

Somewhere in Between and Nowhere to be Seen: A Look into the Asian-American Transracial
Adoptee Experience through Educational Programming

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in
Media Studies and Educational Studies

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Introduction

Throughout the 1990s-2000s, the number of international adoptions into the United States increased drastically, reaching a little over 20,000 international adoptions in 2002 with 25% being from China and 9% from South Korea (PRB, 2003). As these adoptees begin to age into their 20s and 30s, and experience life outside of their hometowns, they begin to gain a larger awareness of their identities alongside their coming of age years. Balancing the in-between nature of being Asian and having parents who are of a different race, often white, is something that Asian-American transracial adoptees constantly must navigate. There are shared experiences, and experiences that vary for each adoptee. With all of these different stories and experiences in the real world of transracial adoption, it is surprising that the experiences adoptees have are seldom spoken about, especially from the viewpoint of the adoptees themselves. Often faced with representations in only one type of narrative that praises adoptee parents, and discusses very little about the adoptee's perspective, the work I created gives more agency and voice to Asian-American transracial adoptees who have often been silenced in popular media and Western society as a whole.

Background

Living as an Asian-American transracial adoptee has had a massive impact on the way I navigate the world around me. However, it took me a long time to accept my identity as an Asian-American transracial adoptee and it is still a work in progress. There were many struggles along the way, and I have found myself wishing that I had felt more accepted and understood as an Asian-American transracial adoptee by a larger group of people outside of my household. I never saw myself represented in a way that I felt really encapsulated the experiences I had in the

media I consumed growing up, so it made sense that those around me didn't grasp the Asian-American transracial adoptee part of my identity either. Going through life feeling like a part of yourself is misunderstood not only by others, but also by yourself can be very challenging, and I believe that with the proper tools to help educate and represent me, parts of these feelings would be allowed to be expressed in ways that would have ultimately encouraged a more positive state of well-being.

I am a firm believer that education has the power to empower people, and my own experiences surrounding my identity have swayed me to believe that adoption, especially transracial adoption, should be taught about more so those who belong to this group can find empowering experiences. The project that I curated brings awareness about transracial adoptee experiences through the lens of Asian-American transracial adoptees. It acknowledges that there are many different experiences adoptees may have, but looks to address the larger issues of navigating identity and finding a sense of belonging.

Literature Review

The Transracial Adoptee Paradox

The project is supported by scholarly research about transracial adoptees as a whole, and is based in the Transracial Adoptee Paradox framework laid out by Dr. Richard Lee, a psychology professor at the University of Minnesota. The Transracial Adoptee Paradox discusses the benefits and privileges that transracial adoptees may receive due to having white parental figures contrasted with the injustice they will face due to race (Lee, 2003). The paradox also explains that although transracial adoptees will face injustices due to their race, they may not have the tools to cope with them or fully understand them due to their parents being white and

not being able to prepare their children for bias one hundred percent, or fully understand what their children are experiencing. As other scholarly work in adoption studies agrees, racial differences are amplified in transracial adoptee experiences through microaggressions surrounding both racial status and family building status as an adoptee (White, et al., 2021). The intersectionality of their racial identity and identity as an adoptee are extremely important in the microaggressions transracial adoptees face. There are constantly negative views on birth parents and countries and ideas of adoptees needing to feel grateful to their parents for adopting them brought up in transracial adoptee experiences, further heightening the legitimacy of the second half of Lee's paradox.

Ethnic Socialization and Preparation for Bias

It is important that parents of transracial adoptees prepare their children for racial injustice that may occur. Parents have a variety of ways that they will go about preparing their children for the world outside of the home, and there are pros and cons to each strategy used. In some cases, to help their children navigate through racial injustice, parents use cultural socialization, also known as ethnic socialization, as a tool which typically allows for transracial adoptees to connect to their birth culture. Still others use preparation for bias methods where parents will acknowledge the injustices and racial differences and confront them head on (Pinderhughes, 2019). Whatever the procedure, many scholars that research transracial adoptee experiences agree that socialization methods are used in a way that is helpful to children, specifically transracial adoptee children in understanding their culture and identity. Those who are racially socialized may become more aware of racial discrimination, however, they benefit greatly from the knowledge as they find ways to engage with racial injustice and feel less stressed about it when it occurs (Hrapczynski & Leslie, 2018). With this in mind, it becomes

clear that it is important to have conversations surrounding race, but it is also important to consider that there is never a full understanding of what the transracial adoptee may be experiencing by those who are not also transracial adoptees. When injustice towards transracial adoptees' racial group occurs, those around the adoptee must remember this because, if handled poorly or not handled at all, non-adoptees may inadvertently cause more stressful situations.

The Effects of COVID-19 and AAPI Hate

For Asian-American transracial adoptees navigating injustice without a full sense of understanding from their white parents and peers, we can look at the reaction towards Asian-American and Pacific Islanders during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 in the United States. Throughout the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Asians, specifically, Chinese people, were being targeted as many believed that Chinese people were the reason COVID-19 began and spread so quickly. This time was especially challenging to navigate for Asian-American transracial adoptees as they were made to feel like foreigners in their own country. At the same time, Asian-American transracial adoptees were trying to find solidarity within the Asian community while still struggling with their own identities. This created a situation where Asian-American transracial adoptees had to navigate the in-between nature of their identity amplified with the tensions (Wing & Park-Taylor, 2022). Along with this, Asian-American transracial adoptees who experienced a longing to meet or find out who their biological parents were, were confronted with an additional sense of loss and confusion with a deadly virus spreading throughout Asia, death tolls rising, and the not knowing if their biological family survived.

The COVID-19 pandemic amplified the foreigner aspect of Asian-Americans, solidifying that Asian-Americans will always be seen as outsiders in the United States (Yao & Nicholson, 2021). Terms such as ‘model minority’ and ‘yellow peril’ have historically been used to ‘other’ Asian-Americans. Model minority is used to perceive Asian-Americans as inferior to white people and superior to other minority groups. Yellow peril is used to place a fear of Asian people as a danger to the Western world. Both terms are used against Asian-Americans to make them continuously appear foreign (Yao & Nicholson, 2021). Throughout the pandemic, a ‘yellow peril’ mindset of Asian-Americans being ‘un-American’ heightened as they became seen as a threat to the health of the country and rumors that the pandemic began because of a Chinese person eating an uncooked bat spread. Rumors, comments and microaggressions that targeted Asian communities for their food choices and played off of the old stereotypes of Asians eating animals that are not fit for consumption to the Western world, only amplified xenophobia and allowed for more hatred to spread. For Asian-American transracial adoptees who may be living within the framework of the Transracial Adoptee Paradox, negotiating between the identities of having white parents, and being a part of a group that was heavily otherized and demonized began to become intensified. With American society pushing back and lashing out against Asians due to fears, Asian-American transracial adoptees faced racial injustice and fear for themselves as Asians. In addition to these fears, Asian-American transracial adoptees also struggled with their place in the issues surrounding Asian-American and Pacific-Islander (AAPI) hate and xenophobic remarks having white relatives who may not fully comprehend the feelings associated with the issue, having a fractured connection to their birth country, and the pushback from the Asian community who perceive adoptees as more white than Asian.

During this time, it could have become challenging for parents to know how to help their children and encourage them. The sense of loss, and in-betweenness of not feeling fully Asian and not being fully white presented a nuance to Asian-American transracial adoptee experiences that is often not explored, and hard to navigate without a support system that knows what it meant to undergo them. Other literature supports this idea that parental support, community support, and emphasis on cultural practices all have a significant impact on the way Chinese-American adoptees internalize their identities, and when there is a lack of these factors there can be extreme confusion and discomfort (Reynolds, et al., 2021). In this case, a lack of support from both parties due to the intersectionality of the racial identity and adoptee identities only increased the discomfort felt by many Asian-American adoptees who did not have any outlets in which to cope. With very few people talking about the impact that the pandemic and following AAPI hate had on Asian-American transracial adoptees, support was lacking and the representation needed for a larger audience to understand the implications of xenophobia in the Asian-American transracial adoptee community was, in my experience, non-existent.

Media Perception of Transracial Adoptees

Support in navigating the identities that Asian-American transracial adoptees possess doesn't only come from their family groups, but also from society as a whole. Support through representation is one way that Asian-American transracial adoptees can feel heard and seen. This can come from the perception adoptees have of themselves through the media they consume, as the media implies a larger societal acceptance or rejection of their identities. From the developmental years, where children are beginning to grasp the idea of identity, into the high school to adulthood years, where we begin to analyze and contextualize identity, the way the media portrays an identity can have a large impact on the way someone internalizes that identity.

In media that does showcase transracial adoptees, there is a lack of complexity, and an increase in stories that frame the parents as saviors, or the birth countries as oppressive (Sun, 2020). The white saviorism storyline has been historically used in the United States to entice potential parents to adopt abroad, hoping to showcase that international adoption is safe and play to the heart strings of potential parents (Jacobson, 2014). However, it is this same storyline that can become detrimental to the relationships between parents and their adopted children as it builds a burden that the child owes the parent something for ‘saving them’ (Sun, 2020). In this narrative, there is no room for Asian-American transracial adoptees to express their concerns or traumas, as they are often told that they should be grateful to their parents. There is very little in popular media written by Asian-American transracial adoptees from their point of view which is concerning when it comes to nuanced representation and media consumption that will influence perceptions of an identity group.

Project Logistics

The project I created, in turn, heavily focus on the stories of real Asian-American transracial adoptees to try to mitigate the issue of white saviorism narratives, and white parent point of view stories that do not tell fully representative stories. In addition to the reading I completed, the research I conducted through a survey and interviews are crucial to the final project since there is minimal research about the Asian-American transracial adoptee experience through the lens of Asian-American transracial adoptees. The survey and interview worked to gain a better understanding of the navigation of identity and the influence media can have in representing these stories. It is important that I collect data and hear the stories of Asian-American transracial adoptees from their perspective so in the creation of the project, I am

able to produce a tool that feels true to their experiences and is respectful to the stories I am trying to tell.

The project takes the form of an autoethnography video with two lesson plans attached to it. One of the lesson plans centers around middle school aged children while the other focuses on people in the high school age group and above. During the developmental years, children are very observant of what is going on around them, especially when it comes to race, and transracial relationships are not often discussed fully in the classroom or in the media (Lingras, 2021). It is important to find helpful resources written by racial minority authors, and examine our relationships to race, racism, and privilege when we are talking to children about race, but these resources and discussions can be hard to find and have (Lingras, 2021). As Cofer's work agrees there is a relationship between the media that children consume and the behaviors they exhibit, thus making it important to have positive representative media that helps guide conversations on topics such as race that are challenging to have (Cofer, 2019). Through the use of autoethnography and teaching tools, my project helps to navigate some of these observations and conversations in a structured way that focuses on a fuller representation, and dives into a transracial aspect of race that is seldom told.

Cognitive and Social Development

People can learn new things at any age, but the depth of the learning may vary depending on their cognitive and social development. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends ages that are optimal in the development process for children to start having conversations about the different aspects and nuances of adoption, and using this information, I created lessons that are age appropriate for the developmental mental and social state of each

person (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1990). This is further supported by literature that finds that different aspects of cultural socialization practices and ethnic-racial socialization conversations may correspond to different developmental stages in a child's life (Pinderhughes, et. al, 2021). Discussions about race and ethnicity must be grounded in developmental stages for them to have a positive lasting impact. Specifically in discussions surrounding transracial adoption that focuses heavily on race and ethnicity as identity markers, being aware of development stages is crucial (Pinderhughes, et. al, 2021). This is important to note in the project I created as the two lesson plans that accompany the video look different depending on the age group, and the stage of development the group of people are at.

Looking at previous work that has been done in the construction of video and autoethnography, it was possible for me to see the important pieces that helped to ensure the narratives being told are age-appropriate and thought-provoking for each audience. For children who are at a very young age, such as preschoolers, interactivity plays a very important role in a child's connection with the materials (Hulshof, Pemberton, & Griffiths, 2013). Everything from the colors used to the way that the interactive qualities are presented can have an impact on the child's connection to the content provided (Hulshof, Pemberton, & Griffiths, 2013). As children grow up, the interactive aspect does not seem to have as big of an impact, although it can help with the navigation of topics when the person feels immersed in their learning and feels a connection to it. Keeping this in mind, in creating the two lesson plans for the two different age groups varied in interactiveness for comprehension purposes. Although there won't be as much need for bright colors, repetition, and interactiveness, it is important that students stay engaged and for both lesson plans, there may be a higher focus more on relating the lessons to current events, linking lingering questions they may have to theory, and using both theory and

relationship to self in a liberating way. Ultimately, there are two lesson plans that are similar in content but differently created due to the development and comprehension skills being at different stages based on age groups. In having two different lesson plans, the project is able to showcase its versatility and ability to have a larger outreach, giving it a long-lasting impact.

Eastern and Western Animation

Thinking about the differences between lesson plans, and looking at how incredibly important details are in connecting different age groups to the media they consume can help structure the project further through subtle symbolism. Much like the in-between state that many transracial adoptees feel, one of the goals in regards to the detailed work of the animation was to combine subtle nods and symbols from the art and values from both Western and Eastern cultures. The creative vision was to have the animated portions giving nods to Eastern culture while the other gives nods to Western culture through the choices in colors and music specifically. To do this in a way that made sense, it was incredibly important to look at what the similarities and differences are in Western versus Eastern culture and animation styles, although it is important to note that not all of these ideas were used or came to fruition.

Western cultures tend to lean more into the emotional effectiveness, and the diversity of characters and stories in animation whereas in Eastern, especially Chinese culture, the animation still holds onto some of the more traditional cultural values of collectivism (Fang, et al., 2017). Drawing from traditional art styles is a great way to emphasize the traditional culture values through the visuals. In addition, the animations feature storylines that possess values of beauty, self-interest, and romance that are heavily emphasized in Western animation, as below traditional values of harmony, wisdom, and collectivism in Eastern animations (Song & Zhang, 2008). The

animation aesthetics go hand-in-hand with the storytelling and it is not so much about the actual animators themselves, but the stories they tell through their work that embody each of the cultural values. However, even though there is still heavy emphasis on some of the more traditional values, other scholarly work suggests that East Asian, and more specifically, Chinese animation has become more progressive in contemporary times, with values such as hierarchy that were once viewed positively, shifting to more negative connotations through characters (Song & Zhang, 2008).

Although I did heavy research in the fields of Western and Eastern animation, I found it more challenging to incorporate these aspects into my project through the actual art and storytelling. I wanted to stay true to the stories of the adoptees I was interviewing as well as my own story, and I am not a professional artist who can imitate traditional Eastern or Western art styles by any means. Due to these obstacles, I turned to an even more subtle nod to showcase the Eastern and Western differences and in-between state. I began to look more heavily into the aesthetics of the piece, through color design and music design, and shifted my focus from the more concrete art to the more symbolic and abstract art created in my mind from the stories I was hearing.

Aesthetics and Symbolism

The use of overall aesthetics such as the music choice and production in animation expresses the values and liminality and ambiguity in the progression of shifting values. Specifically in the piece I created, the music plays a role in this ambiguity by having a mix of Western and Eastern derived harmonies and sounds that people tend to associate with the two cultures. The music heard underneath are written by Western composers, and is played on the

violin. It is important to note that the violin is chosen as it is the closest sounding Western instrument to the erhu, a Chinese two-string bowed instrument that is common in East Asian composition. The lack of East Asian instrumentation shows the lack of availability to Asian culture that transracial adoptees may face as they may not have cultural material objects passed down by family. The Western compositions and Eastern influence work together and against each other to showcase the confusion, acceptance, and struggles that come together with the identity. The music helps enhance the story, and by using instrumentation that is meant to imitate Asian culture through an erhu-like sound, versus the score from Western cultures there is ambiguity and nuance that is added into the piece. In addition Eastern and Western values play a large role in the way the people and objects in the animated parts of the video are portrayed as the animation begins to show in a subliminal message the balancing act between Western and Eastern in the Asian-American transracial adoptee experience. Creating visual representations that are contrasting of the cultures through color, and values that are traditional in these cultures' animation styles emphasizes how tricky it can be to find a balance.

The aesthetics of the project are heavily influenced by the two cultures, specifically through the use of color. In the animated portions of the video, I use color to show the differences between the Western and Eastern parts of myself, showcasing Western with higher saturation, hue, and intensity and Eastern as more faded saturation, hue, and intensity. This is a subjective perception of color, with my mind thinking of hue and saturation in association to American media such as advertisements, well known companies that are considered 'American' such as McDonalds, and the bright lights that are used to describe famous cities in the United States such as New York, Las Vegas, and Los Angeles. The faded colors in my mind are associated with the older art styles that can be often found in Asian folklore and myths such as

the imagery for the story of Hua Mulan. Understanding that these colors are subjective symbols is important to note, as it is not to say that one is 'better' or 'worse' but rather the color palettes I have associated the cultures with through my experience. They also symbolize a few different things, with the most prominent being the fact that in my narrative, the Asian parts of myself have somewhat faded away in the sense that I know less about them and the Western parts remain bright and present in my life. The brightness in this sense represents a knowledge that is at the forefront of my existence where the faded colors represent a part of myself I have not been as easily in touch with, something that had, for a long part of my life, been put on a shelf to collect dust. Throughout the animation, the colors in the clothing on the character merge together to form one me, the person that is a mix of both the East and West, who may have a larger knowledge of the West but continues to grow her understanding and curiosity of her birth culture. The use of saturation in colors also helps to showcase this as the Asian parts that are originally less saturated, and a lesser intensity begin to rise, and the American parts that are originally at a brighter hue, saturation, and intensity will mellow out, showcasing a balance by the end.

In combining Eastern and Western art and values in subtle ways, the project itself symbolizes the two cultures integrating while also holding their own, much like in the identity of Asian-American transracial adoptees. This symbolism ultimately goes back to the idea of racial and ethnic or cultural socialization where the tool provided helps connect adoptees to both birth culture and inherited culture, and allow others to gain a better understanding of these connections as well. Through these uses of color, music, and symbolism in both represented through the characters' appearances and the sounds that surround them, we begin to find the merging of identity and the understanding of it that unfolds over time. Race and ethnicity are not inherently

exclusive, and using racial-ethnic socialization to frame the project helps with forming cohesive understandings surrounding the experiences of transracial adoptee experiences. Creating a tool that allows for both cultures and the racial identities that transracial adoptees may feel connected to, there is a pathway to dialogue on these identities.

Racial-Ethnic Socialization

In addition to helping others gain more knowledge and empathy towards the transracial adoptee experience, by using the racial-ethnic socialization framework, the project guides adoptees through parts of their identity they may never have been able to explore before. Those who engage in racial-ethnic socialization have outcomes that are healthy for transracial adoptees both psychologically and emotionally as they are able to discuss the racial and cultural spaces they find community in (Montgomery & Jordan, 2018). The racial socialization and ethnic socialization are intertwined, and in relationships that support these types of socialization, transracial adoptees have higher self esteem and a lower sense of marginality and loss of belonging (Mohanty & Newhill, 2011). Using racial-ethnic socialization as a moderator in the relationship between racial discrimination that is perceived to happen and transracial adoptees' distress levels, ultimately helps transracial adoptees balance their identity journey with their mental well-being in a way that does not harm them (Presseau, et al., 2019). The practices of racial and ethnic socialization are able to better prepare transracial adoptees for the things they may face due to their racial status and give them comfort in knowing how to handle and cope with these things by giving them the opportunity to dialogue about their places within their racial and ethnic communities. Through racial-ethnic socialization, transracial adoptees are better equipped to cope with the aspect of racial and ethnic discrimination that Transracial Adoptee Paradox explains they may be initially facing alone due to having white parents, which, in turn,

allows them to gain a healthier way of expressing and steering through the in-between state they may find themselves in.

The challenging nature of the paradox is broken down slightly when parents encourage their children to partake in the racial-ethnic socialization process, and help guide them through it. This form of socialization has been used as a framework within racial minority families at a larger scale than with transracial adoptee families, but the structure and outcomes remain similar. Adoptees tend to view their families as less cohesive and expressive, and overall more negatively, than their parents (Hrapczynski et al., 2022). With this in mind, Montgomery and Jordan agree that the role of the parents, or non racial minority are crucial in the formation and process of the racial-ethnic socialization and ensuring cohesion in family and societal sense of belonging (Montgomery & Jordan, 2018). Parents who engage in cultural and racial socialization practices rate their family function as more expressive than those who do not, and parents who engage in preparation for bias over socialization have children who view their family functioning as more negative amplifying the importance of incorporating these processes into adoptee lives (Hrapczynski et al., 2022). These practices bring awareness to the side of the paradox that examines the discrimination transracial adoptees may face and may struggle to cope with when their parents may not understand the complexities of the racial-ethnic injustice that their children are experiencing (Lee, 2003). Transracial adoptees whose parents are exposed to other races, confront their own racial privileges and biases, and learn about their child's birth culture and race have been found to have a better overall well-being than those whose parents do not participate in these practices as they feel they can have productive conversations with their parental figures on the struggles they may be facing (Montgomery & Jordan, 2018). Scholars in adoption studies agree that the process only truly works if the non racial minority member can look within

themselves and examine their place in relation to the adoptee in terms of race and ethnicity as in doing this, it helps to negate the feelings of stress that transracial adoptees may have in coming to their white parents about challenges they may be facing due to pieces of their identity their parents may not identify with at all (Pinderhughes, et. al, 2021). Racial-ethnic socialization practices have provided a healthy gateway that encourages transracial adoptees to dialogue on racial differences that ultimately help them grasp a better understanding of their space in society through the very complex identity they hold.

Adoption Socialization

In addition to the racial-ethnic socialization aspect, transracial adoptees also go through adoption socialization, where they may learn about their parents' decisions to adopt, potential contact of birth parents, and placement stories, among other things (Pinderhughes, et. al, 2021). For audience members who are transracial adoptees themselves, adoption socialization plays a very large role in the impact of this project. Adoption socialization allows for a sense of belonging to be reached, specifically in family units, but also, in this case, in a sense of comradery through others who have similar experiences (Pinderhughes, et al., 2021). With real recollections from transracial adoptees being at the center of the project, stories of learning where adoptees fit within their families and society as a whole are guaranteed to arise in a way that allow for comradery to be built. As much of the project can be cited to be aimed towards teaching tolerance and empathy for those who are not transracial adoptees, by including adoption socialization alongside racial-ethnic socialization, this aspect of the project helps transracial adoptees become more comfortable in themselves as they will be heard and seen in a way that represents their stories and encourages them to speak their truth.

Using Real Adoption Stories and the History of Adoption in the US

It is extremely important that this project provides quality over quantity as the stories must be complete to have the impact that I wish to convey. It is important for parents to be aware of the quality of socialization adoptees are exposed to in addition to the quantity and frequency at which they are integrating racial-ethnic socialization into their lives (Hrapczynski et al., 2022). When the stories and the intention behind the socialization process is more genuine, it helps to create an environment where voices are encouraged to be heard and amplified. In creating a project that creates a space that is genuine, it is also important to take into consideration the pain, damage and trauma that can come with adoption.

A large part of the pain and trauma that transracial adoptees face can come from a sense of loss of their own culture and heritage which ties into a large part of identity. Transracial adoption in the United States is historically fixed in a lens of colonization, specifically beginning with the abduction of Native-American children to be assimilated into White European Christian culture in the 1800s (Branco, 2021). It is essential to take these ideas of assimilation and colonization into consideration when discussing the transracial adoptee experience in a truthful way as it acknowledges the pain and loss that is inherent in adoption practices. In addition, it is important to note that not every transracial adoption process is positive, and not every family that adopts transracially is inherently anti-racist or prepared to work on the issues surrounding race and ethnicity, which can cause assimilation practices and colonization practices to be forced upon transracial adoptees which is crucial to consider.

Looking at adoption from both a positive and negative perspective is significant in providing a narrative that encapsulates the differences in adoptee stories that occur. Although

there are positive experiences in adoptive families, it is important to note the way in which these stories often get framed, and who is telling them. Transracial adoptees are not given platforms to speak on their experiences very often, and popular media's portrayal of adoptees is not all true to their lives, showing them and their home countries as troubled and damaged (Jacobson, 2014). In instances where adoptees are given platforms to speak out about their experiences, they have cited that throughout their life they have been told to listen to the 'lucky' narrative which emphasizes the idea that adoptees should be grateful to be adopted by their parents and brought to a new country (TEDx Talks, 2021). This narrative is colonization focused, as it only assumes the best of the people who adopt, and often puts them in a frame of being a savior, implying that the ethnic cultures of the adoptee are worse or less than the ones they are adopted into, and denying access to lost culture and heritage (TEDx Talks, 2021). These narratives deny adoptees the right to come to terms with their traumas, constantly pushing positivity onto them when adoption experiences can be very dark and trauma driven. Instead of viewing adoption as a form of loss for adoptees, these narratives frame adoption as something that saved them from a worse fate, pushing a very white and Eurocentric agenda onto transracial adoptees.

Creation Process

In creating the project, there were many factors that I had to take into consideration, but at the end of the day, the project can stand on its own as a way to teach about an identity group, and provide comradery to those who identify as such. The project took the form of an autoethnography animated video with two lesson plans attached, one for middle school aged students, and one for high school aged students and older in an effort to make the content more accessible. Using Dr. Richard Lee's theory of the Transracial Adoptee Paradox alongside the

framework of racial-ethnic socialization, the project worked to understand a larger picture of adoption through the lens of the Asian-American transracial adoptees themselves. Through the use of visual symbolism, research, and Asian-American transracial adoptee testimonies, the project amplifies the Asian-American transracial adoptee voice, providing a new way of examining the experience that is truthful and representative.

Timeline

- October 5th, 2022 - Draft Project Statement
- October 25, 2022 - November 1, 2022 - Surveys sent out and completed
- October 24th, 2022 - Literature Review Completed
- October 25, 2022 - November 15, 2022 - Interviews completed
- November 12, 2022 - Script outlined/written for Autoethnography (I want this to read naturally, so it may be more of an outline then a hard script)
- December 7, 2022 - Begin working on the lesson plans
- December 8, 2022 - January 18, 2022 - Finalize lesson plans and finalize script, begin animations through Final Cut Pro (if grant is approved)
- December 16, 2022 - Final Project Statement Completed
- January 18, 2023 - February 16, 2023 - Continue animation and work on edits (Begin animations and compile draft if grant is not approved)
- February 6, 2023 - Work Plan Revision
- February 17, 2023 - First Draft and Abstract Complete
- February 18, 2023 - March 19, 2022 - Continue to edit after first draft
- March 20, 2023 - Project Draft Done

- March 24, 2023 - MEDS Senior Project Logistics Planning Form Completed
- April 14, 2023 - Final Project completed and turned in

Anticipated Challenges and Costs

There were very few anticipated challenges for this project, however, the project was not completely challenge free. One of the anticipated challenges was the process for Institutional Review Board approval. After submitting to the Vassar Institutional Review Board, it can take a few weeks for the proposal to be approved. The surveys and interviews that I wanted to conduct to collect information that is relevant to the project could not be done until the project got approved by the Institutional Review Board due to research ethics. Not knowing how long it would take to get the Institutional Review Board approval was challenging because it set me back on my original timeline.

There was not much that could be done to overcome this specific obstacle as the Institutional Review Board can take as long as they need to review the application. However, to ensure that I was not wasting my time, and staying productive, I used the time before the approval to begin preliminary drawing for animation and research through literature review. Through the literature, I gained a broader understanding of the different frameworks that I used to enhance my work. I was also able to see what has already been done, and what I can continue to do in my thesis project to continue and push the research that is already readily available to make it more accessible, and at a higher quantity. While I waited for the Institutional Review Board, I maintained productivity by doing things for my thesis that did not pertain to the survey and interview portions of the project.

Another logistical challenge occurred in regards to the creation of the project itself. I used animation for the video project which I didn't have previous experience in. However, I met with Baynard Bailey to work on these skills and help to sharpen them. Baynard suggested that I use Final Cut Pro for the animations that I incorporated into the piece which was helpful in the sense that it was easier than what I had originally planned to use, stop motion animation, but it provided the issue of the cost of software. The software cost \$300, and was originally only available on campus currently. Luckily I was able to submit to the grant committee and they granted me the \$300 reimbursement which allowed me to work on the project even while I was not on campus. I was able to work on my time management and took advantage of learning the animation skills while I was on campus, and had access to people like Baynard. I was also able to continue to find videos and tutorials that helped me with this part of the project while at home, and work on the pieces of the project that did not require the animation software such as completing the lesson plans over break instead of doing the animation.

As for the animation, it went smoothly at first, but I found as I was continuing to work on it on my MacBook Pro, the software was giving me issues. I found that after five to ten minutes using the software, my laptop would overheat, and the application would not respond, causing me to have to force quit it constantly. It was rather frustrating, and set me back causing what should have been an hour of work to turn into two or three hours. I also found that since most of my characters were drawn, lining up the animations on top of each other to make the characters appear to talk was a challenge. I never was able to make this animation fully smooth because of this, and there are parts where characters jiggle a little between the open mouth drawings and closed mouth drawings, but overall, I am proud of what I created.

As for costs, the only additional cost I encountered was the \$300 video software which I was able to get via the Academic Enrichment Fund at Vassar. I was able to use my own iPad for drawings, my laptop for animations and writing, and my personal CANVA account to create the backgrounds for my animation. Using all of these resources I had available to me allowed me to create the project at a low cost to myself.

Conclusion

In the end, the project came together in a way that I am proud of. I am extremely grateful to the adoptees who were willing to be vulnerable and share their stories and experiences with me. I kept pieces of each person's stories, and meshed them together, although I found many to be quite similar to begin with. The pieces I kept were the ones that resonated with me both due to research and personal experience. It was an eye-opening experience and one that was self-liberating as well. In speaking to others, and researching something that is so meaningful and personal to myself, I learned more about myself and my comfort in my identity as a transracial Asian-American Adoptee than I thought possible.

In the end, I spent 5 hours completing interviews, 20 hours of reading and research, 10 hours of coding and sorting through data, 5 hours of script writing, and over a 100 hours of editing, animating, and drawing. The project, although split up among two semesters of college, was very labor intensive, taking up most of my time. For all the hours spent, the animated work at full length is 10:02:25, and has two lesson plans, one for middle school, and one for high school that touch upon the ideas of identity formation present in the video. Thinking about how much work went into the final product is insane considering how short the video seems to be in comparison. Nevertheless, all the hard work paid off, and I am so happy to finally be able to

share with the world, “Somewhere In Between and Nowhere to be Seen: A Look into the Asian-American Transracial Adoptee Experience through Educational Programming.”

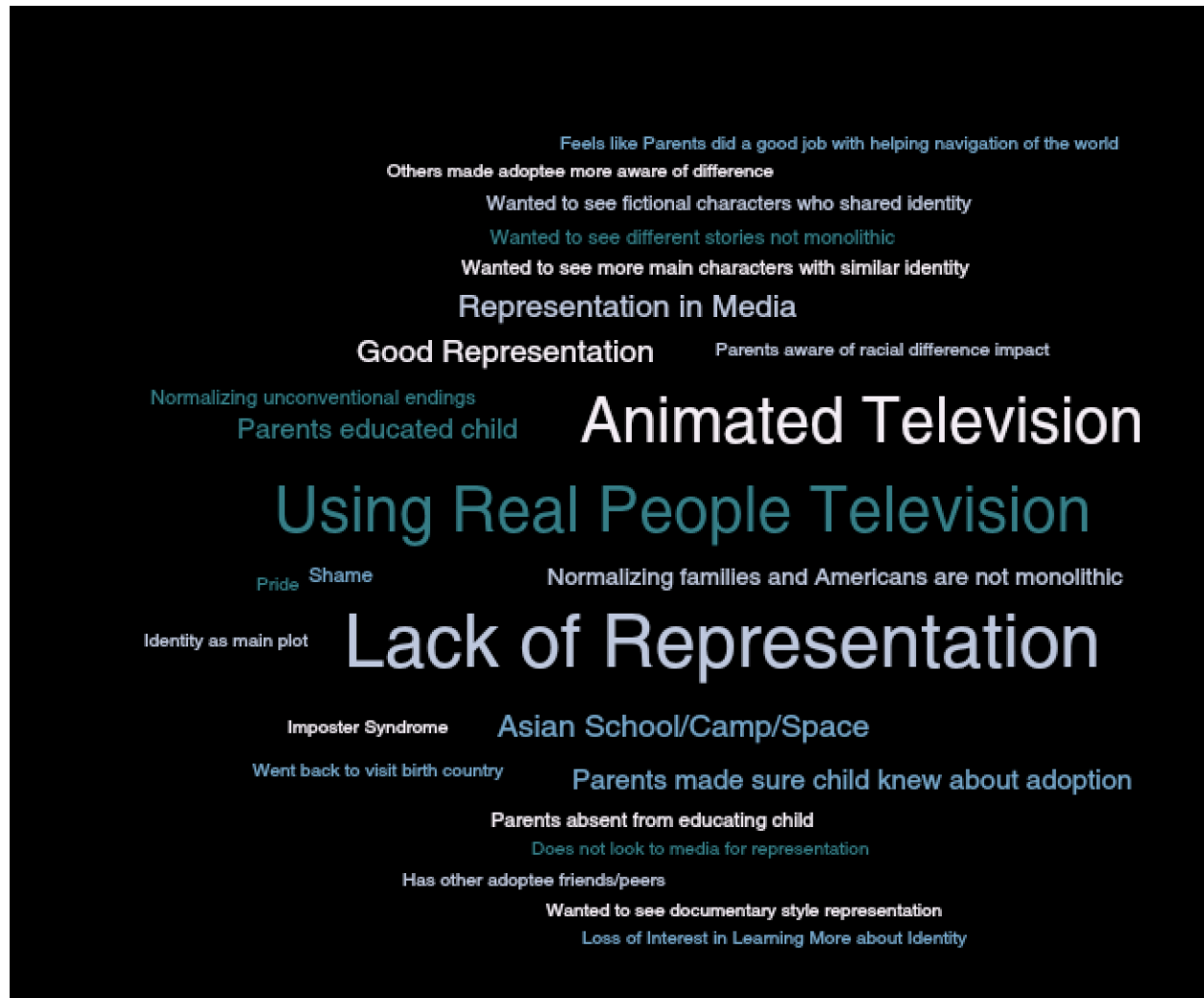
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Appendix

Appendix A: Word cloud representing the codes used for the survey data



Appendix B: Sample Interview Questions

1. Warm up:
 - a. Thank you for joining me today. Before we begin, I would like to go over this consent form with you *Go over the consent form.* Just to reiterate, you are allowed to stop the interview at any point, or let me know if you do not want the information used in any way. There will be no consequences to this and no questions asked. The interview should only take around 20-30 minutes, and at the end, all information will be stored in a secure location that will not be shared. If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to Kimberly

Williams-Brown, the faculty advisor on this project at kwilliamsbrown@vassar.edu. Are you ready to begin?

- b. How are you today?
 - c. Can you tell me a little about yourself?
2. Key Questions
 - a. How, if at all, did the media you consumed as a child shape your understanding of racial identity?
 - b. Did your identity as a transracial adoptee affect your understanding of yourself and/or the people around you?
 - c. How do you view your identity as a transracial adoptee today?
 - d. Have your parents helped you to navigate the world as a transracial adoptee?
 - i. If yes - How did your parents help you?
 - e. If you could create a resource about the Asian-American Transracial Adoptee experience, what would you want to be included and why?
 - i. Developmentally, at what ages would you have appreciated the resources?
3. Ending
 - a. Is there anything else you would like to add that I did not ask you about?
 - b. Do you have any questions for me?
 - c. Thank you again for participating in this. Just a reminder that your identity will be kept anonymous, and that all the things you shared with me today will be kept in a secure, encrypted location that will not be shared. If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to Kimberly Williams-Brown, the faculty advisor on this project at kwilliamsbrown@vassar.edu.