

## **“Balancing Two Worlds” Supporting Transracially Adopted Asian/American Students on the College Campus**

**By Daniel K. Suda & Nicholas D. Hartlep**

### **Introduction**

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Transracially adopted Asian/American college students are a minoritized and underserved population on campuses across the country in part because they are often an invisible population to their non-adopted peers and university administrators (see Kim, 2012). “Transracial” refers to being connected across races, e.g., transracially adopted children are adopted by parents of a race different from their own, transracial families are multiracial families; and multiracial/mixed-race families are formed through the coming together of two or more races (Steinberg & Hall, 2000, pp. 22–24). According to the 2010 U.S. Census, in 2009–2011 there were approximately 438,000 transracially adopted children under the age of 18, comprising 28% of all adopted children under 18. The largest proportion of transracially-adopted children was Asian (2%). Overall, 37% of the transracially-adopted children were foreign

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born (Kreider & Lofquist, 2014). It is important to note that the U.S. Census does not take into account the status of being adopted after turning 18. The adopted population in the United States is no longer documented once they become an adult, and colleges make no effort to ask for this information when adoptees enroll at the university, making college-aged adoptees an important population of study.

In this article we use the term Asian/Americans when referring to the participants. Drawing on the work of Palumbo-Liu (1999), Morita-Mullaney and Greene (2015) discuss why they insert a backslash (“/”) in Asian/American in lieu of a hyphen to situate the dynamic and hybrid identities for those with an Asian heritage, including those who self-identify as Asian nationals, Asian Americans, or any variant mix of identity claims that can be made dependent upon factors such as, but not limited to, environmental context, psychological development, and socio-historical awareness. We find value in Palumbo-Liu’s (1999) and Morita-Mullaney and Greene’s (2015) use of the backslash in lieu of a hyphen and therefore use it in this article.<sup>1</sup>

Research has found that it is common for adopted individuals to question their cultural roots. An adoptee’s “dual identity” problem may prompt them to search out their past and pursue information about this unknown self in an effort to resolve the break in the continuity of their lives (*cf.* Hoopes, 1990, p. 160). Adoptees who identify with their biological identity may cause concern for adoptive parents because “some adopted adolescents may feel that to identify very closely with the culture of their birthland is to ‘dis-identify’ with [their] adoptive parents” (Smith, 2006, p. 254). However, adoptive parents’ concerns may be unwarranted since their adopted child may just be trying to understand more about their birth heritage.

Adoptive parents are responsible for instilling life values in their child(ren). Dalley and Kohon (2008) state the following: “Without knowledge about and experience of biological parents, it may be difficult for the adolescent to build a firm sense of identity by locating his own personal history within his adoptive family” (p. 227). As a result, it is highly possible that adopted children will know little-to-nothing about their heritage culture and may find it easier to identify with their adoptive parents identities (see Lee, 2003; Lee, 2009; Roorda, 2007; Wolff, 2000). Notwithstanding, research has found that a single racial identity may be neither possible nor desirable for mixed-race students and individuals can change how they identify depending on different experiences at various times in their life (*cf.* Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2009, p. 297).

Previous literature, such as Renn’s (2004) ecological theory of mixed-race identity development, has focused on how mixed-race individuals might form a racial identity based on their life influences. Renn’s (2004) theory describes five identity patterns: (1) *Monoracial*, where an individual identifies with one identity, typically their most salient, which is often congruent with their appearance; (2) *Multiple Monoracial*, where an individual is conscious of more than one identity typically based on their parental heritage; (3) *Multiracial*, where an individual finds themselves outside of the mono paradigm and can integrate all of their identities into a positive self-concept; (4) *Extraracial*, where an individual chooses to identify

with a race that is different than their mixed heritage, these students often viewed race as a social construct; and (5) *Situational*, where an individual chooses an identity based on their environment and current circumstances. In Renn's (2004) model, these five identity patterns are meant to be fluid and non-exclusive, where an individual can change how they identify based on their different life experiences at any given time. The major limitation of Renn's (2004) five identity patterns is that they apply best to non-adopted individuals and the influences from their birth parent(s). Renn's (2009) model omits the possibility that having the cultural influences of not only one's parents (adoptive parents), but also their birth-given heritages (biological parents).

This idea of "balancing two worlds" of their adoptive and biological parent(s) culture may be a complex issue for college students, especially if there is little support being given to assist this development. The two guiding questions that this article asks are as follows:

1. What are the challenges faced by the lived experiences of transracially-adopted Asian/American college students?
2. In what ways can colleges support this population?

One of our assumptions in this study is that college campuses are normatively cisracial. We have adapted the term "cisracial" from gender identity studies' use of the term "cisgender." Johnson (2013) suggests that if an individual's gender identity aligns with her/his sex morphology, s/he is said to be cisgender. We propose that "cisracial" means to align with the perceived race or heritage that society places on the individual. This study seeks to understand the ways to best engage the transracial adoptee population on the college campus as well as how to transform college campuses from employing cisracial paradigms to transracial integrative paradigms.

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## Research Design

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### Methodology

The intent of a grounded theory study is to generate a theory that explains a phenomenon based on the qualitative experiences of participants (Charmaz, 2006). Because no theory currently exists on how to best support transracial-adoptees on college campuses we decided to develop a theory grounded in transracial adoptees' self-described experiences as American/American college students.

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### Participants

During the spring semester of 2015 the authors conducted a study. Participants met the following criteria: (a) were currently enrolled in a college or university in the United States, (b) self-identified as being Asian, Asian-American, or Pacific Islander,

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(c) were transracially adopted, and (d) were 18 years of age or older. An email was sent to all undergraduates at the university where the researchers were based who had indicated they were willing to receive emails from university researchers (total student population of  $n = 18,155$ ). A link to the survey was also distributed via Facebook and relevant listservs that reached Asian/American transracial adoptees. Seventy-five ( $n = 75$ ) students (22.67% male, 73.33% female, and 4.00% other) responded to this invitation. The age distribution was as follows: 26.67% were 18–19 years of age; 33.33% were 20–21 years of age; 13.33% were 22–23 years of age; 6.67% were 24–25 years of age; and 20% were 26 years of age or older. In the study sample, 22.58% were freshmen (0–30 credits), 19.35% were sophomores (31–60 credits), 22.58% were juniors (61–90 credits), 19.35% were seniors (91–120 credits); and 16.13% were students who had 121 or more credits. 25.5% of the sample identified as being U.S.-born adoptees while 74.65% identified as being born in a foreign country.

The present article focuses on a subset of qualitative data that was generated from the study outlined above. Of the original 75 students surveyed, 33 fit our inclusion criteria for this study. The population included the same criteria as above, but with further specifications. Data was filtered and those who answered the three open-ended questions at the end of the survey were included in the present qualitative study. Our study’s population contained 6 males and 27 females. Students from all college level classifications and from regions across the country were represented. Two participants (Aubrey and Liam) were transracial adoptees but rejected an Asian identity, instead choosing to self-identify as white based on their adoptive parents’ race, but were still included in this study (see Table 1).

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### Data Sources

Grounded theorists rely on quantitative data to capture effectively the encounters of participants as they relay the information in their own words (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Our original survey (hosted by SurveyMonkey) contained qualitative and quantitative questions on the racial identity formation of transracially-adopted Asian/American college students. The present study analyzes the qualitative data, which came from the following three questions:

1. Describe in your own words what it’s like to be transracially adopted?  
How do you balance your dual statuses: adopted and biological?
2. Detail any current struggles you face in regards to race at your college/university? What are the sources of these struggles? Can they be mitigated?
3. What can your college/university do to help you feel more comfortable with your dual (adopted and biological) identity?

We used the mail-merge feature in Excel/Word to individualize the raw data from all 33 participants. The mail merge produced a 34-page document that con-

tained each respondent’s demographics and answers to the above three questions. Although the aggregate responses were anonymous, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant for the sake of readability in the article.

**Data Analysis**

Open, axial, and selective coding was used to analyze the qualitative data contained in the 34-page document (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Open coding was

**Table 1**  
*Participant Demographic Characteristics*

Pseudonym	Gender	Identified Race(s)	Region	Classification	Age
Abigail	Female	Korean	South	Senior	20-21 years old
Addison	Female	Chinese	Midwest	Freshman	18-19 years old
Amelia	Female	Korean	Northeast	Senior	22-23 years old
Anna	Female	Korean	Midwest	Junior	20-21 years old
Ariana	Female	Korean	Northeast	Junior	22-23 years old
Aubrey	Female	Not Asian or Asian American (White)	West	Senior	26+ years old
Ava	Female	Chinese	Northeast	Freshman	18-19 years old
Avery	Female	Chinese	South	Freshman	18-19 years old
Brooklyn	Female	Korean	West	Senior	26+ years old
Charlotte	Female	Korean	South	Sophomore	26+ years old
Chloe	Female	Chinese	South	Junior	18-19 years old
Elizabeth	Female	Chinese	Midwest	Freshman	18-19 years old
Ella	Female	Chinese	Northeast	Freshman	18-19 years old
Emma	Female	Korean	South	Sophomore	20-21 years old
Ethan	Male	Korean	South	Junior	20-21 years old
Harper	Female	Chinese	South	Sophomore	18-19 years old
Isabella	Female	Chinese	South	Freshman	20-21 years old
Jackson	Male	Korean	Midwest	Senior	26+ years old
Jessica	Female	Korean	South	Senior	20-21 years old
Kaylee	Female	Taiwanese	West	Senior	26+ years old
Layla	Female	Chinese	South	Sophomore	18-19 years old
Liam	Male	Not Asian or Asian American (White)	Northeast	Senior	22-23 years old
Madison	Female	Multiracial (Korean)	West	Senior	24-25 years old
Mia	Female	Chinese	West	Sophomore	18-19 years old
Michael	Male	Korean	South	Sophomore	20-21 years old
Noah	Male	Korean	Midwest	Senior	22-23 years old
Olivia	Female	Korean	West	Senior	26+ years old
Peyton	Female	Korean	Northeast	Junior	20-21 years old
Ryan	Male	Korean	West	Junior	20-21 years old
Samantha	Female	Korean	Midwest	Junior	20-21 years old
Sofia	Female	Chinese	South	Senior	20-21 years old
Sopia	Female	Chinese	Northeast	Sophomore	20-21 years old
Zoe	Female	Korean	Northeast	Senior	20-21 years old

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done to find categories (see Appendix A, B, C). Axial coding was done to find links between the themes/categories. Finally, selective coding was used to find the core category. The process of coding is listed below with more references in the appendices.

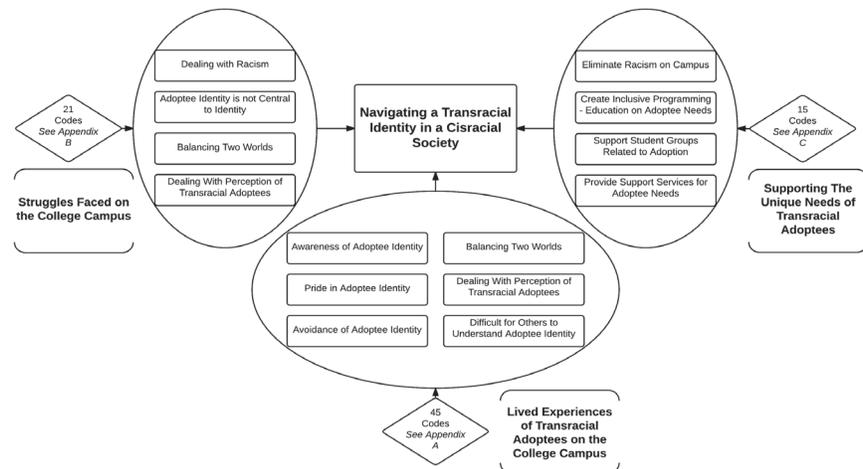
We followed the framework outlined by Saldaña (2009), noting that some categories may contain clusters of coded data that merit further refinement into subcategories. And when the major categories are compared with each other and consolidated in various ways, you begin to transcend the “reality” of your data and progress refined thematic findings to conceptual frameworks and theoretical ideologies.

## Results

We took the qualitative data and looked for descriptors (codes) amongst the answers, which we then generalized even further into categories/themes to frame our findings. We developed 14 categories amongst the three guiding ideas in our study. These three ideas were as follows: (1) supporting the unique needs of transracial adoptees, (2) lived experiences of transracial adoptees on the college campus, and (3) the struggles faced by transracial adoptees on the college campus.

A common theme emerged from our data, showing that transracially-adopted college students in our study were forced to deal with societal perceptions of them: appearing as a monoracial person but identifying in a more complex multi/bi-racial way (identities from their birth parents and adoptive parents). A grounded theory was developed for navigating a transracial adoptee identity in a cisracial society (see Figure 1). In the sections that follow we unpack how navigating this identity

**Figure 1**  
*Grounded Theory Model of Navigating a Transracial Identity in a Cisracial Society*



is complex. We then share our theory for creating what we have conceptualized as an integrative cisracial college campus.

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### **Lived Experiences of Transracial Adoptees on the College Campus**

Six themes emerged that were related to the lived experiences of transracial adoptees on the college campus: (1) Awareness of Adoptee Identity, (2) Pride in Adoptee Identity, (3) Avoidance of Adoptee Identity, (4) Difficult for Others to Understand Transracial Adoptee Identity, (5) “Balancing Two Worlds,” and (6) Dealing With Others Perception of Transracial Adoptees.

We found conflicting messages in our data, such as students who are proud identifying as an adopted student and others who try to avoid the identity as much as possible. Peyton, like many other participants in our study, was aware that transracial adoption is a complex subject and a constant journey of learning.

I haven't really thought much about being transracially adopted—my mother and father are just who they are. Others may think it's weird that they're white and I'm Asian, but I don't actively see a difference between us. I'm simultaneously aware and unaware of my racial identity. I'm discovering my identity through my work. I go to an art school (RISD) and find my art helps me discuss these various issues and inform the public about this minority. I also like reading about the subject of adoption; not only Korean adoptees like myself but also stories of women who gave up children in America during the 50s, etc.

Other participants had differing viewpoints. Ariana felt that showing an adoptive identity only leads to further issues in her life, which is why she avoided the subject all together.

The biggest struggle I had was when I came into contact with a larger Korean—American population than I was used to since I grew up in a mostly white town. I felt rejected and ostracized by other Koreans, who told me I wasn't really Korean, or that I was weird. No one ever guesses that I am Korean they guess every other type of Asian, just not Korean. At one point, I was very ashamed at being adopted, and avoided saying my last name as much as possible.

Several college students, like Anna, showcased a pride in being adopted and suggested that it was a concrete part of their identity that did not require much extra thought.

I think it is a blessing to be transracially adopted. My parents are my parents and having birth parents in Korea is just a bonus. Being adopted as always been a part of who I am, so I do not put much thought into it daily. However, when I meet new people, I am reminded that it is a special gift to be adopted.

Many transracial-adoptee students in our study discussed that owning a transracial identity meant dealing with the perceptions of others. Some suggested that the journey of being a transracial adoptee involves choosing an identity based on

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the situation or the environment one is in. Renn’s (2004) research on mixed-race individuals found that individuals change how they identify racially depending on different experiences at various times in their life. Illustrating how self-identification can be situational for transracial adoptees, Olivia talked of how difficult dealing with the perceptions and expectations others was on her as a racially appearing Asian/American.

I feel like I’m always trying to feel out the situation and trying to negotiate situations to the best of my ability. With the absence of the racial awareness and implications of what it meant to embody an Asian looking physical appearance, I found myself often times bewildered why people had the expectations that they did have. The experience was like a frosted up windshield. I was going into the situation confused and lost, as I couldn’t grasp why people were reacting or treating me the way that they were.

To our knowledge, our introduction of the term cisracial in this article is wholly original. We conceptualize a cisracial identity meaning that an individual identifies with the race to which s/he appears to be, or that society places her/him into. For many transracial adoptees in our study, having the appearance of one race (Asian), but the cultural understanding of another (white), is challenging and complex. It’s *challenging* to “balance the two worlds”<sup>2</sup> of appearing to be Asian, but internally feeling like you don’t truly fit-in white or Asian culture. It’s *complex* because transracially adopted children do not have the advantage of learning about their birth culture through their everyday interactions in single-race families (*cf.* Wolff, 2000). As Wolff (2000) powerfully states, “No guidelines or checklists exist for learning how to instill racial pride in a child who has been adopted transracially” (para. 1). Amelia talked about this phenomenon of liminality<sup>3</sup> in her everyday life.

I think that being a transracial adoptee is complex because often how you may perceive yourself (your personal identity) may not line up with other people’s perceptions on who you are. And as a result people’s views may end influencing how you perceive yourself. Also sometimes there’s a feeling like you are not fully welcomed in either culture you reside in (Asian or the culture of your birth parents).

Many students in our study struggled with the idea of “balancing two worlds” and thought that transracial adoption was much more complex than our statement. Charlotte, for example, said that it was “emotionally difficult” being a transracial adoptee in college.

I really do not know what you mean by “balance” my dual status. I think this word is loaded and highly subjective to one’s own experiences. I think that my transracial identity is a daily struggle and will be for the rest of my life. I have yet to find solidarity among Korean Adoptee’s in my part of the country and it is emotionally difficult.

### **Struggles Faced on the Cisracial College Campus**

Four themes emerged that were related to the struggles faced by transracial adoptees on the cisracial college campus: (1) Dealing with Racism, (2) Adoptee Identity is Not Central to Identity, (3) “Balancing Two Worlds,” and (4) Dealing with Others Perception of Transracial Adoptees. Racial identity is a complex topic, which has so many layers and intersectionalities that it really cannot be limited to the typical six-topic check boxes of racial identity. When “balancing the two worlds” of being a transracial adoptee, it can be challenging knowing how to racially identify on demographic forms such as exams or surveys.

Aubrey shared why she felt excluded by her university, which did not take into account her adopted identity. She even mentioned how making her identify on this survey was challenging for her.

I think generally, the issue is population, meaning when we check the box of which racial or ethnic category we identify ourselves, we don't ever have a chance to check off something that indicates that we adopted. Therefore, for the university, there is no statistical indication that there is anything that needs to be considered. As with any differences, there is just a need for more people to stand up and address the absence of certain experiences, and continue to keep pushing and pushing otherwise it will just remain invisible or fall through the cracks.

Many of the participants in our study believed the issues they faced on their college campus were related to the lack of institutional support for understanding this minoritized population. In some cases students shared stories of experiencing microaggressions related to their appearance as an Asian/American student. According to Sue et al. (2007), microaggressions are “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative...slights and insults towards [the minoritized group]” (p. 271). Because the dominant groups on college campuses are non-adopted, adoptees are minoritized and subjected to microaggressions. Aubrey, for example, shared that for her it was difficult to look as Asian/American but not necessarily identifying with that culture. This raises the question, “Are student affairs professionals acting microaggressively by asking students to represent a culture that they are perceived to be?”

I was asked to be a poster child for a diversity brochure. I was asked to mentor another Asian American student when I don't identify that way. During an ice-breaker to meet her, our diversity director used foods to find your partners. Ours were rice and soy sauce. The marginalization and racism was so intense I have no words to describe it.

And

It's confusing for strangers and also for friends. I am so sick of being presented with identity boxes to check when none apply to me, including on this survey. I had a boyfriend once tell me that I'm the ultimate social experiment. I've had

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family members tell me I speak English really well. I have been accused of being a mail-order bride when I'm out with my White father (and I phenotypically present as Asian).

Another example of subtle racism is assuming the language or accent that one may speak based on their appearance. Amelia—like other adoptees in our study—shared her frustration with this reality.

I haven't had many struggles/obstacles before or currently at my university. The only time my race came up was in one of my classes. I wasn't understanding the material in a class because I felt the teacher wasn't explaining himself clearly and he took me aside and asked if English was my first language. I told him that English was the only language I knew and he went on to say that a lot of his Asian students have issues with understanding the material so that's why he asked. I think they could be mitigated if teachers were maybe taught to not assume.

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### **Supporting the Unique Needs of Transracial Adoptees**

Four themes emerged related to supporting the unique needs of transracial adoptees: (1) Eliminate Racism on Campus, (2) Create Inclusive Programming and Education on Transracial Adoptee Needs, (3) Support Student Groups Related to Adoption, and (4) Provide Support Services for Adoptee Needs. In our survey, we sought to gain the student voice in response to what their university/college needs to improve to support this student population.

Although diversity programming at universities typically do a great job of showing students the diverse backgrounds of individuals at the university, often-times only the salient minority races/groups are highlighted (events focused on a single race such as Black, Latino, or Asian and/or non-cisgender groups such as LGBTQI and Pride groups). Olivia's statement illustrates why although bi/multiracial programming is becoming more common on her campus, there still needs to be educational opportunities for others to learn about what it means to be transracial and adopted.

There is a greater awareness of biracial and multiracial individuals compared to those who were adopted. There is a need for a greater awareness and recognition that not everyone who is born into the physical appearance matches their physical appearance. This is not within just the conversations, curriculum, counseling, student affairs, and etc., but including all of the above. It's really about carving out a space that recognizes, promotes awareness, and enables those who are adopted to contribute to the realm of race and ethnicity.

We found that many students in our study do not feel comfortable joining racial affinity groups such as the Asian Student Organization on their campus. Transracial adoptees may be interested in exploring their birth heritage, but joining groups where you feel expected to understand an Asian language may be overwhelming. Amelia's situation shares this tension lucidly.

I think by learning to develop a more open mind and to realize that human beings are complex and assuming things about a person based on someone's race is not okay. Also, if universities offered organizations/programs for transracial adoptees to connect that would be a great way for transracial adoptees to connect with people going through similar things. Similarly to how Asian, African American, Hispanic organizations exist, it would be great if organizations for transracial adoptees could exist too.

## Discussion

The current college campus (see Figure 2) shows that a normative cisracial culture segregates through its diversity programming and student-led organizations (Banales & Burke, 2014; Jackson, Sweeney, & Welcher, 2014). A transracially adopted Asian/American student may feel ostracized by the current campus culture of student affairs professionals helping students find their fit through affinity groups. In our model, we suggest that a transracially-adopted Asian/American college student may attempt to access a white culture through an organization such as a fraternity/sorority, or they may attempt to access an Asian/American culture through an affinity group like an Asian Club on their campus. Our data illustrates that these organizations feel exclusionary to transracial adoptees and the segregation that occurs often precludes these attempts to access.

When attempting to access white spaces (i.e., Greek Life) a transracial adoptee may experience microaggressions and butt up against white privilege because of not aligning with the race perceived by their peers. An example of this possibility was shared by Aubrey who was told, "You speak good English!" Imagine how offensive that could sound to someone who has spoken only English language and has lived his/her entire life in the United States. Conversely, when attempting to join an Asian/American spaces, a transracial adoptee may feel fraudulent (for lack of a better word) in their attempt to comply with the norms of Asian culture. A student who is socially-constructed to be racially Asian, but has no cultural knowledge of Asia, will likely be ostracized from the Asian/American student group. Racial affinity groups allow students to become educated about culture and traditions, but as a transracial adoptee, these multicultural events may be overwhelming for those who have little-to-any lived experiences with their heritage culture. It also can be alienating to suggest that a transracially-adopted Asian/American go to an Asian student affinity group to learn about their heritage culture. Our data suggest that many Asian/American transracial adoptees feel ostracized when put into situations that involve their birth given culture.

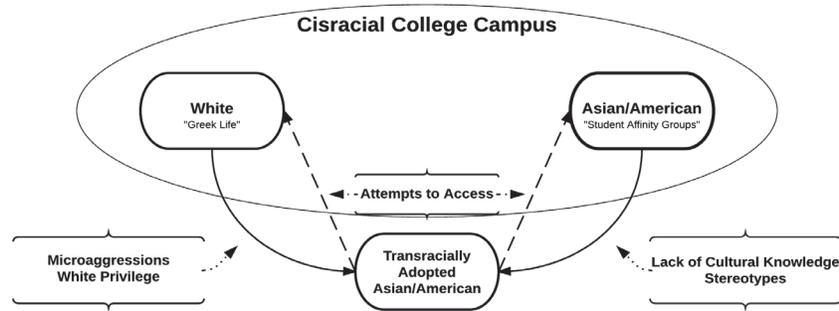
The model shared in Figure 2 provides no proper entry point for transracially-adopted Asian/Americans on the cisracial college campus. Due to the segregation of student affinity groups—and the outside perceptions that many adoptees deal with—it is hard for students to find their niche on campus when their population (read: adopted) is rendered invisible. We believe that a reconceptualized college

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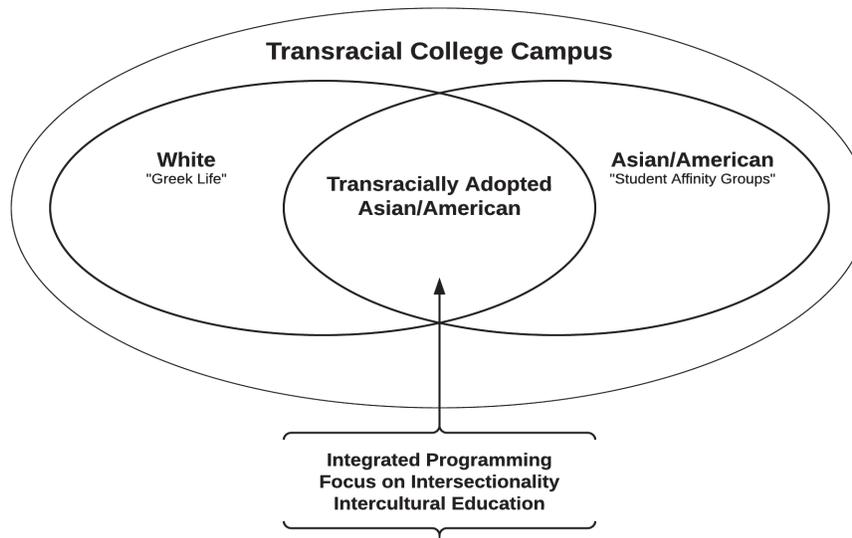
campus culture holds much promise. A transracial college campus is possible; a campus that is integrative, as opposed segregating (see Figure 3).

In Figure 3, our reconceptualized model, student affairs professionals are tasked with integrating the campus cultures to assist transracial students. Our data supports the notion that this population seeks to have opportunities to connect with other students who share similar identities, whether that means student who have similar racial heritage backgrounds, backgrounds like their adoptive parents, or just have an understanding of what living an adopted life is like. Sponsoring educa-

**Figure 2**  
*The Current Cisracial College Campus*



**Figure 3**  
*The Future Transracial College Campus*



tional sessions, like lectures by transracial adoption researchers, can assist faculty and students to better understand this population. The staff on college campuses can begin supporting the adoptee population by providing the financial resources to start student organizations related to adoption or transracial adoption. In addition, university administrators can open space for safe dialogue on this unique and complex and minoritized culture.

Student affairs professionals can assist transracial adoptees in feeling more comfortable on their campus by developing campus-wide mentoring programs. Perhaps adopted students can be paired with other adopted students to discuss the challenges and identity politics of being transracially adopted. The transracial adoptee population is small and in most cases invisible in the eyes of higher education administration and general student body. By highlighting to transracial adoptees that there are other students on campus with similar identities, connections can be made that would work to help students feel like they matter (Schlossberg, 1989). Another way to assist the adoptee population is by preparing counselors and staff members to break away from the norm of finding comfort in one's culture. It is a common method to suggest to students to seek relationships with people whom appear and behave similarly to themselves. However, this method does not produce the spaces that transracial adoptees most benefit from because an adopted college student may be perceived racially one way, but identify differently. Counselors must know how to serve transracially-adopted students effectively as they explore their own identities and provide the support and knowledge of this culture to all students on campus.

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### Limitations and Future Research

Through our literature review, we learned that the research of transracial adoptees on the college campus is fairly limited with very few studies found that focus on this population. The preponderance of existing adoption studies focus on adolescents and children and the development through adoptive parents (e.g., see Benson et al., 1994; Dalley et al., 2008; Hoopes, 1990; Steinberg et al., 2000). We noticed a gap in the literature and sought to develop more information on serving the transracially-adopted college student population. This study was originally intended to focus on the racial identity development process of transracially adopted Asian/Americans, but through our data collection, the opportunity for a grounded theory was conceived. Future research may lead to a model that adapts Renn's (2004) ecological theory of mixed race development to find the impact that one's "balancing of two worlds" (adoptive and biological) might have on a college students' racial identity development. Examining the experiences of adopted college students would extend Renn's ecological theory of mixed race development research (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010; Renn, 2004, 2009) in inclusive ways.

Our study did not account for all transracial adoptees. We targeted Asian/Americans as a study population due to Asians being the largest subset of tran-

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sracial adoptees in the United States (*cf.* Kreider & Lofquist, 2014). Asians are also the fastest growing minority population in the United States (*cf.* U.S. Census, 2010). More research should be done to test whether Asian/American identities and struggles can be translated to other races. Future studies may expand our models and apply them to other transracial adoptee groups, such as Latino or Black transracial adoptees who face different challenges than Asian/Americans. One study showed that African American and Hispanic transracial adoptees appeared to have greater pride and comfort in their ethnicities and races than did Asian/American transracial adoptees (Benson et al., 1994). We believe that our grounded theory modeling applies to other transracial college students insofar as it identifies clearly the ways that institutions of higher education must break away from institutionalizing segregated student organizations and providing educational sessions on single-race diversity.

The transracial adoptee population is small, and invisible on our cisracial college campuses, but is still a relevant one for student affairs practitioners to serve. While discussions of mixed-race identities and the intersectionality of identities are important and should continue, we cannot omit transracial adoptees from this conversation as well. Transracially-adopted college students are a minoritized group and remain silent due in large part because colleges and universities are not aware of their unique needs. Higher education must break away from the traditional cisracial model of a college campus and find ways to integrate all of the campus programs to support students with transracial identities. This is no easy task, but by finding this population on campus and discovering their needs, we can develop ways to support transracial adoptees.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> As an anonymous reviewer pointed out, the Asian/American community is extremely large, diverse, and heterogeneous. Hune (2002) explains why student affairs professionals need to address the diversity of Asian American students if they are to be better served and supported. According to Hune (2002), “*Asian American* (or *Asian Pacific American* or *Asian and Pacific Islander*) is now a term in common use in institutional data and U.S. society. Most important, it has come to represent numerous groupings as if they are a single coherent category” (p. 12, italics in original). An informative web-based resource that captures the diversity of the Asian/American community can be found online here: <http://aapidata.com/>. Some scholarship has different acronyms to refer to the diverse Asian/American population, such as the following: APIDAs (Asian Pacific Islander, Desi, Americans), AAPIs (Asian American & Pacific Islanders), APIs (Asian-Pacific Islanders), and/or APAs (Asian-Pacific Americans). While we don’t take up this important discussion in this article, interested readers can read Lien, Conway, and Wong’s (2004) *The Politics of Asian Americans: Diversity & Community*.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew G. Garrod and Robert Kilkenny describe “Balancing Two Worlds” in their edited volume *Balancing Two Worlds: Asian American College Students Tell Their Life Stories* (2007, Cornell University Press).

<sup>3</sup> We use the term “liminality” here in the sense that “balancing two worlds” can force transracial adoptees to both sides of border.

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## Appendix A

### *Open Codes for Research Question 1*

Describe in your own words what it's like to be transracially adopted? How do you balance your dual statuses: adopted and biological?

1. Salience of Race
2. Minority Status
3. Cultural Knowledge
4. Acceptance
5. Fine
6. Complex
7. Proud
8. Difficult
9. Hard

10. Blessing
11. Love it
12. Unsure
13. Awareness of Racism
14. Frustration
15. Limited Cultural Immersion
16. Journey
17. Victimized for being Different
18. Daily Struggle
19. Colorblindness
20. Lucky
21. Limited Cultural/Heritage Knowledge
22. Not being understood
23. Happy Adoptee
24. "Angry Adoptee"
25. Perception
26. Seeking heritage knowledge
27. Emotion/Emotional
28. Challenging
29. Struggle
30. Invisible
31. Being Different
32. Perpetual Outsider
33. Race Matters
34. Don't fit in
35. Being teased
36. Incomplete/Incompleteness
37. Central to identity
38. Not important to identity
39. Stereotypes
  - a. Speak English Well
  - b. Where are you really from?
  - c. "Real Parents"
40. Resentment
41. Balancing Two Worlds
42. Third-Culture
43. Avoidance

## **Appendix B**

### ***Open Codes for Research Question 2***

Detail any current struggles you face in regards to race at your college/university? What are the sources of these struggles? Can they be mitigated?

1. None
2. Stereotypes
  - a. Language (English)

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- b. Model Minority
- c. Internalized Model Minority
- d. Where Are You From
- e. Assumed Intelligent
- 3. Minority Status
- 4. Balancing Two Worlds
- 5. Avoidance
- 6. Shame
- 7. Racism
- 8. Microaggressions
- 9. Lack of Institutional Support
- 10. Perceptions
- 11. Racial Segregation
- 12. Being/Feeling Singled Out
- 13. Lack of racial authenticity
- 14. Racial Appearance
- 15. White Privilege
- 16. Invisibility
- 17. Being Ignored

### **Appendix C**

#### ***Open Codes for Research Question 3***

What can your college/university do to help you feel more comfortable with your dual (adopted and biological) identity?

- 1. Nothing
- 2. Programming/Events
- 3. Organizations/Clubs
- 4. Counseling
- 5. Education
  - a. Lectures
  - b. Talks
  - c. Panels
- 6. Student Services
  - a. Translation Services
- 7. Address Stereotypes
- 8. Promote Diversity
- 9. Provide Safe Spaces
- 10. Provide Institutional support of adoptee led initiatives
- 11. Provide Organizational support for adoptee groups
- 12. Become more diverse
- 13. Promote awareness