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community + education + equity



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Where are you in your understanding, feelings and attitudes about your
_____ (insert your racial-ethnic identity) at this moment?

Use the opening prompts below to help start some statements.

I am . . .

I never/sometimes/often . . .

How do I . . .

I don't . . .

They need to . . .

I feel . . .

I would like . . .

I don't know . . .

We need . . .

Are there . . .

When I . . .

Using racial identity models, this section was modified by Mark Silberberg, Director of Innovation & Learning at LREI

Color Blind Racial Ideology – Color-evasion: the belief that race does not matter in one's personal life or have an impact on interpersonal relationships (Sullivan & Cross, 2016).

Racial Self-Schema – Distinct generalizations, thoughts, feelings, and emotions about one's racial-ethnic self (Oyserman et al., 2003).

Use the prompts below to reflect and write about your journey of **Transracial adoptee awareness**

1. Think of a moment about the types of messages you heard about yourself and your country of origin or your racial-ethnic group. (dancing with White cultural identity)
2. Can you recall a moment this past year when you experienced tension, stress, shame, embarrassment, or guilt about your racial group? How did negative messages about your group impact your ability to associate with members of your group? Is there a moment when you realized you were different than your adopted parents? (opening pandora’s box)
3. What is/has been your process for understanding yourself as an adoptee and a racial person with a unique ethnic heritage, culture, and history? (engaging and reflecting)
4. What are the tensions, conflicts, or challenges you have faced in your journey to understand yourself as an adoptee and a racial-ethnic being? Did/do these tensions impact your relationships with White people/loved ones? (questioning what I have done)
5. Do you feel racial pride? What are ways you reconnect with members of your racial group? What are ways you translate your understanding of yourself as a transracially adopted person? How do you deal with the clash of other people’s myths about you compared to the reality you now possess of your racial and adoptee identity (empowering identities and executing social change)

Framework	My Race Journey
1. Dancing with a White cultural identity	
2. Opening pandora’s box	
3. Engaging and reflecting	
4. Questioning what I have done	
5. Empowering identities	

Transracial Adoptee Identity Development (Palmer, 2011)

Dance of Identities, by John Palmer

The information below was originally compiled by [Rosetta Eun Ryong Lee](#) and modified by Chap

The “Dance of Identity Theory” implies that there is no one path to engaging in one’s cultural, racial, and transracial adoptee identities. The activities the adoptee chooses to engage in and the extent to which (s)he immerses in cultural, racial, and transracial adoptee identities are solely up to the individual; there are no rites of passages or developmental stages that each adoptee must transition through. This engagement and reflection allows for the transracial adoptee to gain ownership of all three identities.

Dancing with a White Cultural Identity

“You’re not like those others – you are like us.”

White cultural identity is developed once you are adopted into White homes. Adopted in infancy, you may know no other reality than the home culture, and you may believe that you are “as White as everybody else” and are surprised when you encounter people who do not see you that way. Adopted at an older age, you may quickly realize that ridding yourself of primary culture and learning to be like White allows you certain privileges and acceptance within your home and mostly White communities. Stereotypical portrayals of people of your race may lead you to believe that being White is superior to being of your race and fear of rejection by White peers leads you to reject your heritage/racial group. To gain acceptance or be granted honorary White status, you may reject your racial identity. You may change your physical appearance to look more White (contacts, perming, coloring, or straightening hair, plastic surgery). Immersed fully in White culture, you may even sometimes forget that you are not White, and you are reminded of this fact only when you look into the mirror or when someone outside your comfort zone asks you questions like “where are you from?” or “who are your parents?” You may believe in colorblind meritocracy, but your experiences may not always reinforce that belief.

Opening Pandora’s Box

“Oh, my God, I’m really Korean!” “Oh, my God, I’m not Korean!”

Racial identity is inherited at birth. In culturally White homes, racial identity may be silenced, especially as you yearn to be accepted by your family and community. You may see your race’s culture as abnormal and inferior to White culture, and your family may reinforce this notion by taking only a surface interest in your race’s culture. You may reject learning about your race’s culture. Early experiences of racism may be dismissed or de-racialized by people in your comfort zones as ordinary teasing – to be ignored and/or not taken seriously – leaving you no outlet for talking about these encounters. At some point, you may experience a racial incident or a series of racialized stressors that precipitates a spark, an identity awakening, a shattering of the belief that the world is colorblind. Since you will never be fully accepted as White, you may feel that you must reject everything associated with Whiteness and fully immerse

yourself in discovering your non-White racial identity. Even as you do so, you may experience rejection from people of your own race because they do not see you as an authentic member of the group due to your White upbringing. You may seek connection to your racial identity by traveling to ancestral homelands, and just being in a place where you are in the racial majority may help you feel connected to your racial identity. At the same time, you may feel culturally disconnected because you are reminded that, culturally, you are White.

Engaging and Reflecting

Similar to racial identity, transracial adoptee identity is given to you by others. The desire to fit in and be like everybody else can lead you to suppress your transracial adoptee identity. Curiosity about your biological parents and racial identity can bring up feelings of guilt and gratitude, as you may have been taught messages of having been “rescued” from awful circumstances by your White parents and that you have such a better life as a result of your adoption. You may or may not have access to information surrounding the circumstances of your adoption due to availability of information or due to divulging or withholding of information by parents, adoptive agencies, cultural practices, or government policies. Eventually, you may come to realize that by denying and disregarding your transracial adoptee identity, you feel incomplete. As a result, you may seek answers to your past life, which may include birth parent search and visits to home countries or orphanages. You may seek reunion with or reconnection to other transracial adoptees by joining adult adoptee groups, attending gatherings, and blogging online. In connecting with these other individuals who share your circumstances as People of Color who were adopted and raised by White parents, you may feel a full acceptance and understanding for the first time.

Questioning what I have done

Incorporating racial and adoptee identity into your understanding of self can be considered a dance with tensions, conflicts and contradictions with the people who love you best. While you continue to work towards connection to your racial-ethnic group, you also contend with White cultural ways that, at times, impede full acceptance. Confronting the feelings associated with this new awakening can lead some adoptees to lash out at White people, even parents and loved ones. This journey may also include tensions with the adoption agencies in regards to paperwork or even the agencies misinformation or discouragement to continue this exploration. Conflicts with, and alienation from, your own racial-ethnic group, and separation from White family members, may lead you to critically question if the identity journey is worth the pain.

Empowering Identities & Executing Social Change

This is the moment you take ownership of your own identity journey. You ultimately choose when and how to identify. You do not feel a need to justify or apologize your complex identities, nor do you feel embarrassed by not meeting external expectations of what it means to be a member of your racial group. You have critically engaged with your racial, transracial adoptee, and White cultural identities, and you have determined for yourself what your identities mean for you. You no longer seek approval from others. You recognize that your identity journey may not look like anyone else's, but it is yours to determine.

Palmer focuses on Korean people adopted by White parents. His work has been expanded here to include other transracial adoptees that they may have ways to examine their unique experience.

We refuse to assimilate into white culture or to submit to narrow ideas about cultural authenticity in communities of color, choosing instead to name our own experience. In doing so, we reject the labels “apple,” “banana,” “oreo,” and “coconut,” recognizing that our experiences as adoptees of color are as authentic as those of non-adopted people of color... We do not have to separate ourselves along heavily policed borders of authenticity nor do we need to adapt to theories of identity advanced by non-adoptees... Instead, we bring forth our unique creativity and spirituality as adoptees of color, to reinvent ourselves to the world.

Julia Chinyere, Sun Yung Shin, and Jane Jeong Trenka
Outsiders Within: Writing on Transracial Adoption

Identity development of transracial adoptees will inevitably experience shifts as adoption agencies, transracial adoption philosophies, cultural definitions and understandings, and parenting approaches around race shift. It is easy to infer the impact that many of these have on the experiences of transracial adoptees. Therefore, it is critical to engage and work with all these constituencies and circumstances to ensure a healthier identity development of transracially adopted children.

