

Reclaiming Culture: Reculturation of Transracial and International Adoptees

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Abstract

The cultural experiences of transracial and international adoptees (TRIAs) are uniquely affected by their adoption across cultures and racial ethnic groups. Upon adoption, TRIAs typically identify quickly with their adoptive parents' white culture, but may eventually seek to reclaim their birth culture. Current terminology used to describe cultural identifications and changes (e.g., acculturation, enculturation) does not adequately depict the reclamation of birth culture by TRIAs. We describe a new term for this process called *reculturation*.

KEYWORDS: *international adoption, transracial adoption, adopted person, cultural identity, birth culture, reclaim*

The adoption of infants, children, and adolescents across racial and cultural groups has been practiced for over 50 years in the U.S. and abroad. Anywhere from 80% to 85% of international adoptions are transracial (Office of Children's Issues United States Department of State, n.d.) and approximately 40% of all adoptions in the U.S. are transracial (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2011). Despite the prevalence and visibility of transracial and international adoptions, scholars lack a full understanding and awareness of the identity experiences of these adopted individuals, particularly regarding the complex interplay between race, ethnicity, and culture.

Although the construct of race is generally seen as biopsychosocially constructed and the construct of ethnicity is increasingly more commonly utilized in the literature, the construct of race is apt for analyzing transracial adoption given its reference to visible differences and race-based socialization (Richardson, Bethea, Hayling, & Williamson-Taylor, 2010) whereas the construct of ethnicity references a group classification based on social and cultural heritage (practices which are often handed down through generations) (Casas, 1984). Throughout this paper, we present identity issues related to transracial and international adoption. Transracial adoption refers to the adoption of a child of one race by a parent or parents of a different race than the child. The vast majority of adoptive parents in transracial adoptions are white whereas the children they adopt are children of color born either within the U.S. (domestic adoption) or abroad (international adoption). This paper refers to people who were adopted transracially as TRAs, those adopted internationally as IAs and those both transracially and internationally adopted as TRIAs.

At early ages, children seek to know where and whom they come from (McGinnis, Smith, Ryan, & Howard, 2009). Between the ages of four and five children typically become aware of racial differences and TRIAs begin to notice that they do not "match" their parents (Lee, Grotevant, Hellerstedt, & Gunnar, 2006). By the time TRIAs reach later childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, many associate with being white and research suggests that approximately two thirds of TRAs do not identify with their own racial status (Andujo, 1988; Feigelman & Silverman, 1984; W. J. Kim, 1995). In fact, the complexity of racial/ethnic identity for TRIAs (Lee, 2003; McGinnis et al., 2009; Yoon, 2004) is reflected by findings that suggest that as many as 78% of Korean TRIAs reported thinking they were white or wanting to be white as children but that a majority of those same adoptees were compelled to heighten their racial/ethnic awareness and shift their identification to

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fit their Asian heritage (McGinnis et al., 2009). The dissonance that TRIAs feel due to differences in their physical appearances and their cultural affiliations builds over time and they ultimately may seek to resolve it.

The dissonance is further exacerbated by the multiple changes in cultural affiliation that adoptees must make after their adoption placement in another country. Although by definition, adoptees immigrated to their adoptive countries, they may not perceive themselves as immigrants per se, particularly if their adoptive parents are not also recent immigrants. Cultural adaptations to changes in cultural context typically require attention to constructs such as acculturation, reverse acculturation, and enculturation. However, despite the actual immigration history of TRIAs, TRIAs rarely identify as immigrants and instead tend to cite being adopted as a more salient experience (Lee, Yun, Yoo, & Nelson, 2010). Given both the differences in immigration experiences and the differences in the meaning assigned to their immigration (to be discussed later), a new construct for understanding cultural change for TRIAs is needed to account for the differences in the process and outcomes of cultural change. Furthermore, as TRIAs engage in the identity process, they may struggle with their cultural affiliations and the need to resolve the dissonance they experience between their physical appearance and their lived cultural practice and affiliation. Resolution of the dissonance may involve the need to reclaim birth culture. Thus, alleviation of this dissonance defines the process of reculturation.

In this paper, we present a new identity construct for cultural adaptation that is based on TRIAs' experiences. We believe that all TRIAs will, to varying degrees, seek to reclaim or readopt their birth culture that was lost or sacrificed when they were placed internationally and across racial and ethnic lines. We call this process of reclaiming birth culture *reculturation*. The rationale for this new construct follows including brief analyses of existing constructs for cultural adaptation and cultural change. We define reculturation and present the model. Lastly, examples of reculturation are offered via excerpts from the personal stories of TRIAs that support and explicate this construct.

Culture and Adoption

The transracially adopted child is raised within the cultural experience of their adoptive parents. In the cultural milieu of American society as well as in the psychological literature, adoptees are forever tied to being associated with their birth culture. Expectations exist that adoptees' birth cultures are *their cultures* forever with little recognition that adoptees' *actual lived cultures* (post-adoption and through adolescence) are almost always the White American cultures of their adoptive parents (Baden, 2008). The distinction between their expected/stereotyped and lived/actual cultural experiences is one rarely found in either the professional or popular literature on adoption. TRIAs in late adolescence or early adulthood are often motivated to bridge the gap between the expected and the lived cultures; a process that can have complicated effects on adoptees. For example, acculturative stress disorder can occur when an individual attempts to negotiate two cultures and adapt to the cultural changes required of the individual to fit into the new environment (Cheung-Blunden & Juang, 2008).

Although many adoptive parents now seek out cultural experiences such as dance classes, language classes, and other activities from their adopted children's birth cultures (cultural socialization), with few exceptions we believe that TRIAs typically do not have ongoing, substantive, authentic, lived experience with their birth cultures. In recent years, attempts at cultural socialization of internationally adopted children have been made with the goal of preserving or rekindling birth cultural ties (Lee et al., 2006). Despite the effort exerted, we believe that IA children rarely, if ever, maintain these ties and the decision and process of rekindling those ties, as described in the literature (Johnston, Swim, Saltsman, Deater-Deckard, & Petrill, 2007; Lee et al., 2006), is not adequately depicted by extant constructs.

Rationale for a New Term: Reculturation

The cultural development and cultural change process of TRIAs is a qualitatively different process than found among non-adopted people due to the TRIAs' unique immigration processes, family compositions, and experiences with birth culture and adopted culture. Although there are various forms of cultural development and change, we assert that none of the previously developed terms or processes applies directly to the experience of TRIAs. We identified and defined several constructs like acculturation, reverse acculturation, enculturation, and remigration that have some utility for our goal of understanding the process of reclaiming adoptees' minority cultures. Each term, however, has limitations that prevent accurate applicability to the experiences of TRIAs. Acculturation refers to a process of change that occurs internally when an immigrant

comes into direct contact with members of a host culture (Padilla & Perez, 2003). Although acculturation is significantly more complex than the scope of this paper allows, Padilla and Perez (2003) provide a solid overview of acculturation and acculturative change. With respect to TR/IA's, the cultural change and adaptation process does not fit given that: 1) for TRIAs, the "host culture" is the same as their lived culture; 2) TRIAs seek "acculturation" to a minority culture when they seek to reclaim birth cultural heritage but the construct does not function in that direction; 3) TRIAs are often reared in environments with little if any exposure to their birth culture; 4) efforts to "acculturate" to their minority culture can include heritage trips or relocations to TRIAs' birth countries or birth cultures and are highly affected by early losses of birth culture after adoption placement outside of the culture/country; and 5) we believe that heritage trips and relocations do not lead to acculturation to the host culture of TRIAs' birth countries but instead are acts associated with reclaiming lost birth culture as will be further discussed below.

Other constructs are similarly ill suited to the experiences of TRIAs. Reverse acculturation, or the step that occurs after acculturation, involves the person who has been fully acculturated to the dominant culture introducing his or her birth culture to the dominant society (Y. Kim & Park, 2009). Clearly, this process does not fit for TRIAs because a large component of reverse acculturation involves the impact of the birth culture on the dominant culture of the adopted society and requires that TRIAs have the ability to convey birth cultural knowledge to the dominant culture. The process of enculturation is often described as the lifelong development of awareness and understanding of one's birth culture, including feelings of pride towards culture, participation in cultural activities and events, and one's identification with culture (Zimmerman, Ramirez-Valles, Washienko, Walter, & et al., 1996). For adoptees, this process of enculturation was abruptly stopped and altered upon their adoption and placement across racial and cultural lines. TRIAs rarely if ever have substantive opportunities to develop and maintain cultural ties or a cultural identity based on their birth culture. Recently, Samuels (2010) published a qualitative study exploring what she termed the enculturation process of multiracial transracial adoptees who had Black-White heritage and White adoptive parents. She reported that participants "described their African American enculturation as a delayed process of 'relearning' requiring their deliberate efforts" (p. 37) often involving the need to develop interpersonal relationships with other African Americans. Although Samuels refers to this process as enculturation, we argue that TRIAs do not retain their birth cultural practices but instead must often learn or reclaim their birth culture after their adoption into predominantly White families.

Lastly, the construct of remigration involves the process of cultural change that occurs upon a return to the heritage culture after living in another culture. Families generally enter the process of remigration together thereby providing a support system for members, yet each individual experiences remigration differently (Hertz, 1984). Hertz warns that remigration can be a very risky experience for single migrants or adolescents given the lack of support. For adoptees, remigration is especially challenging given the nature of TRIAs' original migration. Those adopted in infancy through early childhood rarely have memories of their birth country, and most TRIAs, regardless of age at adoption, were not raised with substantive exposure to or experiences with their original/birth culture to maintain or build connections to their heritage culture. However, remigration does have some utility for labeling the action taken by a small, undocumented subset of TRIAs who move back to their birth country in an effort to build birth cultural identification and as well as to authenticate themselves as belonging to that original birth country. Remigration is further complicated for many TRIAs by the lack of an accessible family to whom they could return and the lack of contact or relationship with birth families.

All of the above processes by which individuals seek to obtain or maintain culture do not adequately or accurately encapsulate the needs of TRIAs. The nature of international adoption involves infants and children being reared in a culture qualitatively different than their birth culture. We posit that TRIAs go through a process akin to the above process but different given that they must seek to acculturate to or reclaim a culture that is not the same as their adoptive parents nor is it dominant in their lived environment. We call this process *reculturation*.

The very nature of adoption across racial and cultural lines creates complexities in our use of predefined constructs. With respect to TRIAs, the processes of assimilating to the adopted culture and of returning to birth culture have not been fully articulated within the literature. The construct of reculturation takes an initial step toward addressing the cultural development and adaptation for TRIAs. When TRIAs reach later adolescence and early adulthood, they may experience dissonance between the way they feel and the expectations others

have for them (Baden, 2008). Given the honorary white status that they attain through their adoption by white parents (Baden, 2008; Shiao & Tuan, 2008), TRIAs may seek to be viewed as credible, authentic, REAL members of their ethnic community. On the other side of the transracial adoption paradox described by Lee (2003), in which TRIAs are treated as though they are white due to their adoption by white parents rather than as authentic members of their ethnic group, we posit that transracial adoptees are also often treated as “real” members of their ethnic group, but they often feel unable to respond as expected and find that their adoption status must be revealed (and thereby negate their identity as authentic members of their ethnic group). Therefore, adoptees are often in a double bind. In essence, adoptees are expected to fit into society’s definition of what or how a Chinese, Colombian, or Ethiopian person should be or behave; yet they are viewed as being inauthentic members of these ethnic groups. By defining reculturation, we hope to legitimize their place in the larger ethnic group while simultaneously acknowledging the subgroup status of adoptees. Although some TRIAs may, at different times in their lives, desire to distinguish themselves from their non-adopted ethnic peers and to be viewed and treated as honorary white people, many TRIAs from later adolescence and adulthood may recognize the value in being members of an ethnic community and having the opportunity for their visible appearance and their internal experience, knowledge, and ability to match. The ability to match their appearance and their behavior may enable adoptees to “pass” as non-adopted and provide a connection to heritage that is often missing for TRIAs (given the conspicuous nature of their adoption). This connection to heritage may also provide the identity experiences sought by adoptees.

Reculturation Defined

After a lifetime of being perceived as not truly representing their ethnic group and through growing awareness of their minority status, their experiences of racism, and their own identity issues around their adoption and heritage, many TRIAs go through a process in which they may actively or passively seek to more thoroughly identify with their birth culture (McGinnis et al., 2009). This process may take on many forms (e.g., education in ethnic studies, intensive language courses, heritage/homeland tours, study abroad experiences, etc.) during which adoptees may seek to immerse themselves to varying degrees in their birth culture.

Reculturation is a process of identity development and navigation through which adoptees develop their relationship to their birth and adoptive cultures via reculturative activities and experiences leading to one of five possible reculturation outcomes. Reculturation can be an active or passive process and is initiated by adoptees themselves, not their adoptive parents. In essence, reculturation can be viewed as reclaiming birth culture. There are various triggers or life events that can initiate the process of reculturation (e.g., going to college and being unable to hold onto honorary white status, or a desire to learn about or reclaim birth culture). To reclaim may suggest that something was “lost” or “abandoned” at some point and that it must be rescued from a “wrong” state and restored to a “natural” state (Merriam Webster, 2010). Applying this definition to the case of TRIAs, to be adopted out of their birth culture and raised in a “foreign” culture is sometimes viewed as “unnatural” due to the mismatch between race and culture. For adoptees, the natural state that society believes they should have is derived from their birth and ethnic heritage rather than their lived and learned white American culture. For example, an individual born in Vietnam and then adopted by White American parents would, as we posit, have a lived culture of White American culture but their “natural” culture would be Vietnamese and reclamation of birth culture would result in a greater degree of matching among birth origins, cultural practices, and physical appearance/race.

The desire among adoptees to “match” their adoptive parents as well as the drive to resolve the mismatch they perceive or to reclaim other markers (i.e., cultural activities that are tied to their racial/ethnic group) of that heritage might help authenticate them as legitimate members of their racial/ethnic group. McGinnis et al. (2009, p. 44) reported that the TRIAs in their study engaged in a variety of services and experiences to form their identity. Some of the activities clearly reflect attempts to gain comfort with their racial/ethnic identity including their physical appearance (e.g., attend racially diverse schools, live in racially diverse neighborhoods, contact with same race/ethnicity child care providers, teachers, adult role models), whereas other activities were clearly designed to increase comfort with their cultural identification or the activities, beliefs, attitudes, values, and competence (Baden & Steward, 2000) associated with their racial/ethnic identity (e.g., travel to birth country, attend events held by own racial/ethnic group, cook or eat food from birth culture, take classes on history/culture of birth country, attend/work at culture camps, take language classes).

Still other activities cited were aimed at identification with adoptees' adoptive identities (e.g., attend events held by adoptees/adoptee organizations, join support groups for adoptees, establish contact with birth relatives, attend conferences on adoption, read books on adoption).

As these examples reflect, to develop identity, most transracial adoptees must seek their birth cultures from sources that are outside of their adoptive families and often outside of the communities in which they were raised. Although the path and time frame varies among transracial adoptees, many transracial adoptees engage in activities or efforts, like those listed above, that we call *reculturative activities*. Reculturative activities refer to behaviors, traditions, attitudes, or beliefs that promote adoptees' attempts to regain cultural knowledge, awareness, skill, or experience and can include, education, language courses, heritage tours, study abroad experiences, and interactions with birth culture or hyphenated American ethnic communities. These efforts can either make TRIAs proficient and comfortable with their birth culture and people from their own ethnic and racial groups or help them come to terms with and accept their birth culture and ethnic group membership. The primary difference in these two options lies in the way that birth culture is approached. TRIAs may actively pursue mastery of birth culture or they may pursue comfort with either their actual birth culture or with the *idea* of their birth culture (Baden & Wiley, 2007).

Although TRIAs' birth cultures are essentially the cultures of the communities from which they were adopted, the parameters for birth cultures have not been clearly defined in the literature. The culture from which a child may be adopted can be based on the child's native country, city, village, or neighborhood. In most cases, birth culture is readily identifiable through labels like "Chinese culture," "Korean culture," or "Ethiopian culture," but an American ethnic group culture also has formed (e.g., Chinese American, Guatemalan American, Vietnamese American) in which cultural practices, values, norms, behaviors, and traditions may have been altered or changed by the interaction with dominant American culture and by the distance from the native country (Deaux, 2008). With respect to TRIAs, references to adoptees' birth cultures typically indicate the adoptees' native countries' cultures rather than the American ethnic group of which the adoptee becomes a member upon their adoption and via their socialization. Naturally, however, the American ethnic group is substantially more available and more closely mirrors the lived experiences of adoptees, but efforts made by adoptees to regain elements of their birth culture are often primarily focused on their native countries' cultures rather than the American ethnic group to which they belong. For example, adoptive parents may view cultural exposure as enrolling children in Chinese dance classes or Korean drumming training rather than socializing and living among Asian American people through which their children may gain exposure to Asian American culture like graphic novels and racial commentaries read by Asian American teens in the U.S. like Gene Luen Yang's (2006) *American Born Chinese*. However, because we see efforts to immerse in either the American ethnic group or birth ethnic group's culture as "culture seeking behavior," both fit the criteria for reculturative activity.

Reculturation Requirements

For those adopted shortly after birth (i.e., after a brief period of enculturation), reculturation requires TRIAs to develop a new relationship with their birth culture. For those adopted at older ages after extended enculturation, a renegotiated relationship with adoptees' birth cultures must be achieved. To gain either mastery or comfort with birth culture, transracial adoptees, many of whom are internationally adopted and therefore immigrants as well, must essentially "acculturate" to their birth cultures. Transracial adoptees must navigate between acculturation and enculturation. Within the literature, transracial adoptees are described as having been acculturated to the majority culture (White American culture), but no literature describes transracial adoptees' second acculturation process in which they seek to acculturate to their indigenous or birth culture. Adoptees must reculturate to learn (or in some cases, relearn) their birth cultural norms. In our model, we propose that TRIAs assimilate after their adoption placement rather than continue their enculturation to birth culture. Assimilation is defined as the full adoption of the host culture or the adoptive culture that occurs when adoptees fully embrace the adoptive culture or when "immigrants unequivocally accept the worldview, values, and beliefs of the dominant host culture" (Chung, Bemak, Ortiz, & Sandoval-Perez, 2008, p. 312).

We recognize that contact with birth culture often occurs in childhood through the cultural socialization efforts initiated by adoptive parents, but we believe that reculturation occurs when adoptees are in late adolescence or adulthood, when cultural contact occurs through their own initiative, when they seek to move

toward their birth culture, and when they may seek to move away from their lived adoptive culture. In many cases, adoptees can no longer pass as the “honorary White” children (Baden, 2008; Shiao & Tuan, 2008) of their adoptive parents and reculturation becomes an adaptive coping mechanism. However, because adoption can never be undone or forgotten, the adoption status of adoptees is interwoven throughout the adoptees’ negotiation of their loss and potential reclamation of birth culture due to adoption.

The Model of Reculturation

In describing the process of reculturation we begin at birth, following the cultural development of the adoptee through the early life transitions associated with adoption and immigration, ending with the process of reculturation (see Figure 1). In our view, several similarities exist between the processes through which adopted persons progress in international and domestic transracial adoption, but we chose to present the case of international adoption first due to some early differences in adoptees’ experiences.

In the case of international adoption, children (prior to their adoptive placement) are born into their native country and culture. They begin their lives in their native country and are biologically, socially, and environmentally connected to those within that country. Prenatally and beyond, children are exposed to sounds, smells, and tastes that reflect their native culture.

Phase 1: Enculturation Begins

From birth, children begin to enculturate to their birth culture. Enculturation, or the development of awareness and understanding of birth culture, is both active and passive in its transmission of cultural information (language, values, behaviors, and beliefs) and occurs via parents and/or caregivers (Chung et al., 2008). Even children, who are relinquished at or shortly after birth, continue to enculturate through their experiences in orphanages and foster care. For TRIAs, enculturation continues until they are adopted and placed internationally.

Phase 2: Relinquishment and Temporary Care

Depending on the country in which the relinquishment occurs and the age of the child, birth parents may have legal, formal means for relinquishment (e.g., South Korea), they may be forced or coerced to abandon their children (e.g., China), or they may have either voluntary or involuntary termination of parental rights (Wiley & Baden, 2005). Phase 2 occurs in every international adoption and is significant in the shift from enculturation to the later step of assimilation. After relinquishment, children may have several placements from orphanages to foster care within their native countries. The children are primarily cared for by caregivers of their same ethnic and cultural group so that enculturation continues throughout these placements.

Phase 3: Adoption--Enculturation Stops, Assimilation Begins

Upon placement with international adoptive parents, the vast majority of whom are White and from western European ethnic groups, the enculturation of the newly adopted child ends and assimilation to the adoptive parents’ cultures begins. The caregivers who provided enculturation experiences for the children are replaced with adoptive parents, thereby shifting the content and nature of enculturation provided from birth cultural content to adoptive parents’ cultural content.

One of the primary ways enculturation takes place is through native language acquisition (Park, 2007). At adoption, some adoptees have already developed language skills in their native language whereas others who are still in infancy at adoption placement may have developed the structures for their native language but do not yet speak. Regardless of the developmental stage of language development, when enculturation to birth language and culture ends, TRIAs’ language use and structures typically quickly shift to the language, dialect, and style of their adoptive parents. We believe that children adopted internationally, regardless of their age at placement do not acculturate or go through the typical process of acculturation experienced by immigrants (Chung et al., 2008). Instead, newly adopted children that are adopted across national and cultural lines must *assimilate* to their adoptive parents’ culture due to (1) their need for survival via communication, (2) the lack of exposure to birth culture, (3) lack of enculturation transmission from birth culture, and (4) need for attachment and bonding to new parents. Upon adoption, children’s enculturation to their birth culture is replaced by an altered post-adoption process in which they essentially assimilate to the new cultures held by their adoptive parents. In the case of the vast majority of TRIAs to the U.S., the culture held by their adoptive parents is White culture, yet that culture is often invisible to many who hold it (Katz, 1985).

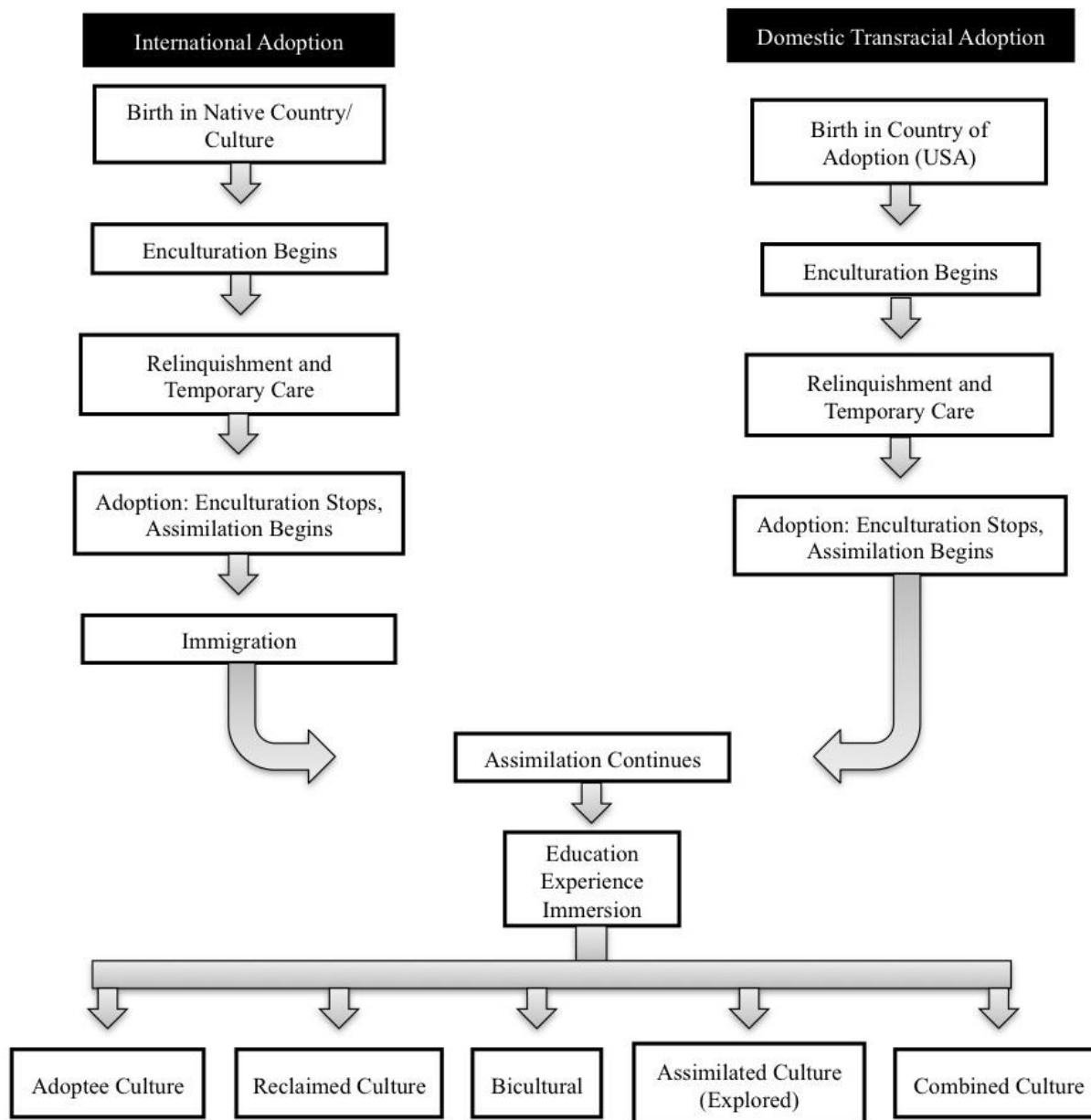


Figure 1. The model of reculturation for international and transracial adoptees. Two potential starting points exist for adoptees depending on whether individuals were adopted domestically or internationally.

Phase 4: Immigration

Although adopted children are, in fact immigrants, most are adopted in infancy and early childhood. When children are adopted, their process of immigration and acculturation differs from that of non-adopted immigrants in significant ways. International adoptees' immigration to the U.S. is qualitatively different due to the streamlined documentation and legal transitions that are far simpler and much faster due to the ease afforded by their newly adoptive parents whose citizenship grants them privileges that just recently included automatic citizenship upon adoption via the Child Citizenship Act of 2000 (Bureau of Consular Affairs U.S. Department of State, 2011). For many years, internationally-adopted children were simply put on an airplane with a "courier" (as occurred in adoptions from Korea), placed in the care of a flight attendant (in cases of adoption from Hong Kong), or even "babylifted" (as occurred for children from Vietnam in 1975) (Zigler, 1976). Upon their arrival, they were greeted by their newly adoptive parents and taken to their new homes by their adoptive families. The adoptive families who greet them are usually White, non-adopted, and non-immigrants themselves and thus do not have shared heritage, culture, language, or ties with the adopted child's birth country nor must

they seek citizenship or enter green card lotteries. More recently, international adoption has required adoptive parents to travel to the sending country to meet the child, visit the country, and await the paperwork that will confer the finalized adoption documentation and the proper visas to return to the U.S. with their newly adopted children. Clearly this process constitutes one that is quite different than that of non-adopted immigrants.

Upon immigration, TRIAs may encounter additional layers of complexity in their experiences in the U.S. depending on their birth country (and their race/ethnicity). Stereotypes of adoptees' racial ethnic group, the socio-political climate between the U.S. and birth countries, and the legacy of racism for different racial ethnic groups may create additional challenges for TRIAs upon their immigration. For example, racism, the legacy of slavery for adoptees of African descent, or anti-Asian sentiment toward adoptees from Vietnam in the post-war era likely impacted these adoptees' experiences as they entered their new adoptive families and their new country.

Phase 5: Assimilation

Given this immigration experience, most adopted children enter families and communities with few if any representatives (people) or markers (things) of their birth culture. As a result, adopted children rapidly assimilate, or fully accept and absorb the culture and cultural practices of their adoptive parents and relinquish their birth culture, so that they can communicate with, attach to (Lancaster & Nelson, 2009), and survive within their new adoptive families. In the U.S., adoptive parents are typically White, middle-class Americans. Thus, the lived culture of adoptees becomes the shared White, middle-class American culture with all of its attendant values, beliefs, assumptions, practices, and traditions. We also believe that, in most cases, rapid assimilation occurs when immersion in the country of adoption takes place. Numerous examples of rapid assimilation for international adoptees abound (Jacobson, 2008; Shiao & Tuan, 2008) in the professional and anecdotal literature. In order for rapid assimilation to occur, a disconnection from birth country and culture must occur. The nature of rapid assimilation also includes an element of forced or involuntary assimilation given the lack of choices that children have for survival without some degree of assimilation.

In phase 5, adoptees seek to fit within the dominant culture of their adoptive families. Their environment, their adoptive parents, and the messages they receive shape their lived experiences. As in the racial identity models that apply to non-adopted individuals experiences, this phase is akin to the pre-encounter stage (Helms, 1990) in which adoptees use the dominant White race and culture as its reference group and evaluate and compare themselves and others to the values and standards of the dominant white racial group.

Phase 6: Reculturation Process and Three Approaches to Reculturation

We believe that TRIAs continue to assimilate to their adoptive parents' culture but also may begin to gain interest in and exposure to their birth cultures due to changes that occur when TRIAs become adults and are no longer under the protection of their honorary white status. We propose that reculturation occurs primarily through three main approaches that are reflected within a literature base made up of personal narratives, anecdotal accounts, and qualitative research interviews (Cox, 1999; Shiao & Tuan, 2008; Trenka, Oparah, & Shin, 2006) but never before organized or depicted as comprising a recognized, predictable, and measurable theory of cultural development. The approaches are described below and examples of each approach from the literature are presented in Table 1.

Education. The education that adoptees may obtain about their birth cultures takes the form of knowledge-based information. For example, they may learn the history of their birth country, take language lessons, and read literature written by and about members of their birth culture. Through knowledge-based exercises, adoptees *learn* the traditions, values, practices, language, music, and relationships, which comprise the foundations of their birth culture.

Experience. After obtaining knowledge of their birth culture in the Education stage, adoptees may seek opportunities to put their knowledge into action by interacting with representatives of their birth culture and ethnic group. Through their interactions with members of their birth culture, adoptees gain experiences beyond the cultural appropriation of their heritage. Adoptees may interact through time-limited, isolated instances of experiences with birth cultures. For example, heritage tours to birth countries (also referred to as Motherland tours) where adoptees use tour guides, speak only English, and visit for a brief period of time can provide experiences and interaction with birth cultures. Examples include the attendance at churches, social events, or

groups where representatives of the adoptees' birth cultures are present and can lead to interactions that deepen adoptees' reculturation.

Table 1

The Reculturation Process: Three Approaches to Reculturation

Phases	Examples in the Literature
Education:	"As I searched for my own identity, I discovered that in order to find my true self, I had to seek out my heritage. Through studying the language, history and culture of Korea, I was able to understand my unique background and relate that to my present situation. In doing so, I was able to reconcile with myself and understand my role in this hybrid society that was the United States." (Shin, 2002, p. 126)
Experience:	"Children need to have a sense of pride in their own heritage. They should be allowed to celebrate as many cultural activities as they so choose- and only if and when they freely choose. I have every right to embrace my Irish-American heritage today and my Korean heritage tomorrow, without question or ridicule. This is the right of every multicultural person." (Regan, 2002, p. 55)
Immersion:	"One day, I decided that I was not going anywhere here in America. I was missing something...I intended to search for my biological family, find a piece of myself, and belong in a society without the kind of racial discrimination I had experienced in the United States...I thought, <i>Hurry, hurry, speak Korean, and you will be a real Korean!</i> " (Nafzger, 2006, pp. 237-238)

Immersion. When the encounters found during the Experience stage are insufficient for reculturation, immersion into birth cultures may provide the lived experiences that can lead to various reculturation outcomes. Adoptees who enter the immersion stage may choose lived experiences such as moving to their birth countries to work and live, moving into neighborhoods or choosing schools dominated by their racial ethnic group, changing or reclaiming birth names (sometimes in favor of adoptive names), and affiliating primarily with their racial ethnic group. Through this immersion, adoptees may achieve bilingualism, deeper connections to members of their racial ethnic group, and lived experiences that affirm their group membership. Adoptees' reference groups in this status are their birth cultures and racial ethnic groups. Relationships that adoptees have with other ethnic groups may be limited, and some degree of distance from their adoptive culture and adoptive family may also occur for some adoptees in this phase.

Outcomes of Reculturation

When adoptees move through the stages of reculturation, several outcomes may occur. Although adoptees *may* go through all of the above phases, they need not go through all of them nor must they be linear in progression. Given the dynamics in each outcome, some outcomes may be more affiliated with certain phases. The outcomes are listed below, and Table 2 contains examples of each stage found in the literature.

Table 2

The Outcomes of Reculturation

Outcomes	Examples in the Literature
Adoptee Culture: Adoptees may feel that neither their birth nor adoptive culture fits them and instead identify primarily as an adoptee and associates primarily with adoptees.	"At times, I began to feel alone and impatient because I always had to explain myself. After some time, I met several OAKS (overseas adopted Koreans) who could relate to me and understand me for myself. I have found OAKS are different in our own ways because our upbringings and individual experiences are influenced through our respective adoptive countries." (Nafzger, 2006, p. 240)
Reclaimed Culture: Adoptees may fully immerse themselves within their birth culture. They have the ability to "pass" and	"In speaking with other Korean adoptees, I have noticed that many have changed their names back to those given them at birth or have returned to Korea to live. There they learn to speak, eat, and breathe Korean culture. They search for their birth families or reach out for Korean lovers; some

authentically, competently, and proficiently perform within their birth culture.

reach for anything and everything—literature, movies, music, cookbooks—that has the word Korean in it.” (Lo, 2006, p. 174)

Bicultural:

These individuals identify with their adoptive White culture to which they assimilated and to their hyphenated-American ethnic group.

“My ethnicity is Korean. The culture I was raised in was Anglo-Saxon. I claim rightful heritage to both. I have learned the prides and pitfalls of two worlds that are both ugly and beautiful. I was rejected and embraced by both and I embrace and reject them in kind. In doing so, I found that, though they are each an essential part of me, they do not define who I am.” (Cromey, 2002, p. 154)

Assimilated Culture (Explored):

Adoptees may continue to assimilate to their lived, adoptive (i.e., White American) culture and may attempt to hold onto their honorary White status.

“I can’t count the number of days/times that I would wish and pray and beg to wake up with blonde hair and blue eyes, stand 5’8”, and be sleek and slender. ... I was the diversity in my high school. I denied my ethnicity and did everything in my power to assimilate, to emulate how White and non-Asian I was.” (McGinnis et al., 2009, p. 41)

“I felt like a banana most of my life. In other words, racially [Asian] due to my skin. But in terms of my inner values and cultural identity, I felt very much Caucasian due to my upbringing within my adoptive family. I still feel this way.” (McGinnis et al., 2009, p. 42)

Combined Culture:

Adoptees may have some combination of the previous outcomes.

“Throughout my struggles, I have become a very strong person. I know that if I had never gone to Korea, I would not feel this way. My journey there has helped my longing—to actually be proud. When I look at myself, I see a Korean American adoptee. I do not see that I am only a Korean American. Korean Americans are very different, by upbringing and by belief. Nor am I just a Korean. I tried that one on—it didn’t fit. I am a Korean American adoptee; that’s how I define myself. I’m not ashamed of it. I’m proud. I can teach many people so many things.” (Nafzger, 2006, p. 247)

Adoptee Culture

Adoptees may feel that neither their birth nor adoptive culture truly reflects their cultural practices or experiences. Instead they may identify primarily as an adoptee and associate with other adoptees. Prior to reculturation, adoptees in this outcome may feel dissatisfied with their adoptive parents’ culture and may have made efforts to reclaim/reculturate to their birth culture such as heritage tours or birth country residency for periods of time. However, the adoptees in this outcome may not feel belonging in either their birth culture or their adoptive parents’ culture and instead consider their culture that of being adopted. This outcome represents adoptees who immerse themselves in adult adoptee organizations and activities.

Reclaimed Culture

When adoptees reclaim their birth culture, they fully immerse themselves within their birth or native culture and fully reclaim the culture. Adoptees who have reculturated to this outcome have the ability to “pass” and they can authentically, competently, and proficiently perform within their birth culture. Externally and behaviorally they may appear indistinguishable from non-adoptees. When fully reculturated, adoptees no longer seek the protection and honorary white status they received via their adoptive parents. Reclaiming birth culture may also result in the rejection of their lived adoptive culture (i.e., White American culture) but reclaiming birth culture cannot erase or replace the *impact* of the adoptive culture throughout the lifespan. Adoptees who fully reclaim their birth culture *may* also become distanced from their adoptive families and express anti-adoption feelings, but this is not necessary for this outcome to occur. Adoptees in this outcome may also reject their adoptee status, but again this outcome is not defined by rejection of culture or status; it is defined by the full reclamation of birth culture.

Bicultural

Adoptees that identify as bicultural are likely to have little if any direct contact or socialization/enculturation from their birth country but seek affiliation, belonging, and cultural knowledge from their hyphenated-American ethnic group. That is, rather than seek reculturation in their birth countries, adoptees in this group reculturate to their ethnic group in U.S. These individuals identify with their adoptive White

culture to which they assimilated and to their hyphenated-American ethnic group. For example, adoptees may choose to reculturate to Chinese American culture as opposed to Chinese culture because it is more accessible in the U.S. and it enables them to maintain relationships with their adoptive families. Adoptees may exert effort to become aware of their birth culture and to seek affiliation and competence with both the birth culture and members of the birth culture within the United States. Adoptees who have reculturated with this outcome can “pass” within communities of their racial and ethnic group and members of their hyphenated-American ethnic community perceive them as authentic. They can authentically relate to both communities, move between and among their communities, and have not severed ties to either their ethnic group communities or their adoptive White culture.

Assimilated Culture (Explored)

Adoptees can take steps to achieve some degree of immersion in their birth culture, but they may progress no further than this initial step in reculturation and/or they may not expend effort to explore the meaning of their birth culture in their lives. Instead, adoptees may continue to assimilate to their lived, adoptive (i.e., White American) culture and may attempt to hold onto their honorary White status. Adoptees having this outcome may have little if any interest in affiliation or belonging to their hyphenated-American ethnic group or their birth ethnic group and may downplay or de-emphasize their adoption. Although this outcome may be lifelong for some adoptees, this status and all the outcomes may shift and change throughout the lifespan.

Combined Culture

Adoptees may have some combination of the previous outcomes. For example, they may have fully reculturated but also identify strongly with their adoptee culture. Another example may be when adoptees combine being bicultural (affiliated to their birth-American culture [e.g., Indian American, Colombian American]) with assimilation to White culture and adoptee culture. This combination leads to truly multicultural adoptees given their lived experience with both birth and adoptive cultures and their efforts to maintain and function within the adoptee culture.

Application to Domestic Transracial Adoption

The reculturation model also has application to the experience of domestic transracial adoptees. In addition to some differences in the phases leading to reculturation as addressed below, differences exist between TRAs and TRIAs with respect to their access to birth culture (e.g., often greater and easier access to birth culture for domestic TRAs), pre-adoptive histories (e.g., ages at relinquishment, foster care experiences, substance abuse histories, orphanage histories), and racial experiences upon adoption (e.g., adoptees of African descent facing different stereotypes than adoptees of Asian descent). For example, domestic TRAs of African descent may have more access to Black American culture given its relative proximity and shared language, but they may also encounter more overt racial aggression. Reculturation might also occur earlier or with different types of pressures for TRAs than TRIAs. We believe the process is very similar for both domestic and international transracial adoptees; however, given some functional differences in the process of relinquishment and adoption, differences exist in the stages before reculturation begins. Differences include: (1) potential multiple racial heritages of the adoptees, (2) legal relinquishment process, (3) lack of immigration experiences, (4) potential for adoption with few or no prior placements (e.g., foster-to-adopt programs), and (5) physical and educational accessibility of adoptees’ culture of origin. Once the process of reculturation begins for domestic TRAs it mirrors the process for international TRAs with the one exception being that domestic TRAs have a greater ease of access to the three approaches to reculturation (education, immersion, and experience).

Reculturation and Parenting

Throughout this paper, limited attention has been given to the role of adoptive parents in reculturation. We recognize that adoptive parents are pivotal in adoptees’ lives yet the construct of reculturation applies to adoptees (TRAs and TRIAs) alone and does not necessarily involve adoptive parents beyond the phases during which adoptees assimilated to adoptive parents’ culture. The point at which TRIAs begin to reclaim their birth culture is one at which they have achieved some degree of independence and self-determination. Essentially, we believe that adoptive parents roles in reculturation shift from high degrees of prominence to lesser degrees of prominence as adoptees achieve more independence.

One important area in which adoptive parents exert influence on the lived cultural experiences of their adopted children is through the environment in which TRIAs are reared. TRIAs’ environment consists of

various circles of influence that they must navigate. Components of the circles of influence are: (1) their adoptive family members including both nuclear and extended family members; (2) their peers from schools, neighborhoods, and communities; (3) popular culture including the social climate and the media (e.g., books, music, television, news, movies, blogs, social media); and (4) their meaningful interpersonal relationships. Adoptive parents are rarely able to determine the components of these circles of influence *directly*, but we believe that many of the choices made by adoptive parents such as the neighborhood in which to reside, family friends, events, lifestyle, and even books in the home *indirectly* determine the composition and components of the circles of influence on TRIAs. For example, adoptive parents who live in predominantly White communities and have primarily White friends, associates, and activities create an environment in which TRIAs' circles of influence are based on their exposure to various individuals and groups. Furthermore, the very nature of transracial adoption in which adoptees and parents are racially different serves as one of the pre-conditions that triggers the reculturation process in TRIAs.

The role of parents in reculturation is also limited by the nature of the identity process for TRIAs. Although adoptive parents may provide opportunities to engage in reculturative activities and may foster an environment in which adoptees have authentic and meaningful interactions (perhaps even immersion) with people representative of adoptees' birth cultures, we believe that transracial adoptive parents alone cannot eliminate the trajectory that adoptees make toward reculturation. For example, even children who were adopted by expatriate families living within the adoptees' birth countries often shift their cultural affiliations and assimilate to their adoptive families' cultural perspective rather than maintain and continue their identifications with their birth culture (Paul, 2007). Although environmental factors such as the racial ethnic composition of one's community (e.g., rural versus urban area) may have some effect on TRIAs identification with birth culture, we believe that the vast majority of TRIAs, regardless of environment, experience the process of reculturation given their adoption by and subsequent assimilation to parents who are racially, ethnically, and culturally different than their birth community.

Despite having limited direct influence on TRIAs reculturation process and outcomes, adoptive parents may find that their relationship with their adopted child shifts and changes during adolescence and adulthood for many reasons, one of which may be attributed to the process of reculturation. Parental understanding, empathy, self-awareness, and racial consciousness (of both self and others) are just some of the factors likely to impact the ways in which the parent-child relationship is impacted before, during, and after reculturation. For example, those parents having a greater sense of themselves as racial beings and of their White privilege (Sue, 2006) and culture (as well as the racial and cultural experiences of their adopted children) may have a higher likelihood of maintaining strong close relationships during particular phases of reculturation than those who have or attribute little or no influence to race and culture in their own and their adopted children's lives. Although the parent-child relationship and parenting concerns throughout the reculturation process are beyond the scope of this paper, we view them both as topics worthy further exploration in future research,

Conclusion

Although adoptees have been the subjects of empirical study regarding the outcomes of their identification with their ethnic groups (Andujo, 1988; McGinnis et al., 2009), reculturation permits greater understanding of their identity processes. To greater facilitate our ability to describe the relationship that TRIAs have with their birth and adoptive cultures, the construct of reculturation depicts the process by which adult adoptees have cultural losses and gains. It also aids in understanding how individuals must assimilate when they are adopted and how they may make the choice, conscious or unconscious, to reclaim their birth culture at some point in their lives. The reculturation process also fits aspects of the Cultural-Racial Identity Model (Baden & Steward, 2000). In particular, reculturation reflects and explains the processes that occur for Cultural Identity Axis of the model. For more information, see Baden and Steward (2000).

Implications for Practice

Clinical practice implications must begin with counselors developing the adoption competence described by Wiley and Baden (2005) and Janus (1997). With this foundational knowledge in hand, we recognize that the construct of reculturation and the reculturation model provides a means for articulating a phenomenon within the international and transracial adoption community that has not previously been identified. Naming the process of reculturation provides a deeper understanding of the cultural identity journey

of adoptees and allows clinicians to differentiate between a client going through the reculturation process of education, experience, and immersion and someone who has reached a reculturation outcome. Adoptive parents, for example, may struggle with the choices of their adult children and may feel rejected or that White culture or White people are judged. Similarly, TRIAs may experience emotional distress when struggling with their identities, and their isolation from peer adoptees may exacerbate this experience. Educational testing and mental health assessments are two additional areas that might be highly affected by stress and the challenges of reculturation. The construct of reculturation can help to explain the feelings, thoughts, and actions of adoptees in ways that can normalize their reclamation of culture and help adoptive parents better understand the experiences of adoptees.

Few systems make such continual, ongoing contact with TRIAs like the school system. Although all practitioners within school systems, both K-12 and higher education, have likely worked with TRIAs, the level of training for working with adoption on the whole and transracial and international adoption in particular needs far more attention. Increasing foundational knowledge about adoption is an initial step, but recognition that TRIAs typically progress through phases toward reculturation that include the challenges of assimilation may be especially helpful for school-aged and college-aged TRIAs. For example, expectations among students that all Asians *should* speak the language associated with their ethnic group can be very distressing for TRIAs and also functions as a racial microaggression (Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009). Educators and practitioners can both avoid exacerbating this assumption and recognize the typical nature of assimilation as one step in their journey toward reculturation. Although we posit that reculturation does not begin until at least late adolescence, counselors and educators can help adoptees to be more aware of ways to gain education, experience and immersion with their birth culture and possibly ease the transition into reculturation. By having a stakeholder in the school with knowledge of the reculturation process, adoptees can begin to understand the process, gain the language to identify the process, and normalize their experiences. Counselors and educators may be faced with siblings, peers or teachers of adoptees who are interested in learning ways to appropriately discuss cultural differences with the adoptee. Counselors can be a resource for ways to address adoption, race, culture, and other multicultural issues within the school.

Counselors, regardless of setting, are likely to encounter clients representing any member of the adoption triad across the lifespan. Thus, an understanding of adoption across the lifespan, rather than any one segment of the process (i.e., pre-adoption, time of adoption, adult adoptees) would be most beneficial. Although there is no doubt that mental health counselors have worked with clients who have experienced what we have defined as the process of reculturation, awareness of the reculturation process gives the mental health counselor the language to name the process, means to normalize the experience, and a stronger frame of reference for working with the adoption triad. Since we believe that most adoptees enter the process of reculturation at ages at which the structured setting of school or college may no longer be available, the mental health setting would also be an ideal setting for further research on the process of reculturation. Additionally, mental health counselors have likely worked with clients experiencing reculturation and can provide insight into the client's experience with cultural identity development or change.

Implications for Future Research

Clearly, reculturation is also an area ripe for research both for validation of the model and a greater understanding of this aspect of identity development. As a newly offered construct and model, research studies to empirically validate the model as well as qualitative studies to add richer, nuanced data to the constructs are needed. Research should specifically develop the differences in motivation and expectations for reculturation between TRAs and TRIAs. For example, qualitative interviews with TRIAs addressing their process of reculturation, the benefits and challenges to reculturation in their lives, and recommendations for reculturative activity to support peer TRIAs will better inform practice and service to TRIAs and the triad. In particular, questions that need to be researched include, in what way does reculturation work similarly for TRIAs? What are the areas where this process might diverge? What factors shape the process of reculturation? These research questions would best be answered using qualitative research (e.g., case studies, phenomenology) thereby creating a foundation for future study. Other related topics of research include the need for greater detail on the role of adoptive parents as well as the effects of reculturation on the parent-child relationship, search and reunion efforts, and adoption outcomes will be valuable. We also recommend additional research focused on

clinical applications and counseling process to further explore treatment strategies and process related to reculturation and identity issues experienced by TRIAs.

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