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UNKNOWN IDENTITIES: HOW TRANSRAICAL INTERNATIONAL ADOPTEES
RACIALLY and CULTURALLY IDENTIFY IN COLLEGE

By,

Amy Williamson

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of

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Unknown Identities: How Transracial International Adoptees
Racially and Culturally Identify in College

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University of Nebraska, 2017

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This qualitative research study investigated transracial international adoptees (TRIAs) and how they racially and culturally identify in college. This study was meant to bring an awareness to student affairs professionals to increase their knowledge about a population they may encounter. Four TRIAs were interviewed. The findings from the data analysis revealed many TRIAs were uninterested in their birth country growing up, they were connected to their adoptive culture, and they racially identified with their birth race. Areas for future research and recommendations for student affairs are included.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to anyone who felt this world has unfairly imposed upon him or her, an identity. I encourage you to live your truth, seek your identity and to live your best life.

Acknowledgements

To my participants, many of whom I would have never met had it not been for this project. I am eternally grateful that you trusted me with your story and were willing to delve into the most intimate parts of your life so that I could share it with the world. Your experience will help so many TRIAs find an understanding of who they are at a much deeper level than you may ever know.

To my advisor, Dr. Stephanie Bondi. I would not be facing graduation if it were not for you and your endless support. I would not be able to call myself a proud researcher and I would not be satisfied with this thesis if it were not for your guidance. The long, stressful, and repeated conversations kept me on track and drove me into a direction I never thought possible. I understand now, why you love research so much. I have come to enjoy this work as well.

To my sister, Heather Williamson. Words literally cannot express the gratitude I have for you. I would not be in graduate school and on the cusp of being the first in our family to graduate with a masters degree without you. I am incredibly appreciative that our life journeys brought us together. Blood never defined sisterhood and I am so fortunate to be a sister to you and the rest of our siblings.

To my friends, mentors, professors, family members, and my student affairs cohort who supported me and pushed me to finish this project. Thank you for allowing me to gripe when I needed to and for encouraging me when I needed it most. My success would not have been possible without you.

Finally, I want to acknowledge my own experience. My interest in this topic would not be as strong if I did not personally associate with being a TRIA. I do not talk about the fact that I am adopted because I used to think that it is not important to my life. I have come to realize the actual real importance being adopted has played in my life. No, being adopted did not end in a lifestyle so lavish with money and material things. My adoption gave me an experience so extraordinary I know I must share with others.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCING THE STUDY

Imagine meeting an individual with features that resemble someone who is of Indian descent. At first glance some assumptions may be, the person is Indian and they must have grown up in an Indian household with Indian parents. Perhaps another assumption may be this individual celebrates the Indian culture and is Indian, both racially and culturally. Now imagine when you interact with this Indian person, they do not act in the way you would assume an Indian person would act. This person cannot speak the language, cannot stomach the spicy food, and cannot tell you any of the Indian traditions.

For someone who grew up in a home that is racially and culturally different than what is depicted on his or her skin color, this experience is not hypothetical. Your assumptions about a person based on the way they look might be misguided (Johnston-Guerrero & Nadal, 2010). Who, might you ask, would grow up in a home that is racially and culturally different than his/her birth culture? Many transracial international adoptees experience what was described above every day. A transracial international adoptee (TRIA) is someone who is born in another country and is adopted into a home that is racially and culturally different than the one they were born into (Juffer, Van Ijzendoorn, 2000). Transracial international adoption began in United States in the late 1940s and affects over 300,000 children (*Annual Report on Intercountry Adoption Narrative*, 2015; Herman, 2012; Shin, 2013; Trenka, Oparah, & Shin, 2006).

Adoption, while it is meant to help both a family and a child in need, has raised concerns when it comes to an international, interracial family placement. Some researchers believe that placing children completely outside of their birth race and culture

has very little effect on the identity development of adoptees when they get older (Feigelman, 2000; Juffer, & Tieman, 2013; Juffer, Van Ijzendoorn, 2000). Others strongly disagree arguing adoptees will struggle with their identity and will have behavioral problems, as they get older. Some researchers believed these things would be less likely to happen if TRIAs were placed in a household similar to the adoptee's birth culture (Elovainio, Raaska, Sinkkonen, Mäkipää, & Lapinleimu, 2015; McRoy & Zurcher, 1983; Simon & Roorda, 2000; Trenka et al., 2006).

Research discovered the experience of TRIAs is complex because the home they grew up in is outside of their birth race and culture (Baden, Treweeke, & Ahluwalia, 2012; McRoy, 1983; Trenka et al., 2006). Many TRIAs were adopted into White homes and some White parents have limited knowledge on racism, which may hinder them in knowing how to talk about race (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Adding to the complexity of TRIAs' experience, some of the research revealed many parents attempt to deflect any trace of racism towards their child by not acknowledging race throughout the child's life. This can unintentionally leave TRIAs to grow up culturally blind or unaware of racial differences (Langrehr, Thomas, & Morgan, 2016; McRoy & Zurcher, 1983; Shin, 2013; Trenka et al., 2006).

Looking at U.S. society, fluidity of identity is not always encouraged. People want you to know who you are and there is an expectation that who are you matches how society sees you (Johnston-Guerrero & Nadal, 2010). In the example described earlier, there were certain assumptions that were based on the way the individual looked. There was a lot of research that outlines a possible reason as to why there are so many assumptions based on the way a person looks (Johnston-Guerrero & Nadal, 2010; Renn,

2004; Root, 1996). For example, there is the model Asian who is smart and skinny or the typical African American who is voluptuous and loud. And let us not forget the Mexican who is part of a drug cartel and adding to the war on drugs (Nadal, Escobar, Prado, David, and Haynes, 2012; Johnston-Guerrero & Nadal, 2010; Tang, McLoyd, & Hallman, 2016; Van der Merew & Jonker, 2001;). It seems in the US stereotypes shape how people perceive others and their expectations about them.

Currently, in U.S. society there is an expectation of having a monoracial identity (Johnston-Guerrero & Nadal, 2010). For example, the US census has a select number of boxes to choose from when identifying race or ethnicity. All the ethnicities and races are not even listed. The census lists an “other” box if the person does not fit into the categories outlined by the U.S. census (Johnston-Guerrero & Nadal, 2010; Root, 1996). There is research that discusses the detrimental effects “other-ing,” such as necessitating someone check an “other” box, has on an individual (Binning, Unzueta, Huo, & Molina, 2009; Johnston-Guerrero & Nadal, 2010; Root, 1996; Shang, 2008).

Even though there is substantial research that reveals identity is not stagnant (Hearst, 2012; Root, 1996; Rosnati, Pinderhughes, Baden, Grotevant, Lee & Mohanty, 2015), in U.S. culture there is an expectation of a stable, unchanging identity. U.S. society has a subjective idea that someone must have a distinct identity that is unchanging (Binning et al., 2009; Johnston-Guerrero & Nadal, 2010). Growing up in this society coupled with the way some TRIAs are parented, many TRIAs might feel they must identify with their birth race and culture instead of their adoptive race and culture to meet expectations of society.

The research on TRIAs focused on children and adolescents (Baden, Treweeke, & Ahluwalia, 2012 ; Feigelman, 2000; Juffer, & Tieman, 2013; Trenka et al., 2006). There is very little research on TRIAs who are in college (Bille, 2013; Kryder, 1999; Niessen, 2011). This lack of research raises questions about the process and outcomes of identity development of TRIAs during college.

Colleges and universities are unique platforms for personal growth and development for young adults (Shang, 2008). Given that institutions of higher education are filled with individuals from all walks of life “colleges and universities are places where personal questions such as those related to race are first confronted away from the support of family and communities” (Shang, 2008, p.10).

Based on the literature, TRIAs grow up in mostly White monoracial neighborhoods and many White parents treat their adoptee as though they are White (Baden et al., 2012; Langrehr, 2016; Nissen, 2011; Trenka et al., 2006). Attending college might be the first time TRIAs are socially expected to know about their birth race and culture, especially based on the research that U.S. society has a certain expectation to be monoracial (Bille, 2013; Johnston-Guerrero & Nadal, 2010; Kryder, 1997). People who TRIAs encounter in college may project certain stereotypes and assume the TRIA can converse about their diverse background (Nissen, 2011). This new environment and being exposed to different racial and cultural backgrounds might spark a TRIA to reevaluate their identity.

Since identity development is a process that is important for the healthy development of each student, several theories came to light to help educators understand students and their development in college (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016). There

are theories that explain ethnic identity formation, psychosocial identity development; as well as theories that help explain the way a student makes sense of their story. There are also racial identity development models such as racial and cultural identity development (RCID), Asian American identity development and multiracial identity development, just to name a few (Patton et al., 2016).

These models help to explain why a person might racially or culturally identify in a specific way. These models also shed light on how individuals make sense of their racial and cultural identity (Patton et al., 2016). There are no theories to help explain the identity development of TRIAs, leaving professionals in the field of higher education unaware about this population.

Baden et al., (2012) pointed out that TRIAs tend to seek more information on their birth culture as they get older, gain maturity and attempt to figure out who they are. The research that will be provided in the literature review alludes to the complexity of identity development for TRIAs. The scholarship on identity development considers social and environmental factors (Allen-Collinson & Brown, 2012; Boivin & Hassan, 2015; Gosine, 2002; Hearst, 2012; Root, 1996; Rosnati et al., 2015). An important finding by Root (2003) suggested students “understand themselves within the context of their environments, which change throughout their life and can lead individuals to alter how they identify” (p 117). Attending college might be a significant place where TRIAs begin to reevaluate how they see themselves. Colleges and universities have a distinctive environment that fosters student growth not only in the academic classroom but outside as well. In this new environment, TRIAs might want to explore their birth race or culture if they have not been exposed to it previously.

The purpose of the present study is to outline how TRIAs identify in college because there is no research on TRIAs who are in college. The point of this paper is not to pigeonhole TRIAs and force them to identify a certain way. Much of the research found that many TRIAs separate their cultural and racial identity. Baden and Stewart (2007) drew upon the previous research and created the cultural racial identity model. This model separates how TRIAs see their selves in regards to both adoptive race and culture as well as birth race and culture. This factor is important when working with TRIAs because their experience is complex and some TRIAs might want to integrate both cultures into their everyday lives. Forcing them to choose one over the other may dismiss part of their life experience and identity.

This study is also meant to bring an understanding to people who may work with TRIAs and might not know much or anything about this experience. The field of student affairs is committed to developing the whole student (Patton et al., 2016). Failing to recognize the identity of TRIAs ignores the priority of student development within this field. Without adequate research on TRIAs in the college context, student affairs professionals in the field are likely inexperienced with and uninformed about with this population. To fill this void, it is important to understand the experiences of TRIAs who are in college. The following were my overarching research questions guiding the present study:

1. How do TRIAs who are either currently in college, or recently graduated, racially and culturally identify?
 - a. What environmental and personal experiences have contributed to their thinking about race?

- b. What are TRIA's perceptions about how, if at all, racism has shaped their racial identity?
2. What kind of awareness did the TRIAs have of their birth culture while growing up in their adoptive household?
3. In what ways, if at all, is the birth culture significant to adoptees as an adult?
 - a. In what ways does this affect how adoptees bring in their adoptive culture?

This study will be a phenomenological qualitative study meaning data will be collected through interviews. Most of the research that has been done was quantitative and did not explore the individual experiences of TRIAs. Quantitative studies, while beneficial in reaching large numbers of participants, do not explain how or why a TRIA identifies in a certain way. A phenomenological study attempts to explain both the how and the why (Mertens, 2010).

This study will illuminate the literature surrounding TRIAs and highlight how some TRIAs racially and culturally identify in college. This study is guided by the constructivist paradigm. This paradigm explains how individuals make sense of their reality (Mertens, 2010). Given that identity is socially constructed and changes over time (Hearst, 2012; Root, 1996; Rosnati et al., 2015) the constructivist paradigm allows for the individual to focus on their experience and make meaning of how they see themselves (Mertens, 2010).

This study will shed light on the experiences of some TRIAs but it will not provide an account of every TRIA's experience making it less generalizable. Even though this study cannot be generalizable, it will explain the complex and multifaceted

experiences of many TRIAs. This study will examine some of the intricacies of this population and educate professionals on a population that is rarely discussed. Finally, I will summarize my findings and recommend areas for future research and for student affairs practice. The next section will delve deeper into the complex experiences of TRIAs and outline other important factors in the literature review.

Definition of Terms

Throughout this thesis there are some terms that will be used that may not be familiar to the reader. The following are definitions of a few key terms that will help clarify the language for the reader.

Culture is defined as the daily practices by the participant. All of the participants identified with the White culture since that is the culture they were socialized in.

Cultural Socialization instills the importance of specific traditions associate with a certain culture (Juang, et al., 2016).

Race is defined as how a participant perceives themselves in relation to their birth race. Race is not always defined by what is represented on someone's skin color.

Racial Socialization is a way parents teach their child about being part of a specific race (Juang, et al., 2016).

Transracial, International Adoptee (TRIA) any person who is internationally, interracially adopted into a family that is racially and culturally different than the adoptee's birth country. The term TRIA will help to explain what a TRIA is and the term will at times be shortened to transracial adoptee. The term will also be seen as TRI adoption.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Transracial internationally adopted (TRIA) students are a population that are hardly ever mentioned in the discourse about college student populations. It is a less commonly known identity but it is one that affects thousands of students within the United States. According to the *Annual Report on Intercountry Adoption Narrative* there were 6,438 children who were adopted from another country, into the U.S. in 2014. Since TRI adoptions occurred in the early 1940s there are now a little over 300,000 TRIAs in the US (Herman, 2012) and many of them are in college. This literature review outlines the complex experience of TRIAs as well as explains the importance of understanding TRIAs in a college setting.

Transracial, International Adoption (TRIA)

Many adults believe being a parent is one of the most important aspects in life and has even “become an essential part of an adult’s identity” (Nelson, 2006, p. 90). A large number of adults turn to adoption in the event they are unable to conceive or birth a child or, simply want to help children in need of a loving home. Juffer and van Ijzendoorn (2007) define adoption as “the legal placement of abandoned, relinquished, or orphaned children within an adoptive family” (p. 1067). Adoption can be domestic or international but either type of adoption can consist of an interracial family placement. When a child is adopted into a racially different family it is known as a transracial adoption (Juffer & van Ijzendoorn, 2007).

Adoption is a rare occurrence. It is estimated that there are about five million adoptees currently residing in the U.S.; this includes domestic and international adoptions (Herman, 2012). About 2.5 percent of all children are adopted (Herman, 2012). In the

U.S., documented adoption has been occurring since the early 1920s (Herman, 2012). Interracial adoption became a possibility when the number of Black youth was overwhelming in the foster care system and some White families were willing to adopt Black babies (Feigelman, 2000; McRoy & Zurcher, 1983; Simon & Roorda, 2000).

International adoption began in the United States during the late 1940s as a result of World War II and became more prevalent after the Korean War (Trenka, et al., 2006). The overseas adoption occurred because numerous children became orphans as a result of the war. Since the 1980s there has been an increase in transracial international adoption in the United States because of the misperception that the number of healthy babies had decreased in the U.S. (Trenka et al., 2006). This caused many parents-to-be and adoption agencies to turn to intercountry, or international, adoption to fulfill the need of parents wanting healthy young infants (Root, 1996; Trenka et al., 2006). A transracial international adoption (TRIA) describes an adoptee who was adopted internationally and placed in a home that is racially different from the adoptee (Baden et al., 2012; Root, 1996; Trenka et al., 2006).

Before there was adequate literature on TRIAs, professionals in the field of adoption assumed that it was best for a child who was adopted internationally to be placed in a home that was completely different than their birth race and culture (Shin, 2013). This is known as the “clean break model” (Shin, 2013, p. 162) and assumes that completely separating the child from their birth culture is going to be beneficial for the child. A large number of TRIAs who were adopted in the late 1940s and early 1950s have become adults and spoke out about their experience admitting they felt isolated,

unconnected and lost (Shin, 2013; Trenka et al., 2006). This shifted the way adoption agencies placed TRIAs.

Since the 1990s agencies have attempted to place international children in a family that was racially similar to the adoptee, but also worked hard to keep children within their birth country by any means necessary since the inception of *The Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption* signed in 1993 (Shin, 2013). The Hague Adoption Convention allowed for TRI adoption as a last resort for the adoptee. Despite their efforts to keep international children in their birth country, many of them were adopted into predominately White households (Shin, 2013; Trenka et al., 2006). In 2015 there were 5,648 TRIAs (*Annual Report on Intercountry Adoption Narrative*, 2015) and currently there are a little over 300,000 TRIAs living in the US (*Annual Report on Intercountry Adoption Narrative*, 2015; Herman, 2012; Pinderhughes & Rosnati, 2015).

Most of the literature states that TRIA children are placed in White households (Baden et al., 2012; McRoy & Zurcher, 1983; Shin, 2013; Trenka et al., 2013; Welsh, Viana, Petrill & Mathias, 2008). This type of placement has continued to raise questions surrounding the identity development of the adoptee as they get older. The next section outlines why a placement for a TRIA may be controversial.

Racial and Cultural Socialization

Transracially adopting children began because of the overwhelming amount of Black youth in foster care. Since there were a large majority of Black youth in foster care (McRoy & Zurcher, 1983; Root 1996), Social workers were hesitant to place them in White families even though White families were willing to adopt a Black child (McRoy

& Zurcher, 1983; Root 1996). At the time, social workers in the field posited families who are racially similar to their adoptee would be better suited for parenting compared to a family who is racially different (Root, 1996). With the high number of Black youth in foster care and many White families wanting to complete their family, adoption agencies began justifying a transracial placement of a Black baby into a White home because of the new guidelines created by the *Child Welfare League of America* (CWLA) which stated a child “should not unduly wait for a same-race placement when a transracial placement was possible” (Root, 1996, p. 66).

At the time, in 1987 when CWLA passed this new guideline, it raised a lot of questions with professionals who worked with transracial adoption placement. Many professionals speculated White families could not adequately integrate their Black adoptee into the Black culture (Root, 1996). Today, a transracial placement is still heavily criticized. Many social workers still believe White parents are not prepared to teach their child about race and racial issues because White parents simply cannot experience racism (Butler-Sweet, 2011).

This criticism is also reflected in the placement of a TRIA because professionals believe that a TRIA will most likely question his/her identity when they get older because the adoptee will notice, at a young age, that he/she is inherently different (Baden et al., 2012; Trenka et al., 2006). Even though the adoptee may notice the difference in skin color, the root of criticizing a TRIA placement stems from the parenting styles of White parents compared to parents of color. Many professionals in the field of adoption believe that people of color, who are much more likely to experience direct racism, are better prepared to parent children of color. The way in which parents of color raise their child is

intrinsically based in racial and cultural socialization which is important for the health and wellbeing of people of color where racism is deeply embedded into society (Butler-Sweet, 2011; Juang, Yishan, Yeong, & Yijie, 2016).

Racial socialization is a way parents teach their child about being part of a specific race similarly, cultural socialization instills the importance of specific traditions associated with a certain culture (Juang et al., 2016). This parental practice is common in families of color. For many families of color, racial and cultural socialization is a practice that is inherited from their families and they inherently talk about race and culture through racial and cultural socialization (Juang et al., 2016; Root, 1996; Saleem et al., 2016). Parents of color teach children about potential racial stressors they may face, how to manage racial prejudice as well as instills in their child cultural pride and knowledge on their racial background (Saleem et al., 2016). The ability for parents of color to teach racial and cultural socialization is major reason why many researchers believe children who are not White will be better prepared if they are placed in a household with a family of color (Root, 1996; Saleem et al., 2016).

When parents of color teach their child about racial socialization they focus on cultural socialization, preparation for bias, and promotion of mistrust (Saleem et al., 2016). Cultural socialization emphasizes the history and traditions; preparation for bias brings an awareness of racial discrimination and offers coping mechanisms to combat experiences of racial discrimination (Saleem et al., 2016). Promotion of mistrust discusses who cannot be trusted outside of their race and cautions interactions with other racial groups (Saleem et al., 2016). Although Saleem et al.'s (2016) research suggests African American parents use this technique and Juang et al.'s (2016) research found

that this parental practice is common in Asian American families further research could inform the ways which this approach is used by parents of other racial groups.

Kyoung et al. (2016) found, “For transnational, transracial adoptive families, the process of racial and ethnic socialization is often complicated by the parental lack of firsthand knowledge and experiences of being a racial and ethnic minority in the United States” (p. 296). Pinderhughes, Zhang, and Agerbak (2015) found families who adopt TRIAs often view and treat them as White regardless of the color of the adoptee’s skin. When this occurs, White parents are doing what they believe is the best practice to protect their TRIA and attempting deflect or minimize any trace of racism towards their child. In doing so, they have unintentionally taught their child to grow up culturally blind or unaware of cultural differences (Leslie, 2013; Pinderhughes et al., 2015; Trenka et al., 2006). White families, since they have not been and are less likely to understand the experiences of being a person of color, talk less about race and culture (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Kyoung et al., 2016; Tang, McLoyd & Hallman, 2016; Trenka et al., 2006). This shows that the parental practices of White families are different than those of families of color.

Much of the research found that many White parents are less likely to experience racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Butler-Sweet, 2011; Root 1996). As a result they often minimize racism and talk about racism as if it is imagined or not important (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). White parents would be less likely to incorporate race and cultural socialization as part of their parenting practice. They do not experience racism and do not see a need in educating their child on the potential stressors of being a person of color because White families see their TRIA as White (Butler-Sweet, 2011; Langrehr et al.,

2016; McRoy & Zurcher, 1983). This could be problematic for TRIAs who are trying to develop their sense of racial and cultural identity.

Baden (2015) explains that racial culturalization is a task impressed upon parents when they adopt a TRIA. Parents are expected to develop their adoptee with appropriate amounts of racial and cultural socialization from the TRIA's birthplace. Researchers believe that adoptees who attend culture camps or are introduced to their birthplace at an early age will be less likely to suffer from depression and identity issues when the adoptee gets older (Baden 2015).

Baden however, found "the socialization experiences that parents provide may differ in quality, amount, content, and frequency" (p. 20). Most adoption agencies do not require parents who adopt TRIAs to take cultural sensitivity courses and adoption agencies rarely explain the expectation to teach their adoptee about the adoptee's birthplace (Vonk and Angaran, 2003). Even though these expectations are not communicated, there is still an assumption that parents will inherently know to incorporate the adoptee's birth race and culture into the adoptee's life (Baden, 2015). The inequality of experiences is most likely an outcome of White parents not adequately knowing how to talk about race or how to integrate the adoptees birth culture.

Beyond not bringing up the topics of race, some White family members actively minimize racism, or talk about it as if it is natural when racial minorities describe their experiences (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). TRIAs may notice their skin color difference and the different ways that they may be treated in society. They may have no one to talk to about it especially if their White family suggests racism has been misinterpreted, the child

overreacted, racism is not important and/or the person(s) perpetuating racism did not mean any harm so the child of color should not feel hurt.

Given that racial socialization instills racial pride and is mostly a practice found in families of color, TRIAs that are placed in a White home might lack an understanding of race and culture. Langrehr et al., (2016) explained, “Studies show that TRAs [transracial adoptees] tend to grow up in predominately White families; [sic] which lead to hardly ever having any racial contact with those who are similar” (p. 432). This outcome is unintentional, is contingent upon where the family resides and the racial makeup of the schools as well as the surrounding community. Understanding what racial and cultural socialization is, it is logical for a TRIA to find it difficult to identify as a specific race or with a specific culture since they are racially different from their family (Feigelman, 2000) and the family may not discuss race. The way TRIAs have been racially and culturally socialized by their adoptive parents can affect how they see themselves. The next section outlines the complexity of identity and broadly explains the identity development of a few racial and cultural identity models and will illuminate what is lacking in research surrounding identity development for TRIAs.

Racial and Cultural Identity Development

Since the research surrounding TRIAs are scarce, there is little research on their identity development. Researchers who study this population argue whether or not TRIAs question their identity when they get older (Baden et al., 2006; Feigelman, 2000; Langrehr et al., 2016; Trenka et al., 2006) but there is not a strong body of research to support either side. The inconclusiveness of this research on this particular population led me to research what had been studied.

Plenty of research suggests that identity is personal, complex, and evolves throughout a person's lifetime (Allen-Collinson & Brown, 2012; Boivin & Hassan, 2015; Gosine, 2002; Hearst, 2012; Root, 1996; Rosnati et al., 2015). Rockquemore and Laszloffy (2005) define identity as "the way we understand ourselves in relation to others and our social environment" (p.4). Identity is developed through the influences of family, peers and society (Allen-Collinson & Brown, 2012; Gosine, 2002; Way, Hernandez, Onnie, Rogers & Hughes, 2013).

There are theories to help explain a multitude of identity development throughout a person's different life stages. Such theories include but are not limited to racial, ethnic, and social identity development. Focusing specifically on racial and ethnic development in college students, the racial and cultural identity development model (RCID) emerged in the research as a base line for explaining other monoracial development models such as Asian American identity development, American Indian identity development, and mixed race identity models. These identity models help to explain how students who identify with a specific race make sense of how they see their selves (Patton et al., 2016).

RCID focuses on the development of individuals who identify as White and has five stages: conformity, dissonance, resistance and immersion, introspection, synergistic articulation and awareness (Patton et al., 2016). Conformity is when individuals have little to no interest in their racial or ethnic group that leads to them not wanting to learn about their cultural heritage. Dissonance is usually when individuals reject the White paradigm and begin to investigate their own racial and ethnic identity. Resistance and immersion is when individuals seek an understanding of how they see themselves outside of the White culture. The introspection stage is when individuals seek a balance between

dominant culture and their personal cultural heritage and begin to integrate the two to create their own specific racial and cultural identity. Synergistic articulation and awareness is when individuals have come to an understanding of how they see themselves (Patton et al., 2016).

Even though RCID focuses on the racial identity of White individuals, it is the foundation for explaining other racial development models. Many other racial identity models have developmental stages much like the ones described in RCID. Cross and Fahgen-Smith's model of Black identity development outlines sectors of identity development. Ferdman and Gallego's model of Latina and Latino ethno racial orientations describe six orientations that people who identify as Latina or Latino go through. Kim's Asian American identity development model has five stages. Horse's perspective on American Indian identity development model outlines five themes (Patton et al., 2016).

Cross and Fahgen-Smith's model of Black identity development explains the ways in which Black individuals make sense of their identity. Cross and Fahgen-Smith found that Black identity is formed through generations and is a lifetime development (Patton et al., 2016). Cross and Fahgen-Smith explained that Black individuals form "their Black identity through interactions with parents and significant others from birth toward adulthood" (Paton et al., 2016, p. 96). Black individuals who have not been socialized in the Black traditions normally do not create a healthy Black identity when they reach adulthood (Patton et al., 2016).

Ferdman and Gallego's model of Latina and Latino ethnoracial orientations explain the identity development of Latina and Latino individuals. Ferdman and

Gallego's understood that there are a number of factors that lead to the way a person identifies which include, "familial reference group, educational experiences, peer interactions, and physical appearance" (Patton et al., 2016, p. 105). Their model outlines six orientations that most Latinas and Latinos go through as they develop their identity.

Kim's Asian American identity development model focuses on the development of Asian Americans. Kim found that many Asians Americans "struggle with feelings about their racial selves and managing the expectations that stem from external perceptions of who they are" (Patton et al., 2016, p. 109). Kim describes five stages of development. Three key factors in this identity model is most Asian Americans have to realize racism influences their identity, Asian Americans have to work to live outside of the norms impressed upon them and finally they have to work through any negative experiences from racism in order to have a healthy Asian American identity. Kim's model explains these three key points as a five-stage process.

Horse's perspective on American Indian identity development explains that Native people develop their unique identity over time. While there are five cross-generational themes that Natives develop through to create their identity, the most important way Natives develop their identity is through being part of a Native Tribe (Patton et al., 2016).

The models outlined above emphasize the importance of growing up in a community of individuals who share the same identity so that individual can grow to have a healthy identity. All of these different racial identity models also help to explain a person who identify as monoracially Black, Latino, Asian American or American Indian. These models are helpful if a person solely identifies as one specific race. Not everyone

identifies with one specific race, which uncovers the importance of researching mixed race and multiracial identity development. The identity development of mixed raced individuals is a little more complex. Some researchers have attempted to synthesize multiracial and mixed race identity development.

Biracial and mixed race individuals have been attempting to prove to society that they have more than one identity (Rockquemore et al., 2005; Root, 1996). This dates back to before the civil rights era when individuals who had even an ounce of black ancestry were forced to identify as black on the US census (Renn, 2004; Rockquemore et al., 2005). Even today, many multiracial individuals are socially forced to identify with what is represented on their skin. Some researchers theorize “multiracial people experience problems because they are ‘between’ races” (Renn, 2004, p. 9) and being unable to identify with a specific race constitutes as “maladaptive” (Renn, 2004, p. 9). Rockquemore et al. (2005) found that biracial individuals who behave according to societal expectations hinder self-understanding. This leaves many biracial individuals “unable to resolve or integrate their dual racial heritage in a balanced way” (Rockquemore et al., 2005, p. 30).

Even though Rockquemore et al.’s (2005) research describes the struggles for biracial individuals, the same battle can translate to people who identify as mixed-race or multiracial. The experiences of biracial and multiracial individuals highlight that identity development is important because a strong identification to either ethnic or racial groups is related to a sense of belonging (Rockquemore, 2005; Root, 1996). Rockquemore et al.’s research emphasized that identity is an on-going process and found that there is not a specific way for biracial or multiracial individuals to identify themselves. This validates

the experience of many multiracial people. Renn (2004) understood that biracial and mixed-race individuals have a difficult time with their identity. She drew upon the previous research on identity development of biracial and multiracial individuals and found that many biracial or multiracial individuals identify in various ways. She created an ecology of race and identity which is explained next.

Renn's Ecology of Race and Identity

Renn's ecology of race, identity and community on campus found some biracial or mixed-race individuals identify in five groups (a) monoracial, (b) multiple monoracial, (c) multiracial, (d) extraracial, or (e) situational. Out of the 56 college-age biracial and mixed-race students that Renn interviewed, some identified as monoracial meaning they identified with one specific race. Others in the multiple monoracial group embraced the multiplicity of their races and claimed all of them when they identified as multiple monoracial. In the same study, Renn found those who identified as multiracial encompassed all of the races and cultures and did not want to identify too much as one or the other. Some biracial or multiracial individuals chose not to identify with any race which is defined as extraracial. Finally, there were some individuals who changed the way they identified based on who or what resources were around, Renn defined this as situational identity.

Renn (2004)'s research posited biracial and multiracial people have a challenging time with their identity even though some of them grow up being surrounded by family with rich roots in a specific race or culture. She also found that many biracial or multiracial individuals experience only one parent's race and culture, and when they get

to college some of them decide to explore more of the culture or race that they did not experience much growing up.

Renn (2004) challenged the idea that identity is relatively stable across different environments. Her research supports the idea that identity changes depending on the individual and their situation. Her research also supports the notion that biracial and multiracial individuals who are in college and grew up with multiple racial and cultural backgrounds, much like a TRIA, can identify in more than one way given the five different groups she found in her research with biracial and multiracial college students.

The findings from Renn's (2004) research were important for this study about TRIAs in college and led me to ask participants about their experiences in different environments within college. Based off Renn's findings, I wanted to know to what extent do TRIAs explore different environments and how those environments may have influenced identity development. Renn's findings also led me to ask participants how their identities might have changed in different contexts.

TRIAs and Identity Development

Experiences of TRIAs are complex because they have typically grown up in a household outside of their birth race and culture (Baden et al., 2012; Langrehr et al., 2016; McRoy, 1983; Trenka et al., 2006). Developing identity may be complex too because people often assume a monoracial identity (Johnston-Guerrero & Nadal, 2010). Oftentimes TRIAs are not exposed to individuals of similar racial or cultural background which has led some researchers to speculate that interracial adoptees lose their cultural identity (Hearst, 2012), do not gain positive racial identity (Butler-Sweet, 2011; Trenka et

al., 2006), and develop behavior problems because of the confusion surrounding their ethnic identity as they reach adolescents (Baden et al., 2012; Feigelman, 2000).

In contrast, other researchers found TRIAs have learned racial awareness (Baden et al., 2012) are able to be confident in their racial identity (Reinoso, Juffer & Tieman, 2012) do not have self-esteem or behavioral issues (Francis, 2007; Juffer van Ijzendoorn, 2007), and are able to claim some aspect of their birth culture which led to a stronger sense of cultural identity (Baden, Treweeke, Ahluwalia, 2012; Butler-Sweet, 2011).

Through his review of the literature, Mohanty (2015) found researchers are attempting to focus on the positive identity development of TRIAs but the findings are inconclusive. He found that many studies focus on identity formation and only a few of them look at how the adoptee copes with adoption-related differences, such as ethnic identity. Usually, there is a positive relationship between psychological well-being and identity formation, meaning that a healthy psychological well-being leads to a healthy identity formation. Mohanty found this positive relationship has been prevalent in Korean-born adoptees; however, the findings in other TRIAs have been inconsistent. In fact, some studies show little to no correlation. These inconsistent findings allude to the complexity in identity development in TRIAs (Mohanty, 2015).

Mohanty (2015) also pointed out that TRIAs take into consideration their ethnicity when forming their identity. Other researchers have specified that both culture and race can also affect a TRIA's identity development (Baden et al., 2007, 2012; Hearst, 2012; Reinoso et al., 2012). This leads to the conclusion that TRIAs might incorporate both race and culture distinctly during their identity formation. Therefore, when exploring the experiences of people in this population, it is important to consider the

racial and cultural aspects of participant' experiences. The following section outlines Baden and Stewart's (2002) cultural racial identity model, which is based on and reflected the experiences of TRIAs. It was used in the present study to frame thinking about participants' identity through both racial and cultural perspectives.

Cultural Racial Identity Model

Baden and Stewart (2007) understood that culture and race are two different elements that contribute to how one identifies themselves. The researchers created the cultural-racial identity model (Baden & Stewart). This model illuminates that TRIAs can consider both race and culture as separate entities. They found the cultural-racial identity model helps interracial adoptees make sense of the way they identify (Baden & Stewart). This model combines racial and cultural identity because it takes into account race and culture.

Within the cultural-racial identity model, the researchers defined culture as "ideals, beliefs, tools, skills, customs, languages, and institutions into which individuals are born" (Baden & Stewart, 2002, p. 170). For the purposes of their study Baden and Stewart defined race as groups of people who believe their physical characteristics and social relations are not the majority (Baden & Stewart, 2002). This meant their participants identified with the minority population. Their model breaks down identity into four quadrants which are called (a) pro-self racial identity, (b) biracial identity, (c) undifferentiated racial identity and (d) pro-parental racial identity (Baden & Stewart, 2002) this is shown in Figure 1.

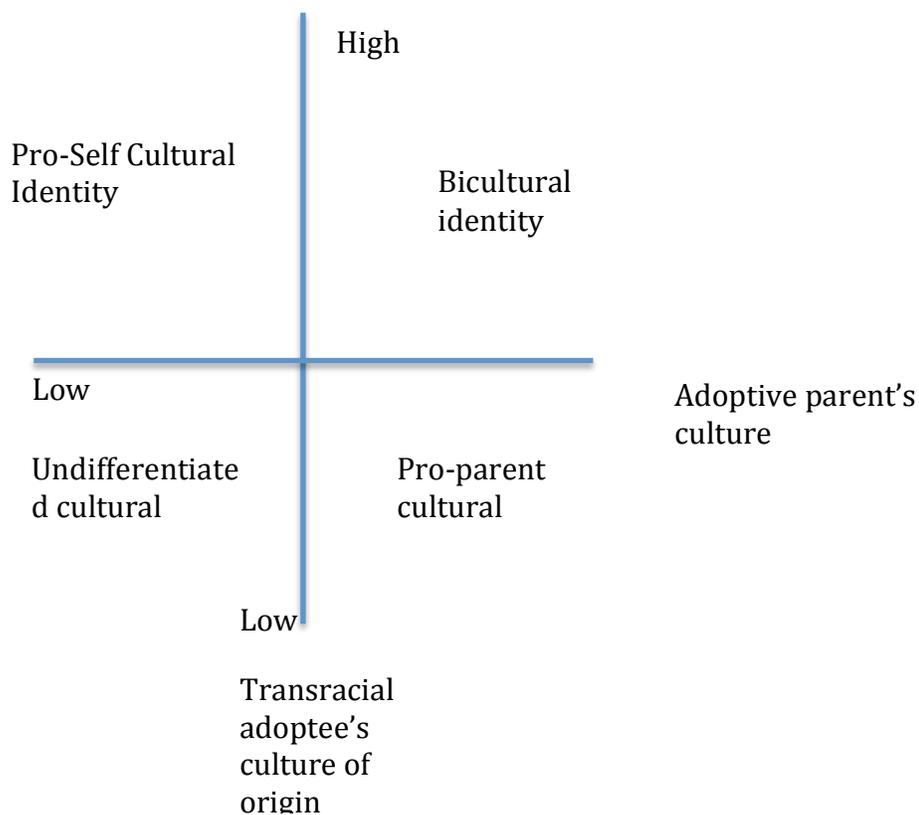


Figure 1: Reprinted from The Handbook of Adoption. In R.A Javier, A.L. Baden, F.A. Biafora & A. Camacho-Gingerich, 2007. With permission from Sage Publications ©

Figure 1, shows the different ways an interracial adoptee might identify within their adoptive parent's culture. Pro-self cultural identity is if the TRIA did not have strong ties to their adoptive parent's culture, but had strong ties to their birth culture. Bicultural identity is if the adoptee incorporated both birth culture and adoptive parent's culture. Undifferentiated cultural identity is if the adoptee did not have strong ties to either culture. Pro-parent cultural identity is if the adoptee identified strongly to their adoptive parent's culture. A TRIA's ability to identify with a culture is contingent upon their knowledge, awareness, competence and comfort with either their birth or adoptive culture (Baden & Stewart, 2002; Javier et al., 2007). For example, if a TRIA felt they identified more with their adoptive parent's culture and did not know much about their

birth culture the individual would most likely identify in the pro-parent culture quadrant (Baden & Stewart, 2002; Javier et al., 2007).

There is a second figure in the shape of a square with four quadrants (not pictured), which looks similar to Figure 1; however, the only difference is the x-axis is defined as the adoptive parent's race. It works the same way as described above. The y-axis is defined as transracial adoptee's racial group. If the two are overlapped, it will create 16 quadrants (Figure 2) representing how the adoptee could identify.

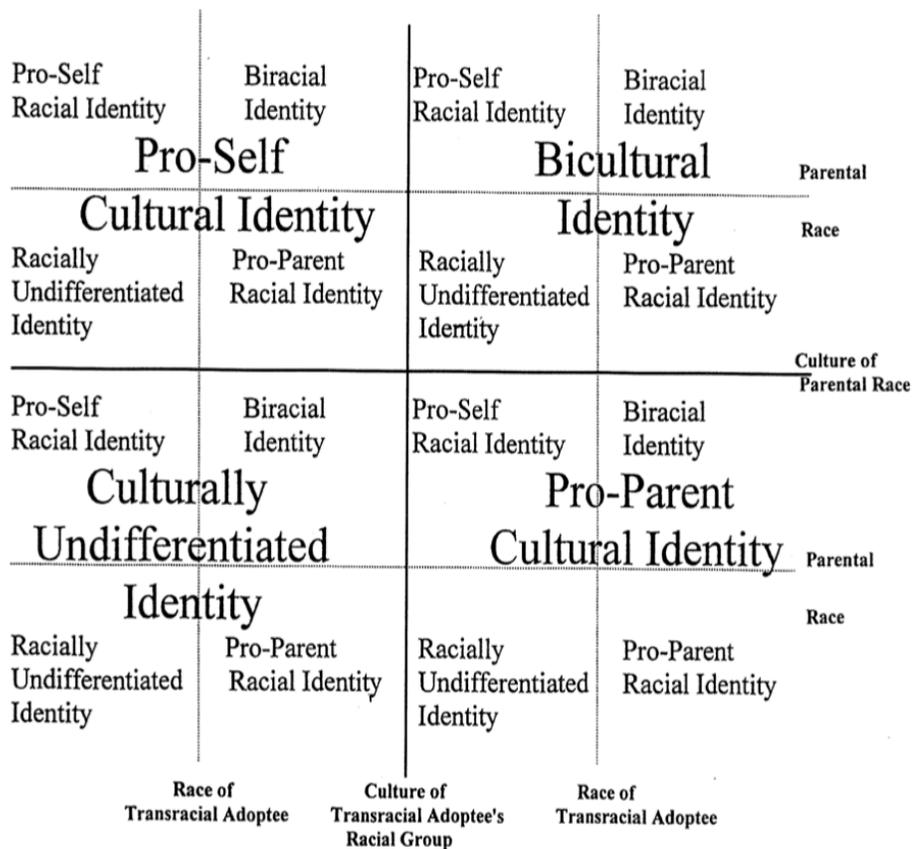


Figure 2: Reprinted from *The Handbook of Adoption*. In R.A. Javier, A.L. Baden, F.A. Biafora & A. Camacho-Gingerich, 2007. With permission from Sage Publications ©

This model plus much of the other research provided a context to the complexity of a TRIA's experience. The literature also exposed the complexity of identity formation for anyone. Figure 2, illuminates the intricacy of combining a TRIA's experience of their racial and cultural identity in both the adoptive and birth realm. The grid helps to explain how a TRIA might see themselves depending on their comfort level with either birth culture or adoptive culture. This grid can help professionals who work with TRIAs uncover the different ways a TRIA can identify. The grid attempts to synthesize all the possible ways a TRIA could identify based on their comfort level and competency in either birth race and culture or adoptive race and culture.

Through looking at the experiences of biracial and mixed-race individuals, discussed in the previous section, there are a lot of similarities when it comes to identity formation. Both Renn (2004) and Baden et al's., (2002) research aligns with other research suggesting that identity evolves over time and there is no singular perspective way to have a healthy identity (Allen-Collinson & Brown, 2012; Boivin & Hassan, 2015; Gosine, 2002; Hearst, 2012; Root, 1996; Rosnati, Pinderhughes, Baden, Grotevant, Lee, & Mohanty, 2015). Understanding that identity can change based on the person's environment and age, it will be beneficial in this study to look at the college environment because college might affect the way a TRIA identifies.

TRIAs in a College Context

This literature review has highlighted what a TRIA is, some of the disagreements surrounding a TRIA placement and outlined the complexity in identity development for TRIAs. The research surrounding TRIAs is scarce and focuses on either young children, adolescents or older TRIAs. This clarifies a need for researching TRIAs who are between

the ages of 19-30 and are in college because as adoptees get older many of them actively or passively seek more information on their birth culture (Baden et al., 2012). Patton et al., (2015) suggested students “understand themselves within the context of their environments, which change throughout their life and can lead individuals to alter how they identify” (p 117). The research surrounding identity development clearly states that identity is fluid and changes throughout a person’s lifetime (Allen-Collinson & Brown, 2012; Boivin & Hassan, 2015; Gosine, 2002; Hearst, 2012; Root, 1996; Rosnati et al., 2015).

A TRIA’s college environment might be different than the one they grew up in given that numerous colleges and universities are made up of diverse populations and many neighborhoods remain segregated. This new environment might afford TRIAs the opportunity to have access to culture, or resources that were not provided throughout their childhood. TRIAs might be able to join clubs or organizations similar to their birth culture, or they might have the opportunity to take a class more associated towards learning about their birth culture. Therefore, the college environment becomes an important context to focus the study of identity development (Renn, 2004).

Higher education institutions are focused on the development of their students. Theories to explain the development of college students have emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016). Student development encompasses the development of the whole student-- emotional, intellectual, and spiritual and is a positive change surrounding “cognitive complexity, self-awareness, racial identity, or engagement” (Patton et al., 2016, p.7). Higher education institutions want to

support their students while in college and the theories behind student development inform the practices of higher education professionals (Patton et al., 2016).

Since college student development focuses on the development of the whole student, the college environment might foster a space where a TRIA might want to try out new behaviors or investigate their birth culture given access to all the new resources such as a multicultural office or faculty and staff of diverse populations. Many professionals in the field of higher education are likely inexperienced and unknowledgeable with the experiences of TRIAs because they are an unknown population and research conducted with this population within the college context is sparse. Without adequate research on TRIAs in college context there is a gap in literature for this population.

To fill this void, it is important for this study to look at the experiences of TRIAs who are in college or recently graduated to define how some individuals who are in this population racially and culturally identify. Having insight from TRIAs who are in college will provide educators with concrete knowledge on the experiences of TRIAs. This information can enhance the scholarship on TRIAs who are in college and can provide higher education professionals with tools for understanding the complex identity development of TRIAs during this life stage.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The research on TRIAs is not extensive given that it is a relatively new phenomenon (Hearst, 2012). Much of the literature has placed an emphasis on needing to understand the experiences of each individual. The literature did not explain the racial and cultural identity of TRIAs in college. This phenomenological study will bridge the gap on TRIAs in college, specifically how they racially and culturally identify. This chapter will outline the methodology, the framework that guided this study and will disclose the researcher's positionality.

Researcher Reflexivity

My personal experience is what sparked my interest in this topic. I explain my relationship to this topic in this section so that readers understand my personal experiences and can imagine how my experiences might influence my relationships with participants and my interpretations during this study. The researcher's role and positionality in the research "is only one possibility, and that [the researcher's] report does not have any privileged authority over other interpretations made by readers, participants, and other researchers" (Creswell, 2016, p. 474). Understanding where the researcher is coming from will reveal the relationship between the participants, researcher and the topic (Creswell).

I was adopted from India as a young child and never knew my biological family. I was adopted twice. The first family that I was adopted into was White. They told me that I was born in India and my biological parents were Indian. I experienced a lot of trauma prior to coming to the US and as a result, my first family was unable to raise me. After about a year and a half I was fostered by another family who later adopted me at the age

of 11. The household where I grew up for most of my childhood was made up of a Columbian-American mom; a White father; four biracial half White; half Columbian siblings; and a Mexican male housemate. I was the darkest person living in the home.

Growing up in this household was difficult. I was the youngest and by the time I was adopted into the family, most of my siblings were either on their own or off to college. I spent most of my middle school years growing up with my White adoptive nephew who was three years older than me. In elementary school, the kids in my class always referred to me as Pocahontas and before I knew better, I thought they were right. I remember I dressed up as Pocahontas for Halloween and one of my sisters explained that I was more like Princess Jasmine instead of Pocahontas. My sister realized that I knew I was Indian but that I was unsure which kind. I remember in middle school I did an art project on India but I did not really think I was Indian.

My mom never explained what being adopted meant. I knew I was adopted because of the obvious skin color difference but she never explained what it really meant to be adopted. Being Columbian-American, my mom spoke Spanish and made a lot of Spanish foods. When I got to high school, she tried to make a few Indian dishes but never explained why. I later realized that this was her attempt to try and get me in touch with the Indian culture.

In high school my mom made me fill out the demographics on school paperwork such as standardized tests. I remember I asked her what I should put for race and she told me to put Asian or Pacific Islander. I did not know what either of those meant, so I believed her. When I filled out my medical paperwork at hospital visits, I changed the race to American Indian because my thought process was, I am an American and I am

Indian. Race and culture were hardly ever topics of discussion unless it was to discriminate against other racial minorities. These lack of healthy conversations left me confused as to what to put when it came to filling out the demographics for race.

During my first year at college, one of my friends, who was Black pointed out that I should not be sun tanning. She caught me outside basting in the hot sun a long side my White roommate. She told me sun tanning was for people with lighter skin so they could get the brown complexion that I had. At the time I did not realize how, as a person of color, she perceived what a White person should do compared to what I should do as a person of color. Her scolding me for being outside in the sun revealed that her idea of a dark person should not be trying to get darker. She was attempting to impress upon me what she learned growing up and what she thought I had missed.

Since my mom did not know how to racially identify me and we never discussed what it meant to be part of a particular race, I was confused. By the time I started college, I saw myself as a White person with really dark skin. I thought, since I did not celebrate the traditions of the Indian culture there was no way I could identify as Indian. As I graduated college and started life after college, I realized society would never see me as White and I knew that I did not identify as Indian, which left me in this unknown limbo of identity. When I began the graduate program, that I was in while conducting this study, I came across the term transracial international adoptee (TRIA) and it resonated with me much more than any other identity before. This discovery led me to want to seek an understanding of a population that I had no idea I belonged to.

I wanted to explore TRIAs and how they make meaning of this complex identity. During this entire study it was extremely important for me to incorporate all of the

validity measures that Creswell (2016) recommends because of my own ties to the research. Although I will not be able to erase my experiences and undoubtedly they will influence my interpretations, I have utilized the steps of quality that will be explained to ensure that participants' experiences are reflected clearly in the study findings. I did not want any of the findings to be overly influenced with my own experiences such that they no longer resonated with participants or did not reflect their experiences. As one can tell, I am extremely passionate about this topic and want to bring to light an unknown population so that student affairs and other professionals can be more informed.

Strengths of Qualitative Research

Some of the research on TRIAs illuminated that several TRIAs felt that their experiences did not matter. Some expressed that growing up they were unable to voice their opinions and concerns surrounding their experience with racism or their parents did not educate the adoptee enough, if at all, about their birth culture (Feigelman, 2000; McRoy & Zurcher, 1983; Trenka et al., 2006). To best understand how TRIAs make sense of their racial and cultural identity, a qualitative approach is the best way to capture their stories. Creswell (2016) stated qualitative research "relies on general interviews or observations so that we do not restrict the views of participants" (p. 205). Giving TRIAs the opportunity to describe their experience in detail allows the researcher to explore how they make meaning of their identities. The qualitative approach will reflect the actual thoughts and feelings of each TRIA.

Study Rationale

The research presented in the literature review showed a lack of information on TRIAs who are in college. A lot of the research either focused on young children or

older adults. Much of the research on children found that they notice racial differences at a young age (Baden et al., 2012; Feigelman, 2000; Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2007). Some of the experiences reported by adult TRIAs stated that their parents were not adequately trained in raising a transracial adoptee, which affected their identity when they got older (McRoy & Zurcher, 1983; Trenka et al., 2006).

Given that the literature either focused on identity development of young children, adolescents, or older adult TRIAs there was a clear gap in literature regarding identity development of TRIAs in their late adolescents into early adulthood. Baden et al.'s (2012) research illuminated that TRIAs are more likely to seek information on their birth culture as they get older. This could inform practitioners who work with this population in college because TRIAs might want to seek information on their birth culture and they may not know how to or be able to articulate why they are curious. A likely reason for this to occur is because many TRIAs "seek to move away from their lived adoptive culture" (Baden et al., 2012, p. 391) to uncover more information surrounding their birth culture.

Since there was missing research on TRIAs during late adolescents and early adulthood, I focused on that age group not only because it was missing in the literature but because Patton et al. (2016) found that identity development take place in late adolescence. Baden et al., (2012) pointed out that some TRIAs actively or passively pursue information on their birth culture, as they get older. I also decided to research this population and focus on TRIAs who are in college because the research found that identity is fluid, changes over time and takes into account social and environmental factors. I am curious about a new environment for TRIAs, specifically attending college,

because it might help initiate a process of identity evaluation for this population (Allen-Collinson & Brown, 2012; Boivin & Hassan, 2015; Gosine, 2002; Hearst, 2012; Root, 1996; Rosnati et al., 2015).

The research on TRIAs and the way in which they are socialized has provided a context to the environment TRIAs may have grown up around (Baden et al., 2012; Langrehr et al., 2016; McRoy, 1983; Trenka et al., 2006). The research also stated that racial and cultural identity development takes into account social and environmental factors (Langrehr et al., 2016; Root, 1996). Given that college is a unique and rich environment full of diverse populations, for a TRIA attending college might be the first time they are introduced to people from their birth culture or the first time they are able to interact with people from different racial and cultural backgrounds if they grew up in a segregated community.

Renn's (2004) ecology of race and identity and Baden & Steward (2002)'s cultural racial identity model were the frameworks used for this study. The ecology of race and identity described how mixed-race and multiracial college students made sense of their identity. Since TRIAs also experience multiple races in their families I used this theory to help inform the ways TRIAs might make sense of their identity in college. Renn's (2004) ecology of race brought to light that some mixed-race individuals who are in college change the way they see themselves depending on who they are with, known as situational identity.

I drew upon Renn's (2004) research and I asked all of the participants if they met anyone from their birth country in college, if college sparked an interest in learning more about their birth culture and how college has changed the way they see their self. These

questions were grounded in Renn's research because I wanted to know when in college and surrounded by a much more diverse population, would TRIAs experience their identities differently in different environments. Please refer to Appendix A and B for a full list of questions to each participant.

The cultural racial identity model (Baden & Stewart, 2007) suggested TRIAs choose how they see themselves in relation to their birth race and culture and their adoptive race and culture. The grid shown in Chapter 2, Figure 1 and Figure 2, acts as a continuum reflecting this population's understanding of how they see themselves. This model more accurately reflects TRIA's identity than earlier monoracial identity models more common in student affairs literature because it does not force them to choose one specific way to identify. For a more in depth description of either of these frameworks, please refer to the literature review in Chapter 2.

Based off Baden et al.'s (2012) research where the researchers found TRIAs notice at a young age cultural difference, I wanted to find out what environmental factors affected a TRIA's identity development. It was my hope that through asking questions about environmental factors, I would be able to gauge what kind of understanding TRIAs had on both adoptive and birth cultures growing up and how that affected a TRIA's identity development. The questions asked to participants surrounding race were specific. I asked what the racial makeup of their hometown was, the racial make up of their school, I even asked if they remembered a time they were singled out due to their skin color. For a full list of questions asked to each participant please refer to Appendix A and B.

Constructivist Paradigm and Phenomenological Approach

I chose to use the constructivist paradigm for this study. The constructivist paradigm explains how individuals make sense of their reality (Mertens, 2010). Within this paradigm researchers believe “knowledge is socially constructed by people active in the research process” (Mertens, 2010, p.16). This is an important distinction from other paradigms because this one focuses on the experiences of individuals. This paradigm along with the phenomenological approach will help frame my study because I want to know the meaning individuals make of their experience and how that influences their racial and cultural identity.

Mertens (2010) explain, “phenomenology research emphasizes the individual’s subjective experience” (p 235). An important aspect of phenomenology is the way individuals “interpret the world and the life around them” (Mertens, 2010, p. 235). A phenomenological study captures the essence of each individual and provides context from each individual’s lived experience. This framework will be the best choice because I want to focus on the experience of each individual. Since I wanted to know how TRIAs racially and culturally identify in college, a phenomenological approach guided by the constructivist paradigm helped me to achieve these goals. Conducting this study as a phenomenological approach also allowed me to focus on the themes that spoke to the primary elements of the participant’s identities. The themes that described the main elements or essence of their identities are described in Chapter 4. The themes that I focused on emerged from the factors that influenced the participant’s identity and identity development such as socialization by parents and environment of higher education.

The phenomenological approach suggested the use of a semi-structured interview protocol. This approach is recommended because participants make sense of their experience through talking and guided discussions (Mertens, 2013). I asked numerous follow up questions to clarify what the participant meant and encouraged them in thinking about their identity. In Chapter Four, the findings chapter, I reveal the story of each participant. I wanted to know how participants identified and if it varied depending on their life experiences. My findings are condensed to focus on the essence of the participants' experiences.

Participants

In order to be eligible for the study participants had to meet a few criteria. One criterion is that TRIAs had to be current undergraduate college students or have graduated within the past five years. This criterion is important for my study since I wanted to research TRIAs who were in college. The second criterion is that TRIAs had to be at least 19 because the age of consent in the state where I am located is 19. The final criterion is that the TRIA must have been transracially internationally adopted before the age of five. This was a criterion based off of the research that adopted children realize racial differences as early as five (Baden et al., 2012; Feigelman, 2002) so I wanted to include participants adopted early in their racial awareness.

Given that college applications do not currently ask about adoption, I relied on snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a way to find participants who are hard to gather data from due to the low visibility of the specific population (Maxwell, 2013; Mertens, 2010). It allowed for a participant who meets all of the criteria to suggest other participants whom they know to meet all of the criteria. Others were recruited using a

Facebook® page created by transracial adoptees who work in student affairs. The Facebook® page was created by them in order to connect with other student affairs professionals who share a similar experience of being transracially adopted and may work with students who are TRIAs. I asked colleagues to send an email (Appendix C) to students whom they knew met all of the criteria of my study. I also had identified a few students who met the criteria because I had worked with them throughout the past school year.

In choosing the participants for this study, I understood my role as a researcher to be “[an] instrument of the research” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 91) which meant the relationship between the researcher and the participant affect the quality of research. Maxwell (2013) determined “the kind of rapport, as well as the amount is critical” (p. 91). These two ideas from Maxwell suggest that the researcher should not analyze the data given from the participants and make assumptions about their experience. Rather, the researcher needs to take what each participant is saying and ask probing questions to clarify the experience of each participant.

Maxwell (2013) also suggested that participants who had close relations with the researcher might not be willing to disclose such personal details and in contrast, participants with very few ties to the researcher might be more willing to disclose the details but they might not be willing to reflect on how they felt about the situation (Maxwell, 2013). Based off of Maxwell’s conclusions, I recruited participants that I knew well and some that I did not have close relationships with and worked to build rapport.

I had four total participants who ranged from where they were adopted from. Three were adopted from different countries in Asia and one was adopted from South

America. All but one of the adoptees were in college at the time of the interview and the one who was not in college graduated in 2012. The oldest TRIA that I interviewed was 30 and the youngest was 21. A full description of each participant is outlined in Chapter Four with the findings.

Research Sites

Since there is little information on TRIAs, they are difficult to identify. In order to reach a number of people who fit the study criteria, I looked for participants all over the U.S. All of the interviews were conducted either face-to-face, or via Skype. The participants were not required to be the same location as the researcher. Even though the institutions that the participants attended varied, they were all US institutions. Two of the institutions that participants attended were set in the Midwest. One of the institutions that a participant attended was a technical college. One participant switched schools from a Canadian University to an institution in the Northeast part of the U.S. All of the institutions were predominately White institutions. A full description of each participant and the institutions they chose to attend is described in Chapter Four with the findings.

Data Collection

I conducted interviews either face-to-face or via Skype. Each participant met with me twice over the course of a few weeks for individual interviews. Each interview lasted about 60-90 minutes. Before the interviews began I made sure to obtain written informed consent using the informed consent form that was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB# 16567; Appendix D). I also made sure the participants knew they could decline answering any of the questions or withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were aware that if they felt any discomfort that we

could end the interview and they could seek counseling to work through any emotional problems that they incurred.

Participants were able to pick the location for interviews. As the researcher, I suggested places to host the interview but if the participant did not feel comfortable the participant was able to change the location. Ensuring participants felt comfortable was of the utmost importance to me because I wanted our interview to feel more like a conversation. All interviews were audio recorded on my personal laptop and some notes were taken during each interview. Prior to recording, I made sure each participant knew that audio recording was going to begin and received verbal consent to audio record.

Interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions because Creswell (2016) suggested through open-ended questions, “the participants can best voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher or past research findings” (p. 218). During the first interview, I asked questions surrounding their wellbeing and spent time getting to know them. Some examples of the questions asked were their major in school, what their hometown was like and what kinds of foods they ate growing up.

In keeping with the suggestions from Maxwell (2013), it was important for me to create rapport because I wanted the participants to feel comfortable talking with me about their experience. I asked a few questions regarding their college experience such as why they decided to go to college, their involvement on campus, and I asked about a specific experience in college that led them to think about race. I also asked if the participants faced any challenges in college outside of academia, like challenges related to racial or cultural discrimination.

The final interview focused on race and recognizing if and when the participants noticed racial differences. During this interview, the questions were specifically about how a TRIA separated race from culture and how they see themselves today compared to when they were children. I also asked questions about reasons surrounding the participants' choice of major or co-curricular activities they decided to join. The majority of the questions in the second interview were to gauge the participants' comfort level with both adoptive race and culture and birth race and culture. I used these questions to assess where each participant might be in relation to Baden and Stewart's (2007) cultural and racial identity model. For an in-depth analysis of the cultural and racial identity model and how the model explained each participant's identity please refer to Chapter Four, the findings section.

The interview timeline was December 2016 through February 2017. Once the initial interview with the participant was done, there was up to two weeks in between before the second interview was given. The time in between the initial and final interview was to give the participant time to reflect on his or her experience because based on some of the informal conversations I had prior to this research with adopted people, I anticipated some participants may not have thought much about their racial or cultural identity before.

Maxwell (2013) found qualitative research designs should include semi-structured approaches. This approach allowed me to ask some follow-up questions based on participant's responses. Having some aspects of the study open to revisions allowed for flexibility during the study. As I conducted the interviews some questions that I asked led to different questions that may not have been foreseen prior to the interview. It also

allowed me to individualize the interviews based on the unique experiences and interviews of each participant. Refer to Appendix A and B for interview protocol.

Data Analysis

After each interview, I spent time listening to the recording and typing up transcripts from the interview and loaded them onto my password-protected computer. Participant privacy was crucial and ensure confidentiality of my participants. I made sure to protect the privacy of each participant and each participant was given pseudonyms. Each interview was about 60-90 minutes and the transcripts from all of the participants produced over 40 pages of data. I created participant profiles and wrote a synopsis of each participant. Since phenomenological approach emphasizes on the essence of the participant's experiences, I wanted focus on the themes that emerged from each participant's story. I did not want to focus on each specific story because this is not a narrative study. In looking at the stories and experiences of each participant a few themes that were consistent throughout each of the participant's experience.

Before I clarified the themes, I went back to the identity models that guided my study. I found that Baden and Stewart's (2007) cultural racial identity model was the best way to capture the participant's experiences. There was a clear way to use Baden and Stewart's (2007) model, compared to Renn's (2004) ecology on mixed race individuals. Renn's ecology set a foundation for a explaining the identity formation of biracial and multi-racial individuals. Her research illuminated that it is not uncommon for someone who is biracial or multi-racial to have different ways of identifying. Baden and Stewart's model justified Renn's research for TRIAs by creating their cultural racial identity model.

Using Baden & Stewart's (2007) cultural racial identity model I outlined the ways in which the model reflected participant's experiences. I identified where each participant was in relation Baden and Stewart's (2007) cultural-racial identity model. The point of understanding where each participant might be within this model is not to force an identity on any of the participants rather, it is to seek understanding of how they identify based on this model. All but one of the participants were relatively in the *pro-parent cultural identity-racially undifferentiated identity* quadrant. This quadrant emerged for participants based off the parental practices and the overall experience of each participant. *Pro-parent cultural identity-racially undifferentiated identity* quadrant is explained to be:

High in knowledge, awareness, competence, and comfort in the culture of their parents' racial ethnic group and feel most comfortable with individuals of multiple racial ethnic groups. May have been raised in a neighborhood in which the adoptee's racial group's culture predominated. May have been exposed to members of multiple racial ethnic groups. A "human" identity may have been endorsed by parents (Baden & Stewart, 2007, p. 105).

I found that three of the four participants were relatively in the *pro-parent cultural identity-racially undifferentiated identity* quadrant because they were high in knowledge and comfort in their adoptive culture. Layla, Julio and Kenzie were not interested in their birth culture enough to seek information about it or integrate any cultural practices into their everyday life. Even though Emmy had a hard time describing how she identifies, her life experience and outlook on her identity created a new sense of identity not described in the cultural racial identity model (Baden & Stewart, 2007).

Many of the quadrants outlined by Baden & Stewart place an emphasis on high levels of knowledge, awareness, competence and comfort in either/or birth race and culture or adoptive race and culture. While Emmy had high levels of knowledge on her adoptive culture, she explicitly states that she does not identify with being Indian or being part of her adoptive parent's culture.

After looking at the cultural racial identity model, I then went back to my research questions. I wanted to make sure my data reflected answers to each question. I stated each question and organized the responses from the participants pertaining to each research question. In looking at the connection to Baden and Stewart's (2007) cultural racial identity model and reading the answers to the research questions the themes emerged. Most of the participants had the same answers and similar experiences. The themes that emerged were participants were uninterested in their birth country growing up, there was a connection to adoptive culture and the participants racially identified with their birth race.

The last thing that I did to ensure my findings were accurate was examined the ways in which I could be wrong in my findings. I looked at each research questions and the participant's answers. I wanted to make sure I can prove what the participants said actually answered the research questions. I then went back to both the transcripts and the findings and made sure I could point out exact phrases from each participant that answered the research questions.

Validity

The "accuracy or credibility of the findings is of utmost importance" (Creswell, 2016, p. 259) so I included several elements that would enhance my research quality.

Many qualitative researchers require their participants to reflect and make meaning of their personal history; this is also a strength of a phenomenological study (Creswell, 2016; Mertens, 2013). To ensure qualitative researchers do not misinterpret their participant's experiences, Creswell indicates they can determine the validity, or trustworthiness, of their research through member checking and external auditing. I used both of Creswell's suggestions to ensure the validity of my research.

Member checking is when the researchers ask their participants about the accuracy of the researcher's findings (Creswell, 2016). Creswell explains member checks can happen in writing or during an interview. Mertens (2013) did her member checks as part of her interview protocol. Mertens also recommends there needs to be three or four interviews for a phenomenological study but her last interview was solely for member checking. I wanted to give participants time to reflect on their answers and allow them to see what they said in writing.

Once I typed up the transcripts from each interview, I emailed the participants a copy of the transcripts and the questions I had asked them. I asked each participant to carefully look over both questions and their responses to make sure I captured their story as accurately as possible. Doing this allowed the participant to double check what I had captured to make sure it reflected the participant's experience. I encouraged participants to disclose anything they had missed during the interview or did not feel comfortable disclosing in the face-to-face interview. This gave participants a chance to reflect on the interview and it afforded them the opportunity to disclose any more information. Member checks were also used to encourage participants to review and comment on the findings.

I used their responses to clarify and enhance what I had collected during the interview. I only heard back from one participant with edits to their transcripts. None of the participants responded to the findings. I was sure the participants received my findings email since I used the same email and communication methods that I had when I set up the interviews with each participant.

External auditor or peer debriefer is when the researcher gets a third party person to review the researcher's findings to ensure the findings are trustworthy and that the findings make sense based off of the data presented (Creswell, 2016; Mertens, 2013). A peer debriefer will look for researcher bias, appropriate themes, and look for ways to increase credibility through looking at the data provided (Creswell, 2016). I used a peer debriefer who is a doctoral student studying higher education and who is interested in the TRIA population. I used this specific peer debriefer because I wanted someone who knew a little bit about the background of this population and would be able to challenge and/or support my interpretations.

I allowed the peer debriefer to view the methodology section of this study, the questions I asked each participant, the answers from the participants and the written findings. The debriefer was not allowed access to the actual names of the participants in order to uphold the confidentiality agreement between IRB, the participant and the researcher. The debriefer asked for the methodology section to ensure what I said I was going to do in the study matched. I took the feedback from the peer debriefer and incorporated many of the suggestions that were pointed out by the debriefer. When I received the comments from the peer debriefer, I looked back over my findings and incorporated her suggestions. Some of the suggestions made by the peer debriefer

included pointing out where my findings would be stronger if I used direct quotes from the participants, identified where my findings were confusing, and also ensured I was upholding participant confidentiality by pointing out places that might make the participant's real identity more identifiable.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I described my positionality on the topic and how my experience might affect the findings in the study. I also outlined the ways in which my study in some ways could be bias; but justified the ways they will be credible in light of my personal experience as a TRIA. Finally, I explained the ways in which I will collect my data and methodology guiding my study. The next chapter will depict the stories of the participants and the findings for this study.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The scholarship on TRIAs in a college setting was missing from research regarding this population (Baden et al., 2012; Feigelman, 2000; Reinoso, 2012). Much of the literature was based in quantitative research and did not discuss the experiences of each TRIA in depth. The present qualitative study focuses on the experiences of TRIAs who are in college, or recently graduated, since that was not represented in the literature. Understanding TRIAs' identity in a college setting will inform student affairs professionals when working with this hidden population. Three research questions guided this study are as follows:

- 1.) How do interracial adoptees that are either currently in college, or recently graduated, racially and culturally identify?
 - a. What environmental and personal experiences have contributed to their thinking about race?
 - b. What are TRIAs perceptions about how, if at all, racism has shaped their racial identity?
- 2.) What kind of awareness did the interracial adoptees have of their birth culture while growing up in their adoptive household?
- 3.) In what ways, if at all, is the birth culture significant to adoptees as an adult?
 - a. In what ways does this affect how adoptees bring in their adoptive culture?

There were three themes that came to light after reading the transcriptions of each participant. The themes were: TRIAs interviewed were uninterested in their birth country growing up, they were strongly connected to their adoptive culture, and finally the participants racially identified with their birth race. This study was the first time many of

the participants thought critically about their experience. This chapter will discuss the participants and the themes that I found. I discuss how they racial and culturally identified relying on concepts from Baden & Stewart's (2002) cultural-racial identity model. First, I provide profiles of each participant so that readers can get to know a little about them and their experiences. TRIAs who did not participate in this study may have similar or different experiences from those who did.

Participant Profiles

Four people participated in the full study and one student completed only one of the two interviews. For the purpose of describing the findings, I will only include the four participants who completed both interviews. All of the participants were adopted from places outside the US. Three of them were adopted from different countries within Asia and one participant was adopted from South America. Two of the participants grew up with each other as brother and sister in the same adoptive family. This meant that I interviewed adoptees who were from three different families instead of four different families.

Participants had a few general similarities. All of the participants were adopted into a family whose parents had either a masters degree or higher level of education. All but one of the participants grew up with both a mom and a dad in the home. All but one of the participants were adopted before they were 12 months old, with the exception of Kenzie who was adopted at 27 months. Three of the four participants grew up with an adopted sibling in the home.

Each participant was given a pseudonym to keep anonymity. A profile of each participant was created to give context of each participant's experience in a snapshot. In

keeping with the phenomenological approach, the following outlines the essence of each of the participants of Layla, Julio, Kenzie and Emmy.

Layla

Layla is currently a third year in college. She is 20-years-old and was adopted from Vietnam when she was six-months-old. Layla grew up in the Midwest but went out of state for college. When asked why she moved away to school, Layla answers that she needed to get away from where she grew up and needed something new. Growing up Layla had an older sibling with whom she fought a lot until her sibling moved out of the house. In the first interview when asked where home is for Layla, she says:

Since this past break, I would consider [the town I go to school in] as my home.

Actually [laughter] I call both of them home. If I'm homesick I'll call [where I grew up] home and when I'm there, I call [where I go to school] home.

Layla describes the place where she grew up is predominately White but was exposed to a lot of different cultures through schooling since she was part of the IB [international baccalaureate] program. At the institution that Layla attends she states that there are so many opportunities to learn about diverse cultures: "I'm also exposed to a lot. My roommate is biracial and works for the office of multicultural affairs so she will invite me to cultural events. I always see so much stuff on campus."

Growing up the relationship between Layla and her parents were difficult. Both parents worked and Layla grew up with nannies until she went to elementary school. Once she started school Layla got into gymnastics which kept her in the gym since Layla wanted to compete at a high level. She explains that it was hard to distinguish what in the relationship, with her parents, was her fault and what was her parent's fault. She explains,

I don't know if it's because my parents were gone. I was the worst kid in the world. I had such an attitude. I was the biggest brat and that's probably why my [sibling] hated me. If I didn't get what I wanted, [it was] tantrum city. It was bad. I was also extremely angry, like punch walls angry. I don't know why. Like, I've calmed it down a lot. I've become really aware in college and high school. I needed something to change... To this day, my dad will always say "I'm sorry we weren't there enough. I'm sorry that you might have felt something wasn't right." So to this day my dad will still preach that.

When talking about her adoption, Layla reflects that her parents told her:

Why should they bring another child in to this world, when there are kids that need homes? They both felt it was right, they didn't see the point of bringing in another kid, when they could love one that needed to be loved, you know?

Layla's parents hardly talked about Vietnam but if they brought up adoption it was always in a positive light. Growing up Layla explains that she never felt like she was different,

Racially [I noticed a difference] only in pictures. Like, when I would see family pictures of other families and they were all uniformed and then there was my family and there was a Hispanic brother, Asian girl and two White parents.

She did not think much about race growing up, "honestly, race wasn't something I thought about. I think another reason why it didn't phase me, [is] because my brother was another color too." Overall Layla is proud to have been adopted and speaks highly of her family. I asked her if she would interact with people from her birth culture. She states that she wanted to get involved with one of the Vietnamese Association but:

I figure that I am so Americanized that I probably shouldn't. It's weird, like I have an interest in my culture, but it isn't burning. Like if you want to teach me about it, then great, but I don't really have a burning interest to actively pursue to any knowledge about it. Which kind of makes me sound bad, because that's where I'm from you know-but like I kind of feel bad about it, but at the same time, no I kind of feel bad about it.

When asked where she felt most comfortable, she replied:

I guess. I'm most comfortable around anyone of any culture. I just talk to them. It isn't like we are practicing their culture. I'm totally open to learning about other cultures, which is kind of ironic because I really want to know about other's cultures. But then when people are like-oh so you want to learn about the Vietnamese culture, I'm just like eh-h-h. Like yeah I'll learn about it. I look at the Vietnamese culture just as I look at other cultures. As if I'm not a part of it, so it's just all one other category of cultures so that's how I look at it.

Julio

Julio at the time of the interview is 25 and a second year in college. Julio was adopted from Honduras when he was 9 months old. Julio and Layla were adopted into the same family and grew up as siblings. Julio was adopted five years before Layla was. Julio had been in and out of college for a couple of years before deciding to attend a college in Georgia to study game design. He explains,

To be honest I was kind of hesitant right out of high school. [Long pause]. I wish I could have taken a break for a year and worked and kind of figured out what I wanted to do. [Long pause] it's kind of hard straight out of high school. At the

time, I felt kind of like-pressured to in a way. Everyone around me, basically everyone in my graduating class was going on to college and felt like oh-this is what I need to do next.

Julio admits that he went to his current college only for the program and does not like the place where his college is located because of the weather. He explains that home for him is Colorado:

I spent a majority of my life there. I mean like, I tell myself. Like, there were times in Colorado that I was sick of Colorado and needed to get out [laughter].

But I don't know. A majority of the places that I go don't compare to Colorado. I lived in Mississippi and that was awful.

Since Julio was about four years old when his parents decided to adopt Layla he remembers:

It was all planned out and everything [laughter]. I always joke about this-I told my parents that I wanted a brother. So I would tease my sister. It was kind of like a big deal at the time because not many families were adopting. I remember my parents and a few other, uhm, adult couples like in my community that were also adopting [pause]. So like they, my mom went to Vietnam with a few other couples to adopt. When they brought Layla back they had like news crews there and they interviewed us for the paper.

Since the literature suggests that the ways in which parents acknowledge adoption and discuss it in the home may influence identity development, I asked if he remembers how his parents told him about adopting another child:

[I think] they asked me how I would feel about having a sibling and then it moved on from there. Like I got to see pictures of her and then I was excited to be [an older sibling].

For Julio growing up in a predominately White neighborhood he felt his parents raised him the best they could. English was spoken in the household:

[My] parents don't know Spanish or anything else like that. Yeah- I don't speak Spanish and Layla doesn't speak Vietnamese and we're awful! Every time I say, I'm from Honduras [others would say] oh you speak Spanish? Ha no! I was raised White basically.

When asked about the first time Julio thought of race or culture, he states it was not until he went to college for the first time:

I took a women's study class and an Anthropology class. And my Anthropology class I found very interesting because we talked about diverse cultures. Just like their societies in general and stuff like that. So it was cool to learn about how people interact socially [long pause]. The women's study class [I took] I was able to learn more about myself and how I identify.

Julio understood that his parents were White from a very young age. He also did not care to learn much about his Hispanic culture. He says when he was in elementary school he learned Spanish but it did not affect how he saw himself, "I didn't really think about it that much, honestly. I mean I felt that my culture was the same as everyone else around me in my community. Cuz that's how I was raised, I wasn't raised any different than anyone else."

In the first interview I asked if Julio ever felt racially or culturally challenged when he went to college:

Not really. I guess like, I can give credit to my parents. They wanted me to have the most diverse up bringing possible. Like I got to hang out and be friends with a bunch of different people. One of my best friends, I got to go over to his house like all the time. Like I basically lived at his house. His mom is gay. uhm. So like looking back on that now-like my parents didn't really have a problem with that at the time. I was able to hang out at their house and have dinner and my parents didn't care.

Julio said that his parents did not explain the adoption process to him when he got older but Julio did not really ask them about the process of his adoption. He was curious more so, with the adoption of his sister. I asked if his parents explained why they wanted to adopt him: "Uhhh. I believe that I asked I just don't remember [long pause] mmm I think I asked around 12 or 13, that was probably when I asked." When I asked him if his parents talked about what being adopted meant he remembered:

Uhhh not really. Uhhh. I mean. Yeah they did. Yeah. I don't really remember...[I do remember this incident] I was in fifth grade so I was about 10 at this time so that was...yeah uhm [pause]. That was around like 9/11 uhm. My dad said I said this to him uhm. Like right when 9/11 happened he said, like he was crying and I remember, well he said that I asked him why he was crying. He told me that there were hundreds of kids that are now orphans. Just like they lost their parents to this terrorist attack uhm I said something like they could come live with us or something. Yeah I remember him telling me that [laughter].

Julio said the conversation about 9/11 did not really spark a conversation about adoption. He was not very curious but he did know:

I know that my mom left me at the hospital or whatever. Like we still have most of the hospital documents from her when she basically signed me over to the hospital [laughter]. Like I believe I have her name and my birth father's name but I do not know, I guess I have thought about them. I don't know I guess not to the extent where I want to find them or anything.

Julio's parents did not try and introduce any of the Spanish culture to Julio growing up. He thought it was maybe because he did not ask about it growing up. He was never interested in it enough to seek more information. Julio said that he never felt like an outsider in his parent's culture because he was generally accepted by everyone. He also never felt any pressure to learn about his birth culture. He says, "I don't know, I just didn't look at it like a big deal, it was kind of there if I wanted to know about it."

Kenzie

Kenzie was adopted at 27 months from China. Kenzie is 21 and is a junior in college at the time of the interviews. Growing up, Kenzie was always very physically active and ran cross-country. The process of going to college was not even a question. She was not pressured by her parents to attend college because she really loved education. Kenzie grew up in the same place that she ultimately decided to attend college:

I was looking at colleges in Colorado because I just loved Colorado [laughter] already. I was looking at a school in Colorado, uh and I had did the college visit, met the coach, and had been accepted into the school, and had a scholarship to

walk on the team [for cross country]. I had this all set up and I was like, yeah! Yes! This is awesome. But then my mom was diagnosed with breast cancer the fall of my senior year. And at that point we didn't know how bad it was, because it was pretty far along because she didn't go in and do her regular checks. And so they needed to treat it aggressively, and her treatment was going to be pretty intense. My dad was working at that time and my mom took time off at her job and my sister was already in college. So no one was really able to be at the house. Since I was in high school I would come back home for lunch and before practice just to check on her. She needed someone who could take her to appointments and be there for her. And for me to leave the state, it wasn't a question anymore. It was like I need to stay with my mom and it's been like the hardest decision that I've made and I've still thought about it. Like my life could be so different if I went to Colorado. But like, I think I wouldn't have changed it anyway because they've done so much for me and family is so important for us it's like I need to be there for her.

Kenzie describes her parents growing up:

[They are] so like cultured! They are so open, and they are so like, I don't know. They are just like so welcoming. It's very different. I've seen other families grow up and it's like-yeah they are open and stuff-but they are going to be Catholic, or they are going to raise their kid Christian, and not just with religious stuff. It's like [pause] I don't know. If you want to be a triangle, you can be a triangle! It's very interesting to me, just to see that.

Growing up, Kenzie had an older sister who was also adopted from China. Kenzie is nine months younger than her adopted sister and when they were younger they were close. Kenzie noticed that when the two of them got to high school their relationship changed. Kenzie felt that part of her identity came from a sense of empowerment from rock wall climbing and also from being adopted:

I'm all about women empowerment and helping each other through this. Cuz like I've had girls come up to me at the [rock climbing] wall and say it's so frustrating. Seeing a group of guys climbing and you feel like you can't be a part of it because they aren't letting you. And it's like yeah! There's things you can do. And I'm going to get off on a tangent but uhm, I just feel very strongly about that. Just because it [rock wall climbing] has given me this strong empowerment where like I love myself and things like that. I feel like adoption has really been part of that [too]. I feel like-so I have a sister that is also adopted. She was adopted from China. But she was 6 months so she was a little younger when she was adopted and uhm. She's very, self-conscious about it and my dad said maybe she's not proud of it, not proud of being Asian and she's self-conscious about it. She's grown up with racist comments, and uhm. She's had a really hard time finding her identity and fitting in. I've never felt, like I never felt out of place because I'm Asian. And because of that I've grown up really proud of it, where it's like I feel really beautiful.

Throughout the first interview Kenzie explains how she was really privileged and lucky to have been adopted:

I grew up near my high school and near my middle school, so I always walked. We're a very like [laughter] normal middle class family and I was very fortunate to go to very good schools. Uhm so we've been very fortunate, sometimes it's hard to say I struggled being adopted and struggled being a minority because I've been so fortunate and blessed and lucky to have so much offered to me. I've always gone to really great schools. I've always had great resources and great tutors before and I can't really complain in that sense. I have a dad and a mom and they both have normal White people jobs [laughter] I don't know.

When I asked Kenzie where home was for her, she reflects:

Home is definitely not here. Like I love where I grew up and I love my family, and it is home. But I don't think it's home-home. I think home for me is when I feel the most myself, I guess? Yeah and I feel that with my family but it's more about the environment, I guess? I think home for me is going to be somewhere where there are mountains and it's open. Uhm, right now I think home is- Colorado, which is stupid [laughter]. I think Colorado is a bit over rated because so many people go there and yeah it's a great place, if you love the outdoors and I do. And uh-home for me really feels like a desert and there's no one out there. I'm camping and I have a little camp fire and I'm sleeping in my car. That just feels like home for some reason. I don't know why, I just feel really good out there. I really enjoy being alone. And I'm happy and I'm okay with being alone and I don't know. I just like it so I don't mind [laughter].

Growing up Kenzie's parents were well cultured and they introduced her to a lot of different cultures. They even made traditional Chinese meals. Her mom worked with

refugees and would be invited over for dinner. At a very early age, Kenzie learned that there is more than one culture in the world. Her parents were also heavily involved in the community. Kenzie grew up around other TRIAs because her parents took her to group gatherings made up of families who also had adopted international children. Even though Kenzie's parents understood the importance of immersing their child in different cultures, English was spoken in the home. Based on this upbringing, I asked Kenzie if there was a time in college that made her think about her race:

So I never thought negatively about my race or culture just because I'm very positive about it. But there was a time in college that I had a really hard time figuring out who I was. It was probably one of the lowest points in my life I would say? During this time I was in a sorority. I don't know why I was there. I just didn't enjoy it. I didn't know who I was. I was putting on a face and I was trying to fit in. Cause in college- it's hard to find a place that you fit in.

In explaining what it was about being in the sorority that made Kenzie feel this way, Kenzie felt that for the most part the girls in that sorority were all the same. They all wore the same clothes, had the same handbags and there was little autonomy. Kenzie also reflects that most of the girls were White with blonde hair:

I don't know why I noticed that I didn't fit in. I think that was actually the first time I realized – wow- there are a lot of people that are blonde here. That's one place where being diverse is very hard... I think that was the first place that I felt different. I've always felt normal and it was the first place that I felt different. Like I don't look like you. I just did not feel like a beautiful strong woman. Not

that every girl feels that way in a sorority but the fact that a sorority can make someone feel like-she is not fierce, is kind of sad.

Although Kenzie's parents explained the paperwork behind the process of Kenzie's adoption a lot, they did not explain what being adopted meant:

It was just something they said when we were kids I don't know. It was just never that big of a thing or a very difficult thing to understand. I do not really remember a time where they were like yeah you're adopted.

During the second interview Kenzie explains that she noticed from a really young age that she was adopted but never questioned it. It was something that never crossed her mind. The town where Kenzie grew up, she felt it was a predominately White area but explained that she felt diversity is reflected positively:

I think diversity is really celebrated here because there are a lot of the different cultural markets and a lot of different places to eat. And, we had a lot of a different cultural community groups. We are home to a lot of refugees and there is a lot of resettlement here. So yeah I would say and I'm really lucky in that aspect. [People] are also very welcoming here so that's been really nice... But maybe I see it because I'm diverse and it's like oh, cool there are more diverse people. Especially seeing diversity on campus. Like I feel like, in high school I always saw it but coming to college it's even bigger because like we get a lot of foreign exchange students.

Kenzie never saw her skin color as different and never made a big deal about it. Her parents never made being from China a huge deal, but they did make it a point to

celebrate the Chinese New Year and make a few Chinese meals. Kenzie responds to a question about whether she ever felt like an outsider in her parent's culture:

Not really just because like a lot of the things that I like had and stuff is influenced by what I'm surrounded by. Uhm I feel like my mind set is similar to those around me. I don't know I think I'm really fortunate and lucky that I'd never been picked on. I'd never been singled out in any way I think through that I have just never felt that much different from everybody else. I guess the sorority experience was the first time that I felt like, wow I feel really out of place here.

But besides that I don't know I was never felt I had any problem with that

Growing up, Kenzie never felt a pressure to learn about her birth culture and never felt singled out when her parents talked about Chinese culture. But once Kenzie got to middle school, learning more about the Chinese culture was pushed to the side due to all of the other activities Kenzie was involved in. Overall Kenzie discussed her adoption experience as positive and spoke highly over her parents and stated that she felt incredibly loved and extremely lucky to have been given the life she had.

Emmy

Emmy is the oldest participant who I interviewed. The first interview was done through email due to time constraints. Emmy is 29 years old and was adopted from India at six months old. Emmy graduated college in 2012 and went to two different institutions before she graduated with her Bachelors degree. When asked about why she pursued a college education:

My desire to pursue higher education was grounded in a commitment to political and intellectual life. I had been taught critical thinking at the secondary level and

college seemed like a natural trajectory for my interests—reading, writing, thinking, etcetera. My mom has multiple advanced degrees and always encouraged me to pursue higher education.

Emmy decided to move away for college because, “autonomy was appealing, and the novelty of [the town I had grown up in] had worn off. I didn’t particularly feel attached to the city and was excited to live elsewhere.” When Emmy went off to college she was first heavily involved at her first institution but when she transferred she prioritized her academics:

Intellectual resources have enabled me to negotiate adoption in formidable ways, both intellectually and personally. It is always an intense experience, often ambivalent, and especially fraught, as it is always caught up in subjectivity.

Emmy elaborates more on her experience of being adopted. Her mom never really talked about the process of adopting Emmy:

She can’t answer those questions. Or she won’t answer them. Like she has a non-specific way of answering them uhm. I think the on some level she is not accountable for her own actions- as a mother. And the commitment and responsibilities that she had as a mother to transracially adopt a child. She is certainly not forthcoming about her desires of being a mother. I have always felt at least as an adult a little manipulated by her lack of accountability to those questions. It bothers me but I would say and that I am not upset or mad I would certainly consider it an omission that she has not thought about it about what it meant to adopt a transracial transnational child.

And when asked what it meant to have been adopted:

Uhh. She'd honestly say I just wanted to or she would say I just really wanted a child in my life. Those are the two basic things she'd always tell me. It was never anything specific. She never gave me a reason of what it meant to adopt or to be a mother. She never gave me a critical answer.

Growing up, it was just Emmy and her mom. Emmy spent most of her time alone reading or writing. When Emmy was adopted into the U.S., Emmy's grandparents raised her for the first few years because Emmy's mom was busy with work. Emmy stated that her grandmother raised Emmy for the first five years which led Emmy to be extremely close with her grandmother. Unfortunately, while Emmy was still young both of her grandparents died and she was never able to connect to her mother:

I think my grandmother was physically present and psychologically present in ways that my mom never was so when my grandma died I kinda felt like she was my lost object. Yeah so all of my memories are with my grandmother. But my mom remembers being with me but I have no recollection of those memories. Uhm. That kind of psychological thing is really interesting to me and like not having conscious memories. Like we obviously and very clearly spent time together but all those memories are with my grandma as my primary care giver. I also felt really alone with my mom. I never felt connected with her and I never knew what was happening with her and I guess, as you say, I never knew if I could trust in her and so I guess I didn't.

Emmy says she does not remember what her mom said when she asked what being adopted meant. Emmy knew that she was adopted but felt a lot of shame in being from a different country:

We have those conversations a lot. I think [I was] pretty young I don't remember exactly but I think first or second grade And probably even before then...uhhhmmn probably elementary school like when I started fourth grade I think third grade was when I [started to feel shame]. I remember older girls at my elementary school and they would always make fun of my skin color. They would just make fun of me and I started to realize that I was different and that the world saw me as such and my mom didn't. But she did not raise me colorblind, she was not colorblind. Like she made it apparent to me that difference doesn't matter. But then I went into the world and difference does matter so I think in third and fourth grade and beyond I developed a sense of difference.

In high school Emmy met another adoptee from India and the two became friends and the two were able to talk about their experience growing up in a predominately White area. Emmy elaborates on that friendship:

So we were on the same basketball team. I think since [the town we grew up] is so White, just seeing her was very special. But when we got to talking we realized that we're both adopted. And I think that conversation happened because you know when you're that age and you grow up in a White place and then seeing someone the same color as you and so that conversation went something like-oh my gosh for you from India and did you grow up there? And we both said no and that's how we knew. And we talk[ed] about adoption a lot it was the huge unifying piece in our relationship. But it was kind of a weird close relationship. But yeah we talked a lot about being adopted and being Indian and growing up in

a White family. But we were very, very different and that's interesting as well but it was a very hard friendship and I would not say it was very healthy.

When asked what it meant for her to have a friend who had similar features:

This something that was very destructive but also very illuminating. We had similar features and we're both small but she was more feminine and I did not care for it. But I was athletic and certainly not a tomboy. But I had a certain kind of femininity and it wasn't the same as hers and so that created a lot of resistance because she defined what femininity was. And she also kind of showed one Indian femininity should look like and I did not really relate or identify with those and so it made me feel more fractured in my Indian identity. So that on one hand yeah it helped having someone of Indian descent in my high school because it was nice to commiserate but we're both very different in our expression of femininity. So it was actually really very hard.

Emmy said that since she grew up in the northwest, it was predominately White and most of her friends were White. People would always point out the racial difference between her and her mom, which led her to become hypercritical of herself:

I developed in pretty critical lens of myself at a really young age. I would stand in the mirror well looked at myself in the mirror for hours and hours and hours. And that's when I was diagnosed with OCD. But you know growing up in a White home and a White city, there [was] the reason why I always looked at myself. Like maybe there was some dissonance there that my brain is trying to assimilate. So I think the internal process happened a lot sooner and it was confirmed by external responses to my physical difference.

Emmy never felt part of a community:

I never felt part of a community and I don't like [the town that I grew up in]. A lot of my memories associate with [that town] are traumatic. Like maybe I felt part of something when I ran cross-country and basketball but I never really felt part of anything. Yeah I think after my grandma died I became very autonomous and very solitary.

Due to not feeling like part of the community and growing up alone, it caused Emmy to feel like an outside in her mom's culture. Not being part of a community was something Emmy chooses to do:

Probably because of this primal fear of attachment and loss that I may not have involved myself in certain things. I think also inherently am OK with being alone as well. And so the minute I start to feel enmeshed in things I become very anxious. There is a very subtle negotiation there in relationships [and] in communities. [But] you know like whatever I've always been very solitary. But it is something that I chose, and I certainly feel more at home in solitude more so than I do in other senses of experiences.

Emmy says that she is not mad at the ways in which she grew up. She does wish that her mother was able to converse about race and culture but understands that it is due to a disconnection both on her part and her mother's part.

The purpose of this section was to give context to each of the participants so that readers could understand a little bit of each participant. Having a snapshot of each participant will help the reader understand how each participant eventually makes sense

of their identity. In finding the themes the research questions were answered. The next section will focus on the three themes that emerged about the participants as a whole.

Theme I: Uninterest to Birth Culture Growing Up

It was clear that the participants were uninterested in their birth culture even from such a young age. Even though I asked a lot of probing questions to get my participants to think about the ways in which their birth culture was brought in, many of them could not remember because they pushed away any attempt their parents made. Kenzie and Emmy's parents attempted to bring in their TRIA's birth culture but it did not interest them enough to want to learn more. Layla and Julio's parents were happy to answer any questions about their TRIA's birth culture but their parents hardly talked about Layla or Julio's birth country. Layla explains the only time her Vietnamese side was brought up was in school when something sparked the conversation:

The only time someone would ask me about my Vietnamese side [was] if we talked about something that happened in Vietnam or something about Vietnam was brought up and they would ask me. Otherwise it was never brought up.

Layla found a few Vietnamese coins around her house growing up and asked her dad about them but the conversation never moved into learning more about her Vietnamese side.

Layla describes her birth country was hardly mentioned:

[My parents] just said you're Vietnamese and I said okay, cool! And moved on. There wasn't really any sort of acknowledgement. I mean we don't talk about it. I know I'm from Vietnam, they know I'm from Vietnam and that's just kind of where it lies. They [my parents] wouldn't initiate [learning about Vietnam]. It was

on me to initiate it. Like if I had an interest or curiosity about it, they would help me figure it out. Honestly in thinking about my adoption-it sucks because the only term, I can think of is “care.” Like I don’t really care about my Vietnamese culture but I will identify as Vietnamese because that’s where I was born. That’s what I look like. But honestly, I just don’t really care about it. Like it sounds horrible! But I can’t think of any other word but care.

For Julio, he does not remember the specific ways in which his parents talked to him about race and culture. He said he probably had some conversations about it before he started elementary school but could not recall any specifics. Growing up, Julio’s parents did not bring in any of his birth culture and he never asked about it, nor did he ask why his parents did not introduce him to the Spanish culture, he reflects “I mean I knew it was there [his Honduran culture] I just was not concerned about it.” Before going to college Julio says he thought about his culture but never acted on it, meaning he did not investigate his birth culture. Julio explained his lack of interest to his Honduran culture to:

I guess just being in a culture that I grew up in. You know? Growing up in a predominantly White culture I was just not exposed to the opportunity. I’m not like upset about it. I don’t know. It’s like being a person from another country, I just wish I had grown up with some idea of my culture but I don’t think my parents ever tried to hide anything about my culture. Like if I asked they would answer. But it just never really came up I guess.

Kenzie’s experience was different than Layla and Julio’s. When asked about the way in which Kenzie’s parents discuss race and culture growing up:

Growing up it has never been a huge topic like they would say you know you are from China. They would always talk about their experience about how [my parents] saw the Great Wall of China. Like they really just describe the experience of being there versus just like trying to teach us about it.

Kenzie remembers her dad worrying about Kenzie being Chinese:

Like I'm Chinese because I am. [Pause]. I know my dad has asked me about that, like aren't you worried? And that its like no not at all, things are different because that's just how it is. And that's just how it works. No matter how much you think about it, you will never be able to change what you are and what you believe. So why should people try to change that I guess? I guess you just have to accept that there are differences in culture and race and identity it's just kind of a simple fact that you do.

Kenzie's parents took Kenzie and her sister to various gatherings where there were other TRIAs from China and some summers Kenzie and her sister went to culture camps:

We went to camps and every year we were doing things and my sister and I both had really good grades and we were both in AP classes and we were involved in multiple groups. Just a ton of stuff every year. I think it just never fit in the schedule. Because we didn't want to add another thing to the plate.

Even though Kenzie went to culture camps, she never felt a pressure to learn about her birth culture. Her parents would try to bring in as much culture as they knew and Kenzie did not push it away. She also did not ask to learn about her birth culture and accepted that her parents wanted Kenzie to be cultured, not just with Chinese culture but

also other cultures as well. Kenize was just as interested in the Chinese culture as she was in the Muslim culture. Kenzie never resented her parents for the way in which they raised her.

Emmy's mother much like the parents of the other participants did not explain a lot about Emmy's adoption, what it meant to be adopted or bring in much of the Indian culture. Emmy explains that growing up she always felt different because of the interactions with her schoolmates and was constantly pointed out for being racially different than her mother. Emmy perceives the way she was pointed out by others as racism. Because of the way she was treated, drew Emmy away from wanting to learn about her birth culture. When her mom tried to teach what little she knew about India, Emmy just did not want to learn:

So we never talked about American culture, we just talked about Indian culture. And so for [my mom] Indian culture meant eating Indian food every now and then. Like we did not listen to Indian music, we did not go to India, we [did] not even read about India. It was basically eating Indian food every so often. But also part of her struggle with [attempting to bring in the Indian culture] is that I did not want to learn about India. It was a huge source of otherness to me you know? I wanted to be more like my peers than different. I did not want to go to culture camps. I did not want to learn about India, I did not want to eat the Indian food. For a long time I did not want to know about religion, or the history or the Indian holidays. I wanted to be quintessentially American. And you know, I think my mom was trying to balance [bringing in the culture] with the notion that one day and I would want to learn.

Emmy never felt a pressure to learn about India:

For example, I never felt that anyone was relying on me to be the authority of India because I hadn't had an interest in India for very long and so I didn't feel pressure that way.

I asked Emmy if attending college influenced her to seek more information about her birth culture:

Uhhh, maybe? I took women's studies courses about India and those were the classes I found most interesting. I enjoyed learning about women in India and learning about the history, film, literature and things about India. I took as many courses as I could about India. But I still don't think I know very much about India.

Emmy did not delve into the reasons why she took such an interest in the Indian culture as a college student.

Most of the participant's experiences reveal that their parents were open to teaching their child about the child's birth culture but it did not interest any of the participants. I can deduct from the participant's explanations about their experiences growing up, that as a result of not integrating their birth culture, their birth culture became hardly significant in their life as an adult. They all felt that learning about their birth culture would not add any value to their identity. Having an uninterest to their birth culture from such a young age can explain why their college experience did not make them reevaluate their identity.

Theme II: Connection to Adoptive Culture

Most of the participants had a strong connection to their adoptive culture. This was a result of feeling competent and comfortable in their parent's culture compared to being competent and comfortable in their birth culture. I asked the participants questions such as where does the participant feel most comfortable, if the participant feels competent in either birth or adoptive culture, and I also asked which culture they preferred. For a full list of questions please refer to Appendix B.

For Layla, people see her as “an oatmeal cookie, a Vietnamese girl who is very White.” Layla says that this matches how she sees herself. When asked if Layla ever felt like an outsider in her parent's culture she replies

My parents let me do everything they did and they never said no, you can't do this because you're not White. I just did everything they did. They let me. I fit in very well with the White culture. And that I'm not Vietnamese, and it's not that fit in with White culture but I'm not any other culture.

When Layla admitted that she is not any culture, I asked where Layla feels most comfortable. Her answer clarifies that she connects more with her adoptive White culture:

I'm most comfortable around anyone of any culture. I just talk to them; it isn't like we are practicing their culture. I'm totally open to learning about other cultures, which is kind of ironic. I really want to know about other's cultures but then when people are like-oh so you want to learn about the Vietnamese culture, I'm just like eh-h-h. Like yeah I'll learn about it. You'd think that would be my number one culture to learn about but it's kind of just like mixed in there. Like I

just want to travel everywhere. I would love to be immersed in the Vietnamese culture but it isn't like my number one. I look at the Vietnamese culture just as I look at other cultures. As if I'm not a part of it, so it's just all one other category of cultures so that's how I look at it.

Layla also explains that she feels most comfortable in her parent's culture because that is what she grew up knowing.

Even though Layla and Julio grew up in the same home, Julio has an interesting perspective on why he identifies as White:

I say my race is my ethnicity and my race is White. I would say that since I identify with the White culture my race and culture are the same in a way. I just think of the general definition. I think about any type of paper that asks for your race or ethnicity and for my for my race I put White and my ethnicity I put Hispanic. It's how I identify so. If you want to get technical, ethnically I'm Honduran but racially I am White. I don't know I guess it's just based societal wise. I don't think I was ever given the opportunity to declare Honduran as my race. It was never an option. I guess any time I have ever had to declare I have never seen Honduran I've seen Asian.

Julio's experience reveals that he identifies based on the options on forms that he has seen. He has been socially conditioned and expected to base his identity off of the options available to him growing up. The lack of conversations with his parents about race added to Julio's choice to base his identity off of the choices available to him. Julio believed that he was White because he did not see Honduran listed as a racial choice on any type of paperwork when it came to filling out demographics.

Julio also explains that he does not really consider himself part of his parent's culture, "there are things for my parents culture that I identify with and that I like, I don't know." Julio also explains that he prefers to associate himself with people from his adoptive culture "because like I said I don't really know. And I'm clearly imbedded in a culture" Julio did not delve further into what this meant.

Kenzie had a similar outlook on her identity as Layla did. When asked about feeling like an outsider in her parent's culture, Kenzie perceives:

[My parents] are so open and extremely supportive and things like that. Just because like a lot of the things that I like had and stuff is influenced by what I'm surrounded by uhm I feel like my mind set a similar to those around me...I'd never picked on I'd never been singled out in any way I think. Because of that I have just never felt that much different from everybody else and I guess the sorority experience was the first time that I felt like wow I feel really out of place here. But besides that, I don't know. I was never felt I had any problem with where I belonged.

Kenzie vividly remembers

I never really thought much about [that I was Asian]. I'd think, oh man, I wish I were taller! But it was never [I'm] Asian and I wish I were White. I never wanted to be White. I was super happy that I was different. It made me stand out. I always liked being different.

Kenzie explains that she fits in well with her parent's culture. Kenzie also reflects that she prefers her parent's culture

[I] probably [feel comfortable in] parents [culture] just because that is what I am accustomed to. [I] probably [prefer to associate] with my adoptive culture because that's what I've grown up around and that's what I know. And I don't disregard my Chinese side, it's just I've grown up in my adoptive culture.

Emmy's cultural identity was fairly different than the others. She explained that when she was younger everyone in her hometown pointed out the difference between her and her mother. Emmy did not like that she was constantly reminded for being different and perceived this as racial discrimination. Since Emmy wanted to connect more with her peers, she pushed away anything that was remotely Indian. Emmy explicitly states:

I'm not proud to be American and I don't feel Indian. I don't identify with either. I identify as a radical person just in the world. I recognize that I am a woman of color, but culturally I am not Indian but the world pursues me that way. Like I do live a gendered, racialized, class life. In terms of culture-I feel privileged to be westernized and I feel an immense uhm responsibility or accountably about living on colonized territory but I recognize that is all of us. I identify culturally more than racially.

Even though Emmy does not identify with her adoptive culture, she does identify culturally with the country where she grew up. Emmy created her own identity but recognizes that some of that identity comes from where she lives and who she interacts with.

THEME III: Participants Racially Identified with Their Birth Race

All of the participants felt disconnected from their birth culture. Even though they were disconnected they identified with their birth race. People in the participant's life

including friends and family, validated their racial identity as the one that is associated with the color of their skin and phenotype. I asked each participant how they identify today, does what they see on the outside match what is on the inside, how do others see them. I asked if that matches the way in which they see their self and finally I asked if they separate the way they see their self racially versus culturally. All of the participants saw themselves racially in a way that reflected their skin color and where they were born. Regardless of the culture they grew up in, all of the participants preferred to be around people who had the same mindset as them, even if they were part of their birth or adoptive culture.

Layla describes the way she sees herself: "I am a college student [laughter]." She goes on to say that being adopted is part of her story and does not focus on it everyday compared to being a student. When asked about what she sees on the outside, Layla explains:

See I don't know. I've never really thought about that. I look in the mirror and I know I'm Vietnamese but because I look Vietnamese I don't look at myself and think I need to act Vietnamese. In my head it matches where to others it might not. Where to other people they might think I need to have a White exterior. I personally don't think that's what would suit me and because I am who I am and that's how I've been my whole life, I think it matches. Cuz I will identify as Vietnamese, this is the Vietnamese portion of me but I will also identify as being submerged into the White culture and that's how I act; though I think they match but I could see where other people wouldn't. But I think they do.

Layla separates race and culture because:

If you were to give me a job application, I would put down Asian, but if you were to ask me what I am culturally I would not say Vietnamese because I don't know anything about their culture. But racially I look Vietnamese.

At the end of the second interview, I asked Layla again how she saw herself today, she describes:

I don't fit with White people because I don't look like them and I don't fit with Vietnamese because I act different. I would say I'm right here! Between the two groups, like a little $\frac{3}{4}$ towards the white because the only thing that ties me to Vietnamese is my looks. Where I think culturally, I tie more in with White.

Julio sees himself as Hispanic and explained, "I identify with being Hispanic [and being] from Honduras and [pause] being adopted yeah." He says since he was born in Honduras he sees himself as Hispanic, "I mean yeah that's where I was born. I mean in a way I still see myself as Hispanic." Other people saw Julio as Hispanic, which matched the way he saw himself. The way he sees himself on the inside match what he sees on the outside in terms of racial and cultural identity.

Kenzie sees herself as an Asian American adoptee and also sees herself as culturally White:

So racially I see myself as Asian, but I'd probably say I'm an Asian American Adoptee just because like I'm Asian people will ask-do you know stuff? And it's like no [laughter]. Culturally I definitely think I identify with the White culture.

What Kenzie sees on the outside does not match how she feels on the inside:

Because what I see on the outside is an Asian woman but how I feel on the inside doesn't identify with Asian culture. Sometimes I do compare myself to the Asian

foreign exchange students and then I look at myself and I can only speak English and something just doesn't add up. Like I know I am Asian but that's just because that's what my race is. Inside I don't feel Asian. I identify with Asian because that's my genetic makeup. Like that's what my race is, besides genetics I'm no different than anyone else.

Kenzie says that others saw her by her abilities, "they see me as Kenzie. They identify me by my ability. I've never had someone ask me why I act White. I think because, like what does that mean?"

Emmy had a much more difficult time explaining the way in which she saw herself, "I have always felt lost and felt adrift to my physical identity." When I asked Emmy how others see her and she said they describe her by her abilities. I asked her if what she saw on the outside matched what she saw on the inside, she had hard time finding the words:

I'm not sure like I recognize that [I am] of Indian descent and when people asked me where I was from I would say I was born in India but I'm not Indian [pause]. But I think on the inside and maybe felt hollow I felt like I was always trying to create self and that self was always kind of like the process and always shifting. Actually it's an interesting question because now I look in the mirror I see that I'm a woman of color. You know that I look Indian and identify more now it as an adoptee and that I am a student. I don't know that an interesting question I guess who I seen the mirror [pause]. I guess is different than how I feel side. I don't know that's hard. I always feel-like I never feel whole on the inside and then

when I see myself in the mirror I don't feel whole. I don't know that's a hard question-I'll have to think about it.

Emmy separates race versus culture and identifies more culturally than racially.

The experiences of each of the participants led them to culturally identify with western society and racially viewed themselves based off of the country that they were born in. Even though Emmy did not specifically say that she identifies culturally as White, she does recognize it was the way she had been socialized. Each of the participants felt they were competent in their adoptive parent's culture and only felt connected to their birth race because that was where they were born and because that was how others perceived them.

Conclusions From The Study

This section focused on the participants, the themes, and the cultural racial identity model (Baden & Stewart, 2007). All of the adoptees interviewed grew up in a predominately White neighborhood. The themes that emerged were an uninterest to birth culture, connection to adoptive culture and racially identifying with birth race. The way the participants racially identified was based on their birth country and was validated by how others perceived their skin tone and phenotype. Overall each of the participant's parents did not substantially bring in their TRIA's birth culture as part of their cultural socialization. For the majority of the adoptees they were not interested in learning more about their birth culture growing up which continued, as they got older. The next section will focus on the discussion of the findings.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The present study focused on the experiences of TRIAs who were in college or had recently graduated. This qualitative, phenomenological study used a semi-structured interview protocol to gain understanding of experiences of each participant. This chapter will reiterate the research questions, discuss the connections from Chapter Four, the Findings and Chapter 2, the Literature Review. It will also highlight how this study added to the body of literature on TRIAs, the limitations of this study, what needs to be researched in the future and implications for future practice.

Previous research studies have focused on the experience of young children, adolescence or older adults (Baden et al., 2012; Trenka et al., 2006). Chapter Two was a literature review on what had been studied on TRIA individuals. The research explored the complex experience of TRIAs. TRIAs have been raised in a home that is racially and culturally different than their birth country (Baden et al., 2012; Root, 1996; Trenka et al., 2006). The literature explained that many White parents do not understand race and racism and therefore are ill-equipped to socialize TRIAs, who are children of color (Baden et al., 2012; Trenka et al., 2006). The research indicated that identity changes throughout a person's life (Allen-Collinson & Brown, 2012; Baden et al., 2006; Boivin & Hassan, 2015) but the research fell short when it came to explaining the identity development of TRIAs who are in college.

The present study focused on answering three overarching research questions based on the findings from the literature review: how do TRIAs who are either currently in college, or recently graduated, racially and culturally identify; what kind of awareness did TRIAs have of their birth culture while growing up in their adoptive household; and

finally in what ways, if at all is the birth culture significant to adoptees as an adult? These questions were influenced by the lack of literature surrounding TRIAs who are in college.

This study's greatest strength is its focus on the experiences of TRIAs who are in college. The present study illuminated a population that is hardly mentioned in the discourse of college student development. The research on college student development has numerous theories that help to explain the various stages of student development. Some theories include the way a student makes sense of their story, how they racially and culturally identify, their sexual identity and their religious identity just to name a few. There was no information on the racial and cultural identity of TRIAs who are in college. The present study adds to the scholarship surrounding this population and will enhance the knowledge for student affairs professionals.

Synopsis of Findings

The findings from this study found that the participants did not think much about their birth country growing up. Most of them racially identified with their birth race because of how people perceived them. Many of them strongly identify with their adoptive culture. All of the participants had an awareness of their birth culture at a surface level growing up. This meant that the participants knew about their birth culture but were not curious enough to delve into learning more about their birth culture. Because of the disinterest in their birth culture growing up, all of the TRIAs were disinterested in it as they began and continued through college.

Baden and Stewart's (2007) cultural racial identity model and Renn's (2004) ecology of race and identity set the foundation for understanding multiple racial and cultural identities. Baden and Stewart's model outlined the ways in which transracial

adoptees could identify in relation to their birth race and culture, as well as, their adoptive race and culture. Renn's ecology found that multiracial and biracial individuals at times shift their identities based on context known as situational identity. The findings from this study found that these TRIA participants did not change their racial or cultural identity based on situations in their life. Three of the four participants were relatively in the *pro-parent cultural identity-racially undifferentiated identity* as outlined by Baden and Stewart. Those who were in the *pro-parent cultural identity-racially undifferentiated identity* had high knowledge, awareness, competence, and comfort in their adoptive race and culture (Baden & Stewart, 2007).

Discussion

The literature surrounding TRIAs suggests that TRIAs who grow up in a household that is racially different struggle with their racial identity as they got older, depending on their racial and cultural socialization. The findings in this study did not support this assumption for three of the four participants. Layla, Julio and Kenzie describe their experience growing up in their adoptive culture as positive and as a result did not feel the need to try and figure out their racial or cultural identity. For the most part they were happy with how they identified and how people perceived them. Emmy grew up in a home with one parent and had a lot of difficulty creating a relationship with her mom. Emmy felt she experienced an immense amount of racism growing up and this is what caused her to struggle with her identity. Constantly being noticed that Emmy was different is what caused Emmy to push away her Indian identity and attempt to conform to the community that she was growing up in. Emmy concluded that the way in which her

community pointed out her difference in skin color had a negative effect on her racial identity as she got older.

Much of the research hypothesized the way in which TRIAs are culturally socialized affects their identity as they get older (Butler-Sweet, 2011; Juang et al., 2016; Saleem et al., 2016). This study supported this conclusion. While none of the participants grew up in homes with parents of color, the participant's White parents culturally socialized them in a certain way by not bringing in their adoptee's birth culture or integrating much of the traditions from their adoptee's birth culture. Failing to bring in the adoptee's birth culture may not have been due to negligence to their child. Two of the parents in this study attempted educate their child.

Baden (2015) explains that there is an assumed expectation for any parent of a TRIA to introduce the TRIA's birth culture growing up. None of the research explained why it is an expectation. The participants in this study did not know if their parents were told that they had to bring in the adoptee's birth culture. The parent's attempts to bring in the culture decreased as their TRIA got older and discouraged any mention of their birth culture.

The literature also suggests White parents are not as equipped to parent a TRIA because White parents normally do not have the experiences that many people of color do. My study found that none of participants harness any contempt towards their parents for not teaching them more about their birth culture but the lack of exposure to birth culture seemed to have added to the participant's disinterest in their birth culture. In Emmy's case, her mother's inability to teach Emmy about the Indian culture combined

with the way she had been treated by her community added to her detachment to the Indian culture as she got older.

This finding complicates the research on TRIAs because Baden et al., (2012) suggest TRIAs passively or actively seek information on their birth country as they get older. Baden et al., (2012) also points out that TRIAs should initiate wanting to investigate their birth culture and it should not be imposed by the adoptive parent. In the present study, the participant's experiences revealed they were uninterested in their birth culture for a number of reasons regardless if their parents brought in any culture. Their experiences exposed that their parents brought in as much culture as they knew but it was constantly pushed away by the TRIA.

In Kenzie's case, her parents tried to bring as much culture as they knew but Kenzie warded it off, telling them not to worry about her being Chinese. In Emmy's case, her mom tried eating Indian food but Emmy was not intrigued. Layla and Julio's parents hardly talked about Layla or Julio's birth country and did not try to introduce them to their birth culture. This instilled an unimportance to their birth country. The experiences of the participants is a conflicting finding because it seems if the birth culture is not brought in the family then the TRIA will grow up not caring and, in contrast, if the birth culture is brought it may be stifled by the TRIA for fear of being different.

Many researchers suggest that identity changes throughout a person's lifetime (Allen-Collinson & Brown, 2012; Baden et al., 2006; Boivin & Hassan, 2015). Baden et al., (2012) found that adoptees actively or passively seek information on their birth culture as they get older as they explore who they are. I expected given the diverse nature of a college environment it would create a platform for TRIAs to reevaluate their identity.

The present study found that one out of the four participants reconsidered their identity as they got older. All of the participants grew up in a household that fostered learning about their birth culture meaning their parents would attempt to answer any questions the TRIA may have about their birth culture. Even though the parents were willing to answer questions, the participants never questioned their parents about their birthplace and the uninterest in it continued throughout college. Three of the four participants found no need to reevaluate their racial and cultural identity but stated that their identity would change based on what life stage they are in. Three of the four explained their identity such as being a student would change one day and when they get married, their identity would change to being a partner.

The findings support the research that U.S. society expects people to have a monoracial identity (Johnston-Guerreo & Nadal, 2010). Even though Layla, Julio and Kenzie continue to identify in the same way that others perceive them, it illuminates the difficulty in trying to change someone else's perception of them. Emmy did not want to continue to identify in the way the world saw her because she was not emotionally connected to the Indian culture and this guided her to a different racial identity. A person of color is less specific than an Indian person.

Throughout interviewing these four participants none of them said that college created a platform for them to reevaluate their identity. This is a fascinating fact because Patton et al., (2016) concluded that college student development focuses on the development of the whole student but in all of these participants their racial and cultural identity was not developed in college. Julio and Emmy did take a few classes related to their birth culture but growth was not fostered outside of the classroom for them to

investigate the meaning behind what they learned. This could also be because they just did not care that much to think more critically about it.

Three of the four participants grew up in household with a mom and a dad. They were able to create healthy relationships with each other and grew up in a community that rarely pointed out differences. Layla, Julio and Kenzie felt confident in their racial and cultural and adoptee identities and admitted that their confidence and happiness with who they are was most likely attributed to their healthy upbringing. Not to say that growing up in a single-parent household automatically creates an unhealthy family, the fact that Emmy was unable to create a relationship where she felt loved and cared for coupled with the racial discrimination of her community added to her disdain for being different. Layla, Julio and Kenzie felt like they belonged which aligns with Rockquemore's (2000) and Root's (1996) research that suggests that a strong identity comes with a sense of belonging.

Something else to mention is Layla and Julio being siblings. Julio is a few years older than Layla, and Layla was adopted five years after Julio was. These two participants who grew up in the household had a similar outlook on the way they saw themselves racially and culturally. Interviewing these participants shed light on the experiences of TRIAs but it also highlights the developmental differences between siblings growing up in the same household.

Limitations

The limitation in this study was that it took place over the course of a few months. Although the two interviews and member checking allowed me to get a strong sense of the participants, perhaps with more time I would have been able to develop a stronger

relationship with participants and have been able to give them more time to reflect upon their experiences between interviews. Since they had not thought much about their experiences and identities it is possible that questions about their identity would have prompted some reflection and the results of that reflection could have been captured over time to better get a sense of their identities and experiences. For example, a participant may have not thought about how racism may have influenced their identity development before but my interview questions about racism may have initiated some reflection that an additional interview after a period of time could have potentially captured.

A second limitation is that during the second interview with Julio, he was distracted. The second interview was when I asked questions surrounding how he saw himself racially and culturally, he was unfocused and it was difficult to get him to focus on the interview. I asked if he wanted to reschedule he said no. It almost seemed as if he just wanted to get this over and done with. The second interview was more personal and was supposed to focus on the experience of identity of race and culture so it was important for Julio to have been present. Julio's lack of presence during the second interview interfered with the depth of the interview and I felt that the answers provided could have gone deeper had Julio not been preoccupied. The way Julio answered questions surrounding how he saw himself racially and culturally was not as extensive as it could have been, so it was difficult to get Julio to clarify what he meant.

The final limitation is that I never heard back from my participants about the findings or about their transcripts. I had to assume that what I wrote and what I found was accurate since I did not hear back from the participants.

Future Research

Some areas for future research would include a longitudinal study of more than four participants who are in college. A longitudinal study could track the participants on their journeys through college. It could document the choices that participants make about who to spend time with and which activities and groups to participate in. Since literature is clear that identity shifts, this type of study could shed light on the ways, if any, participants change their identities during college.

Mertens suggests that there should be eight or more participants to be a viable study (Mertens, 2010). Researching more than four TRIAs would bring more research to the limited body of knowledge surrounding TRIAs who are in college. College student development emphasizes that every experience is different and this would be an opportunity to give more TRIAs an opportunity to reveal their experiences to help enhance the knowledge on this relatively new and unknown population.

An additional area for future research would be looking at TRIAs who grew up in homes that are not nurturing or loving. Since identity takes into account environmental factors it will be important look at the experiences of TRIAs who grew up in an unstable home. Many TRIAs grow up in unstable and unhealthy homes, failing to illuminate this aspect will hinder future student affairs professional's knowledge on an already complex population.

Another area for future research is delving into the reasons why most of my participants were so quick to identify with their adoptive culture. Many of the adoptees explained how grateful they were to have been given this experience and maybe on some subconscious level they did not want to offend their parents and this gift that their

adoptive parents gave them. Looking into the reasons why a TRIA does not want to explore their birth culture could shed light on why TRIAs do or do not want to.

A final area for future research should be how the college environment impacts the identity of TRIAs. While a longitudinal study should look at this, the TRIAs who are part of the study need to be aware of how they identify and how their identity may have changed or why it stayed the same based on their college environment. A longitudinal study focusing on the identity development of TRIAs would add to the body of literature on this population because it will reveal how well a university is creating an environment that fosters racial and cultural identity development. Student affairs professionals are committed to developing the whole student and this type of study could reveal the ways in which their university is doing so or it could high light some areas for improvement.

Implications for Student Affairs Professionals

Given that many higher education professionals care about student development, having an understanding about this population will add to the breadth of knowledge that these professionals should have in the field. While the present study suggested that TRIAs do not struggle with their identity in college, this study did bring to light that TRIAs are hardly discussed. When working with TRIAs, student affairs professionals need to be aware of this population and that the experiences of each individual are complex.

This study provided insight to the ways in which TRIAs can identify, and it illuminated that for these participants, identity was hardly discussed on their college campuses. As student affairs professionals, it is important to have this population in mind when working with students. While TRIAs are rare, they are still a population that needs

to be recognized. As stated in the literature, some TRIAs want to seek more information on their birth culture but may not know how. Even though the present study did not support the research that TRIAs want to investigate their birth race or culture, there are far more than four TRIAs in this world and on each campus.

This revelation is important for student affairs professionals because the college environment is a place where students can think about their identity. The institutions that each of the participants attended did not provide a platform for them to reevaluate their identity. Many of the participants did take a course or two on diversity but as a result of the course, they did not internalize their coursework and seek to reevaluate their identity. Student affairs professionals focus on the development of the whole student and need more interactions with students that prompt them to explore their identity.

While most of the TRIAs were fine with how they identify and were not interested in seeking more information about their birth race or culture this study illuminated that identity is hardly talked about on college campuses. The student affairs profession is committed to developing the whole student and not talking about identity is a major flaw in student affairs practices. This study is not to suggest that student affairs professionals need to force TRIAs to explore an identity that is not salient to the TRIA, rather it is to inform student affairs professionals of the scope of change that can happen to a TRIA while in college and to create an environment that fosters racial and cultural identity development.

Student affairs professionals could host table discussions about race and culture and discuss the ways in which they are both integrated into our everyday lives. While this may not get a TRIA to talk about their birth race or culture, it provides a place for them to

learn about why identify in a certain and it might create a space for them to want to learn about another race, even if it is not their birth race. As part of diversity courses, student affairs professionals could meet one-on-one with students outside of the classroom to discuss what they learned and how it might impact their life moving forward.

Finally, this study illuminated that identity is multifaceted and is affected by social and environmental factors. As a student affairs professional, it is important to understand that not everyone will appreciate being defined by a monoracial identity. Identity development is complex and can be negatively affected by impressing upon someone prior assumptions based on what is represented on someone's skin.

Conclusion

This study was created to bring light a population that is unknown to many student affairs professionals. It introduced what TRIAs are, the literature surrounding TRIAs, revealed the complexity of identity development for TRIAs, and highlighted that TRIAs have not been studied in the college context. The present study interviewed four TRIAs who are in college to gain insight on their experience and understand how they racially and culturally identify. Finally, this study provided the findings from the participants, illuminated areas for future research and described implications for student affairs professionals. It is my hope that this research will be of use to current or future student affairs professionals.

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Appendix A: First Interview Questions

Initial Interview Questions

1. What is your name and preferred name?
2. How old are you?
3. How old were you when you were adopted?
4. Where were you adopted from?
5. What year in school are you?
 - a. If not currently in school, what did you study?
 - i. When did you graduate
 - ii. What have you been doing since graduation
 - b. When will you graduate?
 - c. Is this on time or sooner/longer than you expected?
6. What are you studying?
 - a. What made you choose that area of study?
 - b. Has this been your intended major from the start?
7. Tell me about your process of deciding to come to college
 - a. What do you think you want to do with your major?
 - b. What made you choose the college you decided to attend?
 - c. Was attending college your choice?
 - i. Why did you want to go to college?
 - ii. Did your parents influence you to attend?
 - d. Are/were you involved in any organizations at your institution?
 - i. How long have you been in the mentioned organizations?
 - ii. What made you choose those?
 - iii. How are you involved in these organizations?
 - iv. Do you/will you take on a leadership role within these orgs?
8. Can you tell me about where you grew up?
 - a. Is that far from the institution you decided to attend?
 - b. If it is far; what made you go so far?
 - c. If it isn't, what kept you close to your hometown?
 - d. Where is "home" for you?
9. What kinds of food did you eat growing up?
 - a. Did your parents cook every night?
 - b. Did you all eat out often?
 - i. Where did you eat, when you did eat out?
 - ii. Did your parents make you try to eat different types of food?
 1. How did this make you feel?
10. What were your friends like in High School?
 - a. If you can remember, what were they like in middle school?
 - b. Could you tell me about an experience with your friends from school that really sticks out in your mind?
 - c. What about that experience sticks with you?
11. Did you feel a part of the community in your hometown?
 - a. Were your parents involved in your community?
 - b. Did you all attend events as a family?
 - i. Church

ii. Community events

12. What kinds of things did your family do growing up?
 - a. Go to the fair?
 - b. Hiking?
 - c. Cultural exploration?
 - d. How did your family spend time on the weekends?
 - e. How did this differ during the week?
 - f. Is there a favorite memory, you'd like to share?
 - i. What about that memory is your favorite?
 - g. What kinds of movies/tv shows did you watch?
13. Do you have siblings? If so, can you describe them to me?
 - a. Did your parents forewarn your siblings that you were going to be part of the family now? (if the siblings are not biological to the adoptee)
 - b. Do you know if you have biological siblings?
 - c. (If they do know) Have you been able to keep in touch with them as you have grown up?
 - d. Do you consider yourself close in relationship to your siblings?
 - e. Do you feel an equal part of the family?
 - i. What did your family do to make you feel part of the family?
14. How did your parents deal with conflict surrounding sibling disagreements/rivalry?
 - a. Did they tend to take one side more?
 - b. If they did, did you notice? How did that make you feel?
 - c. Do you feel you can talk to your parents about anything?
15. What was the main language spoken in your family?
 - a. Could anyone else speak another language?
16. How are you feeling at this point in the interview?
17. Thinking about your current/past college experience
 - a. What is it like being a student at your institution?
 - b. Are there opportunities to get involved?
 - c. Do you think there is enough opportunity to learn about diverse cultures?
 - d. Have you met people from your birth culture?
 - e. What was that like?
 - f. Have you created a friendship with them?
18. Can you tell me an experience that sticks out in your mind regarding college?
 - a. What made you share that particular experience?
 - b. Do you define this as a positive or negative experience?
 - c. How do you feel about that experience?
19. Can you share with me an experience in college that made you think about your race/culture?
 - a. Was that a negative or positive experience, or neither?
 - b. What about it made it negative or positive?
 - c. Was this the first time that you thought about your racial/cultural identity?
 - i. If this wasn't the first time, can you remember when you first thought about it?
 - ii. How did you make meaning of that experience?

20. Have you encountered any challenges being in college?
 - a. This could be academic
 - b. Gender
 - c. Cultural
 - d. Racial
 - e. How were you challenged?
 - f. Do you think you over came that challenge?
 - g. Where you able to talk to anyone about how that challenge affected you?
 - i. Why did you choose that person?
 - ii. Did they help you work through that experience?
21. Is there anything else you would like to share?
 - a. Are there things I should have asked and did not?
22. Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix B: Second Interview Questions

Appendix B-1

Second Interview:

1. How do you spend your free time, now that you are in college?
 - a. What types of food do you eat
 - b. What movies or tv shows do you like to watch?
 - c. What do you and your friends do when you all hang out?
2. What has been your most favorite class in college?
 - a. What about the class do you like?
 - b. Is it challenging?
3. What is least favorite class?
 - a. What makes it your least favorite class?
4. Would you tell me what you remember, if anything about your adoption? (Not from what your parents told you, but you yourself remember)
 - a. You said you were adopted at (whatever age) from (whatever country), were you aware at (whatever age) that you were being adopted?
 - b. Do you remember the process of being adopted?
 - i. If not, did your adopted parents ever explain the process to you?
 - ii. Did your parents tell you why they wanted to adopt?
 - c. What do you remember (if at all) prior to your adoption?
 - d. Do you remember anything about your birth country?
 - i. If so, what? Why do you think you remember that particular experience?
 - e. Did your parents talk to you about being adopted and what that meant? *Can't remember (maybe ask now, since this question was brought up in Interview 1)*
 - i. Did they keep mementos from your birth country?
 - ii. Did they explain these to you?
 - f. Did you meet another adoptee? Were they interracial adopted?
 - i. How old were they?
 - ii. How do you know they were adopted?
 - iii. Did you become friends with that person/persons?
 - g. Do you remember anything about your biological parents?
5. Thinking about your hometown, did you see race?
 - a. What race were your coaches and your teammates?
 - b. What was the racial makeup of your hometown? *-Predominately White*
 - c. How do you think your adoptive parents racially and culturally identify?
 - i. Does this match the norm in your hometown?
 - d. Was the same racial makeup reflected in your school?
 - e. Did the kids in your class point out that your skin color (or any physical characteristic) was different?

- f. Do you remember a time you noticed you were different racially or culturally from your family or your community where you lived? Can you tell me about that experience?
 - i. If you can't remember, why do you think that is?
6. When was the first time you saw a person of color?
 - a. Did you ask your parents about them?
 - b. What made you notice that they were different?
 - c. Did you talk to your siblings about it?
7. Could you explain to me the ways in which your adoptive parents talked about race or culture growing up?
 - a. How old were you when they first began talking about race or culture?
 - b. Did the way they explain it make sense to you as a child?
 - c. Did your parents accept that you had friends that weren't white?
 - i. How did they or how didn't they?
 - ii. Did this influence how you made friends in school?
 - d. Do your parents talk about race and culture now? Are you able to make sense of it?
 - e. How did your parents acknowledge your birth country growing up?
 - f. Do they acknowledge it today?
 - i. Why/why not?
 - ii. How would you feel if your parents never discussed race, and they all of a sudden brought it up?
8. Have you ever felt like an outsider in your parent's culture?
 - a. Tell me about an experience that made you feel like an outsider
 - i. If not-why do you think you never felt like an outsider
9. Do you feel you are competent in your parent's culture?
10. You mentioned that you a part of (whatever organizations)
 - a. Were you able to create strong friendships within these organizations?
 - b. What makes those friendships strong?
 - c. Thinking back to when you were going to join the Vietnamese association, do you think they would have pressured you to learn about the Vietnamese culture in order to be fully integrated into the RSO?
 - i. If so-where did idea of thought come from?
 - ii. If not-have you ever felt pressure to learn more about your birth culture from other marginalized populations?
 - d. Do you think these organization reflects more of your birth culture or your adoptive culture?
 - i. Was that an unconscious or conscious decision?
 - e. Where do you feel most comfortable? –Who are your closest friends?
 - i. When you are with people of your parent's culture
 1. Do you think your parents accept that you are friends with people who are not white?
 2. Do this influence who you are friends with now?
 - ii. Birth culture
 - iii. Cultures that are neither?

- iv. Which do you prefer to associate yourself with?
 - 1. Has this changed since you started college?
 - 2. Can you explain why?
- 11. Have you met anyone from your birth country in college?
 - a. How did you meet them?
 - b. What was that interaction like?
 - c. Have you stayed friends with that person/persons?
- 12. How are you feeling at this point?
- 13. You mentioned that you do (whatever) with your friends when you all hang out, why do you think that is?
 - a. Have you brought up going to a cultural event?
 - b. Have they suggested going to a cultural event?
 - c. Why do you think this happen/doesn't happen?
- 14. Before you went to college did you think about your identity?
 - a. How did you see yourself when you saw your reflection?
 - i. Was there a particular experience that led you to understand how you identify?
 - b. Did how you feel on the outside match what you saw in the mirror?
 - i. How did you feel on the inside?
 - c. Was there a time that this was not the case?
 - d. Did your parents and or siblings affirm the way you see yourself?
 - i. How or how didn't they?
 - e. Before going to college were you looking forward to potentially meeting more adoptees?
 - i. Were you intrigued at the possibility of meeting more individuals from your birth country?
 - f. Do you consider yourself part of your parent's culture?
 - i. What is this based on?
- 15. Now that you are in college (or have been in college) have you been inclined to seek more information on your birth country?
 - a. Why or why not?
 - b. How has being in college shaped who you hang out with? Has it changed, stayed the same?
 - i. Why do you think this happened?
 - c. If you investigated your birth country, how do you think your adoptive parents would interpret that?
 - i. How would you respond?
- 16. Who do you consider your role model?
 - a. What about them attracted you to be their mentee?
 - b. Do you feel you can talk to them about anything? Including race?
 - c. Do you know how they identify racially and culturally? Does this fit your parent's culture?
 - d. Do you think you were intentional with who you chose your role model to be?
- 17. (If applicable) If you were able to explore your birth country, how has your family supported you?

- a. Have they asked how they can help you through the process?
 - b. How have you explored your birth country?
 - i. Do you think you could identify with the culture?
18. How do you see yourself today?
- a. How has college, if at all, altered how you see yourself?
 - b. How has your adoptive upbringing influenced who you interact with in college?
 - c. How has your adoptive culture influenced how you socialize with others?
 - d. Does what you see on the outside match how you feel on inside?
 - i. How do others see you?
 - 1. Does this match how you see yourself?
 - 2. How do you make meaning of how others see you?
 - ii. Do your parents and or siblings affirm how you see yourself?
 - 1. How or how don't they?
 - 2. How does this make you feel? Does this influence how you make meaning of how you see yourself?
19. Do you separate the way you see yourself racially versus culturally?
- a. Explain how you do or do not
 - b. When did this separation occur? Was there an event that made you separate the two?
20. Even if you haven't had a chance to explore your birth country, are you drawn to visit your birth country?
- a. Do you think this will change in the future?
 - b. What would cause you to change your mind in the future?
21. If applicable: When you get older, like a few years after graduation, do you think how you see yourself will change depending on location? Job? New friends you have made?
22. Is there anything else you would like to add?
23. Are there questions I should have asked, and did not?

Appendix C: IRB Recruitment Script

Email to be sent from the Academic Advisor:

Dear Students,

Amy Williamson is doing a research study on transracial or interracial adoptees. A transracial or interracial adoptee is an individual who has been adopted into a family that is racially and or culturally different than their birth race or culture. She is interested in understanding how international, interracial adoptees racially or culturally identify while they are in college. Participants for this study must be a current college student, or have completed their bachelors degree within the past five years. Participants must be 19 years or older, and internationally, interracial adopted at the age of 5 or younger. If you are interested or may know someone who might be interested, please contact her at awilliamson3@unl.edu or 540-688-9810. Participants will be asked to meet with Amy two times within the span of 6 weeks. Meetings will consist of a series of questions being asked surrounding your experience. Each meeting should last between 30-60 minutes. Please contact me or Amy if you have any questions or concerns at awilliamson3@unl.edu or 540-688-9810.

Thank you so much for your consideration on this matter. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Best,
[Name of Academic Advisor]

Post that will be on Facebook:

My name is Amy Williamson and I am doing a research study on transracial or interracial adoptees. I am interested in how international, interracial adoptees racially or culturally identify while they are in college. Participants for this study must be a current college student, or have graduated within the past five years. Participants must be over 19, and internationally, interracial adopted at the age of 5 or younger. Please ask students who may qualify for this study and are interested in participating; or if you are interested in participating, to contact me at awilliamson3@unl.edu or 540-688-9810. Participants should expect to meet with me two times within the span of 6 weeks. Meetings will consist of a series of questions being asked surrounding their experience making sense of their adoptee identity. Each meeting should last between 30-60 minutes. Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns at awilliamson3@unl.edu or 540-688-9810.

Thank you so much for your consideration on this matter. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Script for Participants to Use When Reaching Out to People They Know

Hi [Potential Participant]

Through our friendship, I have come to understand that you are an international, interracial adoptee. As you know I, too, have been internationally, interracially adopted. I got the opportunity to speak about my experience through a current research study that is happening. Amy Williamson, a current graduate student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, is interested in how international, interracial adoptees racially or culturally identify while they are in college. Participants for this study must be a current college student, or have graduated within the past five years. Participants must be over 19, and internationally, interracially adopted at the age of 5 or younger. I recently interviewed with her and my experience was [ENTER IN YOUR EXPERIENCE]. I agreed to met with Amy twice for about 30-60 minutes to answer some interview questions about my experience. I really enjoyed speaking about my experience, and I think you would be a wonderful candidate for this study. If you would like to participate please contact Amy at awilliamson3@unl.edu or 540-688-9810. If you would like to speak with me before contacting Amy, I am more than willing to speak with you further. I hope you have a wonderful day,
[Participant]

Appendix D: IRB Informed Consent

IRB#16567

Title: **Unknown Identities: How transracial, interracial adoptees racially and culturally identify in college.**

Purpose:

This research project will aim to understand how interracial adoptees make meaning of their experiences, and how they racially and culturally identify as a college student. You must be 19 years of age or older to participate. You are invited to participate in this study if you are an adoptee who was internationally adopted and whose birth race or culture differs from the race or culture of your adoptive family.

Procedures:

You will be asked to meet with the researcher and answer a series of questions. The two interviews will last approximately 30-60 minutes and be scheduled at your convenience with approximately 3-4 weeks between interviews.

Benefits:

You will be able to reflect upon your experience and discuss your experience of being an adoptee that was internationally and interracial adopted. The field of higher education will benefit from knowing more about the experiences of identity development of interracial adoptees.

Risks and/or Discomforts:

You may feel some discomfort if you are recalling any negative experiences. There are counseling services that are available to work with you to resolve these feelings.

Confidentiality:

Any information obtained during this study, which could identify you, will be kept strictly confidential. The data will be stored on the investigator's persona computer and will only be seen by the investigator during the study. After the study is complete the evidence will be destroyed on May 5, 2017. The information obtained in this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but the data will be reported as aggregated data or identifying information will be removed.

Opportunity to Ask Questions:

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. Or you may contact the investigator(s) at the phone numbers below. Please contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965 to voice concerns about the research or if you have any questions about your rights as a research participant.

Freedom to Withdraw:

Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or in any other way receive a penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Participant Feedback Survey:

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln wants to know about your research experience. This 14 question, multiple-choice survey is anonymous; however, you can provide your contact information if you want someone to follow-up with you. This survey should be completed after your participation in this research. Please complete this optional online survey at: https://ssp.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_aVvlNCf0U1vse5n.

Signature of Participant:

Signature of Research Participant
Date

Name and Phone number of investigator(s)

Amy Williamson, Principal Investigator	Office: (540) 688-9810
Stephanie Bondi Ph.D., Secondary Investigator	Office (402) 472-8977