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## Determining and addressing the needs of transracial Korean adoptees in higher education

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DETERMINING AND ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF TRANSRACIAL KOREAN  
ADOPTEES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A Thesis Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Designation  
University Honors with Distinction

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## Determining and Addressing the Needs of Transracial Korean Adoptees in Higher Education

One out of ten Korean Americans is estimated to be an adoptee (McGinnis, 2007). The majority of these adopted Korean Americans are transracial adoptees (TRAs), a group that has not received enough attention despite their unique experiences, perspectives, and needs. On top of the unique challenges TRAs face throughout life in general, most young adults go on to pursue a higher education which is a developmentally challenging time for anyone, pushing students to define their own values and personal identity (Long, 2012). According to the U.S. State Department Bureau of Consular Affairs (2018), there were 20,800 transracial Korean adoptees (TRKAs) adopted between 1999 and 2018. Hoffman and Peña's (2013) study about TRKAs for application in higher education suggested that, based upon the previous statistic, there are probably a significant number of TRKAs currently in higher education and will be for the next several years. The purpose of this study was to advocate for these students, and identify the unique supports they may require in order to develop successfully as well rounded individuals.

Over the years, the higher education community has come to realize the importance of acknowledging and supporting different identities of students. It is common to find campus resources for minority students such as multicultural centers, student organizations, and various events and programs to support student identities. However, transracial adoptees are a student population that is often overlooked in higher education. The purpose of this study was to identify the areas where transracial adoptees have the potential to struggle and provide an explanation of their unique needs. From this research, I have recommended future steps for higher education and student affairs professionals to acknowledge and support this population and their unique

position, as well as recommendations for transracial Korean adoptee students looking to fill the gaps in their adoptee identity.

## Literature Review

### Transracial and Transnational Adoption in the United States

There are several terms to describe the circumstances in which people are adopted; this study focuses on *transracial adoption* and *transnational adoption*. Kim Park Nelson (2016) defined *transracial adoption* as “the adoptions of children of one race by parents of another race” (p. xiii). She went on to define *transnational adoption* as “the adoptions of children with citizenship in one country by parents with citizenship in another” (p. xiii). It is important to note that these terms, transracial and transnational, are not interchangeable. A transracial adoption can take place domestically, and they often do. Transnational adoptions do not have to be transracial (e.g. an Asian American couple adopting a child from China). However, a significant number of transnational adoptions are transracial, and transracial adoption is on the rise (“Transracial Adoption,” n.d.; Zill, 2017).

Before 1948, transracial adoption was nearly unheard of and actively discouraged. The adoption industry of the time focused on “matching,” a technique used to place adoptable children with adoptive families of the same race, ethnicity, and even religion. Transracial adoption in the United States first began in 1948 with African American babies being adopted by White adoptive parents (Nelson, 2016). Later, transnational adoption was institutionalized in 1953 with the Refugee Relief Act which allowed more foreign orphans, especially those from the Korean War, to emigrate via adoption to the United States until 1956 (Bergquist, 2007). The end of the Korean War and the media’s intense coverage of the orphans left behind directly led the first boom in transnational adoptions to the United States (Nelson, 2016).

Inspired by the media coverage of war orphans, a couple from Oregon, Harry and Bertha Holt, travelled to Korea in hopes of assisting these children. They adopted eight “GI orphans” (Bergquist, 2007, p. 6) or children of American soldiers who had left them behind with their Korean mothers. The Holts then founded Holt International Children’s Services in 1956 and it is still the leader of transnational, Korean adoptions in the United States (Nelson, 2016). This single agency was the catalyst for the international adoption industry. According to Bergquist (2007), between 1955 and 1973, 21,890 children were adopted internationally from Korea. After the Korean War ended, the United States was only allowing 500 Korean orphans into the country each year. Because of the high number of Korean War orphans, the Refugee Relief Act of 1953 allowed 4,000 Korean orphans into the United States until 1956. These visas were sponsored by the Refugee Relief Act; in 1957, the cap on orphan visas was removed, allowing even more transnational adoptions to take place (Bergquist, 2007). By 1961, adoption immigration became normalized through enactment the Immigration and Nationality Act (Bergquist, 2007). This act removed the visa quota system and created the permanent institution for immigration of adoptees (Carlson, 1988). In the same year, Korea enacted the Extraordinary Law of Adoption for the Orphan Child; this legislation encouraged foreign couples and families to adopt Korean children (Bergquist, 2007).

However, around the same time, transracial adoption was seen as controversial in American culture. In 1958, the federal government created a new research initiative called the Indian Adoption Project. This project was to determine if Native American children would adjust well to “American” culture if adopted to White families. There were 395 Native American children on reservations adopted to White families, with permission from representatives of the tribe. According to Fanshel (1972), these children were chosen because they were identified as

“at great risk of growing up without any semblance of family life” (p. 17). In the following years, the assimilation of the children into modern, American society was analyzed and evaluated (Fanshel, 1972). Fanshel (1972) concluded, “Only [Native American] people have the right to decide whether their children can be placed in [W]hite homes” (p. 341). Overall, the study found that the children adjusted well, but it is important to note that the research completely focused on the answers and opinions of adoptive parents in the studies, not the adoptees themselves.

The practice of domestic, transracial adoption received significant criticisms in several communities due to concerns that adoptive parents were unable to provide cultural heritage. In 1971, Native American leaders released a statement denouncing transracial adoption of Native American children, calling it a form of cultural genocide (Nelson, 2016). In 1978, the Indian Child Welfare Act was enacted which protected Native American children from adoption outside of the tribe unless the tribe consented. The year after the first Native American statement was released, 1972, the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) released a statement calling for an end to transracial adoption of Black children altogether for the protection of the children and to prevent cultural genocide (Nelson, 2016; Lee, 2003).

Despite the controversy surrounding domestic, transracial adoption in the United States, transnational, transracial adoption continued to increase in popularity. There appeared to be a shift in the world of transnational, transracial adoption from adopting as a public service for orphans of war to adopting transnationally and transracially out of necessity (McGinnis, 2007). This shift was a result of several different reasons. In the 1960s and 1970s, there was increased access to birth control, decreased fertility rates, and baby boomers had reached parenting age (Fanshel, 1972; Nelson, 2016). All of these factors resulted in decreased availability of adoptable White children.

Due to the statements from Native American tribal leaders and the NABSW, domestic, transracial adoptions of minority children were seen as racist and so the occurrence of these adoptions declined. White families and couples turned to adopting Asian children from overseas, as this was seen as more socially acceptable. In part, this was due to the model minority myth surrounding Asian communities (Nelson, 2016). This myth is still an issue that Asian Americans face in modern society today.

The model minority myth is the widespread belief that Asians are the model minority because they typically are academically more successful, have higher median incomes, occupy higher-status professions, and have lower instances of mental health issues and crime rates (Jackson, 2006). However, Asian is a term used to refer to a massive population of people from approximately 29 varying ethnicities and so is not comparable to other ethnic groupings. Asian households also tend to have a higher number of adults contributing to the total household income creating another statistical misrepresentation. Additionally, the claim that Asians typically hold higher status professions is simply untrue; in fact, studies had shown that Asian-Americans typically face a glass ceiling regarding salary and position rank compared to White peers with similar qualifications (Nagasawa & Espinosa, 1992). However, the myth has created negative ramifications for the Asian-American community. Allegations against higher education institutions for lower Asian-American acceptance rates, higher instances of racial altercations against Asian-American students on campus, and a general reduction of academic and social resources for Asian-American students have all been reported in recent years (Jackson, 2006).

All of these factors led White, American adoptive parents to look elsewhere for adoptable babies. They turned to international adoption which led to the peak of Korean transnational adoptions in the mid-1980s (Nelson, 2016). As of 2000, there were approximately 258,000



transnationally adopted children in the U.S. (Kreider, 2003). Of these children, almost half (approximately 123,000) were adopted from Asia, and almost half of that population was specifically from Korea (approximately 57,000). Comparatively, the number of children adopted from the continent of Europe was only approximately 42,000 (Kreider, 2003). More children were adopted from Korea, a small country only decades removed from the devastation of war, than the entire continent from which the majority of all Western history is based.

Early research about transracial adoptees focused on domestic adoptions of African American and Native American children largely to contribute to the civil rights movements previously described. Initial transracial/transnational adoption researchers, typically social workers but also sometimes government agencies and nonprofit organizations, were slow to investigate the effects of transracial adoptions before the 1970s (Nelson, 2016). Eventually, around the 1980s and 1990s, studies began to shift toward transnational adoptees when they became more common. Nelson (2016) pointed out some common themes that she noticed in this early transnational adoptee research: a) adoptive parents are the focus of each study and even speak to the experience of their adopted child, b) studies concentrated on “adjustment” really meant concentrating on the adopted child’s assimilation into the adoptive parents’, usually White, culture, and c) any issues faced by the adoptee are better than the alternative of being a lonely orphan. This complete dismissal of TRA experiences led to false confidence in the success of transracial adoption that can still be seen today. Just recently (i.e. since the 2000s), has transnational, transracial adoption been seriously questioned and analyzed in an adoptee-first approach (Nelson, 2016).

Due to past research not having focused on firsthand adoptee experiences and perspectives, there continues to be a grey area regarding transracial adoptee development and

psychological issues. According to the Child Welfare Information Gateway, formerly National Adoption Information Clearinghouse (CWIG), there is a common occurrence of psychological concerns among adoptees, transracial or not; these can include “a sense of loss, grief, shame, rejection, intimacy, control, identity formation, and depression” (as cited in Pearson, Curtis, & Chapman, 2007, p. 165). Adoptees, regardless of transracial or transnational classification, make up approximately 2.4% of all children in American society as of 2000, yet there is a severe lack of understanding or knowledge of adoption-related developmental deficiencies or emotional trauma in the general public as well as in mental health fields (Kreider, 2003; Sass & Henderson, 2007). According to a survey by Sass and Henderson (2007), 90% of psychologists in the study felt they had not received enough education in adoption issues. They reported that of the 210 psychologists in the sample, 51% responded that they were “somewhat prepared” to work with adoption issues compared to almost another 25% responding “not very prepared” or “no knowledge of adoption issues” (Sass & Henderson, 2007, p. 318). Despite these shocking statistics, it is also reported that adoptees are overrepresented in the use of mental health services (Sass & Henderson, 2007). If professionals feel unable or ill prepared, who is helping adoptees?

### **American Higher Education and Student Development**

The United States of America has had a long journey, shaped by several diverse influences, to the higher education system in place today. In its earliest stages of existence, its political leaders saw the potential in creating a system for advanced education. In 1636, Harvard University opened its doors with only nine students and a focus on a classical, Christian education. While it was not the first institution of higher education in the colonies, it became the first to actually succeed. Because early colonists developed the first colleges from what they knew, Harvard was based upon English models of higher education, specifically drawing from

the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge. Harvard was followed by institutions that continue to be well known today such as Yale and Princeton, founded in 1701 and 1746 respectively (Cole, 2009, p. 14).

One of our most well-known founding fathers, Benjamin Franklin, had a profound influence on what would later become one of the biggest factors in American higher education - vocational applications. The earliest institutions such as Harvard and Yale were primarily used for the education of ministers, but Franklin believed that education should be focused on subjects like public service and business. With Franklin's support, the University of Pennsylvania became one of the first institutions to offer science-based education and practical knowledge in 1751 (Cole, 2009).

Thomas Jefferson was another founding father that influenced an aspect of higher education that we can still see in effect today. Cole (2009) discussed Jefferson's support for the idea of an "educational village" at the University of Virginia (p. 14). This residential idea was not new; it is based on Oxford, a prominent English university most colonists knew (Fink & Inkelas, 2015). The Oxbridge model was implemented in several American universities such as Harvard, Princeton, and Yale (Fink & Inkelas, 2015). In this model, small groups of students studying the same subject would be housed in close proximity to each other and one professor (Cole, 2009). This model encouraged the development of the students as a whole person rather than simply as academic pupils (Fink & Inkelas, 2015). The idea was not always popular but eventually caught on and developed its own American style.

However, these institutions proved to be rather limited. Geographically speaking, it was rare for students to ever travel outside one's hometown for education. For this reason, many small, local universities and colleges sprung up and, inevitably, many of them failed. The

students were usually only aged 13 or 14 maybe 15 when entering college (Cole, 2009; Cohen & Kisker, 2010). The admissions process was typically an oral exam or short interview to prove a knowledge of Greek, Latin, or both (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). In 1745, Yale introduced a standard for arithmetic which later caught on at Princeton and King's College (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). These factors and other limitations of the political climate of the day also kept most people from higher education at all, typically only admitting young, White, elite boys (Cole, 2009).

Over time, other influences began to make their way to the colonies. The higher education model from Germany proved to be highly effective; it produced some of the most groundbreaking research, innovations, and discoveries of its day. Various American political leaders and others of influence took time to study abroad, bringing back new elements of this model and applying it to the American system already in place. German institutions had a strong emphasis on advanced, pure research meaning that the knowledge did not necessarily provide immediate, practical applications. The key characteristic of this model was the blending of teaching *and* research. The German model included lectures, seminar, labs, and the “master and apprentices” configuration in which the professors taught students methods and techniques for research purposes (Cole, 2009, p. 27).

Eventually, American higher education transformed into a truly unique institution. American colleges and universities expanded to include students beyond the elite social class, applied sciences, and vocational programs. There were several driving factors to influence these drastic changes such as military conflicts and their after-effects including the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944, otherwise known as the GI Bill. This act allowed veterans to obtain a college education funded by the federal government. Following World War II, approximately 2,232,000 veterans attended college and were celebrated as highly successful scholars compared

to their non-veteran peers (Olson, 1973). The significant increase in student population caused issues at colleges such as overcrowding in living arrangements and classes and overworked professors (Olson, 1973). Other factors included a booming population, an ever-growing need for scientific advancement, and eventually a need for vocational and technical education (Cole, 2009). As the idea of the university and the diversity of enrolled students evolved so did the role of higher education professionals.

As institutions of higher education became larger and more diverse, in both academia and student population, the need for administrators grew as well. According to Hevel (2016), most of the earliest non-academic professionals primarily dealt with “welfare and behavior of students” (p. 847). In the 1920s, there was finally a movement to create new positions for student affairs administrators. This was also when the responsibilities of the positions expanded beyond housing and discipline into other areas such as student life, orientation programming, and financial aid (Hevel, 2016).

In the 1960s, American higher education underwent another major change in the purpose of student affairs work. Rather than focusing on providing basic, purely practical assistance, student affairs professionals turned to focus on intentional student development (Creamer, 1990). The 1960s were also a time of political unrest. The Vietnam War, civil rights, and women’s movements caused a big change in the demographics of the student population in higher education. Students on campus were not just mid to upper class, white men; now women, veterans, and students of color and various social classes began to emerge more and more on college campuses (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quayle, 2016). Organizations and researchers began to study the concept and later the effects of promoting development in students (Creamer, 1990).

With the shift in focus and student population came a flood of new material to research, assess, and employ in the field of student affairs. Student development became the focus of new research; institutions eventually turned to psychologists and later sociologists to better understand these new issues and diverse students. New theories based on student experiences were developed from this research (Patton et al., 2016) and addressed cognitive, psychosocial, moral, and identity aspects of student learning and growth. Some of them are continuing to be expanded upon, adjusted, and tested to this day.

In 1959, Erik Erikson published his first research on the development of identity in adolescents. This work became essential to the student affairs profession and served as the basis for many later student development theories because the findings translated to college students as most of them were in late adolescence (Patton et al., 2016). This work divided identity development into eight stages following the chronological order of child development; it started with *Basic Trust versus Mistrust* in early childhood through *Integrity versus Despair* occurring in late adulthood (Erikson, 1959). Erikson continued to research and develop this theory, publishing revised editions in 1963, 1968, and 1980 (Patton et al., 2016). This theory serves students in higher education because it identifies several points of development throughout one's life. Stage five, *Identity versus Identity Diffusion*, focused on development of individual identity, signifying the transition from adolescence to adulthood and typically occurring in traditional college age years.

Nevitt Sanford produced the Theory of Challenge and Support identifying that students require a certain amount of challenge balanced with a certain amount of support to achieve success in higher education (Sanford, 1966). While Erikson focused his work on a similar age group, Sanford's work was the first theory to specifically address how students develop. This

forged a new path for higher education to study how institutions can analyze and promote student development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Student development theories are typically categorized into four different types. Psychosocial theories, such as those published by Erikson (1959), Chickering (1969), and Marcia (1966), typically describe development as a series of stages. Cognitive theory describes changes in instinct and acknowledges the way their frames of reference develop that influences their personal values, beliefs, and assumptions. Early and influential cognitive theorists include Perry (1968) and Kohlberg (1976). Though technically not development theory, typology theory identifies clear differences based on various characteristics such as personality type, learning style, or temperament; Myers-Briggs is an example of this type of theory (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Finally, person-environment interaction theory examines the ways in which the same environment can have a different effect on people in various stages of development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

In 1966, James Marcia elaborated upon Erikson's work, focusing more specifically on the fifth stage of development when adolescents develop an individual sense of identity (Patton et al., 2016). Marcia articulated four main ways in which people in late adolescence react to identity crises such as identity diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement. Each of these reactions requires the individual to make choices and ultimately commit to different aspects of their personality (Marcia, 1966). This stage occurs in college age years for traditional students in higher education and explains the ways in which students may handle life crises allowing student affairs professionals to prepare and develop methods to help students through such crises.

In 1969, Arthur Chickering developed a theory that aimed to serve as a model to illustrate “what student development looks like and how to foster it” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 44). The theory summed up student psychosocial development into seven vectors that describe distinct ways in which students exhibit growth. The first three vectors were suggested to typically occur first and concurrently with one another. The fourth vector, establishing identity, was to come next, followed by the last three vectors. The original theory was later revised in 1991 with the assistance of Linda Reisser who, at the time, was the dean of student services at Rockland Community College and will be discussed at length later (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The application of this theory in various student populations has been studied and found to be effective with community college students, students with learning disabilities, and first-generation students (Patton et al., 2016). This theory is highly regarded and widely known by student affairs professionals and has been applied within student affairs in many capacities.

In 1968, William Perry published work that focused on the development of intellect and ethics in college students (Perry, 1968). Perry’s work has gone on to become a major influence on the student affairs profession (Patton et al., 2016). In a similar vein, Kohlberg (1976) analyzed the moral development of students, and classified six different stages of moral development. Each stage represents a refined perspective and more inclusive thought process (Kohlberg, 1976). Both of these theories support the idea that increasing cognitive complexity supports moral development in college students.

The concept of seeking one’s true identity became a very popular concept among social science researchers even outside of the realm of academia. There are several identity development models for different populations. Some of these models specifically focus on the development of racial, cultural, and ethnic identities. Levey, Blanco, and Jones (1998) defined an



identity development model for people of color (POC) dealing with experiences of racism. It presented multiple stages that individuals progress through in order to develop their own identity as a person of color. These stages ranged from lack of awareness about racism through the development of social responsibility to positively contribute to society as well as establishing a balance between their place in their own culture and the cultures of others (Levey, Blanco, & Jones, 1998).

As a doctoral candidate, Jean Kim (1981) developed the Asian American racial identity development model. This model also has stages that the individual advances through in their own time. Kim (1981) identified five stages: *ethnic awareness*, *White identification*, *awakening to social political consciousness*, *redirection to Asian American consciousness*, and *incorporation*. In the *ethnic awareness* stage, the individual simply becomes aware of their Asian American ethnicity; this is usually modeled by the individual's immediate family. The individual typically moves into the *White identification* stage around the time they become school age. They begin to be influenced by their peers and may begin to experience racial prejudice and a sense of otherness from a White majority. When the individual eventually learns to attribute negative experiences to societal perceptions of race rather than themselves, they have moved into the *awakening to social political consciousness* stage. In this stage, the individual learns to identify as a member of an oppressed population. The individual then learns to identify specifically as an Asian American and begins a journey of reconnection to their Asian heritage in the *redirection to Asian American consciousness* stage. Finally, *incorporation* is the stage in which the individual proudly identifies as an Asian American while maintaining a strong respect for other cultures (Kim 1981). Kodama, McEwen, Liang, and Lee (2002) also developed an identity model for Asian American college students based upon Chickering and Reisser's (1993) work. Within this

work, they incorporated their own proposed changes to be more inclusive of Asian American populations into an inclusive, comprehensive model. There are also other models to describe White identity development (Levey et al., 1998; Helms, 1995).

Development models for people who have been adopted are lesser known but still available. The first theory to become widely recognized was Kirk's (1964) social role theory of adoption adjustment. This theory laid out issues and struggles that adoptive families face that non adoptive families do not. There are two options when it comes to handling these situations: ignoring the differences or acknowledging them. According to this theory, ignoring the differences led to maladjustment and negative self-esteem and acknowledging differences proved to be constructive, producing higher self-esteem in adoptees (Kirk, 1964).

Adoptee identity development theory has continued to evolve and change with new perspectives from other theorists. Brodzinsky, Schechter, and Henig (1993) suggested a different adoptee identity development model based upon Erik Erikson's stage theory of psychosocial development. In their model, they assign "adoption-related tasks" to each of Erikson's psychosocial tasks (Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Henig, 1993, p. 15). For example, in infancy the adopted child faces *Trust vs. Mistrust* as they develop attachments to the new family and new home (Brodzinsky et al., 1993).

After Brodzinsky et al. (1993), adoptee identity development theory has continued to progress as more information about different ways adoptees develop has been studied. Grotevant (1997) published work describing four identities that adoptees progress through: *unexamined identity*, *limited identity*, *unsettled identity*, and *integrated identity*. The *unexamined identity* means that the adoptee is not concerned with or given thought to anything related to adoption or their adoptee identity. With *limited identity*, they have considered this aspect of their identity but

it is not an important part of their existence. The *unsettled identity* describes an adoptee who has explored their adoptee identity and spent a great deal of time thinking about what it means to be adopted. This analysis results in negative emotions leaving the adoptee unsettled. Lastly, the *integrated identity* is the final stage when the *unsettled identity* finds resolution and peace with their adoptee identity (Grotevant, 1997).

There are even a select few models that describe transracial adoptee identity development but these are not based specifically on Korean adoptees. Carter and McGoldrick (1999) developed the Adoptive Family Life Cycle model. Similarly to the previously described models, it was stage oriented and described as a lifelong process. This model progressed through issues of loss from the adoption process experienced by the adoptive parents and adopted child. It discussed assimilation of the adopted child into the family, the adoptee coming to understand their loss and adoptee identity, and developing the adoptee's identity without information about the birth culture (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999).

Though Carter and McGoldrick's (1999) theory was a step in the right direction by focusing on transracial adoptees, it did not address the development of racial identity in transracial adoptees. So Baden and Steward (2007) developed the Cultural Racial Identity Model (CRIM). This model has two axes: the cultural identity axis and racial identity axis. These two axes each have two dimensions and are superimposed to result in 16 potential cultural racial identities. The individual's place in the model is determined by how much the adoptee identifies with each dimension. While it is a very thorough model, Redington (2011) suggested the CRIM model does not always work because the adoptee has to identify with birth culture/race or their adoptive parents'; it does not take into account the lack of identification with these groups.

## **Discussion**

### **Chickering's Seven Vectors Theory**

In this study, I used Chickering and Reisser's (1993) seven vectors as a framework within which to analyze the areas of development that may be a source of hardship for transracial Korean adoptees. The seven vectors are not designed as a linear path but as "maps" for those working with students to assess the progress students are making through their individual development and can also identify the possible obstacles ahead (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 34). However, certain vectors do typically progress in a particular order (Kodama, McEwen, Liang, & Lee, 2001).

The first four vectors are *developing competence*, *managing emotions*, *moving through autonomy toward interdependence*, and *developing mature interpersonal relationships*. *Developing competence* focuses on three types of competence: intellectual, physical or manual, and interpersonal. As a student begins to master skills in these areas, they will be more willing to branch out into new challenges. *Managing emotions* encompasses the heightened awareness of one's emotions and a need to control them as a student develops. The objective of this vector is to acknowledge and manage these new or heightened emotions in a healthy way. Another key factor in student development is finding a balance between self-sufficiency and interdependence. *Moving through autonomy toward interdependence* encourages taking responsibility for one's own actions and decreasing a need for constant support while also developing recognition and acceptance of communicative and fair relationships. *Developing mature interpersonal relationships* focuses on developing tolerance of personal and cultural differences and applying this to everyone, not just close family and friends. The second facet of this vector is the capacity to have mature intimate relationships based upon trust and free from selfishness (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

The fifth vector, *establishing identity*, could really encompass all of the vectors in some way. The first four vectors typically need to occur first because this vector is partially a culmination of the previously mentioned vectors (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). It is the concept of being comfortable in one's physical body, appearance, sexuality, and identity as well as having a strong sense of one's own culture, self, and values. Self-identification within one's family heritage, ethnic origin, and religious or cultural tradition are also strong factors in establishing one's own identity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

The final two vectors are *developing purpose* and *developing integrity*. *Developing purpose* concentrates on a student's sense of intentionality within their life. This includes setting goals, making plans, and sticking with them even through hardships. Lastly, *developing integrity* means defining one's own beliefs and values, creating a strong foundation of principles that one uses to guide decisions and influence "socially responsible behavior" such as being civically engaged or participating in community events (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 51).

Chickering collaborated with Reisser in 1993 to make adjustments to his original theory from 1969 in order to address various criticisms. For example, Straub and Rodgers (1986) suggested that women experience the development of interpersonal relationships differently than men; Chickering's earlier findings were based on a population of only men. Because Straub and Rodgers (1986) determined that women may need to become autonomous within the context of a relationship before establishing it on their own, Chickering and Reisser (1993) changed the order of the vectors, moving this one ahead of *establishing identity* and renaming it to *developing mature interpersonal relationships*.

In the original "managing emotions" vector, the concentration was on aggression and sexual desires. This was expanded in the second edition to include a wider range of emotions

such as anxiety, depression, and more positive emotions as well (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). They also put a larger emphasis on the importance of interdependence in the third vector; the vector only discussed the development of personal autonomy but was renamed to moving through autonomy toward interdependence after the changes (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Several researchers (Greely & Tinsley, 1988; Straub & Rodgers, 1986; Kodama et al., 2001) criticized the original theory for not being inclusive. Due to the lack of diversity, the theory did not necessarily apply to people of color, women, and the LGBT+ community. Chickering and Reisser (1993) acknowledged this in the *establishing identity* vector by including issues faced by particular genders, ethnic backgrounds, and sexual orientations. However, according to Kodama, McEwen, Liang, & Lee (2001) these changes were not enough specifically regarding the development of Asian and Pacific Islander Americans (APA). They proposed changes to Chickering's theory in several vectors to address these gaps regarding APA development (Kodama et al., 2001). These limitations, suggested criticisms, and gaps of unknown information further highlight the fact that more research examining TRKAs' actual life experiences is needed to effectively apply this theory to TRKAs in higher education.

### **Potential Challenges for TRKAs**

TRKAs have the potential to struggle with four of the seven vectors: *managing emotions*, *moving through autonomy toward interdependence*, *developing mature interpersonal relationships*, and *establishing identity*. Chickering and Reisser (1993) developed a sound theory that has managed to stand the test of time so I used it as a measuring stick by which to compare the experiences of transracial Korean adoptees. As Kodama et al. (2001) found, there are still some gaps in the theory when it comes to experiences of minority students. Therefore I used a combination of Chickering and Reisser's (1993) work as well as the proposed changes from

Kodama et al. (2001) to determine the ways in which TRKAs struggle and to identify the reasons behind their struggle.

**Managing emotions.** Chickering (1993) discussed *managing emotions* as developing awareness and acknowledging the strong emotions that typically present during young adulthood. Chickering and Reisser (1993) suggested that to develop this vector, one needs to identify appropriate channels to manage these “disruptive” emotions before they become destructive (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 38). There is a significant focus on the importance of dealing with specific emotions such as depression, guilt, fear, anxiety, and anger because they are the most “toxic” and the most likely to affect everyday life for students (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 90).

Kodama et al. (2001) explained how differences between APA and White culture affect the development of emotions. APAs are typically raised with an emphasis on emotional discipline and restraint of strong feelings. This means APA students may need to learn to be comfortable with other people expressing their emotions or familiarize themselves with their own emotions rather than managing them. Chickering also identifies guilt and shame as very toxic emotions but does not discuss their actual impact on student development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). These two emotions play a large role in Asian culture in addition to the fact that a lot of Asian parents typically work and sacrifice a lot for their children’s education so their children tended to receive little emotional support (Kodama et al., 2001). All of these factors can lead to APA students not expressing issues they may be experiencing which can lead those around them to assume they are doing fine when they really need help. While this is a valid point for traditional APA students, it does not necessarily apply to TRA students because they

typically have a White cultural upbringing and so these values are not instilled within them. In fact, their values tend to align more with their White peers.

However, TRKAs struggle with managing emotions in a different way. Adoptees may experience emotions subconsciously or they may experience emotions without knowing or understanding the cause. This creates a challenge for them because it may be impossible to determine an appropriate channel for release of an emotion that has no obvious cause. Nancy Verrier (1993) discussed this experience in her work describing the primal wound theory. This theory suggested that adoptees often form depression and anxiety as a result of unresolved grief from the trauma and abandonment experienced during the adoption process. A quote from a study conducted by Rebecca Redington (2011), then a doctoral candidate at Columbia University, to understand experiences of transracial adoptees supports this claim. One of her participants stated:

[In my childhood,] I would never believe that my mom was going to be home when I got home, like I would be like, “ah she's not gonna be home” or “where is she?” like I have these visions of her just disappearing off the face of the Earth. (p. 66)

Studies have also shown that adoptees are more prone to developing attachment disorders (Nissen, 2011). Bowlby (1969) described attachment theory as the instinctual process that a baby undergoes to develop trust and dependence on the person/people who care for them. Because adoptees experience trauma especially regarding early attachment bonds, they are typically more susceptible to experiencing attachment disorders (Baden, 2007; Alvarado, Rho, & Lambert, 2014).

As previously mentioned, adoptees are also at higher risk for developing psychological issues. They are overrepresented in the use of mental health services (Sass & Henderson, 2007).



In fact, in the United States, approximately two percent of all adolescents are adopted while anywhere from five to seventeen percent of these adoptees are in therapeutic treatment (Hauggaard, 1998). This suggests that adoptees need additional support especially in issues regarding mental health.

**Moving through autonomy toward interdependence.** There are three parts to this vector: emotional independence, instrumental independence, and interdependence (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Emotional independence involves taking responsibility for your own emotions and actions and relying less on relationships with other people. Instrumental independence is the physical act of being independent and the ability to function independently. Instrumental independence might look like going grocery shopping alone or building independent problem solving skills. Interdependence is the understanding that life involves participating in a community and acknowledging the responsibility to contribute to it alongside everyone else (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Chickering and Reisser (1993) also suggested that greater autonomy enables healthier forms of interdependence.

Regarding this vector, Kodama et al. (2001) discussed Asian culture's reliance on strong bonds between family members. The culture encourages APA students to put aside individuation for the greater good of the family unit. Western culture emphasizes separation from one's immediate family as a sign of maturation but this does not happen in APA culture. Similarly to *managing emotions*, transracial Korean adoptees are less likely to identify with this argument because of their lack of traditional Asian values.

TRKAs do have the possibility of struggling with *moving through autonomy toward interdependence*. This is because autonomy can be difficult for adoptees. According to Verrier (1993), because TRKAs experienced abandonment and the resulting trauma from such a young

age, they may experience very complicated feelings of abandonment and anxiety. These emotions can manifest as the ability to develop very strong bonds with people or an aloofness that keeps people an arm's length away. Some adoptees struggle with any degree of separation from friends or family because it can trigger feelings of abandonment. Developing interdependence can also be a struggle for adoptees. Verrier (1993) explained that adoptees often develop issues with relationships in their lives. A general fear of rejection was a common theme for these issues which led adoptees to feelings of general unworthiness and a tendency to sabotage relationships (Verrier, 1993).

**Developing mature interpersonal relationships.** Chickering and Reisser (1993) described this vector as having two parts. One part is developing tolerance as well as an appreciation of people's differences. This involves developing awareness of these differences, making an effort to understand them, and then accepting them. The second part is a "capacity for intimacy" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 48). This aspect of the vector encourages the individual to develop as a genuine, unique individual with the capacity to value a mature relationship. In these relationships, each individual is content being their own person and feels comfortable relating to the other honestly and deeply. They have the capacity to sustain the relationship and make a long term commitment (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

TRKAs are at risk of struggling with this vector because of the previously discussed concerns that affect the development of interdependence. Kodama et al. (2001) also discussed the hierarchical structure of Asian cultures and the emphasis within the culture on strong relationships. This has an effect on APA students because, in college, they tend to experience a time where they feel the need to choose between APA and non-APA friends and social groups

(Kodama et al., 2001). This a difficult position for APA students to work through that their White peers do not have to face.

While TRA students do not have the cultural aspect that encourages strong familial relationships, they may experience the same situation of choosing between groups of people. In general, college is a time for students to find social groups or student organizations where they feel welcome and a sense of belonging. Because college is a time where TRA students begin to have a heightened awareness of their physical identities, this is when TRAs can have difficulties finding their place. APA students can choose to be a part of APA social groups or organizations where they look and feel that is where they fit in because society expects them to participate in those groups based on physical appearance. When APAs choose to have non-APA friends or hobbies, they know to expect to be the minority and, to some degree, they are prepared to feel like an outsider. However, TRAs may have more difficulty with this experience than APAs because they can often feel a distinct difference between where they feel they fit in and where they look like they fit in.

Hoffman and Peña (2013) discussed this experience calling it “the notion of Whiteness” (p. 160). In this study, one participant was cited stating:

I mean if people were to ask, “How do you identify?” I would say “Korean American,” but because I don’t have the Korean heritage sometimes I feel like I’m not falsifying information but somehow that I don’t necessarily feel right saying Korean American because what do I know about Koreans? . . . I don’t have that cultural understanding so it’s hard for me to even identify myself as such.

A common theme in several studies was a feeling of simultaneously belonging in multiple social groups and none at all (Hoffman & Peña, 2013; Redington, 2011; Nissen, 2011). TRKAs

commonly refer to themselves as a Twinkie because of the feeling of being yellow on the outside and White on the inside (Nissen, 2011; Hoffman & Peña, 2013). In a study assessing the college experiences of TRKAs by Nissen (2011), then a graduate student at Iowa State University, one participant verbalized this idea in the following way:

Being Korean, myself I am Korean, but I grew up White. There are days when I feel Korean and there are days I feel White. Being Korean at [the university], it's not different. There's other Asians, Japanese, Chinese, Korean. You don't feel left out physically, but inside I feel left out a bit because I don't know their language. I don't know their culture. (p. 241)

Hoffman and Peña (2013) called this an “‘in-between’ identity” and suggested that it can lead to TRKAs feeling like they do not have a place to be comfortably themselves (p. 161).

**Establishing identity.** Chickering and Reisser (1993) stated the *establishing identity* vector was a combination of the previous four vectors. It involves the development of acceptance of physical attributes and gender and sexual orientation. It also entails a deeper exploration of cultural and historical components of one's identity. This vector defines an individual's specific lifestyle and encourages self-acceptance. The biggest takeaways from this vector are a need for satisfaction with one's physical appearance and a significant reflection about ethnic heritage to define oneself (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Transracial adoptees encounter a combination of different aspects of identity theories as well as totally unique experiences. TRKA students, while they may not identify with APA culture, still have to go through a process of establishing their racial identity as an Asian American. This is an extremely important part of minority students' college experience. This is in part because college may be the first time that APAs experience racism, so they spend time

explaining their racial or cultural identity to people in order to push back against racist or microaggressive interactions (Kodama et al., 2001). Kodama et al. (2001) discussed the prevalence of other issues that APAs face such as explaining Asian names to peers and professors or dealing with the perpetual foreigner issue. The perpetual foreigner stigma is the common assumption that any APA is not from this country, should not be able to speak English very well, and other expectations about a foreign upbringing. These experiences can push students to develop a sense of otherness compared to their White peers (Kodama et al., 2001). A participant in Nissen's (2011) study recounted personal experiences of this issue on her college campus calling them "misunderstandings with others" when others would speak slowly and carefully when talking to her or when Asian international students would talk in their native language to her (p. 92).

Because of this racial identity, TRKAs may also experience discrimination based upon Asian stereotypes. APAs tend to focus on only intellectual competence, one of the three types of competence, because of the APA cultural emphasis on education (Kodama et al., 2001). While this may be true, this argument may not have an influence on TRKAs because they tend to lack traditional APA cultural values, instead having White cultural values. However, it may hold true for TRKAs because they physically fit into Asian stereotypes. This can mean they are subjected to the assumption that they have traditional APA values from others such as professors and peers. There can also be an internal pressure to live up to APA stereotypes of high academic standards whether or not the culture of the TRKA encourages it. In Nissen's (2011) study, one participant talked about how she measures up to her cousin intellectually:

My cousin, who was adopted, also . . . (is) very intelligent. . . . She's a mechanical engineer and sometimes I feel like I personally don't match my stereotype of being intelligent; there's always that kind of stereotype. (p. 79)

Another participant had a different, humorous perspective of the stereotypes imposed upon Asian people:

I'm [laughter] not the stereotypical Asian in any sense of the word. It's become almost cool; [my friends and I] make fun of it a lot. "Oh, you are so good because you're Asian." It's hard to explain. It's almost like a compliment... It's almost a cool thing to be Asian 'cause for some reason in my little group of friends in the music hall, I'm one of the only Asians and they're like, "Oh, it's because you're Asian" or I can make fun of myself and be like, "I can do this because I'm Asian." People once in a while, they'll make jokes that you might consider derogatory, but I know they're just joking, they don't mean any harm by it. Just something about Asians being bad drivers and they'll call me "yellow," they'll call the blacks and the whites and the yellows, the Asians. I told you about those stereotypes that people have of Asians being good musicians and being intelligent. We crack jokes about it all the time because I'm by no means the most talented person in the department. I'm not your typical withdrawn, shy person like a lot of Asians are. (p. 81)

Though TRKAs are unable to avoid assumptions about their identity from most of society, they also tend to experience "passing" in White communities because of their upbringing. According to a study by Bergquist, Campbell, and Unrau (2003), parents of transracial adoptees tended to "downplay" the differences the racial differences of their adopted children (p. 57). The parents also did not consider the potential struggles their adopted children may face because of their racial identity. The study also showed that as time went on, an

increased percentage of parents believed their adopted children identified as Caucasian rather than Korean or Asian (Bergquist, Campbell, & Unrau, 2003).

In Hoffman and Peña's (2013) study and Nissen's (2011) dissertation, participants described belonging to White communities more than Korean or Asian communities. Their classmates and friends said that they do not see the participant as Asian or they "forget" the participant is not White (Nissen, 2011, p.112). Kodama et al. (2001) suggested that Asian Americans deal with identity first because they are forced to deal with their physical/racial identity at a very early age, sometimes even before they understand the concept of identity. However, transracial Korean adoptees may not experience this in the same way as APAs because they have the ability to "pass" in White communities.

This may contribute to the transracial adoption paradox developed by R. M. Lee (2003). The paradox suggested that a TRA may feel and be expected to act a race that is not their biological one but rather that of their adoptive family. This phenomenon appears to be more prevalent when the TRA is also raised in a community where the population is racially homogeneous in line with that of the adoptive family (Lee, 2003). This makes sense when considering the previously discussed popular experience that TRAs have of feeling White inside.

Some TRAs have even recounted experiences of disconnect between their sense of self and physical bodies. In Redington's (2011) study, one adoptee described an experience when she was a small child waiting for the bus. Some older children called out racial slurs to make fun of her. However, she did not even realize they were addressing her because she did not realize she was Asian (Redington, 2011). Some adoptees may not be bothered by this disconnect. A participant from Nissen's (2011) study said,

I forget that I don't look like an American. People say that to me, too. I like it because they're knowing me as a person rather than me as my ethnicity. Same things with my friends. My closer friends they always say that they just forget. I notice when people stare and usually I'm good with it. There are days where I'm like, "Everyone looked at me today. Everyone had some snide remark to say today." My friends were like, "What? Are you kidding me? I don't even notice." That is reassuring to me because they've looked past it. They've also looked past my ethnicity. I don't think physical things should define a person. I don't like it. (p.112)

Others have a harder time making peace with this experience. An adoptee from Redington's (2011) study said,

There were things about [growing up] that were really difficult in terms of accepting a body. This whole body seems strange. It's not a face that I see anywhere ... You know it just gets clear to me all the time that how I meet people isn't how I was raised. I was raised in a White family and felt White and that's not necessarily how I will be greeted. (p. 71)

This unique position that TRKAs have where they simultaneously belong to so many identity development theories and also none of them at all can create a difficult situation. A common theme in the studies with TRKAs is a feeling of belonging to White and Korean communities but also neither of them (Hoffman & Peña, 2013; Nelson, 2016; Nissen, 2011; Redington, 2011). Because they are so many categories this results in them being none at all; transracial Korean adoptees do not currently have any identity development models based on their own unique experiences by which to gauge themselves. This points to a significant gap in research and practice that demands to be addressed.



## **Recommendations**

### **Recommendations for Higher Education and Student Affairs Professionals**

Institutions of higher education need to start identifying transracial adoptees as a student population. This might include adding adoption-related questions on admissions surveys and establishing professional development trainings for student affairs professionals that interact with TRAs. This would be significant because it brings heightened awareness of the unique needs of this large population.

This study discussed the lack of awareness of adoption-related mental health issues even within professional mental health resources. Institutions of higher education can better serve their adoptee student populations by requiring additional training in adoption issues for on-campus counselors or at least ensuring one professional is familiar with adoption-related topics.

Asian American Studies programs, diversity-related courses, and access to Asian role models on campus result in very positive impacts on APA and TRKA students (Hoffman & Peña, 2013; Kodama et al., 2001). These opportunities can be a catalyst for identity development and provide a comfortable environment that TRKAs may not find elsewhere especially on predominantly White campuses. Because of this, institutions of higher education should be sure to provide access to these programs and opportunities in order to support these student populations.

### **Recommendation of Resources for TRKAs**

There are also resources available to transracial Korean adoptees beyond the support provided to them by higher education that have the potential to alleviate some of the challenges they face. Therapy can be invaluable to adoptees and the adoption constellation (i.e. those close to them such as parents, significant others, or friends) to address the concerns previously brought

up regarding adoptees' mental health. Professionals in this field are starting to recognize the adoptee community as a population in need of mental health services support (Robyn Park, personal communication, April 4, 2019). There are significantly higher rates of self-harm, injury, and suicide within the adoptee community, and the mental health profession is beginning to address this issue (Robyn Park, personal communication, April 4, 2019). Therapy can also provide the support and space an adoptee needs to build their personal identity and can give them the tools to understand their unique place (Robyn Park, personal communication, April 4, 2019). In Hoffman and Peña's (2013) study, one participant shared this experience about discussing her emotions with her classmates. "I think being able to process it out loud and talk about it with people, that was hugely therapeutic, even [with] people who weren't other Korean American adoptees..." (p.164). Group and individual counseling and TRKA affinity organizations can ease some of the developmental obstacles TRKAs have the potential to experience especially in higher education.

Peer support can also provide growth and development for adoptees looking to cultivate their adoptee identity. Redington (2011) found that participants in her study "deepen[ed] their connection to their birth culture" by participating in events and social activities with other "racially similar" individuals (p. 93). Hoffman & Peña (2013) identified "peer groups and significant others" as having a strong role in providing support for adoptees especially in traditional college age years (p. 162). Colleges and student organizations can sometimes provide these resources and events. Another popular resource among Korean American adoptees is the use of Facebook groups. They are often closed networks that require some sort of validation that the individual trying to gain access to the group is actually a Korean adoptee. There are different types of groups ranging from general Korean adoptees (KADs)/Korean American adoptees

(KAAs) groups to regional groups such as the Iowa Korean adoptees group to topic specific such as KADs learning Korean.

Cultural exposure can also play a crucial role in identity development. Cultural exposure is the opportunity for an adoptee to experience their culture of origin. It can be in many forms such as culture camps (i.e. a summer camp with activities focused on cultural experiences such as traditional food, music, or language), Asian or Korean organizations or communities such as churches, or taking a trip to visit one's country of origin. Redington (2011) found that this factor was more influential in TRA's development than age or cultural knowledge. One participant in that study who was a TRKA recounted becoming more interested in her birth culture after visiting Korea. Nissen's (2011) study had a participant who recommended visiting Korea to younger students. She said,

Like you [the younger students] should go on this tour or do this program because it opens your eyes up so much. You can learn about Korea all you want, but until you go there, it's a whole different world ... I felt so comfortable there. It's an amazing experience ... There's just something about it, being there, and it's not for everyone, it's true. You got the full feel of what it's like to live in Korea, and you get time to meet other Koreans and form these friendships with Koreans, and that was really really hard to leave ... It was really cool. (p. 247-248)

There are also many resources available specifically for adoptees taking steps to fill in gaps in their adopted identity. DNA testing through big companies such as 23andMe or AncestryDNA provide general information about DNA geographical origins and suggest relatives based on common DNA (23andMe, n.d.; Ancestry, n.d.). Korean adoptees specifically have some other resources. 325KAMRA is an organization that "use[s] DNA as a birth searching

tool” (325KAMRA, 2018, para. 1). Their mission is to reunite adoptees and birth searching families through DNA. They provide free DNA testing kits to qualifying individuals, help Korean adoptees with genealogy research, and help Korean adoptees searching through DNA connect through a Facebook group among other services (325KAMRA, 2018).

Most adoption agencies also provide post-adoption services. For example, Holt International can provide personal adoption records for individuals adopted through their services (Holt International Post Adoption Services, n.d.). These records contribute more information about an adoptee’s relinquishment, infant health records, and perhaps even provide insight about an adoptee’s life before adoption. They can also sometimes facilitate birth family searches and offer events and trips such as “Heritage Tours” to birth countries (Holt International Post Adoption Services, n.d.; Holt International, n.d.).

There are several international organizations dedicated to providing resources to Korean adoptees such as Global Overseas Adoptees’ Link (GOA’L), International Korean Adoptee Associations (IKAA), International Korean Adoptee Service Inc (InKAS), and Korea Adoption Services (KAS) (Global Overseas Adoptees’ Link [GOA’L], n.d.; Korean American Adoptee Network [KAAN], n.d.; International Korean Adoptee Associations [IKAA], n.d.; International Korean Adoptee Service Inc. [InKAS], n.d.; Korea Adoption Services [KAS], n.d.). Each organization is different, but they typically provide similar services such as birth family search assistance and trips to Korea. Because these organizations are specifically focused on post adoption services and serving adoptees, they are equipped with more resources than adoption agencies. For example, GOA’L can provide translation services in Korea, information regarding re-establishing Korean citizenship, and scholarships for KADs enrolling in language programs in Korea (Global Overseas Adoptees’ Link [GOA’L], n.d.).

Some organizations hold regular conferences or meetings. The Korean American Adoptee Adoptive Family Network (KAAN) is an organization that holds an annual conference in a different location across the United States each year. The purpose of the conference is to “provid[e] affordable, meaningful resources and information” for Korean adoptees (“About KAAN,” 2018, para. 1). IKAA holds a gathering annually designed as an opportunity for “ideas information and resources [to] be shared” (“About IKAA,” 2019, para. 1). Every three years the gathering is held in Seoul, and in off-years, mini gatherings are held in various locations globally as a means to facilitate social connections and spread resources and information regarding adoption and adoptee experiences.

### **Recommendations for further research**

In the future, there needs to be more adoptee conducted studies that focus on firsthand adoptee experiences. There is a significant gap in the research regarding transracial Korean adoptee identity development that needs to be addressed. More specifically, the existing studies on psychological adjustment of TRAs should be evaluated for accuracy. Redington (2011) suggested they are “inconsistent” and the sources of the data may not be reliable such as secondhand information about the adoptee from adoptive parents (p. 26). There is also a significant lack of research on adoptee experiences and adjustment during late adolescence and beyond (Hoffman & Peña, 2013; Redington, 2011). Examining the experience of transracial adoptees in institutions of higher education is another area for future research that requires improvement (Hoffman & Peña, 2013). More research examining TRKAs’ actual life experiences is needed to effectively produce targeted programming and interventions in student affairs.

### **Conclusion**

Transracial Korean adoptees are a significant population that has been overlooked for decades. Their unique experiences, perspectives, and needs make them an invaluable resource as a student population. The 20,800 TRKAs adopted between 1999 and 2018 are in our institutions today or will be soon and for the next several years (U.S. State Department Bureau of Consular Affairs, 2018). As demonstrated, there continues to be a gap in the research and development theories focusing on the experiences of TRKAs especially in higher education. Using Chickering and Reisser's (1993) Seven Vectors Theory, I have identified several unique ways in which TRKAs have the potential to struggle in higher education: *managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, and establishing identity.*

Institutions of higher education have a responsibility to their transracial adoptee students to start identifying transracial adoptees as a student population, requiring additional training in adoption issues for on-campus counselors, and implementing or maintaining Asian American Studies programs, diversity-related courses, and access to Asian role models on campus. Looking forward, there need to be more adoptee conducted studies that focus on firsthand adoptee experiences. The gap in the research regarding transracial Korean adoptee identity development should be addressed by evaluating current literature for accuracy, extending the scope to adoptee experiences and adjustment during late adolescence and beyond, and examining the experience of transracial adoptees in institutions of higher education. Research examining TRKAs' actual life experiences will lead to targeted programming and interventions for TRKA students within student affairs. TRKAs may continue to face difficulties finding their place physically, culturally, and emotionally, but moving forward, student affairs professionals can take steps to legitimize their experience and support them through this difficult stage of life.

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