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dissertation entitled

ECOLOGICAL INFLUENCES ON ETHNIC IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF FEMALE KOREAN-BORN TRANSRACIAL ADOPTEES

presented by

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has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Doctoral degree in Family & Child Ecology

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11/13/09
Date

ECOLOGICAL INFLUENCES ON ETHNIC IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF FEMALE KOREAN-BORN TRANSRACIAL ADOPTEES

BY

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

FAMILY & CHILD ECOLOGY

2009

ABSTRACT

ECOLOGICAL INFLUNCES ON THE ETHNIC IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF FEMALE KOREAN-BORN TRANSRACIAL ADOPTEES

By

Katie L. Bozek

The purpose of this study was to examine the ecological influences on ethnic identity development in female Korean-born transracial adoptees and how contributors informed that process. Exploration of ethnic identity development was done with specific attention to female adoptees, as it is believed the gender of the child has a significant role in this process. Fifteen women who were born in Korea and adopted to Caucasian parents in the U.S. participated in in-depth interviews that explored their ethnic identity development over the years.

This study was informed by two theoretical frameworks: human ecological theory, and critical race feminism with an ethnic identity lens. Feminist interviewing methods were utilized to gather qualitative data through in-depth interviews and triangulated with written reflective journal responses. This process allowed for the intersection of being adopted, female and Asian to be explored. In addition, the use of these perspectives allowed for the themes of oppression, racism and gender to come to the forefront.

Qualitative data analysis revealed several major themes related to the process of ethnic identity and the external contributions to how the adoptees viewed themselves in various contexts throughout their lives. These themes related to their adoptive family life,

perceptions of their adoption, interactions with Korea, ethnic identity journey, current circumstances and their future hopes and fears.

The findings of this study also point to the process of ethnic identity development as a life-long journey that involves various ecological influences. It was found that as adoptees are faced with new experiences and interactions with larger systems they are forced to re-evaluate the cultural messages that are imbedded within our culture about who she is versus who she believes she is. The findings also have several implications related to ethnic identity development in terms of providing information for adoptive parents and clinicians who work with transracial adoptive families, or transracial adoptees.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project is dedicated to all the Korean adoptees that have come before me, with me, and for those who will come after me. We are not alone in our struggle. We may come from different backgrounds, but we are linked by a common desire to find a place where we truly "fit in".

I would like to acknowledge the women who participated in this study. I thank you for your courage and dedication to creating a better life for those adoptees who continue to struggle with their identity and who they are. Your words and your stories are inspirational to me and others.

This is also dedicated to my children, Jaden Yong & Eli Kang-dae. I love you more than I can put into words, and am so proud to be your mother. Thank you for keeping me inspired with your endless smiles, hugs, kisses, and your unique craziness. I want you to know that my motivation came from my desire to create a better world for you and to teach you how to be proud of who you are and know where you come from.

To my husband, Benjamin. I could not have done any of this without you and your support and encouragement over the years. This year particularly was full of ups and downs and lots of learning and growing, and I thank you for sticking by my side through all the late nights, days away, and the ridiculous logic that came with them. Thank you for supporting me in your ways and for allowing me to go out and try and make the world a better place for not only us, but for our children. Today you may finally call me Dr. Bozek!

I could not have made it through without the support, encouragement and laughter of my dear friends, Jen & Amy. Thank you for your friendship and your ability to make me laugh through even the most difficult times, otherwise known as chapter 1, chapter 2, chapter 3,

chapter 4, chapter 5 and finally, formatting. Thanks for all the fun times during these past six years. I look forward to many more in our new roles that don't include the word "student"!

I would also like to acknowledge the FIT team and it's fearless leader, Kathleen. Each of you has played such a supportive role in my growth as a therapist, researcher and as a person. I have learned so much about myself through each of you. Thank you for all the memories of t-shirts, meth coffee, night auditing, sage-burning rituals, and all the great food at the countless FIT parties and celebrations. Rock on AKT's!

And last, but certainly not least, I would like to acknowledge all my committee members who provided me the opportunity and the encouragement to examine my experience and the experience of other adoptees, Adrian Blow, Deb Johnson and Andrea Louie. This was truly a rewarding experience and I cannot thank you enough for supporting me in this endeavor. In particular I would like to thank Marsha Carolan who has supported, encouraged, edited, and guided me and this project through many revisions, emails, and talking me through the Katie-Crazy-Method. Thank you for your support throughout the years—I could not have made it to this point without you.

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Introduction

Transracial adoption is often a misunderstood topic as the results of studies on the effects and outcomes of transracial adoptions are relatively inconclusive (Brooks & Barth, 1999; Deberry, Scarr & Weingberg, 1996; Feigelman & Silverman, 1984). It is believed that the different circumstances in which international transracial adoptions take place have a profound affect on the development and adjustment of the adoptee (Huh & Reid, 2000; Weinberg et al., 2004; Vonk, 2001). Adoptions from Asian countries are of particular interest because it is typically both a transracial and international adoption. In these circumstances, the child experiences the normal losses of an adoption, but also the loss of his/her birth country and culture. Studies (Cubito & Brandon, 2000; Burrow & Finley, 2004; Feigelman, 2000; Friedlander, 1999) that have involved international-transracial adoptees have focused on the "adjustment" of the adoptee. In these studies the term "adjustment" has referred to different concepts, such as physical adjustment, psychological adjustment, socio-emotional adjustment, etc.

Many of the questions about the adjustment of a child adopted from Asia to a Caucasian family revolve around if and how the child will develop a positive ethnic identity while living in an environment where there may be little to no contact with his/her birth race or culture. Thus, the goal of this project was to focus on the adult understanding of their adjustment as Korean-born children who were adopted to Caucasian parents in the United States.

The general purpose of this project was to contribute to the scarce literature on Korean-born transracial adoptees. Specifically, this project was designed to determine

what the ecological influences on a Korean-born transracial adoptees' ethnic identity development were, as well as what role those external forces played in the ethnic identity development process. This was done with specific attention to female adoptees, as it is believed the gender of the child has a significant role in this process. Examining these factors is important in order to fully understand how ethnic identity development occurs in Korean-born transracially adopted children. It is believed that these children are at a disadvantage in ethnic identity development because of the nature of their family structure (i.e. being a minority in a majority family). Ethnic identity development in same-race families is an already complex process, while growing up in a mixed-raced family may complicate this process further. Various accounts of young adult and adult Korean-born transracial adoptees indicate the process of finding and creating a complete identity from their Korean heritage and their Caucasian upbringing is often difficult and confusing (Hurdis, 2007).

Examining the ethnic identity development in Korean-born transracial adoptees was accomplished by exploring what the lived experiences of these adoptees were. Though there continues to be a void in research on the collective transracial adoptive family experience, the current project focused on the individual experience of the adoptee. The purpose of doing so was to give voice to the female adult adoptee that is often left out of the literature on Korean adoptees and to contribute to the literature regarding the ethnic identity development of women in transracial adoptions.

History of transracial adoption

Transracial adoption involves the adoption of a child that is of a different race than the parents. Over the past several decades the United States has seen an increase in

the number of transracial adoptions, and in most recent years an increase in international transracial adoption. This increase has caused some backlash in the past, and continues to be a heated topic among some. For example, the practice of adoptions of African-American children to Caucasian parents in the early 1970's resulted in the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) to adopt a strong stance against this type of adoption. The Child Welfare League of America's National Council of Latino Executives (CWLNCLE) (1998) also took a stand against transracial adoption. They emphasized the importance of the consideration of race when considering what is in the best interest of the child in regards to placement and adoption decisions, and opposed the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) that sought to prohibit the use of race, color or national origin to be determinants of placement for children who were in the foster care system or eligible for adoption.

In the immediate years following the National Association of Black Social Workers, and the Child Welfare League of America's National Council of Latino Executives voiced opposition to transracial adoptions there was an increase in research on transracial adoptions. The majority of that research focused on the ethnic identity development of the adoptee, and how living with a family of a different race mediated that development. Over the years, however, research in this area has decreased, although transracial adoptions continue to rise.

History of adoption from Asia

Though transracial adoption continues to be a debated topic, international transracial adoptions of Asian children have become more popular since the beginning during the 1950's. Adoptions from Asian countries began soon after the Korean War,

and another influx in Asian adoptions occurred soon after the Vietnam War. During the early 1980's there was another increase in adoptions, especially those from South Korea. Since then, this adoption practice has increased and become more popular. During the 1990's South Korea was ranked more than once as the country that had the most children adopted to couples in the United States. During the late 1990's and the early 2000's South Korea was ranked consistently as either the third or fourth country with the largest number of children adopted by couples in the United States. For the year 2006, there were 1,376 children adopted from South Korea to parents in the United States (U.S. State Department, 2007). Since 2002, South Korea has consistently been the fourth highest ranked country for number of children adopted to the United States (U.S. State Department, 2007). The number of female children adopted from Asia was almost SIX times that of the number of male children adopted in the year 2006 (Childwelfare.gov, 2007). Thus, it is important to also consider the influence of gender on these adoptions.

The rise and fall in the number of children adopted from S. Korea over the years can be explained by the political and social landscape of those times in S. Korea. By looking at the historical contexts for these adoptions, one is able to have a glimpse into the legacy these children hold. Kim (2007) provided an in-depth look at the three "waves" of adoption from S. Korea to the United States. The first wave of adoption occurred during the early 1950's to mid 1960's and resulted from the Korean War, and Cold War. Many of the children conceived during this time were a result of relations between Korean women and U.S. soldiers. These children faced immense stigmatization from being mixed-race and having what was referred to then as a "military prostitute" as a mother. As a country, Korea was experiencing a tremendous amount of poverty, and the

traditional, cultural emphasis of familial lineage discouraged the domestic adoption for these children. During this time, the Korean government was focused on providing and maintaining national security and promoting economic growth. As a result, the government did little to provide services for orphaned children and funding for social services relied on foreign resources and private humanitarian efforts (W. Choi, 1996, as cited by Kim, 2007). All these factors resulted in thousands of Korean children being adopted to foreign countries, specifically, the United States during this time.

The second wave of adoptions occurred during the mid-1970's to late 1980's. Korea experienced a rapid industrialization and urbanization that led to a large recruitment of young women from rural regions to come work in the factories. This disrupted the flow of the traditional family as women went to work and lived independently from their families of origin. The income for these women was far below a livable wage resulting in many of the women having to share living arrangements with other factory workers that often led to the unplanned pregnancies. During this time the Korean government, in an effort to control the population increase, implemented a Family Planning Program with the slogan, "Raise only two children well." The government continued to support and encourage foreign adoption of financially burdensome children (Huh, 2007). Children who were born into extreme poverty constituted the majority of adoptees who were sent across seas during this time (Kim, 2007).

The third wave of adoptions began in 1988 and continues to present-day. Since 1988 there has been a decrease in the amount of Korean children who were being adopted into foreign countries, such as the United States. This is largely due to the attention South

Korea received from Western media during the 1988 Olympic games for "baby selling" (Rothschild, 1988, as cited by Kim, 2007). The Korean government stopped all foreign adoptions during that year and created programs that worked to decrease the number of children adopted out of the country. Birth mothers are often teenage mothers with a history of trauma (e.g., poverty, domestic violence, sexual abuse, single-parent households) (Kim, 2007). Traditional families are still held in high regard, with single mothers, and young mothers facing stigmatization. This is reflected in the Korean educational system not allowing pregnant teens to continue school, forcing them to "voluntarily" dropout. This time is also marked by many adoptees returning to Korea.

From the standpoint of sheer numbers and the unique legacy these adoptees carry, it is apparent there is a need to explore what the experiences of these adoptees and their adoptive families are as these types of adoptions continue.

A pervasive belief about Korea continues to be that as a country Korea has, in essence, chosen to ignore the number of children who are adopted to other countries. This is reflected in the creation of groups to promote awareness of how many children are adopted out of Korea. The current practices and beliefs about international transracial adoptions from Korea is being informed and led by a movement by Korean-born transracial adoptees and those who are involved with the adoption process to promote an awareness of how many children are exported out of the country each year. The International Korean Adoptee Services (InKAS) organization is one such group and has outlined several goals related to promoting ethnic pride among Korean adoptees and improving the image of Korea to adoptees, adoptive families and countries that adopt from Korea. To serve their goal, InKAS set up billboards throughout Korean subway

stations filled with pictures of children who had been adopted to other countries. These billboards were affectionately called "Awareness Walls" because they were created as a means to promote an awareness of the large number of children who are adopted out of Korea, and to promote the belief and practice that rather than send their children away, Korea should work to be able to keep their children.

Another organization that is working toward more awareness of the number of children who are adopted out of Korea each year is the Mission to Promote Adoption in Korea (MPAK). MPAK is formed by adoptive families and works to promote more domestic adoptions in Korea. They have been successful in obtaining and establishing economic incentives for families to adopt that were not previously available (Brian, 2007).

Theoretical background

The theoretical framework for this project is based on human ecological theory and critical race feminism with an ethnic identity lens.

Many studies on ethnic identity development have used stage-progression models to describe this process (e.g., Cross, 1978; Helms, 1991; Huh & Reid, 2000; Quintana, 1998). These models do not account for the ecological influences and interactions between individual aspects on ethnic identity development in children and adolescents. A focus on the individual aspects and individual influences fails to account for parental, familial, peer, school, or other institutional influences that have been documented to impact ethnic identity development (e.g., Friedlander, 1999; Yoon, 2004). To attend to this interaction, this project used an ecological framework to study Korean-born transracial adopees. Using an ecological perspective in conjunction with a stage-

progression model of ethnic identity development allowed for the consideration and examination of all the factors that influence the ethnic identity development of a transracial adoptee and coherently brings the literature together.

This ecological approach provided the means to examine the various aspects of a transracial adoptees' life and how it contributed to their ethnic identity development. Using an ecological model provided a backdrop for understanding all the different influences on ethnic identity development and allowed for the complexities of ethnic identity development to be highlighted. It also allowed the process to be shown as a dynamic and vibrant process. Ethnic identity development may occur in various stages, but the experience of those stages and various experiences and influential people propel the progression from one to another. The use of this theory highlights the belief that ethnic identity development is not influenced by only one aspect of a person's life, but instead, there are many different aspects and areas of a person's life that contributes to his/her ethnic identity development. This allows for a broader look into how the family functions and what other external factors influence and affect the family and the individual members.

Human Ecological Theory

Human ecological theory provides a way to make sense of how people develop in the different contexts of their world. It is based upon the notion that as individuals, groups and societies, humans interact with the environment and the environment interacts with humans. In short, it is the study of the interrelationships between all organisms (living and non-living) and the environment (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993).

Human ecological theory posits that humans are biological organisms and social

beings whose interactions take place within different environments: the physical/natural environment, the human created environment and the socially constructed environment (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993). For the purposes of this project, the socially constructed environment was of particular interest. The socially constructed environment consists of the settings humans exist in and interact with that encompass our reality. Several examples of the socially constructed environment are family, work environments, cultural norms, social policies and language. A major component of human ecological theory is based upon Bronfenbrenner's (1979) four levels of systems: micro, meso, exo and macro-system. These levels are differentiated by the varying degrees of distance from an individual. The microsystem is considered the primary environment, such as a person's immediate family.

In regards to Korean-born transracial adoptees the microsystem would consist of the adoptive parents and siblings they may have. The mesosystem consists of the various systems that interact with the microsystem, for example a child's school. For parents who are actively involved with the child's birth culture, this may include Korean language classes, Korean culture classes, or other classes or activities related to the child's birth culture. The exosystem is the external environment that a person participates in that affects the other two systems, such as a mother or father's workplace, social networks and in the case of an adoptive family, the adoption agency. The macrosystem is the broadest system and consists of the ideological values, norms and patterns of a particular culture that people adhere to. In regards to adoption, it is the beliefs about how families should be formed, why kids are placed for adoption, reasons or adopting, and other beliefs about adoption. Specific to transracial adoption, the macrosystem involves ideas

and beliefs about mixed-race families, racism, discrimination and prejudice.

It is important to note the interconnectedness of these levels. Each level effects and is affected by the other levels. Change in one level can influence the other levels, and how they relate and affect one another. This model provides a basic framework from which to understand how families process external forces in all levels.

Using Bronfenbrenner's theoretical model, there are influences from all levels that have the potential to influence and impact ethnic identity development in Korean-born transracial adoptee. Looking at ethnic identity development from a top-down approach using Bronfenbrenner's model can accentuate the influences from various levels and how it can affect the individual adoptee.

At the macrolevel, society's beliefs and notions about transracial adoption, how children come to be adopted from other countries, and other beliefs about racial and ethnic identity affect the adoptee, the parents and the family as a whole. These effects are seen in the perceptions of the adoptive parents of their children, and the role race plays in their lives (Bergquist, Campbell, & Unrau, 2001). These beliefs trickle down to influence the exosystem, which includes the community in which the family lives in, the school the child attends, and the laws surrounding adoption. Couples who chose to adopt from Korea may chose to move to a more racially and ethnically diverse community based upon their beliefs about what is beneficial and important to their child of color (Meier, 1999). The community they live in can have a profound influence on the ways they interact with the family and adoptee by their level of acceptance of the child and the adoptive family (Vidal de Haymes & Simon, 2003).

At the mesosystem level is the interaction with parent's work environments,

extended family and other support systems, such as the parent's social network. Parents from the Vidal del Haymes and Simon (2003) study reported disturbing and sometimes very hurtful reactions from their friends, family, and their communities. Parents indicated that adoption raised questions from others, as well as some erroneous assumptions about the family. These assumptions were categorized into two categories: perception that the family deserved pity, and assumptions regarding the parent's motivation for adopting transracially. Some parents reported people viewing the adoptee as a "poor, unfortunate" child and the adoptive parents as saints who "saved" the adoptee by sacrificing themselves. Other parents reported incidents where people assumed the parents adopted because of "White liberal guilt". Some parents indicated their extended families were the culprits of erroneous assumptions, or opposed the adoption. One mother reported persistent rejection by her husband's family, indicating that her mother-in-law still holds on to the belief that African-American people are inferior. This resulted in her children not wanting to visit their grandmother, or the grandmother not knowing their names.

At the microsystem is the immediate family and individual adoptee. At this level, all the other influences of the previous larger levels can be seen. The adoptee and family can also be seen affecting the other levels of the system through their interactions and information they bring to the other systems. In Vidal del Haymes and Simon's study (2003) transracially adopted children reported a sense of having to choose "loyalties". In other words, they felt that other children (white, or of color) and society in general forced them to choose one racial identity, which also translated into choosing whom they would be loyal to. Some children reported ambivalence about their racial identity, while others held certain stereotypes about others of the same race. For the adoptive parents, some had

more awareness of racism and racial issues than other parents. The children also echoed this sentiment. Some indicated their parents did not always recognize a racist act in school or other community activities, or the parents would try to minimize the experience. Some children indicated that their parents would avoid a conversation about race (Vidal de Haymes and Simon, 2003).

The final level is the chronosystem, at which all levels of the model are viewed as changing over time. Beliefs about race, about adoption, interactions among the various levels all change over time. The chronosystem is especially pertinent to the study of ethnic identity development as it was previously stated that this process is a life-long progression.

Figure 1.1 Conceptual Map

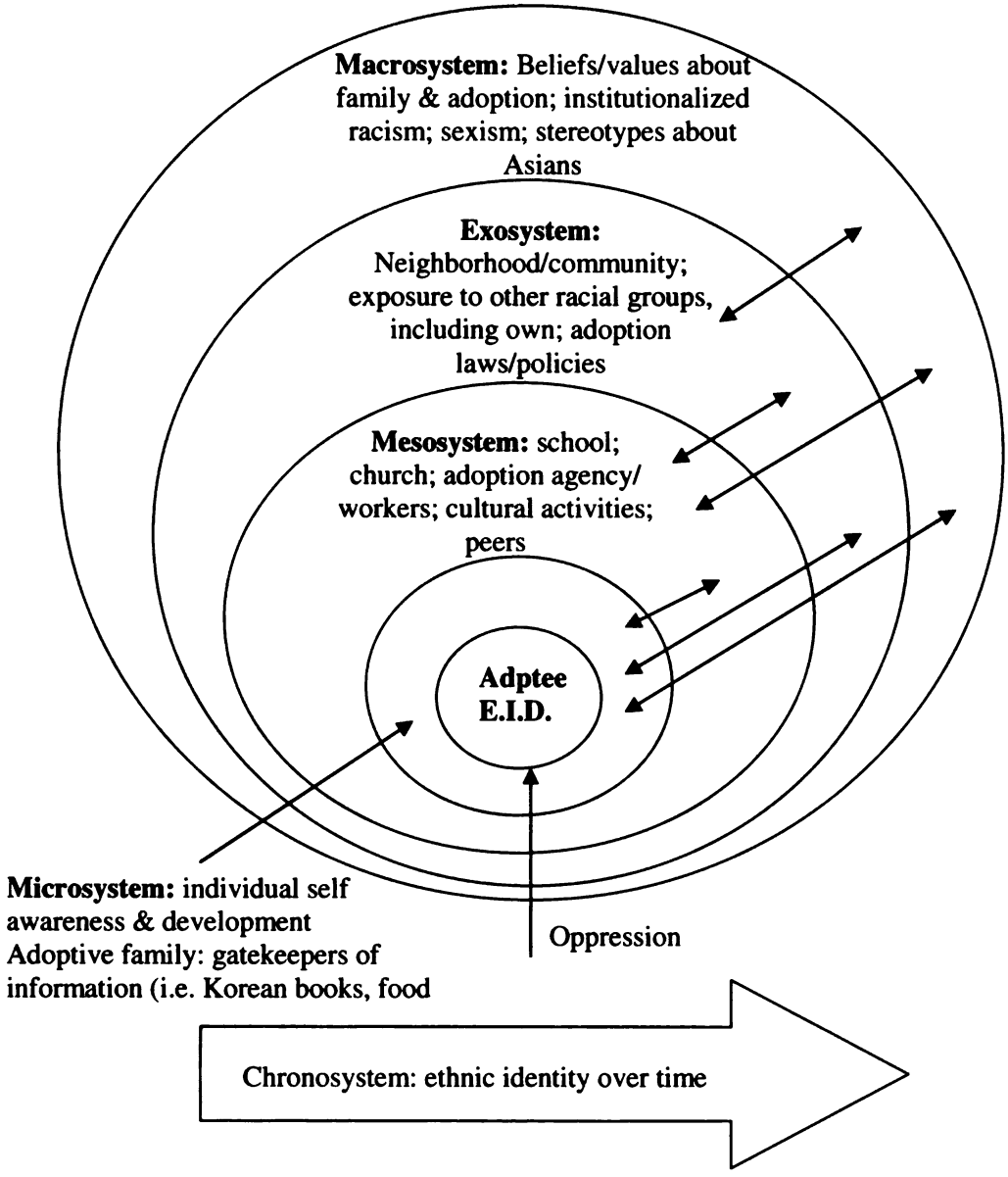

Figure 1.1 represents the various levels of systems from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model and how they interact with each other and with the ethnic identity development of the adoptee. At the center of the figure is the adoptees' ethnic identity that is influenced and informed by each of the systems. Each of the headings describe what makes up each system.The two-way arrows indicate that the systems influence and inform each other.

The one-way arrow from "oppression" represents that oppression cuts through all levels of systems and can come from any one of those systems. The large arrow depicts the chronosystem as each of the systems change over time, including the ethnic identity of the adoptee.

As the previous discussion has shown, an important aspect to examine in the ethnic identity development of Korean-transracial adoptees is the external influences, such as those from the various levels of Bronfenbrenner's model (Yeh and Huang, 1996). Just as the Korean transracial adoptive family's functioning and experience is affected by all levels of Bronfenbrenner's model; so is the ethnic identity development of a Korean-born transracial adoptee connected to and dependent upon all levels of the model. The messages the adoptee receives from the larger society about race, about racial groups, and stereotypes that all classify them as second-class citizens can be internalized by the Korean-born adoptee resulting in a struggle between what society says about who they are, and how the adoptee feels about who they are.

Critical Multiculturalism Feminism

The strong roots of Confucian values, a patriarchal society, among other macro-level situations in Korea (e.g., economic hardship, domestic abuse, prejudice, stigmatization of single mothers) have led to numerous female babies abandoned or put up for adoption by the parent(s) (Kim, 2007). One cannot examine the ecological influences of a Korean-born adoptees' ethnic identity development without the consideration of gender. In Mier's (1999) study looking at the role of place and identity in Korean-born adoptees', she found that gender played a role in the development of the adoptees' identity. Knowing what the adoptees' knew about the culture's emphasis on

male children and the importance of carrying on the family name, many female participants identified with a feeling of abandonment that was directly connected to their being female. These findings point to the necessity of placing the adoptees' gender at the center of the project along with race as prominent components to their ethnic identity development. As a result, this project will also be working from a critical race feminist theory perspective. This allowed for the intersection of being adopted, female and Asian to be explored. In addition, using this perspective will allow for the themes of oppression, racism and gender to come to the forefront. One cannot talk about a population that is oppressed and discriminated against without examining it through a critical lens.

Critical race feminist theory has its roots in critical race theory and transpired through the exclusion of racial and/or ethnic legal women scholars by their male peers (Few, 2007). Critical race theory began within the discourse of law; however, it has since been applied to a variety of other fields of study. The following discussion relates to the roots of critical race theory in an effort to provide the context from which critical race feminist theory was established. Critical race theory has several core themes that serve as the foundation from which the theory was created upon (McDowell & Jeris, 2004). These are: (1) Race continues to be a fundamental organizing principle in U.S. society (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1999), (2) racism is a "normal" and "everyday" experience for people of color within the U.S. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), (3) the ultimate goal of CRT is social justice, and (4) people of color have specific social positions and experiences with oppression that provide them with an unmatched voice in matters involving race.

Though critical race feminism comes from critical race theory, the former emphasizes a different lens for observing the world around us. Similar to critical race

theory, critical race feminism also pulls from a variety of scholarly traditions. It has paved the way for many innovative methodologies and perspectives to immerge. As De Reus, Few & Blume (2005) stated, critical race feminism has created a space for examining diversity that "challenges conceptual boundaries, centers marginalized ideas and people, decolonizes knowledges, and compels the creation of innovative research questions, methods, and praxis." (p. 447).

Critical race feminism places emphasis on the location of a person, which can empower or marginalize individuals and groups (De Reus, Few, & Blume, 2005). Using a critical race feminist lens allows the female adoptees' historical and current location to be a part of her story. It is necessary for the current project to identify the "location" of the adoptees that are to be included. It also allows for the multiple identities from these locations she holds as an adoptee, a woman and a Korean to converge and gives each a voice (De Reus, Few, & Blume, 2005). Part of a Korean adopted woman's location is also the context in which she was adopted. This context can also contribute to how the dominant group "racializes" other minority racial groups that is dependent upon the current needs of the time (De Reus, Few, & Blume, 2005). This is of particular interest when considering the timing and social and economical reasons for the different "waves" in Korean adoption to American couples. A critical feminist lens would say that children from each of these different cohorts would be "racialized" differently based upon the current reasons for and trends in adoption from Korea.

Another contributing factor to how Asians, including Koreans, are racialized are the stereotypes that exist regarding this group. One pervasive stereotype of Asians is that of the model minority. This stereotype portrays Asians as superior to others in academic,

financial and success due to the family values and strong work ethic. This stereotype is often viewed as positive, rather than negative, although, as it is a stereotype, there are inherent dangers to accepting it. This stereotype is often a double-edged sword, so to speak. The "model minority" just by name implies that this is a "positive" stereotype, however, people still use it to single others who are different out. This stereotype also leads people to believe that Asian people do not struggle resulting in fewer services being made available, and using Asians as a "model" for other minority groups to aspire to.

With regards to adoption, adoptive parents have been found to apply this stereotype to their Korean adopted children as evidenced by Burrow and Finley's (2004) study. The children in this particular study were found to have higher academic achievement than other students, however, the researchers could not help but wonder if this was a direct result of the adoptive parent's expectations of the adoptee. It is believed that this stereotype among others that contribute to the macrolevel influences on the ethnic identity development of Korean born transracial adoptees.

Few (2007) outlined several advantages to using a critical race feminist lens that are pertinent to the current project. The first is *eliminating marginalization while centering experience*. Through the process of contextual critical thinking the authenticity of an individual's or group's voices are centered within their context. She spoke of informant's "location" which she defined as "those historical, geographical, cultural, psychic, and imaginative boundaries and axes of self-definition." (Few, 2007, p. 459). The second advantage to using critical race feminism is that is *compatible with other family theories*, specifically ecological theory. Using any critical theory requires the critical analysis of the multiple contexts and environments an individual or group is part

of, or interacts with. The third advantage Few (2007) outlined was that by using a critical race feminist perspective, one is able to *create culturally sensitive intervention approaches*. This is accomplished through being able to create interventions and prevention strategies that are culturally appropriate and relevant to specified groups. This was especially pertinent for the current project, as it was the hope that the information and knowledge gained here will inform future adoption policies and practices.

Research Questions

This project looked at the influences on ethnic identity development by focusing on:

1. Contributors to the ethnic identity development of Korean-born transracial adoptees.
2. The intersection of being adopted, female and Asian and how it contributes to creating an identity.

Fulfilling these objectives was accomplished by answering several specific research questions. These questions were derived from the theoretical framework that was described earlier. The first three questions come from ecological theory as they relate to the interactions with the various systems that influenced and informed the adoptees' ethnic identity development.

1. What are the ecological influences on a Korean-born transracial adoptees' ethnic identity development?
2. How do aspects of the adoptees' ecology influence ethnic identity development for Korean adoptees?
3. What are the factors or influences that propel a person from one stage of ethnic identity development into another?

The last two questions were derived from a combination of the ecological and critical race feminism theories as they pertained to the intersection of the multiple identities as Korean women who were adopted as young children.

4. How does being from a minority culture adopted into a majority culture influence ethnic identity development?
5. How does gender influence ethnic identity development in Korean-born transracial adoptees?

The following chapter will examine how previous research on Korean-born transracial adoptees can support and inform the current project.

Chapter 2

Literature review

The following section intends to review the small base of literature on the ethnic identity development in Korean-born transracial adoptees. This review also includes sections on ethnic identity development in general as well as in Korean-American children who were not adopted. The literature review also provides some literature on documented ecological influences on the ethnic identity development in Korean-born transracial adoptees (i.e. parental influence). These sections are included in hopes of integrating the literature to create a more informed and well-rounded picture of what the experiences are for these types of adoptees.

Overview of ethnic identity development in transracial adoptees

In discussions of ethnic identity, it is important to distinguish between race, ethnicity and culture. Race is typically defined as a group of people who share genetic and physical features, while ethnicity refers primarily to the shared sociological or anthropological features (i.e. customs, religious practices, language) of a group of people who share the same ancestry. Culture, on the other hand are the subgroups that exist within racial or ethnic groups (Quintana, 1998).

Friedlander (1999) reviewed the literature regarding ethnic identity development in transracial and international adoptive families and found that in many articles there is no agreement on a single definition of "ethnic identity". As a result articles may be talking about different things even though they are referring to the ethnic identity of a person. She also indicated that recent theorists have conceptualized ethnic identity as a "dynamic, developmental process involving active decision making and self-exploration"

(Friedlander, 1999). Ethnic identity development is influenced by a multitude of factors: immediate family, and also the broader social context the family and individual lives in (Shiao & Tuan, 2007).

For the purposes of this project, ethnic identity will refer to how an individual is able to integrate notions of self and other, group membership and difference and her own beliefs about race, culture and heritage into her sense of self.

Adoptee adjustment

It is important to note the significance of a person's adopted status has on the ethnic identity development process. Being adopted inherently infers that the biological parent(s) were either unwilling or unable to care for the child and that child had to placed with those who could provide care. Adoptive parents have often alluded to instances of having their family classified as "substandard" because they were formed from adoption (Vidal de Haymes & Simon, 2003). For a transracial adoptee, that means "she" encompasses these categories of "substandard": adopted, minority status, and female. The intersection of these identities makes it difficult to be able to identify only one source of influence on ethnic identity development. Studies looking at adjustment in transracial adoptees have often focused on only one of these identities, rather than allowing for the inclusion of each. This makes it difficult to decipher if adjustment problems are solely due to being adopted, or because of their minority status, or their gender. As such, it is important to also include in this literature review previous studies that have looked at adjustment outcomes based on a person's adopted status.

Many of the studies of transracial adoptees in general have yielded results that have indicated that transracial adoptees adjustment varies very little from that of those

who are adopted in-racially or non-adopted (Kim, Shin, and Carey, 1998). Others have found that transracial adoptees do differ from other groups in significant ways. Miller et al., (2000b) found adoptees to be at higher risks for delinquency and school performance than their non-adopted counterparts. Weinberg et al., (2004) found similar rates of risk in transracial adoptees for delinquency, general health, and school adjustment problems. Specific to Asian transracially adopted children, Burrow and Gordon (2004) found that they reported more psychosomatic symptoms than those who were in racially adopted. It is still unclear what accounts for the extreme differences among various findings related to transracial adoptees' adjustments. One hypothesis has been the varying degrees of ethnic identity development in these children.

There have been other studies that have looked at the protective factors for this unique group of adopetees. Huh & Reid (2000) found that participation in cultural activities, such as reading books, and attending cultural festivals was associated with higher levels of adjustment in Korean-born transracial adoptees. The limitations of these studies on adoptee adjustment are that many have been in reaction to research opposed to transracial adoption, or for those who are pro-transracial adoption.

Some studies have looked at the intersection of the multiple identities of Korean-born transracial adoptees and how it impacts their adjustment. In a previous review of transracial adoption, Lee (2003) concluded that there does not appear to be psychological risks inherent in transracial adoption, but there did appear to be a connection between being adopted and being part of a minority group and varying levels of adjustment, of primary concern are primarily lower levels. Simon and Alstein (2000) found that of their sample, 25% of the transracial adopted children reported difficulties growing up that

were connected to their racial status, whereas only 2%-3% of those children identified difficulties related to their adoption status. These studies point to the importance of examining what those challenges transracially adopted children have related to their ethnic and racial identity (Lee & Quintana, 2005).

Importance of ethnic identity development

There are questions as to whether or not the adopted child's ethnic identity development will be affected negatively due to living with parents who are not from the same racial or cultural background. Friedlander's (1999) findings point to the importance of a strong sense of ethnic identity as it relates to self-esteem and psychological adjustment. Ethnic groups that are more physically, and culturally similar to the dominant group are less stigmatized, and experienced less racism than those who were part of a more physically different ethnic group. For Asian adopted children, however, their physical features are very distinct from those of Caucasian children. As a result, these adopted children will most likely experience more taunting and teasing than someone who is adopted from Eastern Europe who physically appears more similar to the dominant group (Friedlander, 1999).

Brooks and Barth (1999) examined adjustment outcomes for 224 transracial and in-racial adoptees over 17 years. The researchers measured adoptee characteristics, educational performance and problem behavior to assess for adjustment outcomes, level of functioning, and ethnoracial discrimination and identification. They found that all 244 Asian and African-American transracial adult adoptees could be classified as having secure or strong racial/ethnic identities, but about half of them still reported discomfort over their racial appearances. No significant differences among the groups were found

regarding adoptees' racial identity, and none of the adoptees were classified as having a weak racial identity, with approximately 70% of all transracially adopted children classified as having good adjustment. This finding suggests that good adjustment and the development of secure, even strong, ethnoracial identities are possible for both African-American and Asian transracial adoptees. What still remains unclear, however, is what influences the development of a secure ethnic identity.

Ethnic identity development

There have been several groundbreaking studies that have examined the ethnic identity development in various racial and ethnic groups. The results of these studies have often led to the development of a stage-model for ethnic identity development. These models have served as the basis for many other studies that have examined ethnic identity development, thus, it is important to identify and discuss these models before examining the literature on ethnic identity development Korean adopted children.

One of the most well known models of ethnic identity comes from Cross' (1971) five-stage model of racial identity in African Americans. These stages are: Pre-encounter, Encounter, Immersion/Emerging, Internalization, and Commitment. During the *pre-encounter* stage there is a lack of awareness of racial/ethnic identity. A person is consumed by the dominant culture's identity. A significant event or experience marks the beginning of the *Encounter* stage. Cross (1978) described the encounter as occurring in two steps: first experiencing the encounter, and then reinterpreting the world based on the experience. From this the person consciously makes the decision to "become" Black. *Immersion-Emersion* takes the form of a person beginning to immerse him/herself in their newfound racial/ethnic identity and denigrate the dominant culture and all that it entails.

The emersion portion of this stage involves beginning to be able to come to terms with neither identity is better or worse. The *Internalization* stage involves a resolution of the "old" and "new" self-identity emerges. Finally, the *internalization-commitment* consists of a person taking one step further than the fourth stage to include continued involvement in being a social activist.

Phinney (1989) reviewed different models of ethnic identity development and proposed a new three-stage model based on their commonalities. The first stage, *unexamined ethnic identity* includes adolescents and young adults who have not yet actively explored or given much thought to their ethnic identity. This may be because they are not interested or because they have assumed the ethnic attitudes and identity of their parents. The second stage, *ethnic identity search (moratorium)* involves active exploration of one's own ethnicity. Often this is a result of a significant experience that forces one to be aware of his/her ethnicity. A person will immerse themselves within their ethnic culture through various activities, such as, reading, cultivating relationships with others, and going to cultural events. Some reject the dominant culture during this time. Successful completion of the previous two stages results in an understanding and appreciation for their ethnic culture, *achieved ethnic identity.* This identity achievement may not include a desire or increased involvement in one's ethnic culture (i.e. cultural events, language, traditions).

Since these historical studies have been conducted there have been changes in how the process of ethnic identity is seen to unfold. Rather than being viewed as a static process, ethnic identity development is now being seen as a dynamic process that involves the on-going influences from many areas of a person's system.

Steward and Baden developed another approach to ethnic identity development with their Cultural-Racial Identity Model (1995). This model takes into account the separate roles culture and race play in the identity development of a person. The model consists of two separate axes: the Cultural-Identity Axis and the Racial-Identity Axis. Within each of these axis two other axis are contained. Baden and Steward (2000) applied the Cultural-Racial Identity Model to transracial adoptees to assess their cultural and racial development.

The Cultural-Identity Axis accounts for four possible cultural combinations in the form of two axis dimensions: the Adoptee Culture Dimension and the Parental Culture Dimension. The Adoptee Culture Dimension refers to the degree to which transracial adoptees identify with their own racial group's culture or birth culture, whereas the Parental Culture Dimension refers to the degree to which transracial adoptees identify with their adoptive parents' racial group's culture. Levels of knowledge, awareness, competence, and comfort the adoptees have with each of the following: (1) their own birth culture; (2) their adoptive parents' culture; and (3) multiple cultures determine identification with a culture or with multiple cultures. Baden and Steward (2000) identified four types of cultural identities: Bicultural Identity, Pro-Self Cultural Identity, Pro-Parent Cultural Identity, and Culturally Undifferentiated Identity.

The Racial Identity Axis also consists of two dimensions similar to the Cultural-Identity Axis: the Adoptee Race Dimension and the Parental Race Dimension. The Adoptee Race Dimension refers to the degree to which transracial adoptees identify with their own racial group, and the Parental Race Dimension refers to the degree to which transracial adoptees identify with their adoptive parent's racial group. Three factors are

used to assess the level of racial identification of a person: the degree of self-identification with (1) one's own racial group; (2) their adoptive parent's racial group; and (3) comfort one has with people belonging to their own racial group and their adoptive parents' racial group. Comfort level also involves allegiances to these racial groups and people belonging to other racial groups. The combination of the two Racial Identity axis results in four possible racial identities: Biracial Identity, Pro-Self Racial Identity, Pro-Parent Racial Identity, and Racially Undifferentiated Identity (Baden and Steward, 2000).

The final model consists of combining the Cultural-Identity Axis with the Racial-Identity Axis. The result is 16 possible identities based on the degree to which the adoptee has knowledge of, awareness of, competence within, and comfort with their own racial group's culture, their parents' racial group's culture and multiple cultures as well as the degree to which they are comfortable with their racial group membership and with those belonging to their own racial group, their parents' racial group, and multiple racial groups.

Ethnic identity development in Korean Americans

When discussing the ethnic identity development in Korean-born adoptees, it is helpful to also consider how ethnic identity develops in Korean-Americans who are not adopted. Examining ethnic identity development in Korean-Americans provides a backdrop from which to better understand how ethnic identity develops in Korean-born adoptees. It provides a comparative group to compare how ethnic identity develops in a group that was not adopted, but has the same physical characteristics. Korean-Americans and Korean-born adoptees share physical characteristics and expectations that are based

upon those similarities (Bergquist, 2003). Thus, from an outsider perspective the two groups are treated the same based upon their physical characteristics and not their adoption status.

Tse (1999) created a model of ethnic identity development in Asian Americans that includes four stages: *ethnic awareness, ethnic ambivalence/evasion, ethnic emergence,* and *ethnic identity incorporation. Ethnic awareness* is marked by a limited amount of contact with others of minority status, including those from a person's own racial or ethnic group that results in an unawareness of one's own minority status. This typically is a short period of time that occurs before a child enters school. *Ethnic ambivalence/evasion* begins to occur as a child has more contact with other ethnic groups. As the name indicates, children and adolescents during this stage have feelings of ambivalence toward their racial/ethnic group and may begin to distance themselves from their group and anything related to it, while simultaneously immersing themselves in the dominant culture (i.e. norms and behaviors). The third stage, *ethnic emergence* is characterized by the adolescents or young adults realizing that it is not possible to fully join the dominant culture or group resulting in exploring other group associations, such as, their own racial/ethnic group. The final stage, *ethnic identity incorporation* is characterized by an identification with all minority groups as a whole (i.e. African American, Latino/a, Asian, etc.) and are able to resolve their ethnic identity conflicts.

Many of the studies on the ethnic identity development of Korean Americans have focused on the second-generation Korean Americans because of their unique position of being caught between the Korean and American cultures, and having to negotiate both. In this sense, Korean Americans and Korean-born transracial adoptees

share much in common. Both groups must navigate their way between being Korean and being brought up in American society. Some Korean Americans have expressed similar situations to Korean-born adoptees in which they are rejected by both Koreans and Caucasians (Kibria, 1999).

Yeh et al., (2005) interviewed Korean immigrant youths in the United States regarding their adjustment experiences. They found that these youth are constantly negotiating their identity across various contexts (i.e. home, school, peers and church) based on the different values, norms and levels of acculturation that each context posses.

One important aspect that cuts across the various studies on ethnic identity development in Korean-Americans is the importance of having relationships with other Korean-Americans. Chong (1998) interviewed Korean-American church-goers and found that many attended the church as a means to feel connected to the Korean culture as well as to other Koreans. Ethnic identity development was transmitted to second generation Koreans through the church by ways of passing down traditional Korean values and morals through socializing with other Korean-Americans. It also provided a safe place to "be Korean". This points to the importance for Korean transracial adoptive families to create and maintain connections and relationships with Korean-Americans.

Sharke and Rhee (2004) examined three dimensions of ethnic identity as predictors of problem behaviors in Korean-American adolescents. The dimensions used were level of ethnic identity (i.e. sense of belonging to their ethnic group), attitudes toward other groups, and perceived discrimination. Their results found levels of ethnic identity, perceived discrimination and academic performance as significant predictors of internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors. Korean American adolescents who

felt a strong sense of belonging to their ethnic group exhibited less problem behaviors. Adolescents who had higher levels of perceived discrimination exhibited higher levels of both internalizing and externalizing behaviors. Lastly, Korean-American adolescents who had higher academic GPA's also exhibited less externalizing problem behaviors.

In their review Hughes et al. (2006) noted that research on immigrant and U.S. born-Asian families showed that these parents transmitted their native cultures to their kids through everyday occurrences (e.g., language, food, traditions). The use of their native language was especially important to these families.

Ethnic identity development of Korean adoptees

Specific to ethnic identity development in Korean-born transracial adoptees, there has been a shift in focus from "examining whether an adoptees' racial identity is disrupted by being raised within a white family to researching its dynamic formation in relation to wider social and political forces that change over time." (Shiao & Tuan, 2007, p. 159). Just as the meaning of a person's adoption changes over time and as the child goes through the different developmental stages, ethnic identity development changes as well (Shiao & Tuan, 2007).

Huh and Reid (2000) have pioneered the field of ethnic identity development in Asian-born adoptees who were adopted by Caucasian-American couples. From their research, they have been able to develop an ethnic identity development model specific for this group of adoptees. Similar to other ethnic identity development models, it follows a stage progression. The first stage of development occurs between the ages of 4 and 6 years old, and is referred to as *recognizing and rejecting differences.* During this period the adoptee begins to realize he/she is "different" from others. For example, adoptees will

begin to recognize physical differences between themselves and others. The child is able to understand he/she is Korean, but is confused about what it means to be Korean. During this stage the child often is confused about his/her race and will reject differences. The second stage occurs between the ages of 7 and 8 years old, and is referred to as *beginning of ethnic identification.* During this stage the child becomes more aware that race and ethnicity differences remain constant over time (i.e. their physical appearance is not going to change). They also begin to have a better understanding of Korea, such as where it is geographically. Children during this stage also report more incidents of racial teasing, and the parents can begin to play a significant role in mediating these external factors. The third developmental stage, *acceptance of differences versus ethnic dissonance* occurs between the ages of 9 and 11 years old. Two different routes can be taken during this stage. The child may either accept and embrace their differences and identify as Korean-American or the child may reject those differences and identify solely as American. The final stage to Huh and Reid's (2000) racial identity formation model is *integrating Korean heritage and American culture.* It occurs between the ages of 12 and 14 years old. For those in the previous stage who began to accept their Korean heritage, the young adolescent continues along that path by integrating their Korean heritage with their American upbringing. The motivation to become involved in Korean-related activities becomes more internal with the parental influence lessening and ethnic pride is based on cultural awareness rather than on the differences between others. During this stage those who were previously not interested in their Korean heritage may become more interested in it.

In an updated article on ethnic identity development in Korean-born transracial

adoptees, Huh (2007) described these adoptees as being forced to go through an identity conflict at an earlier age than others who were not part of a transracial family. This research also described children as being confused at an earlier age about who and what they were as a direct result of being Korean in a white family.

Quintana (1998) created a PTA model (perspective taking ability) that examined the ethnic identity development in children based on the varying levels of "perspectives" children are able to incorporate into their understanding of race and ethnicity. His model is based on four levels of perspective-taking abilities in children: Level 0 (physical perspective), Level 1 (literal perspective), Level 2 (social perspective), and Level 3 (group perspectives). Level 0 (physical perspectives) consist of an understanding of ethnicity and race that is focused on superficial markers of race, such as physical characteristics or language. Older children in Level 1 (literal perspective) have an awareness of nonphysical features, such as heritage and cultural characteristics. This perspective is considered literal because children at this level typically focus on obvious or literal cultural features (*Korean* ancestry, speaking *Korean,* or eating *Korean* food). At Level 2 (social perspective) preadolescent youths see their racial status through social dimensions as they connect experiences with racism and social discrimination to their conceptions of race. The final level, Level 3 (group perspectives) involves a racial or cultural group consciousness in which there is increased awareness of a "collective group consciousness perspective" (p. 132). Here, adolescents focus more on a psychological connection to other members of their racial group than on the physical, literal, or social features.

Quintana's (1998) original PTA model was applied to only non-adopted children.

In another effort to understand ethnic identity development in Korean-born transracial adoptees, Lee & Quintana (2005) examined the benefits of being exposed to an adoptees' birth culture in terms of the adoptees' perspective-taking ability (PTA). Lee & Quintana examined the applicability of the PTA to Korean-transracial adopted children and found that in general the model appeared to be able to be applied to Korean-transracial adopted children, however, there were some differences the authors attributed to varying levels of cultural exposure. They speculated that the developmental differences may be overcome if transracial adopted children receive greater exposure to their culture of origin. The results also suggested that cultural exposure had a particularly critical role for TRA children's development of PTA (Lee & Quintana, 2005). Korean children who are not adopted are believed to be exposed to higher levels of culture than those Korean children who are adopted by Caucasian parents. Increasing the levels of cultural exposure for the adopted children was speculated to minimize the differences in the two groups' developmental understanding of culture and race. Lee & Quintana (2005) also suggested that for older adopted children close to adolescence exposure to their birth culture needed to be supplemented with other kinds of racial socialization and support as "they increase their understanding of the racialized components of being Korean" (Lee & Quintana, 2005).

Bergquist (2003) used quantitative methods to examine the constructs of ethnic and racial identity in Korean adotpees as it related to process of acculturation. Her findings pointed to the progression towards an internalized racial identity in Korean adoptees as not marked by a period of rejecting the majority culture (i.e. Caucasian). This finding is contrary to other racial/ethnic identity models that have suggested that a period

of rejection, often referred to, as "immersion" of the majority culture is necessary to forming an internalized racial/ethnic identity. Immersion also includes a period of "immersing" oneself into their own racial or ethnic group. Berguist (2003) explained her findings as suggesting immersion for Korean adoptees involves an increase in exposure and group-affiliation with the Korean culture and Korean people rather than a rejection of the white culture.

It is apparent from all the models of ethnic identity development, including those that are specific to Korean-born transracial adoptees that there is potential for the parents, and external forces to play a significant role in the identity development of a transracial adoptee.

Ecological influences in ethnic identity development

The following sections examine the ecological factors that are believed to contribute to ethnic identity development in Korea-born adoptees.

Microlevel influences: Adoptive parents

In the previous models of ethnic identity development, it has been suggested that the adoptive parents play an integral role in the ethnic identity development of their transracially-adopted child. It has been suggested that the family is the primary social system through which culture is transmitted (McGoldrick, 1982). There are inherent challenges for parents who are raising children who are not from same race. A lack of experience with the racial or ethnic background of the child creates challenges for all members of the family (Steinberg & Hall, 2000). When the adoptive parents are Caucasian, their certain life experiences and worldviews do not generally incorporate racism, discrimination or prejudice like other racial minority group's do, including their

adopted children (Steinberg & Hall, 2000). Despite this, adoptive parents' support for children's ethnic identity development is likely to be a significant factor for their psychological well being (Yoon, 2001). Much of the research on Korean-born transracial adoptees' has focused on, or alluded to the adoptive parent's ability to encourage, support, and teach their children how "to be Korean". This literature can be thought of as encompassing one of two categories: cultural competence or parental racial socialization practices.

The most complete definition of cultural competence comes from Vonk (2001) that is based on an extensive review of the literature and feedback from experts in the field and TRA parents. She defined cultural competence in terms of three separate, yet connected, components: racial awareness, multicultural planning and survival skills.

Racial awareness refers to the adoptive parent's ability to recognize and acknowledge the role racism, discrimination and prejudice plays in the lives of people who are not part of the dominant race. This includes acknowledging what is referred to as "white privilege" or those privileges that are granted to those simply because they are Caucasian. Vonk (2001) borrowed from Green et al.'s (1998) definition of cultural competence to include an awareness of how race, ethnicity, culture, language, and related power status operates in a person's own, and other's lives. This may occur through an understanding of the dynamics of racism, oppression and other forms of discrimination (McPhatter, 1997). For Caucasian parents of Asian children this may be especially difficult. Hamm (2001) found that white parents often promoted a color-blind perspectives, in which children are taught that they should not notice race. Hughes et al (2006) stated that failure to initiate or discuss race-related issues also communicates to

children certain values and perspectives regarding race. Vonk (2001) also highlights the importance for adoptive parents to examine the reason why they chose to adopt transracially. When considering adoption, adoptive parents need to recognize what is in the best interest of the child, and not because they are trying to fight social injustices, or right past inequities.

Multicultural planning refers to the ability of the adoptive parents to provide opportunities for their child to participate in their culture of birth. Suggested activities range from reading books about their culture to participating in cultural festivals. Little research has been conducted on which types of activities provide the most effective means of participating and connecting with their birth culture, although, many who work in this field suggest that those activities that are more hands-on, such as attending festivals, or connecting with a family of the same race or cultural background as the child, will be more beneficial to the child. Multicultural planning is the piece of being culturally competent that has received the most attention, and the aspect that most adoptive parents are most aware of. Huh (2007) described parental encouragement and coparticipation in cultural activities as critical to the ethnic identity development process stating, "If such parental involvement were lacking, children seemed less likely to develop the Korean side of their identities." (p. 93).

Survival skills refer to the adoptive parent's ability and willingness to teach their child how to effectively and successfully cope with racism. As stated previously, the majority of transracial adoptive parents are Caucasian. As a result, many have not experienced racism directed at them, thus, they may not have the skills necessary for knowing how to deal with this type of situation. This places children of color at a distinct

disadvantage because racism and racist acts still occur on a daily basis. There is a lack of research of how to teach adoptive parents how to teach their children survival or coping skills. One suggestion has been to connect and interact with families of color, especially those who are of the same racial and cultural background as the adoptee. This provides the adoptee opportunities to discuss with others who have experienced racism how they have coped and dealt with racism (Vonk, 2001). This does not, however, take the responsibility off the adoptive parents to teach their children the survival and coping skills that are needed. If adoptive parents chose this route of learning from another family, the adoptive parents also need to learn the "survival skills" as they are now part of a multi-racial family. Adoptive parents are still accountable for recognizing and acknowledging their child will most likely encounter a situation where their racial background will matter, and decide how to teach their child how to deal with the situation.

Parental racial socialization practices can be thought of as the actual "doing" of cultural competence. According to Lee (2003) cultural socialization for racial/ethnic minorities involves the transmission of cultural values, beliefs, customs, and behaviors from parents, family, friends, and community to children that will foster their racial/ethnic identity development. Cultural socialization also provides children with the necessary coping strategies to deal with racism and discrimination effectively, and encourages appropriate prosocial behavior and participation in society. Hughes et al (2006) noted that these racial socialization practices "are shaped by individual and group characteristics and by characteristics of the contexts to which parents and children operate" (p. 758). The findings of the studies examining racial socialization and its

importance for ethnic identity development have been mixed, perhaps as a result of the inconsistencies in definitions used.

In a recent study, Johnston et al. (2007) examined the ways in which White American mothers socialized their Asian adopted children around issues of race, culture and ethnicity. They found that Chinese and Korean adoptees that reported higher levels of cultural socialization practices by their adoptive mothers also had fewer externalizing problems. Shiao & Tuan (2007) found that Caucasian adoptive parents of Korean-born adoptees were more likely to work towards integrating activities that were classified as cultural and heritage preservation (i.e., reading cultural books, eating cultural food), rather than focusing on healthy racial identity development, interacting with the wider Asian-American community, or developing coping strategies for addressing racism.

Yoon (2001) presented a theoretical model in which a positive relationship between adoptive parents and adopted children in terms of sharing experiences of the children's ethnic socialization is the fundamental factor in the children's identity development process. The results provide empirical evidence that a positive parent-child relationship has a direct positive effect on the child's psychological adjustment. Korean-born adopted adolescents who described their parents as supportive of their ethnic socialization felt more positively about their ethnic origins. The findings demonstrate that parental support of ethnic socialization is associated with a positive sense of ethnic identity, whereas a negative sense of ethnic identity may represent a vulnerability to psychological maladjustment. Yoon (2004) also replicated earlier findings and found that Korean-born adoptees who described their parents as supportive of their ethnic socialization tended to feel more positive about their ethnic origins and background.

Parental & other's perceptions of adoptees

The previous discussion points to the importance of a positive relationship with parents and the importance of parental support of the child's ethnic identity development. How to create and maintain this type of positive relationship between parents and children is relatively unexamined. One step in discovering how to create a positive relationship is to examine the parental perceptions of the adopted child's race and its impact on their family. Parental perspective studies have examined what parental perceptions of their adopted child are and how they impact that child. Bergquist, Campbell, and Unrau (2000) interviewed parents of 117 transracial adoptive families comprised of at least one Korean born child. They compared the responses of mothers and fathers in three different areas: reasons for adopting, adjustment problems resulting from the adoption, and their perceptions of their children's ethnic identity. Overall, parents were more similar than not in their responses. In regards to the reason for adoption, the top two cited reasons were "the desire to adopt internationally" and "the shorter wait time". Mothers were more motivated by the international aspect than fathers, who were more motivated by the shortened time it would take. Mothers and fathers were very similar in their responses to the adjustment and amount of problems the family experienced at the time of the adoption. Both parents also reported similar adjustment problems around the time of the adoption. When a couple adopted more than one child from Korea, mothers tended to identify their family as multi-racial more than fathers did. Fathers, however, were found to believe their children knew more about their heritage and culture than mothers.

The parent's perceptions of their child's ethnic identity were tracked over seven

years. At the time of follow-up the authors received a 33% response rate. It was found that over time parents began to downplay their child's ethnic identity. Many of the parents reported their children looked more "Caucasian/Asian" than "Korean" or "Asian". Parents also reported wanting their child to identify solely as "American" rather than only as "Korean", and this desire increased over time. At the seven year mark, parents also reported an increase in the amount of racial teasing their child received, yet, at the same time, there was also an increase in the parent's downplaying the importance of their child's ethnic identity. This presents a conflict in that the children are experiencing racism occurring outside of the family that is recognized by the parents, but the parents downplay the cause and effects of these incidents. This can be confusing to the child who is being told by her family that race does not matter, but at the same time is being told by the broader community that it does matter.

Johnston et al. (2007) examined how White American mothers socialize their Asian adopted children around issues of culture, race and ethnicity. Their results indicated that these mothers did make efforts to socialize their children within their birth culture, and teach them about racial bias, however, the extent of these efforts were influenced by the mother's psychological connectedness to Asian Americans as well as the child's age and birth country. The authors found that cultural socialization and preparation for racial bias practices among White American adoptive mothers was fairly low. Mothers who felt more connected to Asian Americans sought out information about Asian cultures and Asian American experiences. Mothers also made more attempts to socialize their children within their birth culture while the children were still young, whereas preparation for racial bias did not occur until the child was older and peaked at

around age 14.

Mesosystem influences

Looking at the meso and exosystems provides further evidence for how outside factors can potentially influence the ethnic identity development in Korean-born transracial adoptees. Friedlander (1999) noted that school, community and family environment influenced a transracial adoptees' ethnic identity. The following sections look at the literature related to the community/neighborhood environment and the adoption agency policies and how they relate to ethnic identity development.

Community/neighborhood

Vidal de Haymes and Simon (2003) interviewed 20 families that had adopted a child of another race and conducted an interview with one parent, and with the adoptee. Parents reported negative reactions from their communities. One family opted to home-school their children to avoid confrontation with their peers, while other families moved to a more racially diverse community. The families who moved to different community still reported some difficulties. Several families found it difficult to find interactive avenues for the children to participate in their birth culture.

Specific to Korean-born transracial adoptees, Yoon (2004) found that adoptees who were raised in more diverse ethnic communities had higher levels of self-esteem collectively than those who were raised in non-diverse communities. This finding supports the notion that interaction with diverse ethnic groups contribute to the ethnic identity development of adoptees, and that ethnic identity development is not only influenced by the family, but by the broader community in which they live. Feigelman (2007) found that transracial adoptees residing in predominately white communities

tended to experience more discomfort about their appearance than those who lived in integrated settings. These feelings of discomfort, in turn, were more likely to be reflected adjustment difficulties. This led him to conclude that when transracially adoptive families live in racially mixed neighborhoods, the adoptees will be able to thrive better than when they live in more segregated settings (i.e. pre-dominantly white communities) (Feigelman, 2007).

Access to a child's birth culture within the community a family resides in can impact the parental racial socialization practices. In Johnston et al's. (2007) study mothers who had adopted from China participated in more frequent cultural socialization practices than did mothers who had adopted from Korea. The authors speculated that this was a result of the higher prevalence and visibility of Chinese culture in the United States One mother indicated that there no Korean restaurants or stores within her community, whereas, other mothers who had adopted from China noted various Chinese restaurants and other "cultural" avenues (Johnston et al., 2007).

Exosystem influences

Adoption agencies and policies

One example of how adoption laws can influence an adoptees' ethnic identity development was given by Westhues and Cohen (1998) who noted that under the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, transracially adopted children have a legal right to "maintain a sense of their ethnic and racial background". It should be noted, however, that this practice is not present in all countries.

Adoption agencies serve as the main source of information for adoptive parents regarding the adoption process, and post-adoption needs. Perspective adoptive parents

have a lot of contact with the adoption agency throughout the adoption process. In recent years, there has been a growing trend in offering select post-adoption services to the families. As a result, it is important to also consider what information adoption workers are providing the adoptive parents with in regards to how to encourage ethnic identity development, how to effectively handle racism, etc. Brian (2007) interviewed adoptive parents and adoptees about their adoption experiences, including their experiences with the adoption workers. She was specifically interested in the facilitators who promoted adoptions from Korea and what messages were being transmitted to the perspective parents. She found that historically and to the present these workers have done little to urge white adoptive parents to develop well-thought-out plans for addressing matters of race within their families (Brian, 2007). Many of the facilitators encouraged adoptive parents to adopt a "color-blind" approach or cultural openness to the adoption process instead of discussing the real traumas of racial isolation and misunderstanding that transracial adoptees face at some point in their life (Brian, 2007). It is then easy to see how this idea that race does not matter can trickle down to the transracial adoptee and cause confusion when the outside world is judging her based on her race.

Macrolevel influences

Lastly, the macrosystem provides a backdrop for how the other systems operate are created. This section will examine the literature on the influences of several of the macrolevel beliefs and values surrounding Koreans as a racial group.

Stereotypes

As with other minority groups Asians are subject to various stereotypes that can affect a person's sense of self and racial/ethnic identity development. Feigelman (2000)

examined how stereotypes about minority groups, such as the Asian population, may not only influence the adoptive parent's perceptions, but also how they are perpetuated within the family. Two of the most popular stereotypes of Asians are the "perpetual foreigner" and the "model minority". The "perpetual foreigner" stereotype refers to the allegiance Asians have for the "motherland". They are viewed as never fully assimilating into the American culture because of the strong ties to their homeland. The second stereotype refers to Asians as non-problem causing minorities who have a high intelligence, which allows them to overcome all the other barriers that face other minority groups. These stereotypes are not the only ones that afflict Asians, however, they are the most prevalent. Feigelman (2000) found that some transracial adoptive parents may perpetuate the model minority stereotype within the family. This is based on the finding that Asian adopted children with Caucasian families had the highest grades, and the highest motivation for educational success; however, they also had the highest psychosomatic symptoms. He postulated that it was because the parents were imposing the stereotype that Asians have a high intelligence onto their children.

Racism/discrimination

"The evidence acquired here suggested that extra-family forces, such as societal racism, did impact negatively adjustment outcomes of adolescents and young adults, and in that, black and Asian children, who appear unmistakably different from whites, were most likely to encounter societal discrimination." (Feigelman, 2007, p.58).

Hurdis (2007) described Korean-born adoptees' ethnic identity development in terms of how the adoptee identified herself (i.e. Korean, American, Korean-American, Asian-American). She saw those who identified solely as American as further support for

the "model minority" myths and immigrant success stories and attributed this to Korean-born transracial adoptees ability to understand the subtlety and nuances of race and racism in the United States. (Hurdis, 2007). In essence, those who identify solely as American are denying their Asian heritage as a means of survival in a racist world, "To identify solely as an American embraces an identity that is rooted in our U.S. white cultural background. Any identification with Korea remains purely as a phenotypic adjective rather than a sense of being." (Hurdis, 2007, p.182).

There are also the stereotypes specific to Asian women. Hurdis (2007) indicated that many Korean-born transracial adoptees suffer "lifelong effects of gendered stereotypes" (p. 182). These often represent images of "exotic" and "promiscuous women" who are "subordinate" to men. The Asian women, whether adopted or not, is subject to being highly sexualized by men. There is a subculture of men who are obsessed with Asian women and will only be in relationships—long-term or purely sexual with Asian women. What is unknown is how these gendered stereotypes impact the ethnic identity development of the adoptees.

Conclusion

Taken together, the literature points to the potential for all levels within an ecological model to influence the ethnic identity development of Korean-born transracial adoptees. There is evidence that indicates the adoptive parent's significant role in this process, and that other influences come from the community, adoption agencies, and macro-level beliefs and values. However, gaining an understanding of how all the levels combined influence the ethnic identity development from the adoptees' perspective is important.

The literature on Korean-born transracial adoptees is sorely lacking a critical lens critique. Adoptions from Korea to other countries, including the United States is steeped in a history bound by social, economic, and cultural reasons for the adoptions. This legacy also has the ability to inform the ethnic identity development in female Korean-born transracial adoptees.

The following chapter will provide the steps that will be taken in order to examine the ethnic identity development in Korean-born transracial adoptees.

Chapter 3

Introduction and background

Methods

Transracial adoptive families

Thousands of Korean children have been adopted into Caucasian families in the United States since the end of the Korean War (Kim, 1995). Since that time Korea has consistently been ranked as one of the countries that have the most children adopted out of the country (US Department of State, 2007). The current project specifically focused on the experience of Korean-born transracial adoptees ethnic identity development within the context of their Caucasian family and other systems. This was an area of concern because of the transracial aspect of the adoption (i.e. adoption across races). In instances where children are adopted from Korea into U.S. Caucasian families, issues regarding how the child develops a strong, healthy ethnic identity and how they are able to cope with racism are questioned.

The purpose of this section is to outline a methodological approach to studying the ethnic identity development in Korean-born transracial adoptees. The purpose of this chapter is two-fold: identify previous research methodology frameworks with transracial adoptees, and provide a rationale for the current methodological framework used. It concludes with a conceptual framework of what was examined. This project involved interviewing Korean-born transracial adoptees as well as reflective journal entries the participants wrote after the interview.

Theoretical background

The current study was grounded in several theoretical frameworks. These

frameworks reflect the beliefs the researcher holds about how relationships function and how to conduct certain methodologies. These frameworks guided the research project process, from who to interview to what type of analysis was performed. The following section provides a brief overview of the theories and how it relates to the current project.

The aim of this study was to examine the factors that influenced female Korean-born transracial adoptees' ethnic identity development. This was an exploratory study that examined how external influences interacted with the Korean-born transracial adoptee to inform and influence her ethnic identity development. As such, this study was conducted from a grounded theory approach, where the purpose is to generate theory based upon the data gathered (Creswell, 1998). Grounded theory can be thought of as working from the ground up to create a theory. In traditional grounded theory a phenomena is looked at without an excess of preconceived ideas. In more recent understandings of grounded theory, previous scholarship helps the researcher to generate a new theory from the results. Previous qualitative studies of Korean-born transracial adoptees have shown the usefulness and success of working from a grounded theory approach in studying ethnic identity development (Huh & Reid, 2000).

Compared to other approaches, grounded theory is able to cover more empirical observations. This results in being able to move the work theoretically. Using grounded theory I was able to portray a more holistic view of Korean-born transracial adoptees (Charmaz, 2005). For the purpose of this project it was helpful to think of grounded theory methods as a "set of flexible analytic guidelines that enable researchers to focus their data collection and to build inductive middle-range theories through successive levels of data analysis and conceptual development" (Charmaz, 2005). I anticipated that

working from this approach would provide knowledge and information that would inform a holistic model of ethnic identity development in Korean-born transracial adoptees.

The two theories that grounded the theoretical framework also informed the methodology of the current study. Working from an ecological theoretical framework compliments a grounded theory approach in that grounded theory calls for a focus on the interactions between people and the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 1998). Human ecological theory posits that humans interact with the environment and the environment interacts with humans (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993). This interaction between the two occurs simultaneously.

Human ecological theory also posits there are various levels of systems that affect the family and individual. These levels can be understood by the model created by Bronfenbrenner (1979). Working from an ecological framework, Bronfenbrenner (1979) created an ecological model that focused on the various levels of systems an individual is part of. These levels are based upon their distance from the individual. It is believed that each of the levels of systems simultaneously influences other systems and is influenced by other systems. In regards to the current project, it was believed that other systems have influenced the adoptees' ethnic identity development, while simultaneously the adoptee also influenced how she related to the other systems involved in terms of ethnic identity development. As such, this project took into consideration the influence of the other systems, and the adoptees' influence on those systems into how it informed her ethnic identity development. The methods utilized in this project reflected an ecological approach by examining all the potential influences on the same phenomenon (i.e. the adoptive parent's, community, school, peers, macro-level values and beliefs).

The study was informed by critical race feminism that offers certain research guidelines for how research should be conducted. With regard to the research process, critical race feminism supports the need for having researchers of the same racial and/or ethnic background as their informants. By doing so, critical race feminism places an emphasis on being able to accurately place the experiences, voices, choices, and outcomes within their context without sacrificing the informant's ability to tell their story. This also contributed to the ongoing process of reauthoring "herstories" (Few, 2007). As such, my own identity as a Korean adoptee can be seen as a positive contribution to the current research process.

Active self-reflexivity throughout the research process is also seen as a requirement when conducting research through a critical race feminist lens. This reflexivity requires the researchers to be aware of and reflexive about the reasons why we participate in the research process (e.g., why are you doing this research and what do you gain). The reflexivity process also demands that as researchers we confront the ways we are exploitive versus how we liberate our informants (Few, 2007).

Grounded in this framework, the current project strove to create a mutual understanding of what influenced the ethnic identity development of Korean-born transracial adoptees. This involved myself consistently checking with the women on whether my interpretation was correct or not, and making the necessary corrections throughout the interview process.

Rationale & Design

Research with Korean-born adoptees

The purpose of this research project was to gain more insight into the experiences

of Korean- born transracial adoptees, with specific attention paid to the ethnic identity development. This project was intended to also answer several calls from previous literature by examining research specific to international transracial adoptees (Lee, 2003); as well as give voice to the adult adoptees that are often left out of the research literature (Gray, 2007; Patel, 2005).

Currently, there is no literature that speaks to any type of "best practice" approaches when working with adoptees. Previous studies that have involved Korean-born adoptees have utilized several quantitative methodologies such as, surveys, cross-sectional designs, and focus groups have been used frequently with transracial adoptees (e.g., Bergquist, 2003; Feigelman, 2000). However, these methodology types often fall short of being able to provide accurate, and in-depth information regarding the transracial adoptee experience. Patel (2005) identified limitations of using these types of methods with transracial adoptees. There is the inherent problem of sample bias with survey methods depending on who completes and returns the survey. Cross-sectional design surveys can only provide a "snap shot" of the adoptee, adoptive family, or any subject at one time (Baden, 2002; Bagley 1993; Bimmel, Juffer, van Ijzendoorn, & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2003; Westhues & Cohen, 1998). Other researcher projects that have examined adoptees have used the adoptive parents as the only means to assess "adjustment problems" (Bergquist, Campbell, & Unrau, 2003). This is problematic in that the parents may not be fully aware of any "problems" the adoptee may be experiencing, or the adoptive parents may be reluctant to report such difficulties (Feigelman, 2007). Focus group methods have the advantage of avoiding the "snap-shot" view of the adoptees' experience, and allow the adoptees to speak for themselves; however, the range

of experiences within the focus group can become problematic. Another argument against the use of focus groups for adoptees is that it does not emphasize strongly enough the need for adoptees to speak for themselves or about their own lives and experiences (Patel, 2005).

Keeping these shortcomings in mind, the current study utilized a multi-method approach. Feminist researchers combine methods so as to "cast their net as widely as possible" in the search for understanding critical issues that increase the likelihood of thorough understanding. The goal of integrating multiple methods was to add layers of information by using one type of data to validate or refine another (Reinharz, 1992).

Participants were also asked to complete a journal entry regarding their ethnic identity development and reflect upon their experiences. This was completed at their leisure after the interview in the case of lingering thoughts or new memories that were elicited from the interview process. The bulk of the data was qualitative data provided by in-depth interviews that were conducted with the adoptee. Interviews have been used in previous studies with Korean-born adoptees (e.g., Gray, 2007; Huh & Reid, 2000). The following discussion provides a rationale for the type of interview used as well as other related issues.

There have also been various studies that have utilized qualitative methodologies, such as interviews (Gray, 2007; Huh & Reid, 2000; Lee & Quintana, 2005; Meier, 1999), as a means to garner as much information and insight as possible into the lives of these adoptees. Qualitative methodologies are able to provide a multi-faceted picture of the experience and worldview of the participant. They have the ability to "dig deeper" if needed and allow for the flexibility to be guided by the participant. For the purposes of

the current study, there were no quantitative measures that would be able to capture the depth and breadth of the experience of ethnic identity development in Korean-born transracial adoptees. The current study utilized two qualitative methods: in-depth semi-structured interviews, and reflective journal entries from the participants regarding their experiences.

A case for using interview methodology

The current study used in-depth interviews with the participants in order to gather data. The use of an interview has many advantages to other quantitative methodologies. An interview is able to reach into the depths of an individual's subjective reality in ways that other quantitative measures cannot. For the purposes of this study the use of interviews was especially appropriate in that the study aimed to look at not only what the adoptees identified as significant influences to their ethnic identity development, but also how it was influential. Perkayla (2005) described interviews as having the ability to allow the distance of time and space to disappear, so that past experiences and feelings are able to reappear and inform the current experience providing an in-depth examination of that experience. Grounded theory also advocates for the use of interviews and the written word as a means to gather data (Strauss, 1987).

Oral Life (Hi)story & Feminist interviewing

Certain aspects of the oral life (hi)story interview framework support the objectives and research questions that drove this project. As such, these aspects provided an anchor for how the interviews were conducted. Using the oral life (hi)story framework allowed for the integration of the factual (i.e. number of times attended cultural activities) and the fictional (i.e. what attending those cultural activities meant to the adoptee or

adoptive parent). This occurred through the creation of an interview scenario, where participants were questioned about their life experiences including the thoughts and ideas that have guided their behavior and interactions with others. Patel (2005) used this method to "explore and uncover the complex realities of racialized identities", of the transracial adoptees. This method has been shown useful with transracial adoptees. Patel (2005) used this method of interviewing with "black" and "mixed heritage" adoptees in "white" families.

A feminist approach also informed the interview process. Feminist interviewing is an inherently relational process. It posits an egalitarian, two-way relationship as the basis for the interview that is grounded in the commitment the interviewer makes to create a sincere, and trusting relationship with the interviewee (Kezar, 2003). Unlike other models, it highlights the importance of the interviewer as an active participant in the process of the interview, but does not see that relationship as detrimental to the quality of information or knowledge that is elicited through the interview (Kezar, 2003). This was especially important to the current study, as I was often asked about my own experiences growing up in regards to my ethnic identity development. One of the main characteristics of interviewing from a feminist framework is the concept of mutuality. Mutuality proposes that the interviewer and the interviewee work together to construct the interview by means of collaboratively deciding the direction of the interview and what questions to ask (Kezar, 2003; Fontana & Frey, 2005). Feminist interviewing also involves the researcher's ethics and commitment to form an interactive, trusting relationship of openness and engagement with the interviewee. This is especially important when talking with transracial adoptees about two areas (i.e. adoption and race) that hold extremely

personal meaning. The interviewee participates with a commitment of sincerity and self-disclosure that is to be believed by the researcher (Reinharz, 1992). Creating this type of interview relationship was done through self-disclosure of myself about my own struggles and experiences. This often helped the interviewee feel more at ease and elicit more memories about her experiences and what it meant to her.

Structured or unstructured?

It is often difficult to decide whether to proceed with an interview with a battery of specific questions, or more beneficial to allow the conversation to flow naturally with minimal interruption and questions from the researcher as in an unstructured interview. Rogan and de Kock (2005) provided some insight and advice on how to decide what type of interview to conduct based upon the objectives of the researcher, the number of respondents involved and the amount of time available for interviewing. They advised that the use of a structured interview is most beneficial when the objective is to explore particular, predetermined aspects of an experience in a limited time frame with a large number of respondents. If however, the objective of the researcher is to explore an experience with a small number of respondents over an extended time period, the unstructured interview is recommended. They also remind us that utilizing an unstructured interview format opens the door for certain ethical and analytical challenges to enter. Corbin and Morse (2003) examined the risk of using unstructured interviews with sensitive topics and found that they posed no greater risk than everyday life.

Based upon Rogan and de Kock's (2005) recommendations for when to use a structured and unstructured interview, the current interviewer used a semi-structured approach to the interview process. In-depth, semi-structured interviews allowed for the

exploration of the women's worlds, and views using their own words to describe them (Reinharz, 1992). The scope of the current study was open a wide view purposely in order to look at a variety of influences on their ethnic identity development as Korean-born transracial adoptees as reported by themselves. The purpose of conducting semi-structured interviews was to allow for flexibility in what topics were covered within the realm of ethnic identity development as defined by the participants. By using a combination of set questions as prompts for the participant to talk more freely, a more in-depth look at what influenced ethnic identity development and how it was influential as perceived by the adoptees was accomplished.

Table 3.1 describes the interview questions and how they relate to the research questions and theoretical framework of the project.

Table 3.1

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	RESEARCH QUESTIONS	INTERVIEW PROMPT QUESTIONS
Ecological Theory	What are the ecological influences on a Korean-born transracial adoptees' ethnic identity development? How do aspects of the adoptees' ecology influence ethnic identity development for Korean adoptees What are the factors or influences that propel a person from one stage of ethnic identity development into another?	• Did you ever attend culture camp as a child? What was it like? • What other exposure did you have to your birth culture growing up? • Tell me about what was influential in how you identify yourself today. • What was most important in forming your current identity? • Tell me about how your racial/ethnic identity has developed over the years. What encouraged that change?
Ecological theory Critical race feminism	How does being from a minority culture adopted into a majority culture influence ethnic identity development?	• Do you see your current ethnic identity changing in the future? If so, what do you foresee having a significant impact or influence on that change? If not, what do you believe has contributed to creating such a strong identity? • What has had the most impact on how you identified yourself today? • Tell me how much of an impact your family has had on how you identify yourself today.
Ecological theory Critical race feminism	How does gender influence ethnic identity development in Korean-born transracial adoptees?	• Do you have any siblings adopted from Korea? Do you have any siblings who are biological to your parents? • How diverse was the community you grew up in? • Tell me about growing up in your community as a Korean adoptee. • How diverse is the community you current live in? • What was your experience with your school and peers
		• Tell me about your current experiences as a Korean woman. • What is it like being a Korean woman? • Do you see the wider societal beliefs and racism as having any kind of impact on how you identified yourself today?

Table 3.2 describes the theoretical sensitivity for the questions that will prompt the reflective journal entries. There were several overlapping questions from the interview to the reflective journals. This was done purposefully, in order to provide a place for more reflection, as it was believed that the interview would elicit other memories after the fact. The over lapping questions were: "What was most influential in forming your identity? How so?" and "How influential was your family in informing your identity—good or bad?"

Table 3.2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	RESEARCH QUESTIONS	REFLECTIVE JOURNAL QUESTIONS
Ecological theory	What are the ecological influences on a Korean-born transracial adoptees' ethnic identity development? How do aspects of the adoptees' ecology influence ethnic identity development for Korean adoptees?	• What was it like to reflect on how you have come to identify yourself? • Thinking back to your past experiences and how they formed your identity, is there anything you would like to change? • What was most influential in forming your identity? How so? • Does being adopted or being Korean have more of significance on how you identify yourself? How so? How have you integrated the two? • How influential was your family in informing your identity—good or bad?
Ecological theory Critical race feminism	How does being from a minority culture adopted into a majority culture influence ethnic identity development?	• In what ways have you worked to learn more about your birth culture and how has that influenced how you currently identify yourself? • At what point in your life did you find yourself "working" to create an identity for yourself? How did you do this?
Ecological theory Critical race feminism	How does gender influence ethnic identity development in Korean-born transracial adoptees?	• Do you think male Korean adoptees have a different experience than female Korean adoptees? How so?

Table 3.2 Continued

		• Is there anything that you wish the interviewer had asked that she did not? • Is there anything more you would like to add to your answers from the interview or in general about your experiences as a Korean adoptee?

Non-comparative study

The current study used a within-group comparison model, rather than a comparative group model. This is based upon previous research on adoptees, and more specifically transracial adoptees. Previous studies that have examined transracial adoptees have often utilized comparative approaches, in which adopted children are compared to non-adopted children, or transracial adoptees are compared to in-racial adoptees, or any combination of the groups. By comparing adopted to non-adopted persons, it is assumed that the person's adoption status is the only difference between the two groups. Adoption has many complex layers that can influence a person in a multitude of ways. This is evidenced by the mixed results when using a comparison model to study adoptees. Some studies that used comparative methodologies have found that adoptees do not differ much from non-adopted persons (Bagley, 1993; Kim, 1995; Kim, Shin & Carey, 1999); however, other studies have found adoptees to have higher rates of emotional and behavioral problems when compared to non-adopted adolescents (Lindblad, Hjern, & Vinnerljung, 2003; Kim, Shin, & Carey, 1999). Studies that have examined within group differences of adopted or transracial adoptees have found variations in adjustment levels (Feigelman, 2000). These mixed results indicate a need for within group studies that look at the variations within a group, such as transracial adoptees. As such, only female Korean-born transracial adoptees were included.

Location of Interviews

The current study conducted the interviews in places where the participants were comfortable in being interviewed at. The participants chose the location of where they would like to be interviewed. This included coffee shops, their offices, and at times their homes. I used a digital audio reorder to record the interviews. The recordings were uploaded onto a computer that aided in the transcription of the interviews.

The journal entries were meant to be reflective and flexible, though some questions were asked as a means of prompting their reflections on certain areas of their life. The questions were sent via email soon after the interview took place. At latest, the journal questions were sent the day after the interview took place. Journal entries were completed following the interview, many of the participants were able to complete them within days of the interview. Participants emailed me their responses.

Procedure: Sample Design & Participant Recruiment

Participants in the current study were female Korean-born transracial adoptees in the 18 to 40 year old age range. This particular age range was chosen to include those that have hypothetically gone through the ethnic identity development process, and be able to retrospectively talk about that experiences in terms of what was influential and how it was influential to their development. Interviewing young adult Korean-born transracial adoptees is not a new concept. Shiao, & Tuan (2007) interviewed adoptees who were twenty-five years of age or older so the participants could reflect upon their childhoods and other stages of life. Some have indicated that it would be helpful to interview those who have already been through the ethnic identity development process (Feigelman, 2000). Drawing from the child development literature, it was assumed that young adult

Korean-born adoptees possess the skills necessary to effectively handle any negative effects of answering questions regarding their adoption and family of origin (i.e. painful memories).

One question that is often asked when conducting research is "How many participants will I need?" Kvale (1996) as cited by Taylor and Bogden (1998) answer with "Interview as many subjects as necessary to find out what you need to know." Taylor and Bogden (1998) described an inverse relationship between the number of participants and the amount and depth of information that is gathered. As such, the number of participants was determined as data was collected. In the end, the project completed in-depth interviews with fifteen women.

Participants were recruited using various methods. Solicitation took place in the form of flier advertisements around a large college campus, a posting on the student Korean adoptee website at another large college, several postings on groups specific to Korean adoptees on the social networking websites, Facebook and MySpace, and the use of the "snowball method" were all used. The snowball method of having a participant refer another potential participant has been successful in recruiting in this specific population (Meier, 1999). Previous studies have shown that the use of these methods has been successful in recruiting Korean-born adoptees and their families (e.g., Bergquist, Campbell, and Unrau 2003; Feigelman, 2000; Huh & Reid, 2000; Johnston, et al., 2007). Meier (1999) used various Internet websites that were devoted to adoptee issues and placed advertisements on these sites to solicit participants. Others have used a convenience sample based upon records from local or national adoption agencies that specialize in Korean adoptions (Benson, Sharma, & Roehlkepartain, 1994; Brooks &

Barth, 1999; Johnston, et al 2007; Yoon, 2001), though this method of recruitment was not utilized for the current study.

In the end, all the participants were female, and were born in Korea and adopted to Caucasian couples who lived in the United States. Each of the participants came from one mid-western state and were dispersed throughout the state. One participant had been raised in a different state and moved to the current one, while another participant had recently moved out of the current state. The current age for the participants ranged from 22 years old to 40 years old with the average ago of 27 years old. The ages the women were adopted at ranged from 3 months old to 6 years old. Of the fifteen women, six were married, one was engaged, three were divorced and five had never been married. Of those who were married or divorced, one was married to an African immigrant, two were married or engaged to a man who was of Mexican heritage, while the others had married or been married to Caucasian men. There was also a mix of those who had children and those who did not. Eight of the participants had children ranging in age from 6 months to 12 years old. Each of these children were a mix of Korean and another ethnicity.

In terms of their adoption stories and how they came to be adopted, the women all had different stories. The women who were adopted at young ages, such as Amy who was adopted at 6 months old, or Julie who was adopted when she was 3 months old had little to no information regarding their biological parents or their circumstances. Some of the women were given names before being placed in the orphanage, while others, such as Alexa had a closed adoption and had her records sealed. Once she arrived in America she had an x-ray done to verify her age, 18 months, and issued a birthday that coincided with the approximate age. Some were adopted at older ages, however, only one indicated that

she had any memories of living in Korea. The other women indicated they did not recall any memories of being in Korea.

Kim was found "out on the streets" when she was 2 or 3 years old and placed in an orphanage until she was adopted at 6 years old. She did not have any information regarding her biological family, but felt that her being "abandoned" had something to do with her cleft lip. Similar to Kim, Linda was also "found" and adopted when she was 5 years old. Another woman, Stacy, was brought to an orphanage when she was 4 ½ years old and was adopted at the age of 5 years old. She was told her biological mother was sick, perhaps with Hepatitis B, and that is why she was placed in the orphanage. Stacy also indicated she did not have memories of her time in Korea, however, she told me a story about going to the dentist when she was around 8 years old and screaming in the car when they arrived. Stacy's mom told her that the building where the dentist was looked similar to the orphanage she had stayed in and that is why she was screaming so much.

Many times, the women relied on the stories their adoptive families told them about their first few days and weeks once they arrived in America. Kim was told that she would sleep under her bed, or behind the couch for the months following her arrival to America. Stacy was told that she cried and spoke in Korean on the way home from the airport until her mom and her stopped for food.

Analysis

Just as the interview process is subjective to the interviewer and interviewee's culture, socioeconomic status, past experiences, so is the analysis process (Atkinson & Delamont, 2005). This was especially pertinent in the current study as the researcher was the only person to transcribe the interviews as well as code and perform the data analysis.

Thus, it was important to recognize that the analysis portion of the current research project was subject to the researcher's own interpretation of the data.

Once each of the interviews was fully transcribed, the researcher used the data analysis software program Qualrus to aid in the analysis of the qualitative data. Qualrus is a software program that helped to organize the qualitative data and eventually helped with the coding process. The data from the semi-structured interviews and the reflective journal entires were uploaded into the Qualrus program and then I was able to go through and code the data. I was able to go through each individual transcript and see the relationships among the codes. Later I was able to look at the all the codes from each of the transcripts and reflective journal entries together. The interviews and the data from the reflective journal entries went through a three-phase analysis process. Much of the data analysis process relied on the coding of the transcripts of the interviews and the reflective journal entries. As such, it is important to reflect upon the coding process of qualitative data. Coding is intended to: (1) both follow upon and lead to generative questions; (2) fracture the data, thus freeing the researcher from description and forcing interpretation to higher levels of abstraction; (3) is the pivotal operation for moving toward the discovery of a core category or categories; and so (4) moves toward ultimate integration of the entire analysis; as well as (5) highlights the relationships among the codes and the development of each (Strauss, 1987, p. 55-56). Thus, coding is imperative to providing a "ground up" approach to analyzing data.

First, open coding was performed line-by-line of each of the interviews as well as the reflective journal entries. This resulted in eighty-one codes. These codes were both descriptive and action oriented (i.e. did you attend culture camp?).

Next cluster analysis was performed through axial coding. It was during this process that relationships among the codes were first highlighted and categorized. It was during this phase that I made determinations of what themes were core to the objectives of the study. For instance, the codes related to relationships among the adoptive family members were placed in a theme titled, Adoptive Family Structure.

Finally, selective coding of the original codes allowed for the construct categories, as well as the subcategories to emerge. It was also during this phase that the relationship among the major themes and the sub-themes were identified.

The use of a three-phase analysis strategy also addresses the idea that analysis is also subject to my own interpretation (Rogan & de Kock, 2005). The use of each phase was to minimize the possibility of my voice to become louder than that of the participant's. Using the three-part analysis provided a more holistic and complete picture of the experience of the women by examining separate parts of the interview.

The typical interpretive process within interview-based studies locates distinct themes *across* interviews; however, Chase (2005) calls upon narrative researchers to listen first to the voices *within* each of the narratives. This is done through extending the narrator-listener relationship and active work of listening to the interpretive process by beginning with the narrator's voices and stories. This interpretive process of first locating the voices within the narrative, and then moving across the various narratives to locate different themes was reflected in the current study as codes and themes were first identified in each transcription and then moved to include all the themes from the various transcriptions. For instance, some codes were identified in later transcriptions (i.e. race & religion) and I went back through the previous transcriptions to see if that code fit as

well.

Trustworthiness (Validity)

The purpose of this section is to outline the ways in which I addressed issues of trustworthiness, or as it is more commonly referred in qualitative research as the term to denote reliability and validity. Similar to providing guidelines for the research process, feminist research also provides guidelines for increasing trustworthiness. Feminist research calls for the questioning of the trustworthiness of research at various points throughout the process: the construction of the research questions, gaining access, data production, interpretation and analysis, and re/presentation of the research (Harrison et al., 2001).

Polkinghorne (2007) described four threats to validity in narrative research: the limits of language to capture the participant's story; the limits of reflection that are present outside of awareness; social desirability that leads to the resistance of people; and the complexity of the co-creation of text between the researcher and participant. It is important to be aware of these threats to trustworthiness as well as several techniques for lessening their potential.

Richardson (2005) made several suggestions for increasing the trustworthiness of qualitative data that the current project adhered to. First, she suggested that the researcher keep a log trail regarding the handling of data throughout the data analysis phase. Second, triangulating data as a means to provide a "checkpoint" in other sources was recommended. The current project triangulated data from reflective journal entries and in-depth interviews with the participants. Finally, she suggested that at the end phase the researcher do a "member check" with the participants. This involves writing a report and

having the participants "check" how you have interpreted their stories and provide them a way to clarify and/or expand their meanings of their experience in the interpretation (Richardson, 2005; Polkinhorne, 2007). Providing participants with the opportunity to read the researcher's interpretation and provide feedback also provides a way to avoid having the author's voice be louder than that of the participants in the final analysis (Harrison et al., 2001). I was able to send a copy of the "findings" from the interviews and reflective journal entries to each of the participants via email to check with them that I had made the correct interpretation of what each had said, and represented it in a truthful and respectful manner.

Another tactic for increasing trustworthiness is providing a reflexive section that addresses the researcher's biases, values, and personal stake in the research project. The current project addresses this by providing a reflexive portion in the following section.

Reflexivity

In keeping with the critical lens grounding of this project, my reflexivity section is guided by the questions Few (2005) suggests we as researchers ask ourselves about the reasons for conducting research and how we treat our participants.

Why do we participate in research?

This dissertation process started almost four years ago when I started to read more literature on Korean transracial adoptees. Since then I have tried to integrate my readings and my own experience into class projects, papers, and presentations whenever I could. As I read more and more on this topic and the "empirical" evidence that existed regarding the adoptees' experiences, the more I was able to see myself in the writings and reflections of the adoptees. There are two reasons why I have chosen to do this line of

research and why I am so passionate about it: for my own self, and for those who have come before and after me to this country from Korea through the adoption process. This project and my passion for the topic comes from my own painful experiences growing up not knowing who I was or where I belonged, and not wanting other adoptees to have to experience that same confusion.

The reason why I chose to do this line of research is partially for selfish reasons as it was born out of my own childhood experiences and process of figuring out who I was and where I belonged. I questioned if I were the only one to not realize she would not have "white" babies until she was 13 years old, or pretend to be named "Stacy" because girls with that name were blonde and beautiful—not brown and ugly. Part of me wanted to know if my experience was unique or not, though from the readings over the years I would wager that it was not. Included in my selfish reasons are reasons connected to my children. Through this process I have learned that not only do I do this for myself, and other adoptees, but I also do this for my children who are a mix of Korean and Caucasian. I realized when I was pregnant with my first child that I did not want him to grow up struggling as I did, and questioned how I would teach him to be proud of his heritage when I myself did not know where my identity laid, or was proud of it. As many of the women who participated in this project who had children indicated, pregnancy acted as a starting point for my own conscious and purposeful ethnic identity journey.

I also do this line of research for those children who will continue to be adopted from Korea and other countries to the U.S. From the start this project has been about wanting to provide a better life for future adoptees'. My goal has always been to gain more knowledge that will better inform those involved in the adoption process,

particularly the adoptive parents. I see the adoptive parents as the gatekeepers of knowledge and information about the adoptees' race and birth culture. They are able to create an image of Korea and Korean people for the adoptee, whether it is positive or negative.

What do we gain?

In keeping with my two reasons for doing this line of research there are two areas of gain: personal and other adoptees, and adoptive families.

Already I feel I have gained a lot of insight and growth from reading and writing about the ethnic identity development of Korean transracial adoptees. It has forced me to revisit memories that are both significant to whom I am today, but also very painful. I have read new literature on the political and social reasons for adoption that have resonated with me so deeply it has moved me to tears. I have also been able to let go of some "demons" that have haunted me and forced me to look at my own ethnic identity development and what other ecological factors were involved, and continue to be involved.

It is my sincere hope that the knowledge and the voices that will represented through this research will be heard by current and perspective adoptive families, adoption workers, family members, teachers, peers, politicians, etc. and be taken to heart. It is my hope that the information garnered in this project will help those involved in a Korean-transracial adoptees' life to be more sensitive and cognizant of how their actions influence the ethnic identity development of that child.

How are we exploitive and how are we liberating for our participants?

Knowing that some of my reasons for doing this research are driven by personal

motivation, it is difficult for me to ask myself if what I am doing and what I am asking of participants is exploiting them for my personal gain. In some ways it is because without their participation I cannot finish this project that is necessary to receiving my degree. But, is it only for my personal gain? No, it is not. I think that any personal gains I may make throughout this process will come secondary to allowing adoptees to voice for themselves what was significant and how it was significant to their ethnic identity development process. For so long adoptees have not had a voice in the decisions that are made about their lives, whether it be in the family level or at the political level where laws and policies are made about adoption. Their voices about their experiences have been silenced by loyalties to their adoptive families, by confusion, by fear, by sadness as well as a multitude of other factors. Thus, it is my hope that the adoptees who chose to participate in this project will find talking freely about their past experiences to be a liberating experience.

Data analysis

Since there is an admitted personal stake in conducting this research, it is important to also note what steps will be taken to ensure that my voice will not overwhelm or silence that of the participants. I am aware that I hold many biases and values about my own experiences that have the potential to color the data analysis phase. I understand there is a real danger in having these biases and values leak into the analysis portion of this project. My biases are mostly related to the role of adoptive parents have as gatekeepers in their children's lives. From my own experience I have felt the isolation of being one of only a handful of Asians in the community. I did not have access to anything related to Korea, aside from books that were never read to me, or an occasional

dinner of Chinese food. Knowing my biases and my feelings about the importance of the adoptive parent's role in their child's ethnic identity development may cause me to question those who had a very different experience with their parents. It was extremely important for me to keep a careful log during the analysis and interpretation phases in order to keep these biases in check.

Conclusion

In conclusion, based on previous studies of Korean-born transracial adoptees, the current study utilized a qualitative approach to the collection and analysis of data regarding the external influences in the ethnic identity development of Korean-born transracial adoptees. The data collection and analysis phases are grounded within a human ecological and critical race feminist framework. The data analysis section of the study included three separate, but connected phases of analysis in order to provide a holistic view of the data.

Chapter 4

Findings

Introduction

This study explored the lived experiences of female Korean adoptees and their ethnic identity development over the years. Fifteen women agreed to be interviewed and completed a reflective journal after the interview. The purpose of gathering and telling their stories was to gain a better understanding of the various contributors to their ethnic identity development and to closely examine the intersection of being adopted, being a female and being Asian and how it contributes to creating an identity. Their interviews told their story of struggling to form an ethnic identity that felt true to them and was not based on their outward appearances, or on their surrounding environment, but an identity that was based on how they saw themselves.

The qualitative data came from two sources, in-depth interviews and reflective journal entries. The codes reflected both sources, however, the excerpts that were taken from the reflective journals are denoted as the participant's pseudo-name followed by the label of "reflective".

Table 4.1 describes the links between the research questions and the findings.

Table 4.1

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	MAJOR THEME(S)	SUBTHEMES
What are the ecological influences on a Korean-born transracial adoptees' ethnic identity development? How do aspects of the adoptees' ecology influence ethnic identity development for Korean adoptees? How does being from a minority culture adopted into a majority culture influence ethnic identity development?	**Adoptive Family Life; Adoption; Interactions w/ Korea; Ethnic Identity Journey; Current Circumstances; Future Hopes & Fears**	**Adoptive Family Life:** *Family relationships; Parental influences; Structure/community; Culture & racism growing up* **Adoption:** *Adoption circumstances; Perception of adoption* **Interactions w/ Korea:** *Korean culture; Relationships w/ other Koreans/Asians* **Ethnic Identity Journey**: *Ethnic identity process; Influences on ethnic identity development; Not fitting in anywhere; Racism/Ignorance (racism growing up; racism today & effects of racism/stereotypes); Being an Asian woman (experiences of being an Asian woman; males vs. females); Media influence* **Current Circumstances:** *Community & culture; Racism; what would you change?* **Future Hopes & Fears:** *Future influences; Future generations of adoptees*
How does gender influence ethnic identity development in Korean-born transracial adoptees?	**Interactions w/ Korea; Ethnic Identity Journey; Current Circumstances**	Interactions w/ Korea: Korean culture; Relationships w/ other Koreans/Asians Ethnic Identity Journey: Ethnic identity process; Influences on ethnic identity development; Not fitting in anywhere; Racism/Ignorance (racism growing up; racism today & effects of racism/stereotypes); Being an Asian woman (experiences of being an Asian woman; males vs. females); Media influence Current Circumstances: Community & culture; Racism; what would you change?

Adoptive Family Life

Within this theme there are three sub-themes: family relationships; community; and cultural activities growing up. Each of these are interconnected in terms of influencing each other and the amount of exposure an adoptee had to her Korean culture.

For instance, many of the communities the women lived in had little diversity, thus, there were not a lot of cultural activities, or opportunities for these women to be exposed to their Korean culture, or any other culture for that matter. Though there may not have been a lot of diversity in the community, some of the adoptive parents went out of their way to find opportunities for their daughter to participate in a "culture camp" or find books about Korea, or travel a great distance to take their daughter to a Korean restaurant. This was indicative of how open and passionate some of the adoptive parents were to keeping their daughter connected to her birth culture.

Family Relationships

The structure of their family referred to the make-up of their family, such as, how many siblings they had, if those siblings were adopted or biological to the adoptive parents, and where the participant fell in regards to birth order. All but one of the women had at least one other sibling. Some of the siblings were biological children of the women's adoptive parents, while others were also adopted from Korea, or were adopted domestically within the U.S. Of those adopted from Korea, some were half-Korean and half-Caucasian, while others were of pure Korean decent. Though they may have had one, or several siblings who were also adopted, the women indicated that they did not talk to their siblings about being adopted or about their experiences of racism or discrimination growing up.

> With my brother I think, I can't think of any time that we had a conversation to share stories or kindof like come up with solutions or experiences. It was usually, from what I recall, I'd usually go to my parents and just ask questions and be confused and try to understand (Kim)

This was also true for those who had cousins or other relatives who were adopted

from Korea. Not talking about being adopted was a theme for all the women and applied to all their interactions with those who were adopted from Korea. It was almost as if it was an unspoken rule that they do not talk about it with each other.

> When we get together we don't really talk about it. I never asked her and she's never asked me either. We just knew we were adopted and that was it. (Kim)

During the interviews the women also spoke about their adoptive families in terms of their relationships with their parents. For the most part the women described their parents as being able to talk to them about being adopted, but also indicated that they felt their parents struggled with the transracial nature of their adoption. These instances were almost always related to discussions about race or incidents of racism they had experienced. The women spoke of their parent's inability to provide them with cultural experiences and a sense of their racial background in terms of their parents didn't know any better and that they did the best that they could with what they had.

> And I mean she did the best she could. She just wasn't aware. You know, she didn't have any training or guidance, you know, how do you raise an adopted child from Korea or, you know? (Alexa)

This in turn affected how the women handled incidents of racism/discrimination/ignorance. The women described incidents of racism or discrimination growing up, however, during the interview they would not always refer to these incidents as such. Instead, they would say that the person(s) was "ignorant", thus, the code was named to reflect the language the participants used. During elementary school the most common instance was racially charged teasing in the form of being called "Chinese eyes" and other children pulling their eyes back to make them "slanty".

> I went to school that was more diverse, but it was still mainly white kids and kids who were not exposed to Asian people. And so yes, they teased me. They called me flatface, pancake face...they would pull their eyes and pretend like they were

> talking in Chinese or Japanese or something. And they would always call me Chinese or Japanese as if they were saying something mean to me. I was always frustrated that they never came up with Korean. I didn't know why they didn't know about Korea. (Linda)

Related to living in communities where the population was predominately white, was the realization that there were not many opportunities or education specific to the Korean culture. As the previous quote indicates, as a young girl she could not understand why others did not know about Korea, and why it was only her that knew that it existed. Many times the women described having a Chinese or even Japanese restaurant in the area that served as the primary bridge to the Asian culture.

When talking about these incidents and how they handled them, many of the women stated that they did not feel comfortable telling their parents about them, and would rather keep those incidents to themselves. Others would tell their parents, but find that the advice or guidance given was not helpful. This resulted in the adoptees not telling their parents of any further incidents.

> You know, my mom just kindof well, you know "that's not very nice" and you know "that's not a word that you use", you know? Kindof, I don't know. Maybe dismissed it a little bit, though not her intention. I'm sure she doesn't even remember, doesn't even know that I still remember. (Alexa).

> I want to be the best daughter possible and I don't want them to think that I can't handle anything and I want to be strong and you know...I want them to think of me as an adult, even though I'm 10. So, I think part of it was just I wanted to protect them cause I didn't want them to be so afraid something bad was going to happen to me. And then after having told them about all this, these racism issues, my mom just freaked out and couldn't believe this was happening in (her town). And couldn't believe that this was happening especially to her daughter so she, she took it very violently. There's a very strong reaction there and after that I really didn't want to tell her at all cause I was afraid she would, you know, have a heart attack or something, so I just, I think a lot of it was... personally I just thought I could handle it. I wasn't that hurt like, I was never physically attacked or anything like that, but I was, emotionally kindof I kept my, my feelings about adoption really hidden for a really long time when I was younger so, I guess, I really just didn't want to make them worry about more things. (Jennifer)

Jennifer's experience was not unlike many of the women's experiences of wanting to protect their parents from feelings of hurt, or feelings that they did not do a "good enough" job raising them. The women spoke of fearing their parents would dismiss these incidents, or in Jennifer's case, feared her mother would have a physical reaction. This resulted in the children working to "protect" their parents feelings, which ultimately resulted in isolating them more in terms of being able to talk about what racism is and the effect it had on these women.

Parental influences

The women also talked about the good and bad influences of their adoptive parents on their ethnic identity development. Several indicated that it was the way that their parents raised them that helped support and contribute to a strong identity. They referred to how their parents taught them that they are a person just like anyone else. When asked what was most helpful to their ethnic identity development in terms of their parent's influence several spoke of their parent's being open and accepting of their two identities as Korean and as American and not pushing them to talk about it when they did not want to.

> I think it's because they always encouraged me to look into Korean things, like they sent me to that culture camp when I was little. It was very, "Do you want to go to this camp?" I was in Korean dance class and a little bit of Korean language, and they cooked Korean food on my birthday every year and on our adoption days and so they celebrated the fact that we were a little different and so I didn't feel like they were pressuring me to be white and I didn't feel like I was pressured to be Asian. They just really encouraged me and my younger brother, who's also adopted, to be what we were, part Korean, or, I mean, I say part because our culture is only part, if any at all. They never wanted us to ignore that, so I never felt like this tear between which one am I because my parents raised me to appreciate both. (Anne).

> There are some things that my parents did that were really helpful. They didn't

> push the subject of race when they could tell that I clearly didn't want to talk about it. (Jennifer)

Another indicator for the level of openness of their parents was related to talking about traveling to Korea. The women identified their parents as open to visiting Korea at some point, though some of the women felt that their parents would say they were open to it, but not follow through on making plans for a trip.

> I remember my mom feeling like it would have to be like this big trip if we were to do it. I think cause I probably brought it up at some point, like, "Oh I would really like to go to Korea." or something. And, "Oh, lets wait until, your cousins are older and see if they want to go, too." and make it this big trip. (Karli)

Structure/community

Quite a few of the women identified their community that they grew up in as predominately white. Some came from rural communities, and others came from suburbs of a larger city. Their descriptions provided insight into what the larger systems in their life were and how they were influential to their ethnic identity development. They also gave insight into how accessible their Korean culture was to them within their community.

> No diversity. Um, I can name on, I can probably count on one hand how many non-white people there were. (Kat)

> I mean there were, my brother and I and one other kid were the only kids who were not white. (Jaime)

One woman had spent her young childhood years in a predominately white community, but moved to a more diverse area when she entered junior high. She described this experience as allowing her more freedom to be herself.

> I definitely felt relieved when we moved. It seemed like it was easier to make friends and easier to feel confident getting involved and you know outside activities, sports and things like that and just. I don't know; it seems like I became like a little bit more outgoing. (Karli)

As a result of living in a predominately white community, the Korean culture was not readily accessible to many of these women growing up, meaning, there were not places that could connect them to the Korean culture in any way, such as Korean markets or Korean restaurants nearby. The closest thing to the Korean culture many of these women had was the local Chinese restaurant in their area.

There were two women who identified their communities as more diverse than the others. One described her community has having more African Americans and Latino/a's, however, there still were not many Asians within that community. Another woman identified her community as unique in that it was a smaller community with several families who had adopted children from Korea. She indicated that growing up in a community where there were others who were similar to her; not only in physical appearance, but also in adoption status was helpful to having a strong sense of who she was.

> It gave me more confidence. I didn't have, I was never ashamed of the way I looked. I always thought "Oh hey, I don't have to tan outside, or my hairs pretty", and I never tried, I know some people have tried to assimilate with their parent's physical features like dying their hair blonde. I just think that's silly. First of all our hair doesn't dye blonde very well, it looks awful. And when I see people who try to do that I'm like, "Oh, you have to accept yourself and yourself is as natural." (Sandra)

When talking about the community that they grew up in, many of the women described their community as being cut off, or close-minded. They described it as a protective bubble that did not know how to handle children of a different race.

> As a child in grade school, I found myself struggling to explain to other kids that I was a person just like them; I wasn't Chinese, I was "Dutch Korean". Most kids in my area had never heard of Korea so it was a lost cause. (Kim-reflective)

Culture & racism growing up:

In terms of the cultural activities that the women participated in growing up, many of them identified their adoptive mom as the one who had initiated it, or would take them to the camp or festival. It was the mothers who continued the involvement with the adoption agency, or who would seek out other Korean individuals for the participants to meet with, or cook the Korean food. The adoptive father's were not mentioned as the primary person to be interested in helping their children stay connected to their birth culture, though, when asked further, the participants indicated that their fathers were supportive.

Along with the cultural activities that some of the women were able to participate in, they also talked about cultural "artifacts" or things from Korea that were in the house. Many described little "souvenirs" from Asia in the form of dolls, Christmas ornaments and dishes. Some of the adoptive parents continued to be involved with the adoption agency and was able to order various things through a catalog. Others had adoptive parents who had been to Asia and brought things back before they had adopted the participant. Several described books about Korea, or about a different Asian country, such as Japan that they had in the home, or would check out from the library.

Adoption

Adoption circumstances

There were various circumstances under which the participants were adopted from Korea. The age they were adopted at ranged from 3 months to 5 years old. None of the participants knew the exact circumstances under which they were placed for adoption, though some had some inkling as to the reasons. The women had various levels of

information and knowledge about their biological parents and the circumstances under which they had been adopted. Some knew a little about their biological mother, such as her age, or the name she gave at the clinic where she gave birth. Others had no information about their biological parents. These were the women who had been "abandoned" or "found" on the street.

> It was a closed adoption. I know that. I know my birth mom was 17 and that's, I don't know if that's the only information that I came over with or that's all that my parents have ever told me. And I've never really, really asked I guess. And I know they'd be more than willing I think to answer any questions I had, but; that's all I know. (Amy)

> I was approximately 18 months. When I was adopted, Korea was still doing closed records so I didn't have any information and you know my exact birth date or you know, biological parents or anything like that. So, but when I came to the U.S., they did like an x-ray of my wrist and determined an approximate age, so that's how I ended up with my birth date. (Alexa)

> I really don't have any memories. I'm sure I was abused cause I got like scars on my body that you know, my parents don't know and the orphanage doesn't know. I think one of the reasons that I was abandoned, probably one of the main reasons, is that I have a cleft lip. (Kim).

Many of the participants could not identify the reason why their adoptive parents chose to adopt from Korea; however, many indicated that their parents knew someone who had also adopted from Korea. This was either another family member, or a family friend. Other participants talked about how their parents had some sort of connection to Asia, either through missionary work or through the Korean War. These women described their parent's reasons for adopting from Korea as altruistic in wanting to provide a better home for "all these orphans". Other did not know of a reason why their parents chose to adopt from Korea.

Perceptions of adoption

The search status of the adoptee gave some insight into how she felt about her adoption. There is some literature that talks about the influence of an adoptee's search status, or whether or not an adoptee has initiated a search for her biological parents on the adoptees' adjustment (Cubito & Brandon, 2000). In the current study, of the 15 women, 6 of them had attempted a search at some point for her biological parents. Some had searched several times, while others had only done one search. Of those who had not attempted a search, the main reasons given were that she felt it would be impossible given the circumstances under which she was adopted (i.e. found alongside the road with no information) or that she didn't feel it was a priority at this point in time. They indicated that if circumstances were different they would attempt a search, or if the biological parents found her she would be willing to try and connect to them.

> Well, because when I was adopted they didn't have any record of a given name. The orphanage I was in actually gave me my name. So, I wouldn't really know where to start. (Grace)

> I think at some point I might. I don't know. It's not anything that I think about a lot. I think it'd be more intriguing if I had more information about them or kindof knew where to start, but I might at some point. (Karli)

> Yeah, and to me it's not like, my priority to figure that all out. My priority right now is my son. (Andrea)

Others described searching as not necessary because they did not feel any type of connection to the Korean culture throughout their lives.

> I still don't think that I'd ever want to find my biological parents just because I mean, me and my parents have talked about it before, like with my adoptive parents. And they'd be very supportive about it and, my mom on some occasions "We would never be against it, by any means, or anything like that. We would support you no matter what you did", but I just think that's almost maybe more awkward for me just because I don't know what I would say. I don't know. We don't have anything in common that type of thing. I don't even know if we would

> speak the same language, I don't even know how I would find them. But, I mean, I really would like, I don't really feel like a part of me is missing. But, just be, when I...last semester when I started the whole process of this is you know, (learning about the Korean culture) this is what I was born into, you know? This is what, and I don't know nothing about it, you know? (Amy)

> Oh, possibly because I've been living like 33 years without really knowing my history before Korea. I mean, of course I remember a whole ton, but it's like you know like the actual facts and information it's like I've lived without that for so long that it's that I'm actually okay with that. But it's like maybe like a sense of dating. That maybe that's it and influence from some of my Korean people I've come across. It's like, "You know your parents might be looking for you", so it's...yeah, I don't know. But I probably would have said that 10 years ago. Like, now I'm okay with knowing or not knowing. (Sharon)

The women had varying perceptions of what it meant to be adopted. The majority spoke of their adoption status as a positive, and felt grateful for being adopted because they knew what the alternatives could have been. Others talked about the adoption process and how thorough the adoption workers are in doing background checks. These women described having a difficult relationship with their parents not related to being adopted. Other women talked about having conflicting feelings about adoption, specifically international adoption because of the societal value that is placed upon it.

> I struggle immensely with the adoption process. International adoption. And the perceptions that it promotes. I think there are hidden...the structure itself promotes white privilege. And the structure itself does not promote equality even with the best intention of the mom who wants to take home a child that has needs. I wish in my heart that there was a structure that would allow for the same parents who want to adopt a baby, who wants to take that child home and raise it with all their love and privilege that they have. I wish that they would take those same privileges and instead of using it on just the child would actually go to that country and empower the woman, the mom, the true, natural mom to raise that child. Whether that be financially, whether that be changing laws, whether that be creating a relationship, you know? It's, they say it takes a village to raise a child, well, it's like, why is our village better than that village? That's what the perception is that I get. And then on top of it you've got the white privilege, blind parents who don't get the fact of what they're doing damage, like what you and I are talking about after the fact because there's no training. And I don't think anyone would adopt if they knew they would have to go through training. (Sue).

One woman spoke of the perceived differences between being a transracial adoptee versus someone who was adopted in-racially.

> Well, yeah, if you think about it, there wouldn't have been as many questions from other people. But, then I wonder too, cause at the same time it might be more confusing like I'm white, I look somewhat like these people, but I'm adopted. I don't know which one would be easier, but I think there would definitely be less challenges being white, adopted into a white family. (Karli)

The women discussed how their parents were able to talk to them about being adopted, but had more difficulty in talking to their children about being adopted from Korea. When asked what had more of a significance in their identity formation, being adopted or being Korean, the answers varied. Some talked about one or the other, while others talked about both having a significant impact on their identity.

> Being adopted has more of an impact on me than being Korean. I feel this way because adoption is what gave me such a confusing identity. Korean people are Korean with a taste of America possibly, or they were raised in both cultures. Adopted people are raised generally with a culture that is not their own. This is what I see to cause the identity crisis more so than a second generation Korean person. I have integrated the two into being a Korean-Adoptee-American. I have explored Korean culture and my Korean side in an attempt to discover that "other part" of me that I was not raised with. So, I identify myself as Asian, as Korean, but still very much American because of my adoption. (Anne-reflective).

> Genetically speaking, I am Korean. But because I'm adopted (circumstances) this combination has thus far, not allowed me to fulfill not just the social norms of what it means to be authentically Korean (in it's most natural state) but it also doesn't allow me to successfully identify with the default definition of unsaid expectations that society has somehow placed on what a "Korean-Adoptee-American" should be either. That experience alone is what gives me identity-not necessarily one term over the other. I also think there is a lot to be said in not being able to fulfill either of those roles quite equally. This can lead to an internalization process that often affects identity. (Jennifer-reflective).

Interactions with Korea

Korean culture

Each of the women had varying degrees of interaction with Korea through various

means. The most common way of connecting with Korea was through eating Korean food. Many of the women described their first experience of eating Korean food, or having their adoptive mom try and make Korean food.

> My mom tried to make Korean dishes once in a great while, but they just ended up looking like Dutch casseroles with pineapple chunks spread throughout them. You know, just like random soy sauce. (Sue)

> And she called it you know, Korean chicken, so we would have that quite frequently and then you know, kimchee. She got that for me thinking it's just Korean food and I'd like it, and I did like it. I loved it. (Stacy)

For others, it wasn't until much later in their life that they had the opportunity to experience any type of Asian food.

> The first time I went to a Chinese restaurant was probably my senior year. I went to China Inn and I loved it. (Kim).

Another way of connecting with the Korean culture was to actually go and visit the country. Several of the women described returning to Korea and what their experiences were like. Some had done it with the adoption agency as a "motherland tour" while others did it as a means to search for her birth parents, or some used it as just a trip with no other agenda than to go and explore a new country. Some had positive experiences, while others had more negative experiences there.

> I do not recommend going to Korea with the sole purpose of a birth search—if it fails, it's not the best way to leave the country and Koreans themselves are pretty jaded to the topic, so there aren't necessarily these warm welcomes. Instead, go with close friends and make it a vacation so that at least you got something out of it. (Kat-reflective)

> I took a trip to Korea about four years ago. That helped me learn a little about the culture. It helped me realize where I came from, face the reality of my early years and what happened to change my life so drastically, and how all those changes added layers to my person. (Linda-reflective).

Their responses about their experiences varied from enjoying their time there, to feeling very awkward being there. Several talked about how the differences between themselves and those who had been raised in Korea were accentuated when they went to visit. Even though they were surrounded by other Koreans the women described still feeling like an outsider.

> I felt different and I dressed differently. I think a lot of it just had to do with not being able to speak the language and having grown up being used to sticking out and suddenly feeling like I was blending in made me feel uncomfortable. And I don't really know why that is exactly, but it definitely felt not normal and I think walking around with my parents who were very clearly American, people, you know, there's like a big sign pointing like "adopted". So, it was just, yeah, uncomfortable I guess. (Jennifer)

> But, you know, everyone was so nice. I mean, they were just really friendly and helpful and, but I mean I definitely, you can tell, they, I don't think they. You're still not Korean to them, you know? Different. (Alexa)

Similar to the responses regarding searching for their biological parents, those who had not been back to Korea had indicated that at some point they would like to go, but because of their current life circumstances it would not be feasible. Others stated that they had no desire to go back.

Several of the women described their earliest interactions with Korea and the Korean culture as through the "culture camps" that their parents had sent them to. These "culture camps" varied in their structure, for instance, some were only day camps during a particular week in the summer. The children were dropped off to do various "cultural" activities, such as arts & crafts, or learning how to do Korean drumming. One woman described her "culture camp" as one where she would spend an entire week at the camp, as any other "regular camp". This same woman was the only one who went to a camp that extended past elementary school. The other culture camps were designed for

elementary school-aged children and were mainly put on by adoptive parents. As a result, many of the women did not have concrete memories of learning anything about the Korean culture, but still described the experience as positive.

> I think when I was really little, first going to the camps I think really little, meaning 8, even younger than that probably like 4 or 5. I thought it was really helpful because I remember actively thinking, "Wow, there, you know, there are people who kindof look like me." And you know, camps once you reach a certain age they're not that useful anymore or at least for me it wasn't. So, I guess in a way it helped really emphasis the fact that I am adopted and so in a way that has sortof brought to this point where I accept that yes, I am adopted. I don't have a strong connection to Korean culture so much, but that's ok because it's sortof more my own understanding of who I am and so in a way it sortof pushed me in a direction of adoption more than Korean identity. (Jennifer)

Jennifer's experience at culture camp is reflective of many of the women who had attended similar culture camps. At these "camps" the children were exposed to "traditional" Korean culture in the form of arts & crafts, sometimes Korean drumming, and at times being able to partake in a Korean meal, however, as Jennifer indicates these camps cease to be helpful in tangible ways as the adoptee grows up. There is a need for more than just exposure to a foreign country's culture that they have no connection to other than through their birth.

Some of the women described wanting to go to a "culture camp", and identified her parents as open to sending her, but indicated that her parents did not have enough money to send her. Those who did not attend a camp often stated that looking back they thought it would have been fun to be able to go and interact with other Korean adoptees. Instead of culture camps some went to a "cultural festival" that was held in their town that celebrated all different cultures. Others described their family as connecting with different organizations that consisted of families that had adopted children from other

countries.

> Our parents were part of the, an adoptee group. And I can't remember the name exactly, but we did attend several of those functions at least maybe two or three times a year. And it was a time where I think it was probably more for the parents than for the kids. I mean as a kid it was, I remember playing with other adoptees from around the world. The majority were from Korea, but there were others from India, and Central America, South America. Our parents were really good about that. Of exposing our family to other adoptive families. (Sharon).

> My mom took me to the, I think it was the Korean festival, it used to be called, and now it's the cultural festival and that was always like downtown and my mom would always get me different dolls and stuff from Korea. (Julie).

Rather than make some of the cultural activities a family activity, some of women described efforts to connect them with the Korean culture designed only for the adoptee.

> I felt uncomfortable just because here was my parents just, my adoptive parents just said, "Hey you need to go to Korean church every Sunday". So it was like I was just being thrust into this world without, I mean, I don't remember if I really agreed to it or not. (Sharon)

> I remember bringing home, they give you Korean recipes and Korean gum, stuff like that. I don't think it was something that I showed them my artwork and everything like that. But I don't think it was something that we talked about a whole, whole lot. (Amy)

> My parents wanted me to go to the first one (culture camp) when I was in 7th grade. And actually after that one I skipped the summer before my 8th grade year. It was fun, but I didn't make quite as many friends as I wanted to or enough to bring me back the next year. So, I tried again on my own accord before my 9th grade year. (Anne)

These experiences reflected in the previous quotes are indicative of the need for parents to be able to take the cultural experiences, such as culture camp, and initiate further discussions about what they learned and what it means to them as an individual and as a family.

When asked, most of the women could not remember who exactly initiated any of the cultural activities, whether it was going to culture camp or any other type of activity

that was designed to connect them with their Korean culture. Others described feeling pressure to participate in cultural activities only because they were Korean.

> I would read a little bit about the heritage camps. But I did not go. I don't know why. I don't know if I just wasn't interested or, and my parents didn't encourage or discourage that, they didn't really bring it up. They didn't ask us, "Do you want to do these things." (Linda)

> I remember at some point, maybe like teenage years or something, my sister bringing up to me like, "You know, you should really get in touch with your Korean heritage and like start learning Korean and taking Korean dance class," and she'd bring it up to me in kindof a forceful way. Like, "Why aren't you doing these things?" At that age I wasn't really interested. Especially as a teenager you just want to fit in and be like, do your, just regular school type activities. So I remember that making me feel weird. That she really wanted me to do that. Then I remember feeling like it was kindof odd, too that my parents, although when I was really young, when I was younger, they tried to make a point to you know, like I said we had the books, you know, get me a Korean Barbie or whatever, things like that, but then when I was older I thought it was odd that we never took a family trip to Korea. (Karli)

Relationships with other Asians

The women also described various levels of interactions with other Koreans throughout their lives and what that meant to them. Many of the women had known of other Koreans or other Asians in their area either through church, at school or through the groups their parents were a part of as adoptive parents. The women described having difficulty in their interactions with Koreans who were raised in a Korean family and/or in Korea who immigrated to the U.S. This was mainly due to the perception that the adoptee was not "Korean enough" or "Asian enough". The adoptees would often refer to these Koreans as "real" or "100% Korean", indicating that they themselves did not feel like she was a "real" Korean, but rather someone who looks Korean, but is not truly.

> I've had friends that always say I'm not Asian enough or I'm not a "real" Korean. So it's like, you know, I don't see why they have a basis to say that, so I don't know what they're depiction of a "real one" is. Just because I'm not traditional and because they can speak the language, but that always bugged me and it was

> always the white kids that were learning about cultures or some of my friends that are like Vietnamese or Chinese they say that, too. It's just like, it's not my fault I was adopted. But I'm still Korean. They just don't get it. (Julie)

> They are, they know the language, they know the culture, they know the food and so I felt completely out of place there, but at the same time, you know, people expect you to fit in there, too because I am Asian. (Anne)

Many of the adoptees indicated they knew of other Korean adoptees growing up, but only two identified that they continued these relationships throughout their childhood and into adulthood. The others said in passing that they knew of other Koreans, or other Asians in their community, and they may have had some limited interactions with them. As they became older and were able to move out on their own, they were able to have more interactions with other Korean adoptees, Koreans, or other Asians. There were different reactions to these interactions.

> But then as I got older I started to realize that I really didn't feel that much of a connection because there were all these people who were Korean who were at the camps who actually spoke Korean really well and you know, they would interact and I could see that and I didn't really feel like that was something I could do. Just by going to the camps and I remember thinking "You know why, why isn't this so much easier for me?" I'd really like to understand more about Korea, but I, I don't know how so much. (Jennifer)

> I have to admit that for many years whenever I would see another Korean adoptee, like I would not want to talk to them and I don't know why. (Sharon)

For those that were able to connect with other Korean adoptees they described this experience as helpful in their identity development and of making sense of their adoption.

> Being able to relate to other Korean adoptees has allowed me to share things that I wouldn't share with others. I don't regret anything that has happened, but I learned that each of us adoptees lost something very similar and that we have been grieving on some level or another. Connecting with people like me has made it safe to feel sad, mad, and even indignant. At the same time, I and others in society, should not allow that to be the one defining factor to my identity. Connecting with other Korean adoptees has been another significant healing

> experience because I saw that one doesn't have to bear a burden completely alone. (Sharon-reflective)

Ethnic Identity Journey

Ethnic identity process

This section discusses the *process* of the women's ethnic identity development. This process involved a conscious effort to reach out to others who were similar to them racially, as well as those who were different racially than whom the women had grown up around. Many of the women also described this process as involving an effort to learn more about their Korean culture and roots, and what it meant to them to be not only Korean, but also adopted.

When asked how they would identify their ethnic identity today the women had varying responses. These ranged from Korean-American to Korean adoptee to Asian-American. Accompanied with their response was always a reason why they chose to identify that way, and what influenced their decision. Within their responses were also indications of not feeling completely "American" or completely "Korean", but having to find an identity that they felt comfortable with for their life.

> That's hard. I used to say Korean and I think that's a strong reaction for Asian adoptees because we feel, or at least from my encounters we do feel this relation. And then when I went to Korea I was like, "I'm not Korean at all." I don't really relate to these people. They don't really like me that much and they were really; they expect you to speak the language. They're very much like, "You're not one of us." That's fine, I'm not. Having to been to Japan, I think Asian and that's weird. (Kat)

> As Korean adopted because I'm definitely American and I've explored my Korean heritage and definitely happy to be an American. Probably because I was raised that way, but there are some things about the Korean culture that I can't identify with, I can't understand. There's some things that are great about it, I mean, wonderful, but where I live now, and for the time being, I definitely identify myself as American. Obviously, I look Korean, but even when I talk to people I say I'm adopted from Korea, just so they don't have any questions

because that can kindof explain it. (Sandra)

The women identified different points in their life where they began to actively work on their identity development. Though many identified consciously and actively forming their identity at a later point in their life, many identified significant moments or experiences early in life that contributed to this process. Some of the women were able to recall the first time she realized she was "different" than her adoptive family and what a surprise it was to her.

> I think I always knew that I looked a little different from my parents, but I just kindof assumed that everyone looked different from their parents. And I remember being really, really small and brushing my teeth and then my dad coming in to brush his teeth. And I remember looking up at him and just kindof doing one of those double takes, like, "Oh wow, we really don't look alike at all" in the mirror. It just made a difference. Cause you know, you don't really think about what you look like when you're just not in front of the mirror. (Jennifer)

Many of the women described struggling with their ethnic identity while growing up. Some talked about how they did not "fit in" with either culture, the American or the Korean. One woman spoke bluntly about her struggle in college with simultaneously feeling she wanted to be neither American nor Korean, but also wanting to be able to choose only one.

> Yeah, I came across a lot of it (racism) when I went to (college). I, it just baffled my mind that at a college where usually people are more open minded that they were so close-minded and they were so harsh and racist. Yeah, so it kindof shocked me. And I guess it changed my mind a little bit because even that part it made me feel like I didn't want to be Korean, I wanted to be American, but at the same time I wished that I wasn't American and just Korean, so, I...it was a really big struggle. (Julie)

While another spoke of the general experience she had growing up during adolescence and how difficult it was for her.

> I really hated my adolescence. It was a tough time because you question who you are and then you have other people questioning you, and then just not particularly

making you feel great. But it, I think it's good to have those challenges because you know I made it. I survived that environment. (Kat)

These struggles were not helped by many instances of people's ignorance and assumptions about how or why the adoptees had joined their adoptive family. Several of the women spoke of incidents where they were mistaken for a foreign exchange student or a member of a family their church was sponsoring. These incidents were some of the earliest recollections of how people could and would make assumptions based upon their skin color and appearance.

> One of them I remember going to an open house with my mom and my dad and my sister and the woman there who was a friend of my mom's apparently didn't know she had adopted a child so she asked, you know, certain, kindof looking at me with a very quizzical look and was just like, "Is this your foreign exchange student?" and I laughed really hard at the time in a way that was kindof probably rude and she thought it was kindof rude, but my mom was like, "No, this is my daughter." And the woman felt like horrible, but and you know here I am laughing obnoxiously, saying, "Ha, you're an idiot". But, after we went home my mom brought me into her room and was like, "Are you ok with that? I'm really sorry that that happened." And I'm like, "No, but it's over." And so I remember writing in my diary that night saying you know, this is bizarre that people can't, like, automatically say that I'm the exchange student instead of just understanding that my parents may have adopted and it's kindof an insensitive jump. (Jennifer)

> I grew up in the Christian Reformed Church, which was very white. Not very diverse at all, and I went to a church not far from our house, but it was a large church, several hundred members. And I do remember one day having, years later after I had been at this church with my family as a teenager, someone stopped me and asked me if I was part of the Vietnamese family they were supporting, that the church was supporting. So, you know, it wasn't the first time. (Linda)

Not fitting in anywhere

Other times the women described instances where comments were made to them about not being "Asian" or "Korean" enough because she was not raised in the country or within a Korean family. There were certain aspects of the culture that became expected of them, and when they did not live up to these standards, they were told they were not

"really" Korean.

> I found that when I go to the Korean market, kindof tried to talk to them and then I feel kindof, you know, I don't speak the language, so that's a huge barrier. And sometimes I feel like you know, they're not real open. (Alexa)

Others indicated that they themselves did not feel as if they were a "real" Korean or felt much connection to being Korean or Asian for that matter.

> In many ways I do not feel Korean at all. (Sue)

> I never thought of myself as Asian, but I had to mark that box. I always resented that a bit, but that was reality. (Linda)

While talking about what they would change if they had the opportunity to, some of the women also made reference to their struggles growing up.

> I wish I wouldn't have let other people's ignorance effect me as much as I did in the past. Also, I wish I would have felt more comfortable educating and correcting those people. (Karli-reflective)

> If there was one thing I wish was available back then, it would have been someone to help guide me and talk with. (Julie-Reflective)

Many times this led to the adoptees trying to "blend in" with their white surroundings without success.

> I think if I had maybe experienced more racial comments or something like that, that would make me try harder, so I don't know if I was trying harder. I mean, I know I was trying, you know, everybody is trying to fit in. So I don't think I was necessarily trying harder. (Amy)

> I really never thought of myself as that way and I definitely wanted to fit in. Like, I remember trying to do my hair different. I had these big glasses, so it was like this, even my appearance made me think subconsciously that you know, that I was different. I curled my hair, I could hide maybe my glasses even, I don't know. It was just kindof interesting. (Andrea)

While others realized they would never be able to "blend in", which caused them further distress.

> I still looked at the world as if, or thought of myself as white and looked at it,

looked at girls, women thinking that to be beautiful you had to be blonde, blue-eyed, and so I was never beautiful because I didn't have that. (Linda)

I think I do remember spending a lot of time being upset about it, but, or just feeling different or wishing I looked different and feelings like that, but when I look back at it now, I mean, I think it was just that community. I mean, just these kids just...never...just lack of exposure, I guess. (Karli)

The most influential item in forming my identity was probably my lack of having someone that looked like me. I sort of took being different to an extreme. (Alexa-reflective)

The women identified different points in their life where they began to make a conscious effort to thinking about and forming their ethnic identity. Some identified early on in life, while others identified the time when they began college as significant.

I think it started when I was in middle school, but I was very active in trying to "form" an identity in college. Taking Korean lessons, and forming a student group really helped with this. (Jennifer-reflective)

My college years were the years I really started searching. I did this by joining Asian organizations, expanding my friend circle to include people from all different backgrounds and making it clear that I was both an Asian student and an American one. (Anne-reflective)

Half of my life I saw myself as Caucasian because I grew up in a Caucasian family except me being Korean. Finally, I think in, you know, even though I knew I was Korean in high school, you know, I gradually accepted myself as who I am in college. (Kim)

For those who were older, they identified another wave of desire to reconcile their identity development occurring during their 30's.

I started in my early 20's trying to figure out who I was and what it meant being adopted and Korean. I think I wanted to make connections with other Asians. However, it was not until my early 30's that I really started digging into what racial identity for me meant and I started reading books and meeting other adoptees. (Alexa-reflective)

I would say that probably four maybe five years ago is when I started really being more introspective and thinking about those, and doing some soul searching. Working through all this with somebody and it was lot of hard work. (Linda)

Influences of ethnic identity development

The women were able to identify certain experiences that catapulted them into processing their ethnic identity and what that meant and who they were. These were often related to moving out of the community, beginning college, and having children. These milestones often brought more opportunities for the women to interact with other Asians or Koreans on a more intimate level, be exposed to a more diverse network of races and cultures, as well as being faced with experiences that forced them to re-evaluate their upbringing and experiences.

All the women described moving out of their community as an eye-opening experience. Many of them experienced racism for the first time and forced to deal with people judging them based on their outward appearances and not on just who they were. This caused many of the women to look more closely at their upbringing and how it influenced their interactions with the rest of the world.

> Like coming to undergrad, I realized that I had to figure out what I was because people were going to try and stereotype me and I had to figure out what I identified with. Now I'm just like, "Ok, obviously they have no idea who I am, but it's just their loss." But coming here, I was 18, I had never experienced racism. And that's when I decided to join the student Korean adoptees group because I realized I had to find myself or reinvent myself because this world that I had been living in wasn't real. (Sandra)

> I have observed that Korean adoptees commonly have understandable indignant reactions when faced with those moments when a stranger makes an assumption or makes a thoughtless comment about one's appearance or origin. I believe we react this way because we have worked extremely hard to be accepted on a variety of levels in the midst of understanding ourselves and resolving our histories in which all of the pieces may never be known. It is easy to forget that other parts of the population are unaware because many of us are surrounded and supported for who we are by family, friends and colleagues. (Sharon-reflective)

> Now I'm sitting there feeling completely betrayed and I'm like, "What am I going to do?" I just went out to war and I don't even know how to fight for myself and my identity of who I am because that was denied for so long and the sad part of

> that is that in (her community) they pride, the community prides themselves in being able to say, "We don't have a racial problem here. We love everybody and everything is fine. We know how to contain this issue." But it's when that person goes outside of that realm. They're like sitting ducks. (Sue)

Some returned to the community they grew up and asked questions and tried to make sense of their experiences within that community versus those experiences outside of that community.

> Well, I did try to come back to my community and ask questions to the role models who were in my life who were predominately white and predominately Christian and the answers they were giving me just somewhere deep inside was just not good enough. It was like, "Ok, yeah, you're telling me this, but what about this, this, and this, because I experienced this, this, and this." And they didn't have an answer for me. They'd be like, "Well, you know". They'd say something very half-assed or very cliché and I just knew deep down that it just didn't resonate. So, I wasn't satisfied enough. So I said, "Ok, thank you very much." Went back to what I was trying to figure out. And I'm not saying all adoptees or all minorities do that, but that was just something driven in me that caused me to go back and say, "Ok, I'm going to figure this out." And the more I started figuring it out the less I started trusting this community that raised me because I started feeling betrayal. Started feeling anger and started feeling like why would they exploit my vulnerability as a child throwing me into this community claiming to take care of me, but never giving me the chance to really understand what it means to be in this identity. You know all that crap that you jokingly as an adoptee saying, "Oh, I don't have those issues," but yeah, that happens. (Sue)

Several of the women spoke of the influence moving to college was on their ethnic identity development in terms of being exposed to a variety of races and cultures they did not have the opportunity to before, as well as being able to take classes that exposed them to a different way of thinking and seeing the world around them.

> I don't think it was so much eye opening until college and that was just kindof like "Whoa there. I am from a different culture," and that kindof sparked my interest to learn a little bit more about it. And my senior year, this past year, I did an independent study and the professor that I did it with he pretty much just left it very broad. Like you could pretty much pick anything you want. I've had him as a professor before and I actually picked to study Korean culture. And so I did a whole portfolio on Korean culture and I had to find like 40 different articles and do a little, you know, brief summaries about them and everything like that. That

was really interesting from what I researched. (Amy)

I didn't like history at all, like in high school, but when I went to college, just sitting in history class, you know, like the African American, the slavery and just everything like that, it just kindof made my eyes more open. (Kim)

And it becomes college where you have ethnic studies programs. You have cultural diversity programs. I mean you may, if you're fortunate, you have that in high school, it might be diversity day. But then it's very foreign, exotified, right? Or whatever, exoticised, you just its just fashion or food. It doesn't, it doesn't talk about the history of struggle, identity, self-awareness that we have in American that you would get through an ethnic studies program or through a guest speaker coming in or through an outreach program that student services would do. So, I think that' it's a maturity level, I think it's just they're not exposed to it. (Andrea)

Some articulated a different level of acceptance they felt in a community where they were surrounded by a level of diversity they had never experienced before.

I wasn't depressed, but I was kindof sad in high school because I didn't really accept myself like I did in college. So, I didn't see myself as outnumbered either in high school, but it's just that a lot of people back then didn't accept Asian people like when I went to college it was just totally a new world. (Kim)

So coming to college was one of the reasons I always knew that I wanted to go away to college. I just wanted to be in a place where I was on my own and experience things and I think that (my community) is very conservative. And I still, a part of me is still very conservative, but I think I became more liberal than I was in high school just because you're exposed to so many, I mean, people can speak out on whatever they want to. It's just, it was a culture shock, but in a good way. I think that on my freshman floor, it was an all girls floor. We had people of every single kindof race on that floor. White was probably the minority. (Amy)

Along with going to college and moving out of their community, quite a few of the women described their interactions with other Koreans and Asians as influential in their ethnic identity development. These interactions were at times on a personal level, while at other times it was through reading books and articles by Asian authors or just doing research on the Korean culture. This was at times related to feeling more accepted, while at other times it was related to re-living past feelings of rejection by other Asians.

There's a lot of Asian Americans and a lot of first generation or you know,

> FOB's, "fresh off the boat", like the students. The international students, and yeah, I didn't blend in with them at all, but I did realize that, that's what I'm not. I didn't grow up in a bi-cultural, you know, household, so that, that all kindof eliminated that identity a bit more than I normally would say. (Kat)

> We meet people who are Koreans who are maybe visiting professors. They would see me and kindof look at me like, "Oh, you do exist." And it was just, it was weird. It was front and center like I had to come to fact with, how am I going to be treated by other people, not only Asian Americans, other Korean people, old and young, and American people. So just kindof getting it from all angles and that's why I think it took so long to figure out who I am and be proud of it. (Sandra)

College was not the only time in their life where they were confronted with experiences with other Asians and Koreans. Several of the other women identified other eye-opening experiences that involved interactions with other Asians or Koreans that were influential to their ethnic identity development.

> The biggest influence in understanding my birth culture is due to my sister-in-law. She and her family moved to the U.S. from Korea when she was four. (Grace-reflective)

> I mean, even stuff like that where you just go to a different city and, "Wow, okay. I feel like I'm not the only one." You know, or you know I dated this guy in (large city) and there's a big Asian population, too, so stuff like that is just interesting. And then catching yourself reacting to seeing more Asian people, too. Like, I just caught myself like looking, you know, staring at them. (Karli)

Some joined Korean-adoptee or Asian organizations as a way to connect with others who were like them. Many described these experiences as helpful to their identity development and any "issues" they were processing.

> So, I started this group and there were maybe 6 of us and we all sortof supported each other. Talked a lot about identity and we all realized that independently we had come to start identifying ourselves as Korean adoptees and that it was a really good thing. It was, very strong relationship realizing that you know, we have this really unique, and visually we're Asian and we have this, we're sortof tied to this connection. To this culture and if we wanted to we could try to work our way in there and make this sortof bridge that gap in between like, these normal American and you know, Korean Americans. And then, but at the same time we had this connection with this other group so we were sortof like, the happy hybrid that

> kindof came out of it. And so somehow that, you know, that really made, well it brought all of us together and you know, it sortof made my identity issues quiet down a little bit and I felt a lot better knowing that there were others out there feeling the same way. (Jennifer)

Several identified becoming active in raising awareness about racism and becoming more comfortable in correcting people when they made assumptions as influential and affirming to their ethnic identity development. Some identified participating in an area-based program that is aimed at bringing awareness to issues of racism and discrimination as influential to their ethnic identity development as it showed them they were not alone in their struggle. It gave voice to the struggles they endured throughout their lives that they were not able to identify or verbalize as a result of being surrounded by white people.

> And I think looking at it now, I attended the institute for healing racism in the past three or four years and that really opened my eyes to a lot of things that I didn't realize. (Grace)

One woman spoke of changing her name to integrate her given Korean name. She described the entire process as very empowering and emotional for her and for her adoptive mother.

> I actually did change my name back to my Korean name. I went from Jennifer Elizabeth Jones to Jennifer Hyerim Shin, when I turned 20 or 21. That was a good change. (Jennifer)

Despite when each of the participants identified when she began to search for and work through her ethnic identity, each of the women described this as a life-long process that took place throughout their lives, and would continue to do so.

> I still struggle with my racial identity. I think I probably will always, you know, until I get there. Maybe I'll never get there, you know. It has made me more aware of the struggles of others. I definitely feel more comfortable in my own skin than I ever have. (Alexa)

> I highly recommend continual lifelong practice for all. I enjoyed speaking with the interviewer, but I am also thankful for the writing aspect because it did allow for deeper reflection. At this point in my life, I have had enough time to process my feelings and have had other opportunities to share them with others without the tears and bitterness that I have conveyed when I was much younger. The bitterness has left, but an occasional quiet private moment is still needed. (Sharon-Reflective)

> I think I've always been working to create an identity for myself. When I was a child I could not have verbalized it in this way, but I was trying to figure out who I was, where I fit in, where did I belong, etc. I also think that creating an identity is a life-long process—a work in progress. For Korean adoptees, this work may be harder because there are so many people who are different and with whom the adoptee cannot easily identify. Trying to find commonalities anywhere with anyone is probably part of how an adoptee does this work. (Linda-reflective)

Racism/Ignorance

Racism growing up

All the women faced various kinds of racism throughout their lives. This had an impact on the women's process of forming an ethnic identity. These incidents of racism took on many different forms, and at times it was difficult for the women to identify an incident as racist. As a result, many of the stories the women would tell would be categorized as "ignorance".

The most common situation related to race were the times the women described as when she was "reminded" that she was Asian, or at least different than the status quo of her community. The women would describe being taken aback by such comments, as she had almost "forgotten" that she wasn't white. Living in and being brought up in a community surrounded by white people afforded her the luxury of "forgetting" that she had darker skin, darker hair, and different shaped eyes. It was in those instances when someone would remind her that she wasn't one of them that she would struggle with her identity of not being white, but living in a white world. At times these types of situations

began when they were young and continued throughout their life.

> I think for me it was around 5 or 6 when someone else pointed out that I looked different. I forget sometimes I'm Asian until someone calls me out, I'm like, "I'm not. I'm not Caucasian or whatever." (Grace)

> I think sometimes it almost takes me as surprise, I guess, because sometimes I do almost forget, so I think sometimes when people say, "Oh well, you know, how did you grow up?" or being adopted comes up or anything like that, like it almost makes me say, "Oh wow, I am. I forgot about that for a minute." (Amy)

> Like, I really didn't know sometimes, and only when it was pointed out to me that I would think, "Oh, I am Asian." (Stacy)

> Growing up, I actually, because of my environment you just wanted to fit in. You just want to be white, and really, I have some funny experiences before. I didn't really see myself as different. I was reminded I was different. (Andrea)

> You know, looking at the mirror was difficult cause that, first of all, faces you with the reality that you're Asian and you're different and I didn't like that when other people would point that out to me. When they would ask me questions because I didn't feel different than everyone else until someone points it out. Someone says to me, "Where are you from?" or "What nationality are you?" or something like that. (Linda)

Effects of racism/stereotypes

The women also spoke of the effects these incidents had on their ethnic identity and on their sense of self. As a result of these incidents of racism and discrimination, or as many of the participants referred to them as "ignorance", the women began to question who they were and what their worth was. The women described what the effects of those racist acts or comments were, as well as the influence of the well-known stereotypes of Asians and specifically, Asian women.

> I think that in my 20's, well, I'm 32 now, but in my 20's I think I really felt rebellious because of those stereotypes and I think I made it a point to be, you know, extra assertive and extra aggressive and extra outspoken. (Karli)

> But, I mean, obviously somewhere it affects you because you...I think it does affect you just because you have, I mean obviously, it does affect your self-esteem. If there are preconceived ideas about how to be "Asian" you either

conform or rebel, and it takes you know, many years to get normal. (Alexa)

One woman spoke of discussing issues in a class and never being asked for her opinion as a woman of color. She talked about this incident as one that drove her to examine her ethnic identity and her voice to speak out on such issues more.

> There was this other, there was this actually other Asian male in my class and he was Laotian. And him, myself and there was one black male in the class. And the teacher was a white male and he'd always refer to anything to, issues of race toward the black male. And I always got, "Why doesn't he ever ask us two about our issues of race?" So you know, again this is like gradually I'm starting to find my voice. (Sue)

Racism today

The women also spoke of how they handle incidents of racism or "ignorance" today based on their sense of self and how they identify themselves.

> I've just excused it and pretend like it's no big deal or I didn't notice, just respond like any normal person would, you know have a conversation. I don't want to talk into you know, some kind of tirade about seriously it's 2009, even though I'm thinking, "Seriously, it's 2009", but I'm just aware and it just when that happens it reminds me of where I am. I mean rather than be angry about some things that I know I could be, you know, why was I given up for adoption, why are people so stupid you know, like assume that I don't understand English or whatever, I just kindof feel sorry for them. That's kindof how I have excused it. Don't waste a lot of energy on it. I mean, know who you are, love who you are, you're unique just like anyone else on this, on this earth, so there isn't anything bad about that. You're just as special as anybody else, and that's alright. (Grace)

> I'm the mentor for another adopted girl and one of the things that I always tell her is keep in mind that these people are coming from very different backgrounds than you and they may not know any better. It doesn't make anything that they're saying right, it doesn't make it, it doesn't justify it, but you have to understand that what they are experiencing is something very different from what you have. And what you have is incredibly special and you need to remember that your parents love you, you know, I love you, and nothing that they can say is going to make that go away. You're a beautiful person. You're very strong, intelligent person and you don't need to sink to the level that they are. Clearly there's, there must be some sense of jealousy or something that is making them be so cruel to you. And it doesn't just kindof come up out of nowhere so just try to be strong. Obviously keep saying to yourself that this is not my fault. If I didn't bring this on because clearly it's, you're not putting your "Asianness" out there and being like,

"Hey, you know, I'm so much better than everybody." Just remember that you know, this is not something that you started, so, it's not a fight that you have to deal with if you don't want to. If you do want to then we can, well, explore some other issues. If we have to talk to teachers or if we have to think of things to say, you know, just say, "Ok, you gotta stop this" you know, "I'm not listening to you. Clearly you don't know what you're talking about." So, something like that. (Jennifer)

Being an Asian woman

Experiences of being an Asian woman

This study also included an examination of the women's unique experiences as Asian women as it pertained to their ethnic identity development. Their experiences as an Asian woman are included in this section as it relates to stereotypes, and how they saw themselves interacting in a world that not only privileges white people, but also males.

When talking about their experiences as an Asian woman, many of the participants referenced their experiences with romantic relationships. The reasons they gave for this was connected to the specific stereotypes about Asian women in terms of the expectations there are for them in their role as a wife, as well as those sexual in nature.

As for dating within this region of the country where Asian faces can be somewhat uncommon, I wonder sometimes if the opposite sex in general are afraid of approaching an Asian woman because they don't know or understand who we are. I have heard from some men that they perceive Asian women as stand-offish and unapproachable. (Sharon-reflective)

And I dated him because I felt somewhere I think subliminally I mean, I could never date a white person because for some reason white people were not interested in, white guys weren't interested in at that time, I don't think Asian girls. It didn't seem like that. (Sue)

But yeah, one said to me after we had dated for a while he said, "I'm uncomfortable being seen with you, being with you, you know being together. I always thought I'd be with a Dutch girl." So, yeah when you have rejections like that when you have people saying things like that you, you say well, for me I internalized that. It's like, "I'm not good enough, I'm not beautiful you know."

Because I didn't look like anybody else. (Linda)

Males vs. Females

The women were also asked to reflect upon the experiences of male Korean adoptees and how they may differ from their own. Each of the women indicated that she thought that the male experience would be different than their own due to gender differences, different stereotypes, and different standards that are expected of males and females. These differences provided further clues for how the women saw themselves and their role in society.

> They have different values placed on them in the Korean culture as well as our society at large, and that adds to the different ways they may see themselves and/or how much worth they think they have. (Linda-reflective)

> I think gender is always a determining factor that marks difference. However, I have spoken to many "male Korean adoptees" and their experiences of feeling isolation, experiencing racism, struggling with identity, etc. is very similar to mine as a "female Korean adoptee." (Andrea-Reflective)

> My brother did seem to have a very different experience than I did, whereas my friend had quite a similar one. I think males would have a different experience just because they are guys, they think differently than females. Then again, each individual person thinks differently from someone else. Perhaps then it is not gender differences, but individual differences that make each adoptees' experience different. I suppose males might feel more disconnected because their "family name" is not what their culture is and for a female the "family name" is not as important (it doesn't get passed down to children and is taken away in marriage traditionally). (Anne-reflective)

Media Influence

Though it was not a research question, many of the women brought up the influence of the popular media on their ethnic identity development. Their responses delved into how they saw themselves as a minority, as well as a minority woman. Many times this was discussed in terms of not seeing anyone who looked like them on

television, movies, or even commercials. The few times that an Asian was portrayed the participants indicated that the person was fulfilling a stereotype of Asians and that it was not helpful to their ethnic identity development.

> Well, and then I think now that there are actually some Asian people in the media because I remember being you know in the 70's the only Asian person on t.v. was the Leg's pantyhose lady. I remember that commercial. And the Pearl Cream lady, which was this ridiculous product in the 70's and their spokesperson was, you know, an Asian woman with like heavy, you know, accent. And stuff, and it was just, you know, some hooky product that was supposed to make you, it was the secret to youth. Asian women have it and it's in this container that looks like a pearl or whatever. It's like face lotion or whatever. So, you know, I remember those and thinking, "Ok, you've got two people to relate to in the media only, and one of them is really being exploited as an Asian stereotype and the other person isn't, which is cool." And then for a long time It just seemed like there wasn't anybody and then of course now there's three. Margaret Cho, Lucy Liu, and then that girl from, Sandra Oh from Grey's Anatomy. (Karli)

They also talked of the lack of Asians in the media as contributing to the definition of beauty as something only Caucasian women can achieve, specifically, blonde, blue-eyed, Caucasian women. This, too, also had an impact on their self-confidence and self-esteem growing up.

> I knew I had really, you know horrible self-esteem when I was younger and I think because you know beauty is so defined like especially in the small, rural area it's defined by being blonde, blue eyed and you know looking a certain way, and I think I just suffered with a lot of self-esteem issues. (Alexa)

> I didn't date in high school. I never, I don't think I was that cute or anything, but you know it just, you never were perceived, or I wasn't perceived as a very, you know, average person in the population. The media has a lot to do with that weirdly enough. (Kat)

Even when Asian women are in the media and are portrayed as beautiful, it is often something the participants described as not something they could relate to.

> So, I guess as an Asian woman I don't feel like I'm perceived that way, I'm not, I don't look the way that the media portrays Asian women to look. I'm not particular like Lucy Liu looking super slim and you know high cheekbones or pin straight hair or you know, great make-up. That's another stereotype. Asian

> women wear a lot of make-up especially Korean women. And I don't. I dress kindof quirky. I don't think I dress like real 5th Avenue, you know? The perception of Asians being very stylish, so I still don't feel like I blend in with Asians to myself, but to the rest of the world. (Kat)

One woman identified the first time she saw an Asian woman in a movie in a lead role as very empowering to her sense of self and identity.

> One of the, a life changing moment is when I went to see the movie "Wayne's World". Do you know why? Because of Tia Carrere, right? The leading female. A stupid slap stick comedy, would, and you know it's ironic again is that it was so life changing because here I am in the audience, and I see this for the first time ever. I see this beautiful Asian female as the leading actress. And I didn't care if you know Wayne...the other males were geeky, whatever, but they wanted her, right? And I remember sitting in that audience just so empowered by her. But the irony that I could be empowered by such a silly movie, but understanding that you know, like I had never seen that before. You know, clearly that's different for I think the adoptees growing up now. I mean there's more representation, but it's still limited, you know. (Andrea)

The women also talked about how there are more Asian role models in the media today versus when they were growing up.

> I know that they don't understand it, yet, but I think to their advantage there's a lot more diversity at least in the media and I think because we're in a larger area than from where I grew up they get exposure to more people that look differently and act differently and dress differently. (Grace)

Though they described seeing more Asians in the media, this did not always lead to positive interactions with others.

> And then there's, well, and Sandra Oh and Lucy Liu, I think are, I think both of them are half, well I think Lucy Liu is like half Chinese and half Caucasian and I think Sandra Oh is half something and half Caucasian. So it's like, two out of the three that people, you know, are familiar with aren't even, you know full blown Asian or whatever. And then, two of them are yeah, I think half Chinese or something. None of them are Korean I don't think. And then also, you know, I wonder if it's just a, you know, it's almost like something where I wonder if it's, I wonder why it's so comfortable for people to say stuff like, "Oh you look like Margaret Cho" because I don't look anything like her. Or why people feel comfortable that I'm not personally offended by it. But it is kindof an ignorant thing to just say, but I'm sure that same person or most of those same people wouldn't feel comfortable just walking up to any African American and going,

"You look like Bill Cosby" just because they happen to be black, you know? (Karli)

Current Circumstances

Community & Culture

Many of the women who participated described the community that they currently lived in as more diverse than the one that they grew up in. The term "community" here refers to the area that the women lived in, as well as the people they chose to surround themselves with, such as friends. For many this was a conscious decision that they made in an effort to create a more diverse environment either for herself or for her children.

> One of the reasons why I'm excited that we're in this area is because (the university) is here and there's such a diverse group of people like when you're out. Not just students, but I just think when you're around universities you tend to get more diversity in the population. (Grace)

Some identified their community as similar in the level of diversity to the one that they grew up in, but also indicated that their circle of friends had become more diverse. This speaks to the adoptive parents as "gatekeepers" because now as adults, these women are seeking out those like themselves, as well as those who are different.

> We have like just about every nationality is represented and none of us have ever tried to hide that I think we just joke about it. And so I think that's helped, too because it made me feel more comfortable with being different because its acknowledged that you know, there's a difference, but its not a joke as in like you know like a mean laugh at you kindof joke, but just kindof like its just a funny little quirk about our group that we're super diverse. (Anne)

> I love connecting with other people from Asia and, but then at the same time I really enjoy connecting with people from all over the world as well. I have a diverse network of friends from all over the world. (Sharon)

> I've always, for whatever reason, kept a pretty diverse group of friends or just life style wise. People that I hang out with tend to be from different ethnic backgrounds, financial backgrounds, different ages even. To me, that's just something that's important to me, maybe just one of my values, I guess. (Karli)

Some of the women attribute this openness to diversity to their experiences growing up and being shunned because she was different.

> How I came to really wanting to connect or connecting with diverse people is really important to me. I think because of my experience growing up in high school and feeling you know, marginalized. I never wanted to make other people feel stifled and I always, I preferred a more welcoming approach of accepting people where they are. (Sharon)

> I guess I just had a lot more time to be like introspective and I think, like a lot of kids don't think outside of themselves and I think just being kindof like on the outside or feeling like you're on the outside or whatever gave me a lot of time to think about how I was gonna treat people who are different and things like that. And I think it helped me develop more of a sensitive side or you know be more compassionate towards other people. (Karli)

The women also spoke of their desire to reach out and connect with not just other Koreans, but people from all different backgrounds. This was especially important for those who had children. The moms described wanting to ensure their children were exposed to different cultures and not just the "Caucasian culture".

> This year they started going to a different school and part of the reason that I switched them was that they'd be in a school where there's more diversity. And my children have actually said to me, "You know mom, I'm glad that you changed because there's more diversity in our school". We talk about that a lot with my kids. We talk a lot about diversity and acceptance of differences and that there are differences and, to treat everybody with respect and, you know, regardless of their color or their race, or you know, or age or their likes and dislikes, kindof things. (Linda)

> He's in preschool now, and his school is diverse. My thing is, I reject the idea that you gotta go to a white school to get a better education. No, my thing is it's gotta be diverse. I don't want a run-down school where you know they have one book in the class or something. I'm definitely not going to do that, but my thing is that I'd rather him go to a diverse school. I need to get him into a different kindergarten. But the one he's at right now is very diverse and that's to me the most important. Diverse of everybody you know. I want some Asian, I want some African, I want some Latinos in there. I want everybody, you know? So, that's important for me. (Andrea)

> I think the main thing is, you know, I want...I'd like to live in a more diverse area number one just so he can see kids that look like him. (Alexa)

Even those who did not have children described a desire to move to a culturally diverse area and identified their future children as the reason for that.

> We know that we have decided that when we want to raise a family we want to live in a place that is more diverse. (Jennifer)

> I don't ever want to pressure them to fit into whatever world we live in, which will probably, hopefully be a little more diverse than this. That's the other thing. We don't want to live in a big city, but we want to live somewhere where there's more culture and more than (name of town) had, which was not. (Anne)

The women also talked about the effects of living in a more diverse community and how it has impacted how she sees and identifies herself.

> I would say just being exposed to a diverse community and just being surrounded by it all the time. Seeing that everybody isn't white and that you know, this Asian, you know is just as much an Asian as I am. And you know they've probably been through you know, maybe racist comments or awkward moments, too. So, I think it's just being more comfortable with yourself. (Amy)

> I think its as I was older, you know, so then I felt better when I was in (large city) because I was kindof surrounded by more Asians. (Alexa)

The women also talked about the cultural activities that they currently participate in, or that their family participates in. These ranged from solely Korean activities, such as, cooking Korean food, or incorporating some Korean traditions into family events (i.e. birthday parties & other holidays) to exposing their children and themselves to all different cultures through festivals, friends, and community activities.

> So for our meal, for our oldest's birthday we did some Korean food. We did some Polish food. So, I mean I just try to enrich them on some of what their ancestry would have been. And then the same thing for Dutch, I mean, our family didn't really do any specific Dutch things other than Centerfaust day in December and that was really until, probably not until I was out of the house and my sisters who were 8 to 10 year olds, maybe 5 to 10 year old range. So, I mean I just think that there are so many different cultures and really neat traditions and customs out there that I, if I find something that's cool then I try to put it in the mix. (Grace)

> We get together, Muslim, Buddhists, even their kids get to know our kids. I mean

> it's very intentional. And we don't probably let our kids out as much as we should but we're very, you know, I mean, I kindof protect them. I guess I'm kindof like that. But when we do go out and my daughter makes comments or sees this, and it's like, "Wow it's so white here" or when we go to (large city) she's like, "Wow there's so many black people", and I'm like, "Yeah there is, why do you think that is?" I mean we talk about it. We bring that level of consciousness that wasn't there before. (Sue)

> One of my best friends married a guy from Nigeria so you know, she gets experiences that other biracial couples and other kids of that look different and not like her and not like other, you know, Caucasian kids in her class. That's really important to me because I think as we move forward and that's going to be something that's probably less of something that they would identify as different, you know, versus when I was little and I looked totally different and it was like sticking out like a sore thumb. For her it's going to be something that's not as big of, you know, kindof a flag or a symbol. (Grace)

Many times the women would identify learning to cook some of the Korean food or learning the language as the cultural activities or ways they stay connected to the Korean culture. Other ways of connecting to their Korean culture was through making attempts to connect with other Korean adoptees or other Koreans.

> I have continued on an accelerated road to self-discovery, including re-connecting to my Korean culture by taking my first language class last year, becoming friends with Koreans and connecting with an informal Korean adoptee group. (Sharon-reflective)

Several of the women took advantage of different types of college classes, or school projects to learn more about their Korean heritage, or other cultures.

> Just recently have I found myself trying to learn more about my birth culture. My last semester at (undergraduate college) before graduating, I participated in an independent study and it was through that study and my professor that I worked one on one with that I began to research what I really wanted to know about my birth culture. I narrowed the research down to parent-child relationships and how they compare/contrast from American ones. It was one of the most interesting studies I have ever done as I began to learn more and more about my birth culture and very interesting facts I had never know about prior to the study. (Amy-reflective)

> At the same time, I and others in society should not allow that to be the one defining factor to my identity. Connecting with other Korean adoptees has been

> another significant healing experience because I saw that one doesn't have to bear a burden completely alone. (Sharon-reflective)

Current experiences with racism

When talking about their current situation the women who had children often spoke of their children's experiences and how it is different from their own growing up. They spoke of how they felt children in today's world had it better in the sense that there is more awareness of diversity, and there are more bi-racial children. This was particularly important for these women as each of their children were bi-racial.

> I have a son and when he was born I just really realized you know, I don't want him growing up and any way feeling the way I felt and that it was, it was a huge impact on my life. But I mean, and I think there's enough, I mean now, even there's more and more mixed raced children. (Alexa)

> Yeah, so I definitely want to expose my daughter. I wish my parents would have exposed to me more, but like I said we didn't have, back then we didn't have the organizations like they do now. (Kim)

These women also spoke of their fears for their children in terms of facing racism and how they will, or have helped their child deal with such situations.

> And then I'm thinking of my son, too like I know in the back of my mind I'm like, "I hope he's not short", just superficial concern. I'm thinking, you know, I'm only 5'3", you know a lot of Asian men you think of as being short and stuff, you know? And different, I think of different roles that he might take on later in life. Whether it be business or you know, things like that. Like as a shorter Asian guy is he going to be taken as seriously or, you know will he be as successful in different arenas in his life? So, I hope a lot of the stereotypes go away, but, I think, I mean they're definitely still there. And I think in different areas, too. I think here in the mid-west it's stronger than out west. (Karli)

> It hurts definitely. It's more if anyone would say anything about my son, you know, that would be way more hurtful. You know, everything that you kindof would brush aside before you know there's, you want so much better for your children. It just amazes me. (Alexa)

Despite these fears, these mother's worked to help their children deal with such

incidents. For those who did not have children, they also thought about how they would handle situations of racism with their children. Those who had children and those who did not both described the ways they would help their children deal with racist situations as different than the ways their adoptive parents told them to handle the situations.

> I'll probably tell him something different. I would just tell him, "You know, here's how you can explain it to them. You know, their, the parents, you know, they probably, you're probably the first person they've seen that's Korean, or whatever. And here's what you can tell them, "Korea's on the whole other side of the world and your mom was adopted." Or you know, just give them like a short two sentence thing that he can say to people. Because part of it, too, is feeling so awful about it would just be not knowing how to respond if somebody was to make fun of him or whatever. But, and then just you know, I probably just let him know where that kindof stuff comes from. Either "You know, him and his parents probably don't have any Korean friends, or, he's probably just curious and doesn't know how to ask questions. How to ask you what you are and stuff so he called you Chinese eyes or whatever the thing is."(Karli)

The women also talked about how they would help their children, current or future, with connecting with their Korean culture. They described this as important to them, and for the well being of their children. They saw that connecting with and being able to identify with the Korean culture would provide their children with a sense of pride that would hopefully act as a protective factor for when they are faced with racism.

> I just want him to feel comfortable with it. I don't wanna bombard him with it or anything like that, but just make him feel comfortable with it so at some point if he does get teased or whatever it just rolls right off of him. I don't want it to be where he's like "Oh my gosh I'm different" or anything like that. Just try to protect his little feelings. (Karli)

> I'm trying to remember what I'd say to adoptive parents or what I say to my kids, cause I talk to them about it. They're gonna experience some of it. I think getting to that point is one of working through your own feelings that you're worthless. Because when you feel that way then you don't have that anger toward the people that talk to you that way because you don't have the self-confidence to have that anger. So, you need to work through your own feelings and then once you do that you can also recognize that people, you can get angry for certain things, but you can also say people are really just ignorant. And be somewhat forgiving of that. What I tell adoptive parents is to cultivate trust with their children so that their

> children will feel comfortable coming to them if something like that does happen. Cause it's going to happen and just to validate their feelings and not say, "Well, don't feel that way cause we know that's not true" cause that's, those feelings are real. That's how they feel . So, to just listen and to empathize and validate and do some education with your children about how there are people who don't know. (Linda)

What you would change?

When asked what they would change in their past if they could, many of the women indicated that they would not want to change anything because those experiences made them stronger, and made them who they are today. Several spoke of how those experiences inspired them to become agents of change.

> Because I cannot change my past, I can certainly look at what was given to me and use it for the intended purposes to change things that are unjust. That is what I am doing. (Sue-reflective).

> While I definitely would not want to experience the racism as blatantly as I had while growing up, ironically, those experiences were integral towards how I view myself as an activist. Therefore, if I did change them, I'm not sure how much of an 'activist' I would be in the present. (Andrea-reflective)

Others spoke of wishing they had been connected to their Korean culture at a younger age or at least was exposed to more diversity.

> Perhaps I would have encouraged my parents to take me to more Korean events, or enroll me into Korean language classes. (Jennifer-reflective)

> I'm not certain it would've been easier to form my identity if we had lived in a more diverse area, but perhaps exposure to a wider variety of people and cultures could've assisted me in feeling more comfortable in "my skin". (Grace-reflective)

Future Hopes and Fears

Looking toward the future

It became apparent throughout the interviews that the women's ethnic identity development had changed over the course of their lives, and as such, I asked them if they

thought anything in the future might contribute to another change in their ethnic identity. Some indicated that they felt their identity was stable and could not think of anything that would change it, while others reflected upon upcoming life events that may force them to re-think their ethnic identity.

> At some point I think when my girls recognize that my husband and I are different, different races, I don't know how to talk to them about that. (Grace)

> I don't think so in the near future. I'm sure at the next milestone or whatever that is, it will probably evolve a little bit. (Jennifer)

> It will change again. I will guarantee. First of all because of (moving) and after I get married and have kids and things, which will be down the road. Then it'll probably change again. Yeah, it'll change. I think it's supposed to change after, and if it doesn't then you're probably too narrow minded, stuck in your ways. Maybe not, but that's how I think if you stick to one thing and your beliefs and your identity the whole time, I don't know. Life changes. You should change, too. (Anne)

The women also talked about the future generations of Korean adoptees and what their advice would be for them and for their adoptive parents. For the adoptees they spoke about the process of growing up and that it will get easier, and the importance of being true to yourself and being proud of who you are despite what others may say.

> Be who you are no matter what. And to hold fast to that I guess. I mean, don't compromise, don't try to fit in, just be who you are. And try to find somebody that's like you, I guess. I mean, I don't know, not necessarily Korean, or adopted Korean, but somebody else that just sees you as whoever you are. So someone that sees me as (her name) like part of me is that I'm adopted and I'm Korean and that I'm a mom, and you know, a sister, a wife, but someone who knows all those pieces I guess. You know, like they don't just hang out with you because you're adopted and Korean or they don't just want to be your friend because you work at this company or whatever. I mean, I guess just, it's so hard. Just be yourself. That seems kindof lame, like a lame answer, but just be, know who you are. Be yourself, don't try to be somebody else. (Grace)

> I think that, it gets easier as you grow up, I really do. I think that when you're, I mean, that's one of like the things about junior high and high school, everybody's trying to find out who they are. And maybe some people find out who they are in high school, but I honestly think that in college is when you really find out.

> You're just exposed to so much more. Living on your own, you know, per se. And just making your own choices and I think until you can start making your own choices, and being independent and not having to rely so much on your parents is when you kindof find out who you are. Cause if you're living by your parents rules and living in your parents house and everything, you can't. You're not so much independent. And its really, I think when you're independent that's when your identity starts forming. (Amy)

> Definitely start educating yourself about the Korean culture, and just totally be proud of who you are and where you came from. (Kim)

> In addition, the only thing I'd like to say is that whatever happened/happens, you have to love your life and who you are. Being adopted isn't easy for anyone, especially when you're adopted into a family that is of a different race and living in a completely different society. (Julie-reflective)

In terms of advice for the adoptive parents, the women spoke of the importance of exposing their children to their birth culture more throughout their childhood and not only during the early years. They also spoke of the importance of showing their children that it is okay to be who they are and to be proud of that. Many of the women related this back to exposing them more to their Korean culture, but also having more books, toys and dolls that looked like their children and not only Caucasian looking people surrounding them.

> It's not a checklist of books to read, and dolls to buy in every shade of color—thinking that loving them will fill in the other areas that is good enough. No, it's a whole paradigm shift. Because I have and am still working on it daily just to remain remotely aware of it, I cannot imagine what it would take for a white person, especially one that is preparing to adopt and repeat this same cycle. (Sue-reflective)

> For adoptive parents I think it's really important for them to expose their kids to diversity. And I don't just mean other children that are like them, but I think all different kinds of people. You know, like in western Michigan it was so obvious that we were adopted because we totally don't look like our parents and, it was kindof, I don't want to say a sideshow, but you just didn't see Asian people around very often. So, expose your kids to different environments where there are lots of different kinds of people so they don't feel like they're the only one, or they're kindof like a sideshow when everyone stops and, "Oh what country are you from? Oh I know somebody and her daughter's adopted and blah blah blah."

You've heard this story they had, you know, how many times before? I think it's so important so that not only do they kindof feel comfortable in their skin, but then they get to see other people and cultures and stuff, too. And it, I don't think it should be limited to just the festivals. It's a good place to start, there are lots of different cultures and foods and people there, but to get out in the community I guess. (Grace)

I would just expose them more to the culture maybe bring in some Korean or whatever, dishes to share with the family. And to even bring the family closer together in a sense because this is who they are, too. They're American, too, but this is who they are, too. It's not, you know, leave that out at all because I think it is important and to the point where you know in some, and if they decide that they, when the kids grow up and the kids don't want anything to do with it, well then that's ok, too. At least you tried. Cause I think it's better to incorporate that into their upbringing than not at all. (Amy)

Definitely expose them to their own culture and just say that, American life and Korean life, you can have both, not just one. You can have both. And just tell them, tell the kids as much as you can about any kindof information and tell them to be proud. (Kim)

More extensive social support networks for adoptive parents and adoptees should be provided by agencies for families who adopt. It seems that the more well adjusted adoptees are raised in areas where there are larger populations of Asians. (Kat-reflective)

And I think that's a big thing to be able to say to your child is it's not you. Don't internalize it basically, you know. It's their ignorance, or their lack of empathy or whatever. So I think those are the kinds of things I have told parents on how to help their children deal with that. You're not gonna be able to avoid it. I do want to encourage parents to try to integrate their children into more diverse settings. And bring in good, you know, have books, or dolls that look more like the children so that your children grow up feeling like it's okay to look like this. There are people, role models who look like me, too. And they're good people and it's okay, and then because then that will build their strength to be able to stand up to those people who say those things. (Linda).

Others spoke of the importance of not only exposing Korean adoptees to their birth culture, but also exposing them to the Asian American culture.

That's fine that they help them with that traditional heritage part, but that's not what the problem is. Adoptive parents are not helping these Asians identify with an Asian American identity. It's only something that's very tradition and foreign, right? So, going to Korean camp, yes, you're seeing kids like you. Maybe, and again that might have been good because I never went to that, but I think that you

> know, again, so I can't really speak on it because I wasn't there, and I think there's benefits for it, but you're saying going to a restaurant or you know, seeing every...it just reinforces you being different. Foreign. So, you're going to shy away from it. So my parent's reaction like, "Why don't you want to do that?" They're not understanding like just growing up specifically in America, so there's not enough of exposing them to Asian American identity and culture and what is that meaning. People will say, "Well, what is that?" and that's very specific to me. (Andrea)

Another woman spoke of the importance for adoptive parents to recognize and embrace the racial differences in their family as a stepping-stone to embracing and becoming passionate about the fight against racism.

> And when I talk to other adoptees, or parents who are adopting and I tell them, "You have to be so driven to fight racism before you adopt that child. For them to understand that you get it." You know, what I mean, you have to just be as on fire. They always joke and say racism is a white person's power and it really is. They started it. They need to fix it. It's not our duty. And so until they get to that point and yes, it's going to cost them their privilege, that's just the hard part. (Sue).

These women also spoke of the desire to create change for not only current generations of Korean adoptees, but also for future generations of adoptees. Some of the women were involved in organizations throughout their college years, while others have made it their career to work against racism and to bring awareness about Korean adoptees in their communities. Many of the women indicated that their reason for participating in this research project was to provide more information for Korean adoptive families and Korean adoptees.

> I hope these reflections will be a great help to other adoptees and their families. (Sharon-Reflective)

> I feel like I did as much as I could while I was in undergrad at (college) to influence the minds of Asian American students who never understood nor accepted trans-national adoptees. There were so many battles that my executive board and I had to face including stereotypes from Korean internationals and Asian Americans that were unexpected and challenging. However, by even influencing one person to stop and think before judging someone for being

adopted, I feel as if I have accomplished my goal. (Sandra-reflective)

> Now I challenge those who raised me. I challenge the systems and the structures. The town and the artwork and the ways we do things. I challenge the thoughts, the conversations, and the type of relationships that occur, because it doesn't apply to me anymore, but I'm still that same person you knew. I am not afraid. I am not ignorant and I am certainly addressing white privilege without even trying. This is exciting for me. This is empowering and liberating. (Sue-reflective)

> I truly believe in my heart that there is an amazing opportunity for Korean Adoptees (along with other adoptees who are from different cultures) to be a bridge builder between the racial divisions and hidden lines that exist. Specifically, to whites and minorities. Korean Adoptees have a unique gift - they understand and speak the language of the predominate culture that they were made to assimilate to for so long. At the same time, they are minority by default and should also learn the struggles and identification of what it means in that realm to empower those who may not have a voice. In that, a new meaning to our identity will have purpose beyond what just one definition could give--- I am working on this everyday for I find that it is the only way to transcend the struggle(s) of the Korean Adoptee issues found here. (Andrea-reflective)

> I believe as a Korean adoptee our identities were, we're kindof like all over the map. Regardless of who you marry, but I think and I don't know a lot because I haven't done a lot of studies, but I think there is a huge benefit if Korean adoptees can grasp that that they can be....bridge builders between the whites and minorities if they can just figure out how to see themselves that way. (Sue)

One woman spoke of her desire to create change in the career path she has chosen and what that road will look like for her.

> Cause right now culturally sensitive therapy is really well, in therapies are geared toward more Caucasian Americans, it's not as effective with any other ones. And so I don't like that. So I want to do some research to fix that within the health psych field. Um, so that's what I'll be doing for part of grad school. And then when I do, I want to do more therapy than research, but once I do that, then I want to work on more diverse populations so I think that's where I'll kindof take my educational years were very multicultural oriented, um, and my own experiences, too just from being so much in a white culture, but being Asian, but um, marrying a Hispanic guy. (Anne)

The stories the women told of their experiences of their ethnic identity development indicate that this process is influenced by many ecological factors and

occurs throughout their life. They also indicated that this process and their identity has evolved as they were met with different life milestones and experiences.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusions

Introduction

This study looked at the process of ethnic identity development through the lives of fifteen Korean-born transracially adopted women. Throughout their lives these women had to not only explain, but also had to justify their identity and who they are to other people. This included having to explain how they were a part of their adoptive family, as well as having to explain and justify how they chose to identify themselves. Human ecological and critical race feminism theory provided the blank canvas from which the women's stories painted the picture of their process of ethnic identity development. The purpose of the study was to examine and identify what the ecological contributors to ethnic identity development are in Korean-born transracial adoptees, and how those factors influenced this process. The study also provided a means to delve deeper into those stories and examine the intersection of their identities as adoptees, women and Koreans on that process.

Overall, the findings painted a picture of ethnic identity development as at times confusing and often complex. The women identified this process as something that has taken many years to achieve and many indicated that they believe this process will continue throughout their lives as they are met with different life milestones and experiences. The women discussed a variety of ecological influences ranging from their adoptive family to their experiences with racism and ignorance. The women also spoke of the evolution of their ethnic identity over time. Taken together, these findings point to a developmental piece that was not taken into consideration at the onset of this study.

Summary of Findings

Connected to the purpose of the current research project were several research questions that guided the research process. These research questions provide a backdrop from which to discuss the general findings of the current study. The first two questions were so closely related that the following discussion combines the two.

What are the ecological influences on a Korean-born transracial adoptees' ethnic identity development and how do aspects of the adoptees' ecology influence ethnic identity development for Korean adoptees?

The current study found that there were many ecological influences on Korean-born transracial adoptees' ethnic identity development that came from all levels of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model of systems. The primary ecological influences the women identified were their adoptive parents, interactions with others, and racism. Their stories reflected the influence of their interactions with their adoptive parents regarding issues around their adoption and their race, experiences with racism and not understanding where it came from when it did not match their experiences within their family and later interactions and connections with their Korean culture. The various ecological influences on the adoptees' ethnic identity development worked to provide the women with experiences that expanded the way they saw the world and how they perceived the world saw them. These later life experiences worked from information provided to them from earlier experiences with their family to inform how they responded to situations that questioned who they were.

These influences informed and provided insight into how the women saw themselves and how others viewed them. When these two views did not match, and the

women experienced cognitive dissonance it often times sent the woman searching for a new identity. This was done by connecting with people from around the world and from a variety of cultures, backgrounds, and life circumstances that provided opportunities for them to expand and create a community that was more diverse and welcoming than the one they grew up in. It also involved connecting with the Korean culture through various means, such as food, knowledge, as well as forming relationships with other Koreans. They talked about wanting to connect with other Koreans so they could learn more about the Korean culture, but also wanting to connect with other Korean adoptees so they could share their experience with others who could understand on a deeper level than others.

The findings also shed some light on what types of "cultural activities" were most beneficial for the ethnic identity development of the adoptees. In Shiao & Tuan's study (2007) they found that Caucasian adoptive parents of Korean-born adoptees were more likely to provide opportunities for their children to participate in activities that were categorized as cultural and heritage preservation (i.e., reading books, eating cultural food) rather than facilitating connections with the wider Asian-American community, cultivating a healthy racial identity development or developing coping strategies for addressing racism. In addition, Vonk (2001) suggested that "cultural activities" that were more "hands on" were more beneficial than the formal links to a child's birth culture. The current findings lend support for these experiences with activities designed to connect the adoptees with their birth culture. The women participated in various cultural activities that were designed to teach them about the "traditional" Korean or Asian culture rather than help them form a solid ethnic identity that integrated both their Korean heritage and their American up bringing. However, the stories the women told of the impact of

connecting with and creating relationships with other people of various backgrounds supports the idea that the most beneficial "cultural activities" are those that include meaningful relationships and skill building. Some of the women indicated their parents were supportive of a bi-cultural identity, however, their parents were still unable or unwilling to teach them the necessary skills to effectively handle the inevitable incidents of racism.

Many of the participants did not identify solely as Korean, but chose to also include their American upbringing in their ethnic identity. Others chose a more global identity as Asian, or Asian American to signify a unity with all Asian cultures. When asked about their ethnic identity and how they identified today, many of the women asked for clarification and then after providing their answer went on to explain the reason why they chose this identity for themselves. Others identified one identity early in the interview, but later described themselves as something else later. This was indicative of the continuing process of ethnic identity development, and the feeling of being caught between two cultures and not being able to choose only one.

The process of finding their ethnic identity was difficult for these women as they did not feel completely "American", nor did they feel like they were completely, "Korean". This feeling of disconnect with both cultures was evidenced in their responses regarding their experiences with others outside of their family. The women often spoke of "forgetting" that they were Asian until someone reminded them they were different. For many these instances were regarded as ignorance. They articulated the reality that as a minority you only see yourself as yourself based on your personality and values and beliefs. Others see the color of your skin and the shape of your eyes first and remind you

that you are different than them.

What are the factors or influences that propel a person from one stage of ethnic identity development into another?

The factors or influences that propelled a person from one stage of ethnic identity to another varied for each of the women. Many times it was incidents of racism or feeling like they did not belong that began a long journey of self-discovery and soul-searching for these women. This finding is in line with previous studies on ethnic identity development that indicate it is typically the occurrence of a significant event that instigates ethnic identity journey (Cross, 1978; Phinney, 1989). The process of ethnic identity development began during their early elementary school years as they discovered they looked different from those around them and began to formulate ideas about why that was. However, the process of really trying to forge their own identity did not happen until years later when they had the ability to be insightful, articulate and take a closer look at the messages the world was telling them versus how they saw themselves. Those early experiences provided them a basis from which to begin to tease apart the messages that were given to them about their race and culture and how they made sense of that currently.

When studies of ethnic identity development began, many of the models were stage models that did not incorporate the external influences from family, peers, community, or societal beliefs regarding race. The stories the women told of their own ethnic identity development in the current study included these external influences that included their experiences with their families, peers, communities, college, life milestones and others. Though ethnic identity development may occur in a stage model,

evidence from the current study supports the findings from Shiao & Tuan (2007) that progression from one stage to the next is propelled by circumstances or interactions with the outside world. These findings also support the more recent idea of ethnic identity development as a dynamic and interactive process that occurs over the course of a person's life (Friedlander, 1999).

The current findings provide evidence for ethnic identity development to continue throughout a person's life as she goes through different experiences and increasingly interacts with the outside world. Huh and Reid (2000) proposed a stage model for Korean adoptee ethnic identity development that ended during adolescence, while the current project indicates that this process continues into and throughout adulthood. This provides support for Shiao and Tuan (2007) who suggested that as a child goes through different developmental stages her ethnic identity and the meaning of her adoption changes as well. The women spoke of the various life milestones that had occurred that forced her to examine her ethic identity closer, while others imagined what future life events would impact their ethnic identity.

How does being from a minority group adopted into a majority group influence ethnic identity development?

Many of the women described a desire to be around others who looked like them as a young child, and sought out opportunities to do so as an adult. Connecting with and identifying with one culture, but having the physical appearances of another was difficult for each of the women. This was exacerbated by being surrounded by those who did not look like them within their family, community or in the media. This lack of exposure to others who looked like them reinforced the idea that they were different and perpetuated

the idea of Asians as "the others".

Several of the current findings mirror that of Vidal de Hymes & Simon's (2003) study on transracially adopted children. Of particular note is the feeling of being forced to choose "loyalties" or choose what race one would identify and belong to, rather then being able to accept and identify with both. Two of the women indicated their parents accepted that their children were bi-culture in the sense of having the physical appearance of one, but being brought up with the values & culture of another. As in Vidal de Hymes & Simon's (2003) study, some of the adoptive parents had more awareness of racism and racial issues than other parents. Many of the women indicated that their parents would have a difficult time engaging in a conversation about race, and would rather discuss racist incidents in terms of "everyone is equal" or from a "colorblind" perspective.

How does gender influence ethnic identity development in Korean-born transracial adoptees?

With all the stereotypes that are placed upon Asian women, I wanted to understand what their experience as an Asian woman was in today's world and what type of influence that had on their ethnic identity development. There were several who indicated it was not something they had given much thought to, that is, being an Asian woman, because she had focused her energies on reconciling her ethnic identity. Discussing their experience, as a woman on top of being an ethnic minority appeared to be another layer of identity that some had not yet processed.

In terms of the stereotypes, the women most often described those related to the ideas about their sexuality and roles as women within Asian culture. This most often affected their romantic relationships and dating habits. Many described incidents of not

knowing whether a person was interested in them because of who they were, or because of the stereotypes they represented. This in turn affected their sense of self-esteem.

Implications for Theory

As discussed in chapter 2, the current study was guided by grounded theory methodology, human ecological theory and critical race feminist theory. Grounded theory provided a structure from which to build a theory from the data. As indicated earlier, the socially constructed environment was of particular interest for this study. The socially constructed environment the adoptees identified included their adoptive family, their community, their school, their social networks, and the language they used, all of which had some role in influencing their ethnic identity development.

The findings of this study were in congruence with each of these theories as the women spoke of their socially constructed environment as influential to their ethnic identity development and within these influences were pieces of evidence of racism, stereotypes as an Asian and as a woman, and how those experiences were handled by their families.

Human ecological theory speaks to the various ways humans interact and relate to the different environments they are in. Brofenbrenner's (1979) model of the four levels of systems that humans interact with provided a basis from which to organize these interactions. The influences the women spoke of regarding their ethnic identity development came from each of the four levels of systems in this model. Critical race feminism theory gives priority to the "location" of a person, such as their various contexts as adoptees, women and Koreans. This provided the women an opportunity to speak about how all three of these "locations" and contexts informed their ethnic identity

development and ultimately how they saw themselves.

As the women spoke of their ethnic identity development it became clear that there was not one incident, one person or one "cultural" activity that primarily influenced their identity development. Rather, it was collection of experiences, and insights garnered from those experiences, over their life that influenced how they chose to identify themselves. Thus, it seems to be appropriate to discuss the theoretical implications within a developmental timeline of these women's lives. From this standpoint, the qualitative data collected through the in-depth interviews and the reflective journal entries of the participants, depicts a process of ethnic identity development as a process that evolves and expands with the inclusion of more interactions with larger systems over time. In other words, as the adoptee grew older and became more independent she began to interact with other larger systems, aside from her microsystem, more regularly. This in turn provided her with experiences that were influential to forming her ethnic identity.

In the following section I will discuss each of these time periods in terms of who the women identified as in those systems, and how the system was influential to her ethnic identity development throughout her life up until this point. This section is divided into four sections to reflect the different time periods and how the women's ecology grew in each period. The grouping of the various life stages and the different influences in each reflects the changes in the women's ecology over time and how that also influenced their ethnic identity development.

Elementary school years

Many identified their earliest recollections of influential experiences to their ethnic identity development as occurring during their elementary school years. During the

early years, many of the women described their microsystem as including their adoptive family and friends from school. The women talked of the influences of her adoptive parents in terms of the values they raised her with, as well as the opportunities they did or did not give her to connect with not only her Korean heritage, but also any variety of cultures. The adoptive parents were able to talk to the women about being adopted, but often had difficulty in talking about being adopted from a different country, and being of a different race. The women identified incidents of other children calling them racial names that they did not understand and pointing out physical differences between them and the white children. The women described feelings of being hurt by these incidents, but not understanding how they could feel this way when their adoptive families never pointed out such differences. As a result, many described not talking to her parents about early incidents of racism, or about their feelings regarding these instances. Thus, from an early age these women's ethnic identity development process became an isolated journey that was not talked about with others. Though many of the women identified having other family members adopted from Korea, either siblings or cousins, or other relatives, they did not talk about their experiences with being adopted, or of being Korean with them. Several of the women spoke of feeling uncomfortable or wanting to "protect" her parents from such discussions about race, which speaks to the entire adoptive family not taking on an identity as a multi-racial family. These early experiences of being told they were different from people outside of their family, but not being able to talk about those differences in a constructive way within their family continued throughout their adolescent and early adulthood years. These feelings of isolation contributed to the beginnings of the disconnect many described between identifying and relating to the

American culture versus the Korean culture.

The early experiences with racism on a child-level informed how they began to see themselves as different than the others surrounding them. The way their families spoke of these differences differed from the way others outside of their family spoke of the differences. Their parents were able to "reframe" any overt, or covert comments that were directed to their family or to their children in a way that changed the meaning of those comments from racist to something that didn't matter. As the women matured; however, and were faced with other racist experiences without their family's protection, they were able to reflect upon those earlier experiences and connect it to the current racism they were facing. Within their families, the women felt protected and safe and "white", while outside of their family the women were exposed to overt racism, sometimes discrimination and always some level of ignorance.

One explanation for the heightened experiences of racism during these times is that at a younger age children are beginning to notice differences among people and point them out. Typically as the only minority in their class, or even in their school, the participants were singled out for this reason. As the children grew up together and interacted more on a basis of friendship the comments would stop because the community knew the circumstances under which her family was formed and did not have to question it. Once, however, a woman arrived on a college campus, or in a different community, she had to explain all over again who she was and how she came to be there. This is the time, however, when many of the women identified beginning to really explore their ethnic identity because it was the first time they were forced to see themselves as the rest of the world saw them, and not only as their family and community

saw them.

The exosystem is the external environment that a person participates in that affects the other two systems, such as a mother or father's workplace, social networks and in the case of an adoptive family, the adoption agency. These interactions during early childhood were primarily through attending "culture camps" or "culture festivals" or participating in organizations geared toward transracial adoptive families.

Some of the women spoke of their family's participation in groups that were designed for those who had either adopted from Korea, or for families who had adopted from any country. These were often times their first experience with children of their same race, or of a race that was different than their Caucasian parents. Many times the participants could not recollect the names of the organizations, and could identify vaguely remembering participating in some activities. While the women indicated that it was helpful to see and meet other Koreans and other adoptive families, none identified this as influential or helpful to her ethnic identity development. These agencies and organizations are in a unique position to provide services and opportunities that are not only designed to expose children and their families to others like them, but to facilitate and provide opportunities to discuss issues of racism, of being a multi-racial family and other related topics.

Middle childhood through Adolescence

As they moved into middle-childhood and adolescence the women described not much changing during these years in terms of the rate of racist incidents occurring. As the women went from childhood to middle-childhood to adolescence there became a certain understanding by those within their community that they interacted with on a daily basis.

In other words, the community had an understanding of their family and how the adoptee came to be in their family. Many times their "race" became invisible as they assimilated into and embraced the Caucasian-American culture that surrounded them. Their family, and now their community became a protective "bubble" for them that provided them with the opportunity to grow and forget their "Asian-ness" or "Korean-ness" and only seen as _____(their name).

Their interactions with the mesosystem continued to be primarily through their school and activities through their school. The women described their mesosystem as consisting of their school, and friends. At this level it was noticed that those who were identified as part of this system at an earlier age did not always stay the same over the years. For example, though the women talked of their friends at this level, the friends that were mentioned in elementary school were not always the same friends that were mentioned when they were in high school or college. This speaks to the changes in this system over the years of who was included and who was not. Some noted that they did go to school with other Koreans, but aside from the woman who identified her community as "unique" because there were several families who had adopted children from Korea, they rarely interacted with these other adolescents.

It was also during this time that many of the adoptees described as when their adoptive parents stopped taking them to culture camps, or cultural festivals, or participating in any of the adoptive family groups they had previously participated in. The adoptees indicated that they thought the reasons for ending these activities were that it took up too much time and the family was busy with other activities, or the adoptee did not express interest in continuing these activities. This is indicative of how cultural

activities are viewed as some sort of checklist to do that would be nice to connect their kids to their cultural heritage, rather than viewing these activities as integral to their family identity as multi-racial and their ability to face racism.

Figure 5.1

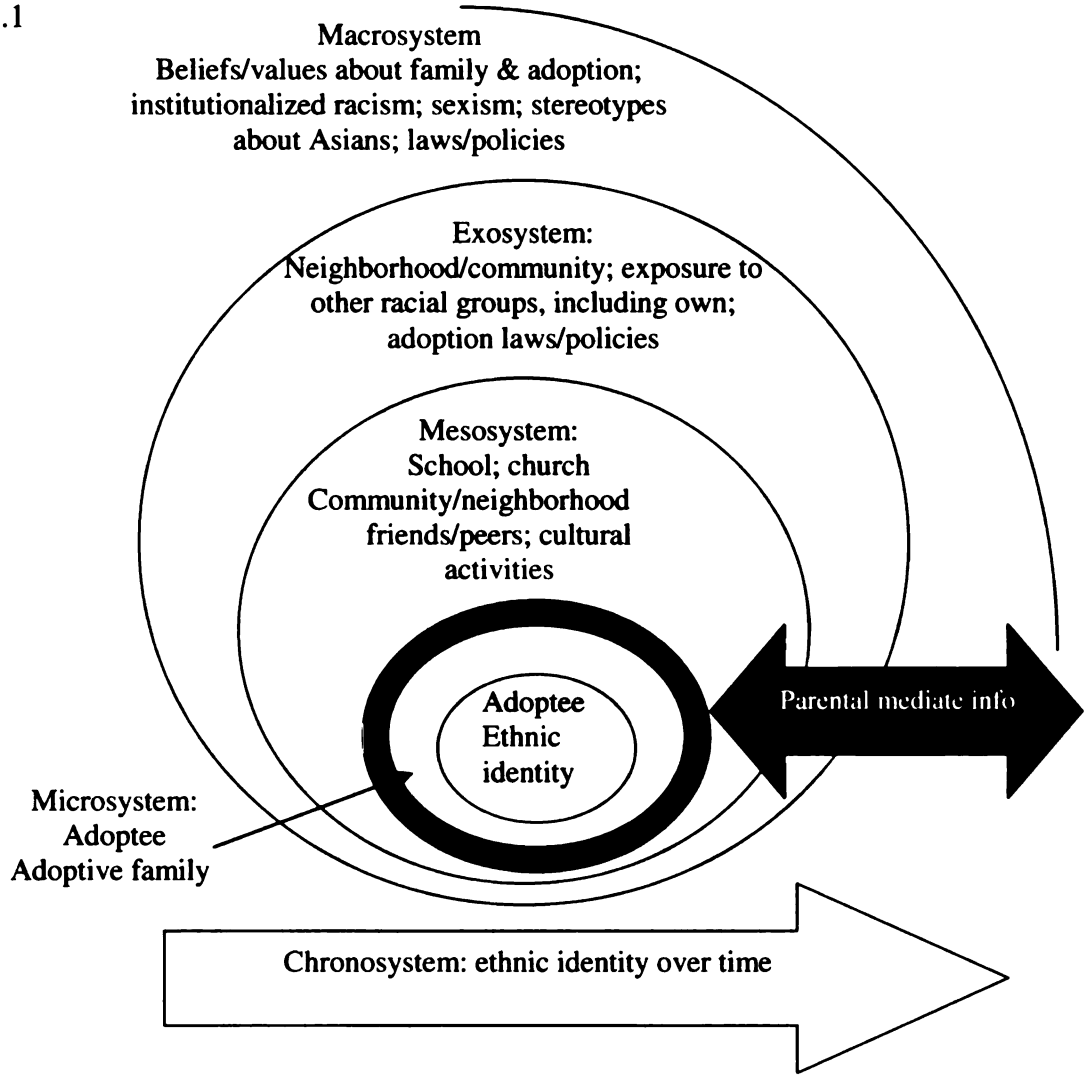

Figure 5.1 represents the revised conceptual map that includes the actual experiences of the adoptees with the various systems during their elementary and middle childhood through adolescent years. There are no two-way arrows because the

information and the influence of the systems is filtered through the adoptive family. The inclusion of the large arrow, "parental_mediate info" represents the experience of the adoptive parents controlling what types of information were allowed into the family. At another level, the macrosystem is depicted as only a half circle to represent the ability of the adoptive parents, family and community to be able to filter the flow of information from the larger system. For example, the adoptive parents were able to act as a type of buffer for incidents of racism by telling their children that it didn't matter. This occurred at other levels, such as at the mesosystem level when parents would send their children to culture camps, or other cultural festivals to learn about their Korean heritage. As in the original conceptual map, the chronosystem arrow represents the changes over time of the systems, and the ethnic identity of the adoptee.

Early Adulthood

At this point the women were beginning to be faced with more interaction with the macrosystem level of values and ideas about race, racism, multiculturalism, etc. in more direct ways. This is not to say the women did not interact with the other levels of systems at this time. They still had interactions, but their descriptions of the influences in their lives reflected an increased prevalence in their interactions with the macrosystem.

The macrosystem is the broadest system and consists of the ideological values, norms and patterns of a particular culture that people adhere to. One of the most salient experiences that occurred for the women in terms of their ethnic identity development was their experience with racism in college. Though many identified racially charged comments occurring earlier in their lives, the incidents in college were much more overt, directed specifically at them, and the women were at a stage where they had a better

understanding of the meaning of such comments versus when they were younger. These also occurred at a time where the women could fully articulate their reactions and feelings about these experiences.

As they moved away to college or out of their parents home, the women described influences that came with exposure to culturally diverse environments, or college classes that focused on diversity, and the struggles of minority people in the U.S. that the women could identify with. Often times these were experiences they had never had before and it inspired them to look at why this was. Many times this also involved an exploration of why they were not accepted into the white culture, but also not accepted into the Asian culture.

They also described experiences where they were once again faced with the reality that they were not in fact white, but were different just as they were in elementary school. What was different about this time was a maturity and developmental level that afforded them the ability to articulate and identify the reasons why people were making racist remarks, jokes, and assumptions. Not only could they identify the real reason behind those comments, but they also how they felt about it on a deeper level that often times sent them on a quest of self-discovery and soul-searching for an identity that was not based on what their family had told them they were, or what country they were born in, but based on what they could relate to and integrate into their sense of self.

These experiences influenced the women to seek out answers through connecting on some level with knowledge about their roots: either their Korean roots, or their roots as a person of color. This was done through joining different organizations, creating a new social network that included people of different races and cultural backgrounds, and

in general learning more about their Korean heritage in more meaningful ways.

Adulthood

The age range of the women was so vast that this time period speaks to the experiences of the women who had graduated from college and had began their careers and family. Several spoke of being glad that the study included their age range as they felt they did a lot of their ethnic identity development "work" as adults.

During this time, the adoptees' microsystem began to change as they got married and had children. This still included their adoptive family and their close friends, but moved to also include their newly formed families. Their interactions with the larger meso, exo and marco systems increased during this time as they were faced with new experiences of exposure to different cultures, including the Korean culture, as well as continued incidents of overt racism directed at them.

The women in this age group were able to identify the ability to be able to better reflect upon their earlier experiences in life and integrate it with their current experiences to inform how they see themselves and how they create change in their own lives and the lives of their children. They used their experience as mothers to reflect upon how their own parents raised them and prepared for future conversations they would inevitably have with their children regarding issues of race.

Figure 5.2

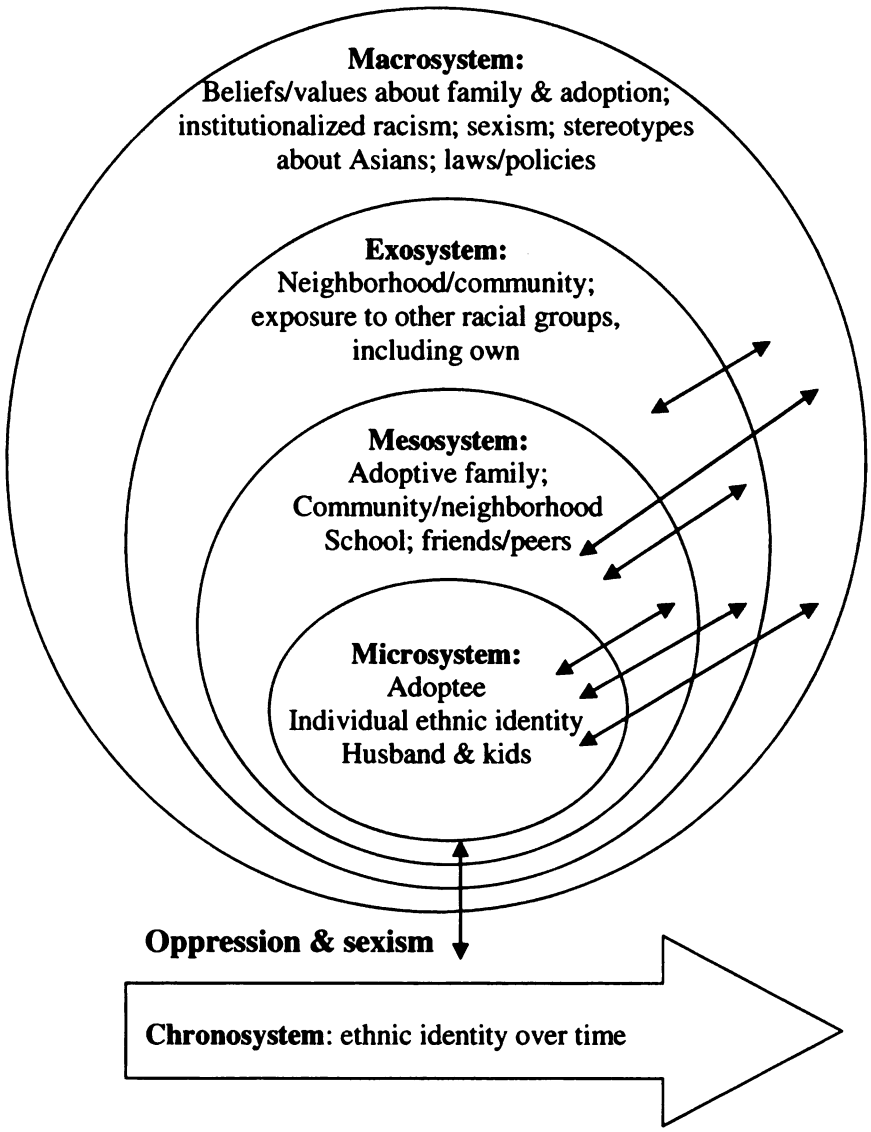

Figure 5.2 represents the experience of ethnic identity development during adulthood that includes influences from each of the different systems that the adoptee was involved in. The macrosystem is pictured as a full circle to represent that the adoptee now fully interacts with this system rather than only partially as in their earlier years. The arrow of "Parental mediate info" has disappeared to reflect this time as when the adoptees were able to interact with each of the systems without the filtration of their adoptive

parents or family. This is reflective of the developmental point of their lives where they were essentially on their own creating a new life for themselves. Oppression and now sexism are both included as cutting through each of the systems that reflect the women's experiences with both from all levels of the model. The chronosystem continues to be a part of the model as the women described changes in their ethnic identity, and contemplated future changes to it as well.

Alongside the four levels of systems is the chronosystem, which is the inclusion of all the other systems "over time". Over time, their ecologies expanded to include more interactions with the larger systems, rather than only their microsystem. The women identified many formative experiences during their early childhood that included incidents of racism and having it be pointed out that they were different than others who surrounded her. During this time her adoptive parents were able to act as a type of buffer to these incidents and reassure her that she was still loved and her skin color did not matter. Throughout her middle-childhood and adolescence she was able to assimilate into the culture around her, and be accepted as one of them with only a few reminders that she was different. Once she got to college, however, those differences were pointed out to her in overt and many times derogatory and racist ways without the protection and reassurance from her family. At this point the women had to find an identity that allowed for the culture she was raised in as well as her outward appearances. As adults, the women took the experiences from earlier in their life and reflected upon those meanings and what it meant for their current circumstances and how they currently saw themselves. It was at this point that the women were able to create an identity that she formed on her own from her experiences & knowledge.

In addition to the influences from their family, community, etc, were influences from their adoption circumstances. Some of the women spoke of their adoption status as more influential to their identity, while others indicated she had not given it much thought. It appeared that their ethnic identity development process and their integration of their adopted selves occurred in parallel processes. There were times when more attention was paid to their ethnic identity, and other times where more attention was paid to their adopted identity. Further investigation of these two processes is warranted.

Critical Race Feminism

As discussed in chapter 2, critical race theory has several core themes that serve as the foundation (McDowell & Jeris, 2004). The second core theme appears to be most notable in terms of the current findings. This theme states that: racism is a "normal" and "everyday" experience for people of color within the U.S. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), however, for the women who were interviewed, it appeared that this was not true for them growing up. This speaks to the predicament these women were placed in as people of color, but not necessarily being told that they were a person of color until they were much older and had grown accustomed to the white privileges they had while living with their white families. When questions regarding their racial differences were brought up, many of them were dismissed because "color didn't matter". This served to silence the adoptees talking about race and about their differences rather than facilitate a discussion about what it meant to them and their family. Many of the women described incidents in which they were "reminded" that they were different than the majority that surrounded them. These experiences reflect their interactions with the white privilege of not having to be constantly "reminded" that you are not one of "them".

Critical race feminism also places emphasis on a person's location, either historical or current. Part of the women's historical location was the circumstances under which they were adopted. Several of the women had some information about these circumstances, while, others had no other information than that they were abandoned somewhere and were adopted to the U.S. The current study did not place emphasis on the adoptees' story of adoption, thus little was discussed about how their adoption circumstances influenced their ethnic identity development, and reconciliation with their adoption. Rather, emphasis was placed on the ethnic identity development process and what factors were influential to that. It could be hypothesized that similar to being female as another layer to their identity, being relinquished and the reasons for that may be another layer that has yet to be reconciled. It may be possible that an identity as one who has been relinquished contributes to and also informs feelings of not belonging, or being accepted on various levels. Future projects may want to further examine this possible contributor and it's influence on how an adoptee sees herself.

As previously discussed in chapter 1 as a possible contributor to how the dominant group would "racialize" the different cohorts that came over, the women spoke of this "racializing" as occurring through the media. Those who were adopted in earlier years described not seeing any Asians in the media; however, those who were adopted during subsequent years described seeing more Asians in the media, and changing from non-speaking roles to leading roles in movies.

Implications for Adoption Agencies

Adoption agencies are typically the first place adoptive parents go to for help in how to handle various situations related to their adopted children, such as, questions

about how to talk to their children about being adopted and what that means. For transracial adoptive families, particularly, those who have adopted from Asians countries, such as Korea, it is important to also provide education for the adoptive parents about how to talk to their children about race and being a multi-racial family. Adoption agencies are in a unique position to talk to perspective adoptive parents about what it would mean to adopt a child from a different race then themselves, and the importance of such discussions about being a multi-racial family, the importance of ethnic identity development, or how to support ethnic identity development when you may not know much about it, etc.

Adoption agencies are also in a position to provide groups for transracial adoptive families that have older children. As the findings indicate, many of the families stopped participating in the culture camps and programs that were offered once their child reached a certain age. Some of the reasons that were given were related to the program ended at a certain age. Providing other opportunities to connect with other families who are like them would be important to supporting the idea that they are not alone. The agencies, at the very least, could provide the adoptive parents continued support in the form of support groups, and also having discussion panels with adult adoptees as guest speakers.

Implications for Adoptive Parents

Cultural Competence

In recent years the concept of "cultural competence" in transracial adoptive parents has taken hold and has led adoption agencies to guide these parents to connect their children with their birth culture through various cultural activities. What they fail to

identify is what "cultural activities" are most beneficial for these children. The types of cultural activities that the current study found to be most common for the adoptees were books about Korea the country, or Asia, "Americanized" Korean food made by the adoptive parents, culture/heritage camps, and cultural festivals. Cultural activities should be viewed as a way to instill an internal pride in themselves, but also a beginning point for teaching them about how the rest of the world perceives them. Rather than focusing on cultural activities that teach children about the traditional traditions, these activities can also include information about the struggle of Asians within this country and abroad.

There were few participants who identified some interactions with other Koreans, however, these interactions mostly revolved around preparing for a school project on the country of Korea, or sharing a meal once or twice a year together. Once the women moved out of their parent's homes, however, many chose to find connections with Korea through interactions with other Koreans or Asians in general. They cited these interactions as integral to their ethnic identity development, in both positive and negative ways. This provides evidence to support the necessity for daily exposure and interactions with other Koreans, and not just other Korean adoptees as most beneficial for their ethnic identity development. The findings also highlight the importance for parents to be "racially competent" in terms of understanding and embracing their children as a different race from them and not shying away from discussions regarding this difference. Adoptive parents need to be able to identify and integrate a multi-racial family identity into their family life, as well as being able to provide their adopted children with opportunities to not only connect with their birth culture, but also be able to facilitate discussions regarding race.

As stated earlier, adoptive parents are the gatekeepers of information and opportunities for their Korean children. This also includes information about racism and discrimination and how to handle such situations in a healthy, effective and productive manner. This is something the adoptees indicated their parents were many times unable to do, evidenced by their descriptions of teaching their children differently than how they were raised. So, the question then begs, "How are children able to face racism with dignity and productivity if their parents are not committed to doing this as well?" As one of the women stated, "it is not our job to fix racism. Parents have to be committed to fight the good fight".

Issues of Power

Issues of power are always at play when looking at power from a critical race feminist point of view. As Korean female adoptees there are many levels of unbalance of power. The larger adoption agencies don't make it a priority to educate and inform the adoptive parents on the importance of having discussions about race with their children from an early age. Studies have shown that the majority of white parents don't have discussions about race with their children, compared to African American, Latino, Asian parents, etc. (Brown, Tanner-Smith, Lesane-Brown & Ezell, 2007). This in itself is an indicator that white parents don't see race as an important topic to talk about aside from teaching their children that "color doesn't matter". These children are raised to believe they have power and privilege, when in fact they do not.

Clinical Implications

The findings of this study have several implications for clinicians who may work with Korean transracial adoptive families, or with an adoptee on an individual basis. It is

difficult to state specific interventions that would be beneficial when many times the presenting problem does not appear related to identity issues. The findings of this study have made it clear that the adoptee may not be speaking about situations and incidents that are occurring at school, but are still having an effect on how she sees herself. Several studies have found that adoptees in general tend to have internalizing problems rather than externalizing problems, such as depression (Borders, Penny, & Portnoy, 2000; Miller, et al., 2000), emotional problems (Weinberg, Waldman, van Dulmen & Scarr, 2004) and psychosomatic conditions (Burrow & Finley, 2004). Thus, it may be difficult for parents to identify when their children are having difficulty with issues related to their adoption or identity. Though the presenting problem may not appear to be related to adoption or race issues, it is still important to acknowledge that it may be a contributing factor. As a result, the following discussion of clinical implications will focus on how to educate and facilitate conversations between the adoptive parents and adoptees so that issues regarding identity problems, or their racial differences and what that means may be opened.

For work with the adoptive family, the focus should be on the parents being able to create an environment in which their children feel safe enough to talk with them about issues regarding race, racism, and what it means to be adopted in their family. As many of the women indicated, they preferred not to talk about it with their families, and felt a responsibility to "protect" them from their experiences for fear that they could not handle them, or fear that their adoptive parents would feel as if they did not do a "good job" raising them. Though parents may bring their children in as the identified client, it is important that as systemic therapists, attention is also paid to the adoptive parent's

thoughts and ideas about race, racism, being a multi-racial family, being an adoptive family and how that informs the messages they are sending to their children, either overtly or covertly.

For those who are working with a transracial adoptive family, it is important to understand that these families may present with the same presenting problems as any other family, however, therapists have to have an acknowledgement of their location as a multi-racial family and what other issues may be at play, even if they do not self-identify as a multi-racial family. Creating a safe and open space for the adoptive parent and the adoptee to have dialogue about these issues is necessary. This can be done through various interventions, depending on the family and what they are receptive to, however, Narrative Family Therapy may be a good "fit" for transracial adoptive families, as its tenets highlight the importance of the language people use, and the primary story that people tell themselves about certain events, situations, and who they are. It can also help clients not only tell their stories, but to find strategies for resisting the internalization of negative cultural messages about themselves, and their family (Semmler & Williams, 2000).

The findings also have specific clinical implications for working with an adopted woman on an individual basis. The findings indicate that ethnic identity development, as well as reconciling adoption-related issues is a life-long process. As such, therapists should be prepared to have women at any age come to them presenting with these types of issues especially at times of transitions. Or, if not a presenting issue, have an understanding that they can be contributing factors is also imperative. Therapeutic work with an adult adoptee may focus on the unresolved identity issues regarding their

adoption and their identity as a Korean adoptee, Korean-American, Asian, Asian-American, or any other identity she associates with. Therapists should be especially attuned to themes of ambiguous loss as the adoptee speaks about her adoption story. There is much discussion about ambiguous loss in the adoption literature in terms of grieving the family the adoptee may have never had contact with, or memories of and how it may impact how an adoptee is able to reconcile her identity as an adopted person.

As with family therapy, it would be beneficial to have the women look at the larger systemic messages that have previously, and currently inform how she sees herself, how others see her and what that means to her and her identity. Special attention needs to be paid to how she speaks about herself in terms of a woman, adoptee, and Korean.

Narrative Family Therapy can be used with any presenting problem and any client that seeks out services, whether it is an adoptive family unit, or an individual adoptee. This is because the tenets of Narrative Family Therapy are flexible enough to be able to accommodate any situation by focusing on a person's strengths and not pathology. Narrative Family Therapy is also well suited for these families and individuals in terms of being able to provide culturally sensitive interventions in the form of externalizing and creating space for a new "story" to emerge. Narrative Family Therapy takes place in several phases. The first phase involves deconstructing the primary story of their lives by listening to the meanings clients attach to their life stories and helping clients to investigate the influence of those meanings on their lives and the story they have written for themselves (Monk, et al., 1997 cited by Selmmer & Williams, 2000). The next phase entails the exploration their experiences with "exceptions" to the problem. And finally, the last phase involves "re-authoring" those stories that highlight the client's strengths

and the "exceptions" that they have found.

Externalization is a therapeutic technique that is unique to Narrative Family Therapy. It is based upon the idea that human dilemmas are manufactured in social contexts rather than embedded in human beings themselves (Selmmer & Williams, 2000). In other words, problems are viewed in the context of cultural messages that are transmitted, rather than on personal deficiencies within a person. This allows for the "problem" to be placed outside of the client, rather than viewed as an inherent characteristic of the client. This is especially helpful with discussions regarding internalized racism, and other messages adoptees receive about who they are. Vonk (2001) indicated that being able to "externalize rather than internalize racism" is an important skill for children of color to learn. Therapists who are able to use externalization with clients are able to have discussions about the messages they receive from outside sources and how they have shaped how the client sees herself. For instance, for Korean adoptees who struggle with identifying with either the American or Korean culture, it would be beneficial to be able to have a conversation that allowed them to examine those messages that tell them they have to chose either culture. Externalizing would in essence help them to see that having difficulty with their identity should not be seen as a problem within themselves, but rather as a problem with the cultural messages received that indicate they have to choose one identity over the other.

Narrative Family Therapy would also be beneficial to use as a means to open up dialogue about the stories others have told them about who they are, versus the story that the woman tells herself about who she is or what story the family tells themselves. Discussions about what it means to be a multi-racial family, or a family created through

international and transracial adoption should also take place. This would create a space to also talk about what it means to be a different race in this country and how they see this impacting their family and their children. From a systemic point of view, it would be important to talk about the various systems they are involved in and facilitate a discussion about how they see those systems having an impact on their family. This would provide an opportunity for parents to examine others around them view their family and their children as a multi-racial family. Externalization would also be beneficial within a family therapy context as it relates to discussion about the messages about being an adoptive family and a multi-racial family. Just as externalization is able to help the individual adoptee see that the problem with identity does not lay within her, it can help the adoptive family create their own story of who their family is based upon their own experiences and beliefs, rather than the beliefs of others.

Narrative Therapy also calls for the sharing of the newly re-authored story. The use of this intervention at the close of therapy would provide the family with a means and a reason to find a transracial adoptive family support group to share their new story with. This would also provide a means to connect with other families who are similar in their circumstances and provide points of discussion and strengthening of their re-authored family story.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. One is that all the participants came from one mid-western state. It would be wise in the future to draw a sample population from across the country.

Many of the participants were recruited through a snowball method in which one

participant told another friend about the study and passed along my contact information. The participants were also self-selected, which resulted in a possible sample bias. It should be noted that there were two potential participants who declined to participate once they found out more about the purpose of the study and what topics the interview would cover. Thus, the sample may be biased toward individuals who have already, or are interested in exploring their ethnic identity development and related issues.

Future Directions

The current project listened to the stories of fifteen Korean-born transracially adopted women speak of their ethnic identity development throughout their lives. Their stories revealed that this process was difficult for them as they sorted through the various messages that were conveyed to them either directly or indirectly from those around them. It also painted a picture of their identity becoming more defined and solidified as they interacted with larger systems, and reflected upon their previous experiences. This study also provided evidence that ethnic identity development within this group occurs throughout their life span as they are met with different experiences and challenges.

This project only interviewed the adoptees thus, in the future it would be beneficial to also include the perspectives of the adoptive parents and other siblings as well to provide a more complete picture of the family dynamics that contributed to the ethnic identity development of the women. It would also be beneficial to focus on one area that has been identified as a contributing factor to ethnic identity development, such as peer influence, or their interactions with other Koreans on a deeper level. Another area that requires further examination is the relationship between an adoptees' reconciliation with her adoption status and her ethnic identity development. The findings of the current

study point to an interrelationship between the two, however, further studies should examine and clarify what this relationship looks like and how the identity as an adoptee and the identity as a Korean person influence each other.

Personal Reflections

This process was very emotional for me as a Korean adoptee. Going into this study I reflected upon my own identity and what was influential for me, however, once I began interviewing the women and transcribing the interviews I found my own ethnic identity evolving. Before this experience I understood that I had two identities, but was unable to articulate or form them into one solid identity. Speaking to these women and hearing their stories gave me more insight and ability to find my identity as a Korean adoptee.

During the writing of this manuscript a high profile actress and her husband adopted a little girl from Korea. Her pictures were plastered all over the tabloid and magazine racks, and splashed across the television and all I could think about was how sorry I felt for that little girl. Deep down in my heart I know that she will struggle and I wonder if her new parents will be able to handle that situation in a way that will help her solidify her ethnic identity and prepare her for the world outside of their family. I still struggle with being able to fully endorse transracial adoption because of how people of color continue to be perceived and how complex and confusing finding one's identity can be in a world that tells you one thing while your family tells you another. It is my hope that this study will spark interest in future studies that can continue to find answers to how to best prepare adoptive parents and adoptees for this process.

Conclusions

This study examined the ethnic identity development process in fifteen female Korean-born transracial adoptees through in-depth interviews that were coupled with reflective journal entries. Their stories highlighted their strengths and resilience while trying to find an identity that incorporated all facets of themselves. The findings indicate that the process of ethnic identity development for these women is often a complex process that is informed by many ecological influences throughout their lives. The findings also provide insight and implications for adoptive parents as well as clinicians who may work with transracial adoptive families or adoptees.

Appendix A

Informed Consent: Interview

Korean-born Transracial Female Adoptees:
Ecological Influences on Ethnic Identity Development

Introduction:
Thank you for considering to participate in my research study! The purpose of this study is to gain better insight and understanding of the relevant ecological influences on the ethnic identity development in adopted Korean women. Essentially, it aims to better understand how adopted Korean women view themselves in terms of their racial and cultural identities and what factors contributed to those identities.

Procedure:
Your participation will entail one meeting with the researcher, which should take approximately two-hours. During this interview the researcher will explain the project and go over the informed consent form with you. Following the interview you will be emailed several reflection questions regarding your ethnic identity development that will take approximately 30-60 minutes. The completed questions will be emailed back to the researcher. You will receive $10 for participating in this project to be given upon receiving the journal entry. You will also be entered into a raffle for $50 that will be given at the conclusion of the project.

Potential risks or discomforts:
There is minimal risk involved with participating in this project. Some psychological discomfort may be experienced from revealing personal information or thinking about things that are related to your ethnic identity development. You are able to take a break at any point during the interview process, and you are able to refuse to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable. After the interview, should you feel overwhelmed or stressed please contact the researcher, or the Family & Child Clinic at (517) 432-2272.

If you are injured as a result of your participation in this research project, Michigan State University will assist you in obtaining emergency care, if necessary, for your research related injuries. If you have insurance for medical care, your insurance carrier will be billed in the ordinary manner. As with any medical insurance, any costs that are not covered or are in excess of what are paid by your insurance, including deductibles, will be your responsibility. The University's policy is not to provide financial compensation for lost wages, disability, pain or discomfort, unless required by law to do so. This does not mean that you are giving up any legal rights you may have. You may contact Katie Bozek at (616) 890-0879 with any questions or to report an injury.

Potential benefits:
By participating in this research process, it is possible you may gain further insight into your own ethnic identity, including what contributed to your current identity. In addition,

your participation may benefit the broader community as the researcher may learn more about Korean adopted women and what contributed to their ethnic identity development.

Confidentiality:
All information that refers to you, or can be identified with you will remain confidential to the maximum extent permitted by law. If you choose to sign this consent form, you are also giving consent to have the interview audiotaped, so that the researcher has complete and correct information from the interview. You may request at any time to have the taping stopped and you can refuse to be taped at all. As the information you provide during an interview is transcribed, any identifying information will be changed (i.e., names of people or places) so that you cannot be identified. Typed transcripts of your interview will be kept as password protected files, and access to the information will be limited to the researcher.

Other than this form, all questionnaires and data will be identified with a code number. A list linking your name to the code will be kept in a locked file for the duration of the study. Once all the data are collected and analyzed, the list linking the names to the code numbers will be destroyed.

The reflective questions will also be coded with numbers and no identifying information will be used.

Recording:
With your consent, the interview will be audio-recorded. Only the researcher and faculty advisor will have access to the recordings. The recordings will be transcribed (typed word for word) and deleted once the typed transcripts are checked for accuracy. Neither your name nor any other identifying information will be associated with the recording or the transcript. Immediately following the interview you will be given the opportunity to have the recording deleted if you wish to withdraw your consent to participate in this study. By consenting to audio-recording you are agreeing to have your interview audio-recorded, to having the recording transcribed and to the use of the written transrcript in presentations and written products.

Voluntary participation:
Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. You may decline participation at any point during the study by simply telling the interviewer you no longer wish to participate.

Rights and complaints:
If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact the researcher.

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Secondary Investigator
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If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 202 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

YOU HAVE READ THE CONSENT FORM. YOUR QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. YOUR SIGNATURE ON THIS FORM MEANS THAT YOU CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. YOU ALSO CERTIFY THAT YOUA RE 18 YEARS OF AGE OR OLDER.

- ☐ I consent to participate in this research study.
- ☐ I consent to having my interview audio-recorded.

Signature of Participant	Signature of Researcher
Typed/Printed Name of Participant	Typed/Printed Name of Researcher

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Background
How old are you?
How old were you when you were adopted?
Have you ever searched for your biological parents? How old were you when you did?
Did you ever attend culture camps as a child? What was it like?
What other exposure did you have to your birth culture growing up?
Do you have any siblings adopted from Korea? Do you have any siblings who are biological to your adoptive parents?

Identity
How do you identify yourself racially and ethnically today?

Past experiences:
Tell me about growing up in your family. What was it like being adopted?
Tell me about growing up in your neighborhood/community and school.
Did you experience any incidents of racism or discrimination growing up? How did you or your parents handle it? How did that inform how you saw yourself.

Tell me about what was influential in how you identify yourself today.
How diverse was the community you grew up in?
Tell me about growing up in your community as a Korean adoptee.
What was your experience with your school and peers like?
What was most important in forming your current identity?

Current experiences:
Tell me about how much of an impact your family has had on how you identify yourself today.
How diverse is the community you currently live in?
Tell me about your experience being a Korean woman in the world today.
Do you see the wider societal beliefs and racism as having any kind of impact on how you identify yourself today?
What has had the most impact on how you identify yourself today?

Future experiences:
Tell me about how your racial / ethnic identity has developed over the years.
What encouraged that change in identity?
Do you see your current racial/ethnic identity changing in the future?
If so, what do you foresee having a significant impact or influence on that change?
If not, what do you believe has contributed to creating such a strong identity?

Appendix C

Reflective Journal Questions

1. What was it like to reflect on how you have come to identify yourself?

2. Does being adopted or being Korean have more of significance on how you identify yourself?

3. Do you think male Korean adoptees have a different experience than female Korean adoptees? How so?

4. Thinking back to your past experiences and how they helped form your identity, is there anything that you would like to change?

5. At what point in your life did you find yourself "working" to create an identity for yourself? How did you do this?

6. In what ways have you worked to learn more about your birth culture and how has that influenced how you currently identify yourself?

7. Is there anything that you wish the interviewer had asked that she did not?

8. Is there anything more you would like to add to your answers from the interview or in general about your experience as a Korean adoptee?

9. How influential was your family in informing your identity—good or bad?

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