

| Keep — one-page takeaway

Scope note: this territory has a literature written largely by the adoptees inside it, and it does not fit in one lesson. Treat this as orientation. Expect to read further, seek consultation, and consider referral or co-treatment.

The clinical territory

- **No racial mirror.** No one in the family looks like them. No access to the hair, skin, and feature information biological children absorb without thinking. Many describe wishing they woke up looking different.
- **The body read by the outside world.** "Where are you really from," hair touched without permission, being mistaken for the help in their own family, being followed, being read as a stereotype. It accumulates, and parents often didn't see it or minimized it when it was reported.
- **Community that exists but wasn't accessible.** A Black adoptee in a white town had a Black community somewhere; an Asian American adoptee had community in the US. Standard racial identity models assume contact with one's racial community. Transracial adoptees often had none, and finding a way in as an adult is its own clinical territory.
- **Love and harm looking alike.** When a child is called a slur by a white classmate and goes home to white parents, the people who comfort them look like the people who harmed them. This is a literal visual fact, and it's not an accusation against the parents.
- **The gratitude bind, intensified.** The culture says the parents did something exceptional. Complexity about race gets weighed against that debt. Many wait until adulthood, or until they meet other transracial adoptees, to say it out loud.

History clients may be working through

- NABSW 1972 position statement opposing placement of Black children with white families. A reference point in the field ever since, revisited by the organization over the years.
- Multi-Ethnic Placement Act 1994 (amended 1996): limited the use of race in placement decisions and increased transracial placements. Argued both as reducing discrimination and as shifting racial preparation onto unequipped white families.
- Indian Child Welfare Act 1978: placement preference to extended family, tribe, then other Native families, in response to documented removal of Native children at far higher rates. Upheld in *Brackeen v. Haaland* (2023); the politics continue.

Frameworks worth knowing

- Cultural-racial identity model (Baden and Steward, 2007): how transracial adoptees may relate to racial identity differently across the lifespan.
- Adoptee Consciousness Model (Baden, Branco, and colleagues, 2022): extends that framework.
- Use them to recognize where a client may be, without imposing a stage.

In the room

- Name what the client describes as real and structural. Don't interpret their parents unless asked.
- You're doing cross-racial work. Humility, attention to power, willingness to discuss race directly.
- A client's wish for a same-race counselor is legitimate information, not a rejection.

Continued considerations

- What can you not understand about your client's racial experience from where you sit, and how would you say that out loud?
- Whose reading list are you working from? If the authors aren't transracial adoptees, start over.
- Sit with this: what would you do if a client told you they'd rather see someone who looks like them?