaster.

Patrick: Sure. So like JaeRan, I was born in South Korea. I was adopted in 1990 at 3 months old and ended up with a white family in rural Indiana. Idyllic is a great way to describe it. I should probably start using that, but I generally say I had a generally positive adoption experience; very supportive and loving family. Community was fairly close knit because it was a small town. But similarly, to many other folks, I grew up in racial isolation and was one of 0.03% Asian population in my small town. So that caused me to do a lot of rejection of my identity in order to survive those circumstances, despite having all that love and support. There was no love or support when it came to microaggressions or racial – whatever you might have. We just didn't have those conversations. And if we did call it out as bad behavior, there were no consequences or follow-up to show me that this was something that truly did stoop to the level of being bad enough to carry that label with it.

And so that's how I navigated the world for my entire life until I was 30. At that time is how I kind of fell into creating content and it is in podcasting as well. My wife and I had just moved back to Indianapolis from Chicago, and we were talking about what it would look like to start our family because we were planning to get married. I guess we were engaged at that time. And we were

also living in the beginning of a pandemic, the beginnings of lockdowns, as well as watching the world kind of set itself on fire, and be set on fire by a number of different things, particularly within the Black community, state violence specifically directed at the black community, and then a lot of violent rhetoric, and then actual physical violence being directed at Asian Americans.

And all of these things were happening at once, and I had my coming to consciousness moment one night when we're sitting on the couch watching a movie called *Always Be my Maybe*. It's an Asian-American romcom, but something about the beginning of that movie just clicked with everything else that was kind of happening in the world. And I remember I just looked over at my wife, and I said, "How am I going to raise our kids to navigate the world as Asian when I don't know how to do that?" And the next day, I had been listening to podcasts, and I searched "Asian American" in the podcast app and came across the podcast that I really fell in love with, and ended up guesting on that show. And by guesting on that show, I was put together with two other Korean adoptees, KJ Rehlke and Nathan Nowak. And one thing led to another, and we started the Janchi Show, which is that show about the adoptee experience, specifically Korean, and then we've started to broach more broadly, Asian.

Through all of that, I have started to share my story a little bit more publicly as well, particularly on Instagram, but also LinkedIn, a site that JaeRan is very active on, and I find more and more adoptees being more active on as well, which is great to see that conversation happening there. But through that, I found, I think, my calling, which is to utilize whatever platforms I have available to me to help tell stories, particularly those that run counter to my own.

Generally, my story is the one that's propped up within this narrative, and the ones that do not look like mine are not heard as much. So, through the podcast, through content creation online, through other means of facilitation, whether it be moderating, whether it be speaking, I'm hoping to be able to use those platforms to do those things, to lift up those voices. But that's how I found myself here.

Lori: I love that, and I love that you seek out stories different from your own. I am drawn to that too. Otherwise, you're just kind of treading the same path all over and over and over again. How did you two come to know each other? Patrick?

Patrick: I was first introduced to JaeRan's work from mutual friend, Sarah Park Dahlan. When I was first starting all of this journey and looking into all these things, I was like, I'm a big reader, so I was trying to read a lot of books. And Sarah suggested that I go on to this website, Harlow's Monkey, and check it out. And I went there, and literally, the thing that I was like, "We need one of these." That was the database of things that I was looking for. And so, that was how I became familiar with JaeRan's work, and when we started to do the Janchi show, obviously, dream guest at the top of the list, and it was Episode 18 that you first appeared. And I we're at 166 now. The next episode that comes out will be a 166. So, Episode 18 was early days, but that was, I think, our very first full conversation, if I'm remembering correctly.

JaeRan: That's my recollection too. Yeah. We have a couple of mutual acquaintances. So, Sarah Park Dahlan is a good friend of mine. And then Jerry Won had invited me to be on his podcast – That's the one that Patrick was referencing – to do a show about Asian adoptees and Black Lives Matter. So, I had been on that show and then from there, I was invited to be on the

Janchi Show. And then we've been at a number of different conferences and community events too.

Patrick: Yes.

Lori: Yeah. Is one of the main ones the KAAN conference? Do you want to mention a little bit about that, JaeRan?

JaeRan: Yeah. So, the KAAN conference has been around since the 1990s. I don't even know how many years. And over the past, I would say, 10 years, the last decade, it's really become more adult-adoptee focused. In the early days, it was really around supporting white adoptive parents of Korean kids.

So, it's a fantastic community conference. It's one of my favorites. I've been there, I think, 9 times? I was trying to count, over the past years, and Patrick has been at a couple of them. We also were at a BIPOC adoptees event in Portland last year, I think.

Lori: I think one of the things that has driven my curiosity all along the way of raising my kids is this idea that adult adoptees are getting together in their own spaces. And what are they saying? Like, what do I need to know about what they're saying? And so, that's probably a big part of the drive behind this whole podcast.

Let's get into the meat of things, JaeRan, would you explain the adoptee consciousness model and its 5 stages to us?

JaeRan: Sure. So, we actually don't call them stages. We call them touch points. And the reason why is because stages kind of makes it seem like it's a phase in a person's life. And while some of them could be phases, like Rupture, for example, is more of an event that happens. And so, we just don't want to give the idea that there's this linear progression to coming to consciousness.

So as we were thinking about it, I was very influenced by Gloria Anzaldúa's work. She has a consciousness model for what it means to be somebody who lives in the borders and in the kind of the overlap of society. Anzaldúa was a queer Mexican-American scholar writer. And so, she often felt like her life was a series of kind of forcing you to be one or the other. And in her own progression; coming out as queer, thinking about her racial identities, thinking about land and country and all the different parts of what made her who she was, including being a scholar, an activist, writer, all the different things, she really kind of tried to counter the narrative that we had to be one thing or another and that figuring out our identities and thinking about what is important to us doesn't happen in these nice, neat, linear stages.

And she talked about things like that earthquake that happens when you encounter some information or things you realize aren't the way you thought it was, that your worldview is changed.

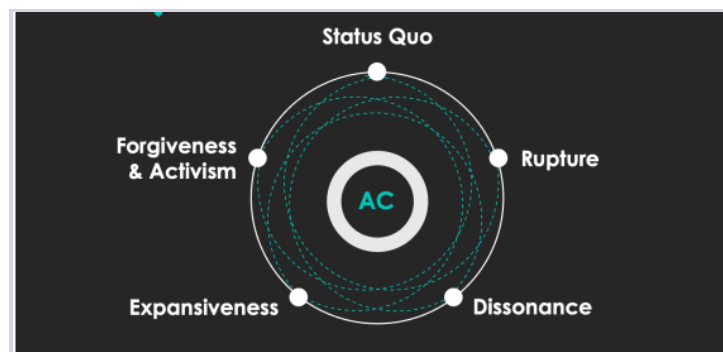
So, we really modeled our adaptive conscious model off of Paulo Freire from Pedagogy of the Oppressed and Anzaldúa's, scholars of color who are really thinking about communities and about our place in communities.

So, even though a lot of people talk about our model as an individual process – and it is very individual – it's also part of what we're hoping people will see is that it's our ability to place ourselves within this larger community of adoptees too. So, it's both individual and it's also a collective process. So, I just wanted to give that background.

The other thing that I think is important to talk about is – so, my co-authors on this, the first four. Susan Branco, Kripa Cooper-Lewter, and Paolo O'Laughan, and I all met as volunteers at PACT Family Camp. We were all there as counselors and educators in 2011. And we – you know how it is when sometimes you meet people and you just form that instant bond right away; you connect? That's what happened with us. The 4 of us just became instant best friends. And throughout the years, we would get together. We would do weekends away. We would meet up at other conferences. And it was at one of those kind of just weekend getaways that we were talking about the language of “out of the fog.” We were seeing a lot of adoptees use this term “out of the fog.” And we were having this discussion about, well, what happens once you're out of the fog? It seems like you're either in it or out of it.

And there also, we were noticing some kind of what we thought was not great reactions to this term, like a sense of shame, if you were not out of the fog and what that meant. And we didn't like that, so we wanted to expand it a little bit more and kind of think together what does it mean if we're supporting each other in community for people who are both “in the fog” or out of the fog. And what does that mean once you're out of the fog? And does out of the fog even mean that you are, like, fully out of the fog? Or can you still have some areas where you're still buying the narrative or believing the dominant narrative?

And then we invited Grace Newton to be part of this conversation with us because she had just written this auto ethnography about taking a class in college that was critical of adoption and how that was for her, as a Chinese adoptee, to be confronted with all this information that she hadn't thought about before. And so, we invited her to be part of it because she just did such a beautiful job of writing about that experience.



So, the different touchstones are Status Quo, and that is where we describe people as just kind of either not really considering adoption as being important in their lives or thinking that adoption is what the dominant narrative of adoption tends to be, which is very all positive. It's a win-win-win solution for everybody. There is no loss or losses minimized, kind of being a champion for adoption, some of those sorts of things. Just not wanting to consider any kind of critical aspects of it, either in an individual way or in a kind of a practice or macro way.

And then Rupture is that point in time when you get that information. For me, it was reconnecting with a friend that I knew when we were children and meeting when we were in our early 30s and kind of having my mind blown like, "Oh, right. She's saying things that I've experienced, but I've never really verbalized or talked about before." It's like realizing that adoption isn't all just win-win. Recognizing, "Oh, I've had these feelings and these thoughts in the past, but I didn't have a way to describe them or a language for them. And so, I just pushed it down as if it were my fault that I was feeling any of these negative things, not realizing that's just a normal part of being an adoptee." So, Rupture is kind of like that earthquake that happens to us.

And then Dissonance is what we call the touchstone of where you're kind of confused and not sure what to do next about this information that you've just experienced and/or received. And so, we think of our model as a spiral, not as a progression, because from that Rupture to Dissonance area, a lot of adoptees might say, "This is too much information. I don't want to think about it anymore. And you know what? Status Quo is great. I want to be back in Status Quo again." And they may stay there a little bit of time or they may stay there permanently.

The whole idea is that our lives are not just in a linear progression, that different things, catalysts, can change us. Becoming a parent for sure was an important one for me. Meeting other adoptees was another part for me. Becoming a social worker was another catalyst for me. So, there are a lot of things that could happen that will kind of provide that point of Rupture for you and then that Dissonance. What do I do now with that?

And then Expansion is what we call that time when you're really doing a lot of exploration. You're trying to gather more information. You're exploring, personally or collectively, what this new information is going to mean for you or means to you. And so, we see a lot of generative things happen during this time in a person's life, this touchstone. They may write a blog, which is what I did. I started writing a blog as my initial expansion. They might decide to do a film. They might write poetry. They may become an activist. There's all these different things. They might go back to school and become a therapist, or they might start reading books. They might get involved in, the online adoptee space.

We see lots of people starting organizations, starting groups, traveling back to their home countries, starting a birth family search. There are lots of things that people do all in ways of trying to support that next wherever they're going to be, the next part of their life.

And then our last kind of touchstone is Forgiveness and Activism. And it seems like these are kind of two really different elements, but we feel like they go together a lot. The Forgiveness part really speaks to this idea of, you know, we can't always change what happened in the past, but we can now start to think about what we want to do in our future. And sometimes that involves forgiving ourselves for what we didn't know, forgiving ourselves for how long we stayed in status quo, forgiving ourselves for not being more active, for believing things, forgiving ourselves for trusting the wrong people in our adoption process and our journey. It could also mean things – and this is where we sometimes get pushback – forgiving our adoptive parents or adoption agencies or even larger society because they don't know what they don't know sometimes.

And like my parents always said, "You know, no one ever told us this. When we adopted you in 1970, 1971, we were told to raise you like we were raising biological kids. And we shouldn't

have just taken that as a word, but we thought we were doing the right thing.” That doesn't absolve them for some of the things that I wish that they had done, but it does help me understand where they were coming from.

So, it's really about kind of extending grace in some of those situations because, ultimately, if I hold on to kind of a toxic anger about that, it would prevent me from being able to actualize myself in broader ways.

And Activism, we really want to make sure people understand activism looks a million ways. So, for some people, it's starting petitions. It's protesting. It's, you know, for other people, it's through their writing. It's through their content that they do on social media. It's through individual conversations they're having with other people that nobody will ever know about, but they are changing that narrative one person at a time.

So, Activism can look a lot of different ways, and we don't want people to think that there's one way to be in any of these different touchstones. What it looks like for some people is going to look very different for others.

Lori: I love how you reframed stages to touch points. Not only because it makes it not linear, but it also makes it not hierarchical. Like, somebody who's *here* is better than somebody who's *there*.

JaeRan: If I can just kind of touch on this too. Adoption is so emotional, and people going through the process, it just stirs up so much emotion. I've seen people who are activists who are toxic in the way that they are doing their Activism. So, they're still an activist, but they can be toxic. I can see people who are in Status Quo who are very kind and give a lot of grace to other people.

So, we also don't want to associate, like you just said, one touchstone as being better than another. So, thank you for bringing that up.

Lori: I know that this was created by adoptees for adoptees, but I just have to say that the model makes sense to me, and I think this is why I have been so drawn to both of your work around this. I, of course, as an adoptive parent entered into Status Quo, what everybody knows. I'm getting ready to do a keynote presentation and I'm going to talk about my moment of Rupture and how painful that was when I realized I didn't know it all and I needed to learn something new. And then the Dissonance that comes from knowing that my ignorance may eventually cost my children, maybe it did cost my children, and then... what's the next stage, no, touchpoint?

JaeRan: The Expansion.

Lori: The Expansion. Yeah. I had to become bigger to incorporate this thing that was not already part of me. And then the Activism; and I'll tell you, I also see in myself. When I was newly getting this knowledge – and I see this in other adoptive parents too – they are sometimes the hardest on the others who don't have the knowledge and it becomes weaponized, kind of like out of the fog. So, there is, as you settle into the touch points, you do kind of get more comfortable and less combative because you're just more secure in your own process.

Because this is an adoptee model, is there anything that adoptive parents need to know, JaeRan, about thinking about this, about using it as a construct for their own children? I'm guessing one of the things is don't push. Don't make something happen.

JaeRan: Yeah. And the other thing is that the group of us that put together this model have experienced is parents expressing that they hope their child won't go through this process. And that is something that you can't prevent. Adoptees are going to go through it at some point or another. And so, I think for adoptive parents, if they can listen to other people talking about it and think through their own process, and we've had adoptive parents who've said, "We need a model like this for us as well." And, you know, again, just, like, applying some grace and thinking about, like, "Okay. My kid might" – If the parents can't be supportive about knowing that their kids might experience these different touchstones, then they're not going to be able to respond in a compassionate and empathetic way when their child might come to them and say, "I'm experiencing this right now." And to help them normalize it and validate their feelings instead of becoming defensive, but it's hard. Defensiveness is just a part of it. We see that a lot in Dissonance, but what I say is that if your kid tries and you aren't there for them in that way where they're in that model, if you can get to that point and then let them know that you weren't there for them, but you do want to listen to them and support them, that repair part is really important. And then, hopefully, they'll be able to come back and share with you, and you can be part of this journey together because otherwise, it's going to be very painful.

Lori: Thank you for saying that. And that was another question I was going to ask you, and I'll ask Patrick about that in a little bit. But first, Patrick, why don't you talk to us about your coming to consciousness, which is the verb I've heard now instead of coming out of the fog. I've heard coming to consciousness. What was your journey coming to consciousness during your life prior to impending fatherhood, like up until your 30s?

Patrick: Sure. I do want to just say that if you ended the episode right there, that would be a great episode. I'd listen to it a hundred times. That was fantastic. My brain is just moving and grooving. I could listen to JaeRan talk forever about any and all of these things. So, thank you.

So, I think my first, like, moment of post-high school consciousness bit would have been when I went to Ball State, which was my first semester of my freshman year. So, right out of high school. I took a class, a US history class, and the teacher was just, like, on the very first day, I'll never forget, was just like, "You're going to learn a bunch of stuff that you did not learn in high school." And, basically, he just reframed pretty much America from 1776 to the 80s, through Reagan and talked about everything that you just didn't hear in school. And particularly, once we got to the 80s and how really detrimental and how targeted and intentional some policies were directed towards the black community and how those things have permeated and influenced the way that we continue to talk about specific communities today. That was the first time that I started to think differently, but I was never moved to truly change or step out of my own sense of comfort until I reached that actual moment of Rupture at 30.

I like to think about my 20s, in particular this time right before 30, as my performative era, specifically because that class sparked in me this idea that I wanted to be an ally and an advocate in whatever that meant at that time. This is Barack Obama's first term. This is the sense of hope. You're a college kid trying to find your way. So, I wanted to do all these things.

But when I look back on my life now and I think about what I was doing at that time, I was learning a lot, but I was not applying the things that I was learning into my own life and into what I actually was wanting to do and advocate and be an ally for. And so, a lot of that just turned into air. It was a lot of talking, not a lot of action.

And so, it really – I like to think about myself having been experiencing Dissonance for the 2 or 3 years prior to my moment of Rupture because I was becoming disillusioned with especially, like, our treatment towards Black people and the Black community, especially now starting to see these blips of violence against Asian folks. But I have family members who are part of the LGBTQ community and starting to realize, oh, some of the things and ways that we talk to them and ways that we treated folks in our close circles was not the right way to go about any of this. And I'm like, "I need to really be thinking about what I was doing in my life at that time."

But, again, it was just like it was building out of the performance and starting to pull that down, so I could finally reach this moment where I thought to myself, "Oh, okay. There's something not just fundamentally wrong with society or what's happening around me, but what's fundamentally at issue right now is what's going on inside *me*."

And so, I loved how you talked about the model as being built in community, how it situates us in community because that's something I've been on a lot right now and something that I started to understand as we started to do the podcast was that all of our individual stories are so freaking important. And despite the fact that there's 200,000 Korean adoptees, and we're like, "Oh, okay. There's so many of us," and you would assume and it would be easy to generalize that experience, even when we have a shared idyllic experience of adoption or even when somebody has a really terrible experience and they share that with someone else. Those two experiences are not the same experience.

And the understanding of that as I broke through, I guess, the fog at that time and came to consciousness was just the understanding that, okay, all of this time before then, I was trying to understand other people's stories and understand community and home without having understood myself first and how my individual story fits within that larger place. And so, by starting to understand myself, I was able to start understanding where it was that I found myself situated within this larger thread or fabric.

Lori: And I think I first started following you when you were about to become a father, which happened earlier this year that you became a father. Right?

Patrick: February.

Lori: In February. Right? Yeah. You were taking no naps in the 'Nap [Indianapolis].

Patrick: No naps. Oh, yeah. No naps in the 'Nap. That's true

Lori: So, how did the Adoptee Consciousness Model, how well did it overlay with you, since your fatherhood journey started last year?

Patrick: Well, I think what's really interesting is I feel like in July, I came back from Korea for the second time, and I was just in a place of – an unstable place, I would say. My foundation was unstable, I guess, after 3 years of doing a lot of that internal work. And that began my therapy

journey. And so, I guess I say this because I feel like the Model came about at the exact right time because some of the conversations I was having within the community, particularly coming out of that trip, was trying to acquire language that was created by us.

And so, I use the fog, the terminology of the fog, a lot when I first came to consciousness. When we were doing clubhouse rooms with adoptees, that was the thing that we were talking about. I think we were talking about those experiences. People were experiencing it in real time in those rooms, moments of Rupture, moments of Dissonance or Expansion. It was really cool.

However, as I've learned more about where this phrase specifically came from, which is, as far as I'm aware and what I've learned, it was coined by Nancy Verrier, an adoptive parent, from *The Primal Wound*, a book that a lot of people in the adopted community like and reference, something that's been very powerful for them. And for me, since I started this journey, it's always come back to how do we create something that's ours and not still – There's this idea of reclaiming. Okay, we can reclaim that language, but it just didn't feel right to me.

And so, as I was going through my own therapy journey, as I was thinking about what it would mean to become a father and expand my own family, this model drops. And it came at the right time because it helped me to then situate myself, at the time in these stages of this model, but understanding it now as touchstones and touchpoints and thinking about it as, or looking at it as the spiral, but also the intersectionalness of how the model was originally displayed in that first graphic. I was like, "This is what I've been looking for, and this is what I've been searching for." And, essentially, I shifted the way that I started to talk about my own story to incorporate these different touchstones and phases or these touchstones and touchpoints. Because like you just said, Lori, what I've been craving has been, how do we take some of these concepts that we talk about within our community and put them within a framework that allows people outside of the specific adoptee community to better understand it, to better understand their own place within that and their and their adjacency to it?

And I think the model specifically does that. And I think for me, especially, it was a timing thing, and it came about just at the right time to help me figure out, okay, this is how I needed to be talking about this, particularly as I was sharing some of these revelations in therapy.

Lori: So, your trip to Korea was part of it. And then will you tell us about your journey into Adoptee Consciousness, JaeRan?

JaeRan: Sure. So, we actually self-published our idea on our blogs in 2022, but it was September 2023 that it was published in an academic journal. We had revised it. And so, we were doing some social media things before the launch of that. So, that's yes. That timing seems really right

Patrick: That must have been it. Yeah.

JaeRan: So, my own consciousness: I kind of spoke a little bit of reference reconnecting with a friend that I had when I was a child who was a Korean adoptee and going to Korea. She had started a group in Minnesota for people who lived outside of the Metropolitan Twin Cities area. So, more rural Korean adoptees. And I was doing things with her and her group. So, those two things; going to Korea for my first time and then reconnecting with her, were two big moments of Rupture for me.

Patrick, I was following along with some of the things you were saying about your trip to Korea, and I experienced not just the Rupture of being there, but then, like, all the aftershocks. It's like over and over and over again, I just kept experiencing more things that were just really emotionally challenging for me. And then that helped me get interested in becoming a social worker. I was a college dropout. I was a very average, nothing spectacular student. I didn't know what I wanted to do. I went to college and dropped out. I went to another university and dropped out. I attended community colleges, and I had kind of given up on the idea of getting a degree at all.

And I was doing some volunteer work for the adoption agency that I was adopted from. And I was doing some other related mentoring programs, and they asked me if I would do a mentoring program in their international adoption program. So, it was that experience there where I was encouraged to consider, like, maybe you should think about being a social worker. You've been doing all this mentoring for us for, you know, at that point, like, 5 years.

So, in my early 30s, I went back to school, and I had the really good fortune of having a professor who was a Black transracial adoptee and a child welfare expert. And my mind was blown. It was, like, you talked about that class that you attended, Patrick. My mind was blown being in the social work program. First of all, it was a unique program. All of my faculty professors were people of color. I didn't have a single white professor in that program. And that's really unique.

And then I had an indigenous native American professor who talked about the boarding schools, who talked about the Indian adoption project. I had a Black transracial adoptee professor who talked about orphan trains and the foster care system and racial disparities, and that all really connected for me. And I realized, at that point, that my individual story couldn't have happened without all these other displacements that other people of color, black and indigenous people in the United States had experienced. That set the stage in motion for Korea to even start its program.

So, that was another big Rupture for me; realizing that here I had grown up thinking I was just this unique story of somebody who had been wanted and saved from this orphanage in Korea to being like, oh, no. I was just part of this larger system of child displacement. That doesn't diminish, and here's where I think a lot of people feel we tend to live in a society that's all or nothing, but that doesn't diminish the fact that I had great parents, loving parents, that I was raised, I was given lots of support and education and everything. But it was that ability for me to start to become critical of some of these larger systems and practices at play and kind of this tendency for there to be this single narrative about what family should look like and how family should be, and that influenced how I came to be adopted.

So, you can pull both things at the same time, and Dissonance is where you really struggle to do that. And so, a lot of people, I think, I've talked to so many other adoptees, whether you're transracial or not, same race, domestic, you know, transnational, kinship, whether even adoptees, adopted by relatives, still can experience this real sense of Dissonance, from trying to understand how I can be loved and love my family and also be highly critical or understand these other mechanisms that took place.

And so, for me, that was largely my college experience. And, again, after that, I started writing my blog as an attempt for me to kind of understand all these different things. And the blog, you know, is so old now. It's 18. I joke that it's an adult now. But I think one of the things that is really important to understand about my blog is that if you were to go back and read it from the start, which, I mean, that would be, quite a quite a deal, you'll see my progression over time, even how I've thought about things.

And so, I want others to understand that what I say today may change tomorrow because as new information comes along, as new experiences happen, I could move my way through this consciousness model differently again and on different things. We also wanted to make sure, like, for me, I started having more of a racial reckoning before I did around adoption. So, the racial things kind of happened to me more in my 20s where I started identifying as a person of color, thinking about how I was going to raise my kids as people of color, but the adoption thing didn't happen until later.

Lori: Boy, isn't that the truth about reading your old stuff? Me too. And sometimes if people do find some of my older posts, instead of cringing, I'm just hoping that they're looking at the year that I wrote it and my own developmental stage as a parent.

So, I think there are a lot of people listening who maybe don't have the transnational or transracial pieces, they have the transfamily pieces. So, I'm thinking about the Rupture touchstone. Impending parenthood is something that can trigger that, going to college and having your mind just blown open in all the ways can be doing that, traveling around the world. From the stories that you've both heard from other adoptees, can you tell us any other ways that tend to open up that space, Patrick?

Patrick: Open the space between –

Lori: For the Rupture. For the prompting to come to consciousness.

Patrick: I think it's really hard, because I think at the end of the day, you can't be prepared for Rupture. You can learn about this model, and you can internalize it and know each touchstone really well. I really don't want to say phase or stage, and I keep trying to add it to touch. You can know all these things, but your moments of Rupture are going to occur at times when you're not prepared for them. And, like JaeRan said, she had racial reckoning prior to adoptee or adoptedness reckoning.

And I would say mine was similar even though they were back to back. And so, my thing was a Rupture within my racial and ethnic identity. Two days later, I was sent a study called *Too Korean to Be White, Too White to be Korean*, about 12 Korean adoptees who grew up in the Midwest. That was the rupture point for me as an adopted person to start thinking about those things.

And so, those two things intersected then, and I went down them in different ways. But I feel like for Rupture, you can't prepare so much, but you can create a foundation that when those moments happen, you are as prepared as you can be to handle the fallout.

And what does handling the fallout look like? It looks like a million different things. The fallout's going to be different for everybody. You might move you back into another touchstone. It might

accelerate you to another place as well. You don't know what that could look like. And by making space, it's simply by, I think, and this is advice I give to adoptive parents all the time, is by constantly and actively creating opportunities to engage with that particular thing, whether it's your ethnic or racial culture of origin or the adopted person in your life's culture of origin or whether it is the system of adoption itself or the narratives and themes about it, whether we need to be thinking critically and talking critically about them all throughout your life as we move along. Those are the ways that you build a stable foundation. So, that way when Rupture does happen, okay, stuff's going to hit the fan regardless, and it's not going to be easy. If it is, that's great. Please hit me up. I would love to hear your story and share it to the world.

But at the end of the day, from the stories that I've heard, Rupture happens at all different times in all different places for all manner of people. And if we can do a little bit of that work each day prior, a little bit of that making space by talking about these things, by being open about it, by affirming the person in your life and whatever they might be feeling or seeking at that time, that's just going to give us a little bit of a runway that when Rupture does happen, you're there. And like we said before or like JaeRan said, if you're not there, willing to find and hold yourself accountable down the line when you have an opportunity to come back and say, "I wasn't there then, but I would like to try and be there now."

And I think that's the other part of making space, because sometimes even as an adoptive parent, you're on your own journey. And it's honestly not on an adopted person to push you or pull you in whichever way that you're going as well. You're going to go there, and you're going to get there when you get there. That's part of that making space that we can also embody as well. And at the end of the day, the things are going to happen in the way that they're going to happen. So, if we can build that runway out a little bit more as we're 5, 10, 15 years old, and it gives us an opportunity to soften the landing of Rupture. I don't know. I don't know exactly what it looks like, but it allows us to be in a better place to approach it.

Lori: That's such an important point that you just made, Patrick. And it makes me think, JaeRan, of our Inclusive Family Support Model. We're laying the groundwork now, even though Rupture, which is not a bad thing – it might be a good thing – even though that maybe years away, you don't know when it's coming. It's going to surprise you and everybody when it does come, but we're laying the foundation now by being able to talk about things, everything, and by – adoptive parents, I'm talking about specifically – by doing our own work so that we feel clear of landmines to our adoptees because we're taking care of ourselves, we're looking at our own stuff so that our adoptees don't come up against our gunk in here.

Patrick: Can I add one thing really quickly? I just want to add that if you're not laying the groundwork, if you're not building the foundation, Rupture will happen much further down the line because, like for me, it happened at 30 because I was rejecting my identity so deeply because of the environment I grew up in. Despite the idyllic nature of my adoption, I still experience things that caused me to create a mask and to reject this part of myself. I have heard stories, and I've talked to other adoptees and adopted people who have not come to this point until they were 50 or 60 years old, and that is because they had been so harmed and so aggrieved by what had happened through their experience of adoption.

And maybe not even so harmed or aggrieved but made to feel like that their lived experience wasn't worth speaking about or was an outlier in the grand scheme of things. Like, if we're not

building the foundation, we are only causing further harm to happen to that person far down the line.

And if for whatever reason there's a break off for that contact, you might not have to deal with that fallout anymore, but that person, the adopter or the adopted person does. And so, your actions now can cause further butterfly effect situations down the line. We don't know.

Lori: Yeah. Yeah. JaeRan, in case there are people listening who don't have intercountry or transracial experiences, I'm guessing they're not off the hook for this eventually coming for their adoptees. This growth is coming. This is a growth model. So, are there any other triggers that you've seen in your work with adoptees that are independent of transnational or intercountry?

JaeRan: Yeah. Absolutely. And in fact, I think in some ways, not that it's harder, but it's really different because like Patrick was alluding to, you can mask for a longer period of time. So, a lot of same-race adoptees; Black adoptees raised in Black families, white adoptees raised in white families, domestic in the United States, they still have oftentimes a sense that something is off or that they can recognize that loss, but it's not okay to talk about. And in fact, in some ways, I think it can be really even harder because adoptive parents can pretend that the child wasn't adopted because, visually, there may not be that difference.

And so, that makes it even more unsafe, I think, for adoptees to feel like they can start to explore their adoptee identity. And I meet a lot of adult, same-race adoptees. And I think they're the ones who oftentimes so, Patrick, you were just saying, don't start to really go through this journey until they're in their 40s, 50s, or 60s. And it's a lot harder because then at that point, they oftentimes have expressed that they feel like they were lied to and betrayed, that these conversations weren't happening earlier, and that they feel very alone with it.

And I think it also is harder for them to find that community in many ways, again, because if you're white or if you're Black and you're raised in that same family, nobody's going to look at you and say, oh, you must be adopted because they're not seeing your family photo and noticing that difference.

And so, even with some of the transnational adoptees, like from Russia who are adopted into white families, they can also experience the same sort of experience. And so, yeah, I think that from what I've heard, when there is that reckoning, when there is that identification, when they do start to learn about the history of adoption practices, in many ways, it can be even more hard hitting because they have such little language to talk about it, even less than those of us that are actually used to having our difference recognized, maybe minimally recognized, but at least recognized.

Lori: Can you count for why some adoptees take the journey through consciousness and some don't? Patrick, do you have any ideas about that?

Patrick: I think a lot of it comes back to what I was talking about in terms of building an affirming safe space to learn and grow and understand yourself. I think at the end of the day, I've been talking a lot about the privilege of storytelling. And I think what I mean by that is this conversation right here, it's a privilege to have, and it's a privilege for me to be on the receiving end because you all could not share anything with me. And, like, that's totally okay. At the end of

the day, it's any conversation that we have with each other is a privilege to be able to sit in and learn from, and I've learned that through podcasting and through the last 4 years of this work.

And what I've also learned and discovered is that I think we take that privilege for granted, and we don't give it the proper respect. And when we don't do that, we create these unsafe situations for people who then, for whatever reason or an infinite number of reasons, feel like they aren't allowed to, or they are not worthy of sharing their story because it's already been told before or somebody's got it worse than you or x, y, z. It doesn't matter what the excuse is. These are the reasons that they've been given to now become shells of themselves or go within themselves to a point that they won't ever come out.

And I think at the end of the day, when we've created a situation in our society where it feels unsafe to be your full self without having to move within specific lanes in order to make it to the next step wherever you're trying to go. And I think at the end of the day, that's what causes some people within our community specifically to go forward and to move out of Status Quo, to move through Dissonance, to experience Rupture or not. And like JaeRan was talking about earlier, some people learn about Status Quo or learn about some of these things, and they go, "Not really for me" and then they take a step back. Because, again, if you're coming to it at 60 years old, I don't blame you. You have a whole life ahead of you. When I had my Rupture moment and I started to go through all of this, I was like, I feel like there's 10 years of my life. I feel like I'm 20 again. I feel like there's so much time and that I have to make up. I cannot even – It's hard for me to fathom an extra 10, 20, 30 years of life having been lived to then have this moment of, oh, my life is not what I actually thought it was. How do I define that? How do I redefine that? What does that mean? Like, that's a lot. And if that were to happen to me at that age, I don't know if I want to go through it either.

So, I think there are a lot of factors that cause us to want to go through it or not. And I think the work of JaeRan, the work that you're doing, Lori, and a lot of people out here is necessary work for more folks, particularly within this community, to feel like they can share, to feel like, oh, my story does matter, whether it's positive, whether it's a negative experience. No matter what has happened, it's the work of this and of sharing and disseminating all kinds of stories that gives people not only the feeling of safety, but the feeling of bravery to start to share when they're ready to do it.

Lori: Thank you. JaeRan, do you have anything to add to that?

JaeRan: No. I mean, I think, minimally, I just think that for some people, that Rupture can be empowering, and it can really activate a sense of urgency around, okay, now I want to do something with this information. For other people, it can be very disempowering because it can feel like, I'm feeling betrayed or like I was lied to my whole life about this. And as Patrick was saying beautifully, it could make you just say, "You know, I don't need that extra stress. I don't need that in my life. I want to be comfortable." And honestly, it's really hard to be in a place of Rupture and Dissonance. Nobody really wants to be in those spaces.

And so, I guess that the only other thing I would say is I think everybody does go through this journey, but how long they spend in these different touchstones might be very, very different. And they may go, they may skip through and they may settle someplace. I've known adoptees who seem to be in Dissonance for almost their whole lives. And because they just are like, I

don't know what to do now about it. And so, whether it's avoidance or whether it's other kind of behaviors, they might just stay in that space because they don't know where else to go, and that's where other resources and community and therapy might all be helpful for some folks at those different stages too. But, yeah, I just want you to know that it looks really different for everybody.

So, I tend to say less that people don't go through the stages, and it's just that they may start to explore, and then they go back to a place that feels better for them. But it doesn't mean they're not still constantly having these Ruptures. I mean, I think whether you're kind of think about being in Status Quo your whole life, you're still going to experience Ruptures. It's just what you do with that.

Lori: And something that you said, JaeRan, triggered me to think that, although we've talked about this as an adoptee model and I've talked about it as an adoptive parent model, I can so see this also being a helpful model for the birth parent experiences too, and the Status Quo being a place where a lot of people stay, and then the Rupture, Dissonance, Expansion, and Activism being a place that other people go.

So, Patrick, we had a chance to hear from JaeRan about what to say to parents who don't eventually want their adoptees to do this potentially hard thing; leaving the comfort of Status Quo. What are your thoughts on that for parents who might be dreading it?

Patrick: I mean, you can dread it all you want. Like JaeRan said, it's going to happen. I would highly stress the accountability piece. I think this model is based on other critical consciousness models. And, again, if this is all rooted in community, and at the end of the day, thinking and being willing to understand yourself is going to give you a better understanding of how to navigate the relationship with the people in your life, but specifically the adopted person in your life.

And I would say if you don't want to do that, then you're – I don't want to say you'll never going to want to do it because I don't like speaking in absolutes, but I think it's imperative for you to start broaching that for yourself because not only for yourself, but also for the adopted person in your life. Because not to be dramatic, but some of these things can become life and death. When it becomes a total and complete rejection of your sense of self and identity, that can lead you down to some severely negative mental health outcomes; including suicidal ideation or execution. At the end of the day, when we don't affirm, when we don't support, and when we don't, like you said, make space, even just attempt to make the space, we are only pushing the people in our lives, the adopted people in our lives, further down that path.

And so, if you don't want them to experience this journey, my statement to you would be, I think you need to take a look at why; you need to ask yourself why that is. And at the end of the day, I think it comes back to you as the individual and not to the adopted person, not to anybody else. It has to really do with why do I feel like I don't want them to go through it? It's not because they don't want to or have expressed any desire to not go through it. It's because I feel like I don't want them to. And we have to interrogate that why.

Lori: Yeah. And if, as an adoptive parent, if I'm taking it personally, they do the Rupture, then that's going to hurt *me*. And so, part of this is getting myself out of it and doing my own

processing of my own attachment wounds that I may have. And I think also to see it as a growth model. This could be a really *good* thing if your adoptee goes through it, and it be a really good thing if your adoptee goes through it *and* invites you along their journey. That is a badge of honor. So, thank you.

JaeRan: Absolutely. Yeah. I think that's exactly right. I often tell adoptive parents when I'm doing presentations for them. It's like with all parenting, you spend the 1st decade of your child's life trying to keep them safe. And then your role the next decade of your child's life is to help them learn how to keep themselves safe. And then by the time they're an adult, ideally, you're just in relationship with your child, your adult child, and, hopefully, that will last 40, 50 years.

We have to be thinking about parenting our adopted children for the future relationship that we want to have, not just for the first 20 years that they're in our homes and sometimes longer. Speaking from experience with my adult children, sometimes they're in your home longer than 20 years. But the idea is that you want to build that relationship for the future because Patrick and I both know this. We're in community with adoptees, and adult adoptees will walk away from the relationship if they don't feel supported. And estrangement is really a sad outcome because the whole idea of adoption is to "provide permanency and forever families."

And so, it's not just the physical and relational disruption that happens with kids before they turn 18 that we're concerned about. We also know that families are so important for the next generation for building our lives and our communities. So, when I talk to adoptees and they say, "I'm in a much better place because my adoptive parents, I don't talk to them anymore, because they were unhealthy to be in community with and in relationship with," that's not what adoption was meant to be, and it's not how, you know, we hope adoption ends up. So, it's not just about that relationship in the first few decades. It's also about your whole relationship. You have a lifetime of relationship together. And, ideally, you're in community and relationship there that is not an estrangement.

That's really my big message for adoptive parents is you don't want to be estranged from your adult adopted child.

Lori: So, we will have show notes on here to the Harlow's Monkey post that shows this model. And you're making me think, JaeRan and Patrick, that adoptive parents, if you want to lay this foundation, apply this model to yourself. If you've been Ruptured by anything we said here, go ahead and take some more touchstones. Tap your toes on those.

I want to be mindful of everyone's time, including our listeners, so we're to our last question, and this is the question that will appear in December's episode of the best of roundup of all of our guests this year. And that is this one: What do you wish that all adoptive parents knew from Day 1 – or from this moment? JaeRan?

JaeRan: I think just kind of what I said is that this is an opportunity for you to build a lifelong relationship together. So, as tempting as it can be to just focus on the day to day of the next 10, 15 years, to be thinking about how you're going to have a relationship with your adopted child in the future.

Lori: Thank you for that. Patrick, what would you like to say about that?

Patrick: I would actually just echo the exact same thing and with a splash of accountability. Just to never be afraid or worried to take a look inwards first before delving into whatever it is that you might need to delve into. Always a good lesson for anybody, whoever that might be. But everything that JaeRan just said, and just don't be above accountability.

Lori: That is such an important point, and it's a piece that I'm bringing into this keynote that I'm preparing for. And that is that one of the things I never knew at the beginning of my journey, is that I would be held accountable to my adoptees for all of it. They don't stay young. I expected them to grow up in all the ways that kids grow up, but I didn't expect them to grow up into adoptee consciousness the way that they are doing.

Thank you both so much for sharing your insights, your brilliance with us today. I really appreciate it.

Patrick: Same. Back to you. Appreciate you having me on, and we'll always do anything with JaeRan, 100%.

JaeRan: Yeah. Thanks, Lori. It was really a pleasure to be in this conversation together. Patrick, as always.

Lori: If y'all could see the video that we're recording on Zoom, you'd see a lot of, nodding heads on all three of our parts as we all talk.

Lori Holden, Close:

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Show Notes

Dr JaeRan Kim

- **Adoptee Consciousness Model on Harlow's Monkey:**
<https://harlows-monkey.com/2022/06/23/coming-to-consciousness/>
- **Websites:** [Harlow's Monkey](#) and <https://jaerankim.com/>
- **Instagram:** [@harlows_monkey](#)
- **LinkedIn:** [@jaerankimphd/](#)

Patrick Armstrong

- **Conversation Piece**
 - **Website:** www.conversationpiecepod.com
 - **Instagram:** [@conversationpiecepod](#)
- **Janchi Show**
 - **Website:** www.janchishow.com

- Instagram: [@janchishow](#)
- **Personal**
 - Website: www.patrickintheworld.me
 - Instagram: [@patrickintheworld](#)

Inclusive Family Support Model (mentioned): <https://www.angelatucker.com/openness>