A PART YET APART: EXPLORING RACIAL AND ETHNIC IDENTITY FORMATION FOR KOREAN TRANSRACIAL ADOPTEES RAISED IN THE U.S. MIDWEST

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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This dissertation explores the lifelong racial and ethnic identity development of Korean transracial adoptees raised in the U.S. Midwest. Using seventy-seven in-depth, semi-structured life history interviews, geographic region, age cohort, gender, and exploration type emerged as the most significant factors shaping adoptees' sense of group belonging. Their unique life experiences as Asian Americans in White families created liminal belonging as "a part yet apart" from White, Asian, and even, at times, Korean adoptee communities. As they aged and encountered new life stage responsibilities and pressures, adoptees in the study experienced greater exposure to racial and ethnic diversity and were generally more willing to explore their identities during early and mid-adulthood. The large population of Korean adoptees in the Midwest, and Minnesota in particular, increased opportunities for exposure to other Korean adoptees and Korean adoptee culture. Involvement typically provided adoptees with a full-fledged sense of belonging that eluded them in traditionally defined Asian, Korean, and White communities. An empowering Korean adoptee identity emerged that was based on explicitly acknowledging adoptees' unique life circumstances in-between non-adopted Asians and Whites and challenged conflations of race, ethnicity, and culture.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> You know, my mom, I think, tried to get us involved in, they have some little [Korean adoptee] camps and such…*I know I opted out because, again, I didn't want to be different*…it just is a reminder of my culture and what I wanted to try to get away from. I wanted to try to blend in. *And so by doing that it just reaffirms that I'm different. And I opted out to do what I wish now I would have…So I wish now, in retrospect, I would have…And I just look back and think, what a waste.* [emphasis added]
>
> -- Kathryn Adler, a thirty-seven year old teacher

Growing up, Kathryn Adler wanted nothing to do with her racial and ethnic background. Rejecting these parts of her served as a means to minimize the visible differences between herself, her White family, and the predominantly White community in which she lived. During early life stages when peer acceptance plays such a significant role in developing a positive self-identity, Kathryn perceived any deviations from a White, middle class identity as threatening to her sense of belonging. And while her racial visibility was a physical marker and reminder of the ethnic and biological differences that separated her from her family, it was with her White peers where the differences led to unequal treatment in the form of racial bullying. As a result, she avoided the Korean adoptee cultural activities her parents offered. In fact, this aversion extended to all Asians in general, not just Korean adoptees, throughout childhood and adolescence.

Now in mid-adulthood, Kathryn wishes she had taken advantage of the cultural resources offered by her parents. As a thirty-seven year old teacher and mother, her priorities have drastically changed at this different stage in her life. The once significant

issues of blending in with peers have given way to an appreciation for her individualism and increased responsibilities in institutions such as family, work, and church. And while Kathryn's racial and ethnic identities remain rather symbolic in nature and do not significantly affect her life decisions, she still wishes she knew more about Korean culture. Her increased level of comfort with her multiple identities has opened channels for cultural exploration that she once stifled.

Crucial to understanding the shift in Kathryn's perspective is how perceptions of *sameness* and *difference* operate in influencing a person's sense of group membership and belonging. I use the phrase "a part yet apart[1]" to conceptually frame Korean transracial adoptees' sense of belonging in racial and ethnic communities throughout their life cycle. Research on social identity formation has shown that a sense of group identification functions to maintain one's psychological well-being[2] (Phinney 1990). In other words, "simply being a member of a group provides individuals with a sense of belonging that contributes to a positive self-concept" (Phinney 1990: 501). Developing strong emotional ties to others that one sees as similar will induce a greater sense of belonging to that particular group; yet, these ties are flexible and often vary in different contexts.

In this study, I explore how based on their unique circumstances, Korean transracial adoptees raised in the American Midwest are *a part* of *yet apart* from White, Asian, and, at times, even Korean adoptee communities. Such a framework highlights

[1]I borrow Shankar and Srikanth's original conceptualization of being "a part yet apart" to refer to South Asian Americans' place within Asian American group membership and social movements (Kibria 2002). This relationship can function as a template for understanding Asian transracial adoptees' place in Asian American collectivities in general.

[2] Well-being refers to "a feeling of being at home in one's body, a sense of knowing where one is going, and an inner assuredness of anticipated recognition from those who count" (quoting Erikson (1959) in Hoopes 1990: 145).

both the inclusion and exclusion that are often, and at times simultaneously, felt by adoptees. This sense of belonging largely depends on particular social contexts and varies as adoptees enter different life stages and face new experiences and responsibilities. Thus, to examine the extent that racial and ethnic identities shape Korean adoptees' lives from childhood through later adulthood, I ask the following questions:

- How do different developmental stages in life encourage either a sense of belonging or a disassociation with in-group racial and ethnic communities?
- How does "place"[3] influence adoptees' racial and ethnic identity formation?
- To what extent do post-adoption[4] services meet adoptee needs given the unique challenges for each life stage?

The Midwest provides a unique environment for studying Korean transracial adoptees because of the unusually large numbers of international transracial adoptees placed in Minnesota (Larsen 2007; Meier 1999). Estimates show that Korean adoptees constitute about half of the 35,000 Koreans in Minnesota (Larsen 2007). A relatively large population of Korean transracial adoptees in the region means that many community residents either know adoptive families personally or have at least heard of the phenomena (Larsen 2007; Meier 1999; Tuan and Shiao 2011). This normalization of international adoption functions for some to minimize feelings of difference from their White communities that would have otherwise set them apart.

[3] Place is used here to describe "the neighborhood, city, town, suburb or rural area in which adoptees were raised as children and teens, and where they choose to locate themselves as young adults" (Meier 1999: 17). I have included in this demographic description regional variances as well.

[4] Post-adoption services refers to "the necessary array of professional assistance offered and coordinated by an agency…to preserve and strengthen the adoptive family" (Cole and Donley 1990: 273).

Additionally, the unusually high proportion of Korean adoptees and adoption agencies in the Midwest region means that more post-adoption groups and activities are available during childhood and adolescence, especially for those placed in Minnesota. Whether adoptees took advantage of such programs or informal interactions varies, but their mere existence provides evidence for the importance of place. Many adoptees in this study had heard of or participated in a growing Korean adoptee community at some level throughout their life cycle, even if only at a superficial level.

Definitions of Race and Ethnicity

Before I proceed with any further discussion, some definitions central to this study are necessary. Although many Americans conflate the terms race and ethnicity, I separate them analytically because they operate differently in society with distinct consequences for individuals. In contemporary sociological literature, race and ethnicity are now widely accepted as social constructions that, while imposed on human bodies, are also contested, challenged, and reconfigured by individuals and institutions (Cornell and Hartmann 1998; Omi and Winant 1994).

A racial group refers to a socially defined population, i.e. Asian, Black, Latino, Native American, and White, whose membership is based on perceived common physical traits that are believed to be biologically determined. Such features include but are not limited to skin color, hair texture, and the shape of one's eyes and nose. While the actual demarcators of racial groups are in fact quite arbitrary and historically specific (Omi and Winant 1994), the social significance of race lies in the ways that such categories structure interpersonal relations. In the U.S., Whites have historically benefited both

culturally and materially from the racial hierarchy and subsequent distribution of resources. In this study I explore how these historical racialization[5] processes affect the meanings adoptees attach to their racial identities, namely, whether "thick"[6] racial ties exist for Korean adoptees. In other words, I examine the extent that being Asian American structures adoptees' behavior as individuals and as a group.

Ethnic groups, in contrast, are self-conscious collectivities with claims to a common ancestry, whether real or not, to a shared history, and certain symbols that define the group's "essence" (Cornell and Hartmann 1998). While racial categorization is often imposed, ethnic groups are mainly defined from within by group members. Research on later generation Chinese and Japanese Americans illustrates a "thinning" of ethnic practices, that is, their ethnic heritage does not significantly guide behavior and the overall structuring of one's life (Tuan 1998). Yet, these ethnic ties still retain meaning and significance to in-group members. As racialized ethnics,[7] Asian Americans are not afforded the same "ethnic options" (Waters 1990) as Whites assimilating into the American mainstream (Gans 1979) and are expected by others to enact specific cultural behaviors.

Racial Categorization and Ethnic Options

[5] Racialization is defined as "the process by which certain bodily features or assumed biological characteristics are used systematically to mark certain persons for differential status or treatment" (Cornell and Hartman 1998: 33).

[6] The terms "thick" and "thin" are used to describe the comprehensive nature of a given identity (Cornell and Hartmann 1998). A "thick" or comprehensive racial identity "is one that organizes a great deal of social life and both individual and collective action" (Cornell and Hartmann 1998: 73). A "thin" identity, in contrast, has little influence in structuring one's life and behaviors.

[7] I use Tuan's (1998) definition of the term racialized ethnics as referring to the process whereby individuals may choose to identify by their ethnicity, for example Korean, but are simultaneously being defined by others according to their racial categorization as Asian.

Most contemporary scholars view racial and ethnic identities as variable social constructions that achieve meaning through processes of exploration. Social identities are dynamic and situational in nature, varying in their content and saliency according to environmental contexts (Cornell and Hartman 1998; Espiritu 1992; Phinney 1993). Yet, it is the visibility of physical features that play a primary role in structuring the "ethnic options" (Waters 1990) available to some groups. For Asians, eye shape, skin color, hair color and texture are primary demarcators of group membership. Conceptualizing racial groups as pan-ethnic[8] entities sheds light on this interconnected relationship.

Pan-ethnicity is the process whereby diverse ethnic groups are lumped together under an imposed racial label while ethnic variance is leveled and homogenized (Espiritu 1992). Since out-group members fail to recognize interethnic differences, Asians' fates are interconnected as a racial group, regardless of how individuals self-identify. Thus, even though many adoptees did not want to be lumped together with other Asians, they learn from both Whites and other people of color that their racial and ethnic disidentification did not affect their Asian categorization.

As a racial group, Whites have also experienced ethnic homogenization; however, their ethnic trajectory varies from people of color. In particular, Whites' ability to claim unchallenged symbolic ethnicities[9] highlights its voluntary nature (Gans 1979). As acculturated individuals assimilate into the American mainstream, Whites' knowledge of old ethnic cultures and attachment to ethnic ties diminish for later generations (Gans

[8] The term pan-ethnic is used to describe "a politico-cultural collectivity made up of peoples of several, hitherto distinct, tribal or national origins" (Espiritu 1992: 2). Pan-ethnicity refers to "the development of bridging organization and solidarities among subgroups of ethnic collectivities that are often seen as homogeneous by outsiders" (Lopez and Espiritu 1990: 198).

[9] Symbolic ethnicity is "characterized by a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation, or that of the old country; a love for and a pride in a tradition that can be felt without having to be incorporated in everyday behavior" (Gans 1979: 9).

1979). Acceptance as a "true" or "authentic" American allows for an abandonment of old cultures from which Whites retain little, if any, knowledge. For Whites, "neither the practice of ethnic culture nor participation in ethnic organizations were essential to being and feeling ethnic" (Gans 1979: 14). Commitment to or involvement with in-group members is unnecessary. As Waters (1990) noted, White Americans have the ability to claim an ethnic identity without experiencing much social cost attached to that label.

Whereas Whites can voluntarily identify with their ethnicity or not, people of color are not afforded such a social privilege (Espiritu 1992; Kibria 2003; Tuan 1998; Waters 1990; 1999). For Asians specifically, their racial visibility continues to mark them with long standing stereotypes as "forever foreigners" (Tuan 1998) or as "not-Americans" (Kim 2007). Asian Americans remain not only outside the American imaginary as to what constitutes a "*real*" or full-fledged American, i.e. Whiteness, but are placed as diametrically opposed to it, i.e. unassimiable and a foreign threat (Kim 2007; Said 1979; Tuan 1999). Regardless of lighter skin color, relatively high socioeconomic positions, and multigenerational status, Asians' U.S. citizenship and American belonging are challenged whereby notions of race, culture, and citizenship are conflated (Kim 2007).

Even though many multi-generation Asian Americans are, in practice, as acculturated as their White counterparts, they are often expected to have in-depth knowledge of a generalized "foreign" Asian culture and to display "authentic" ethnic behavior (Kibria 2003; Kim 2009; Tuan 1998, 1999). In particular, Korean adoptees confront imposed expectations of cultural competency in Korean values, norms,

language, and social behavior from both Asians and non-Asians alike. Thus, ethnicity is "a binding and involuntary matter" (Kibria 2003: 101) for Asian Americans.

Racial and ethnic boundaries define group membership and distinguish between "us" and "them." Full acceptance as "authentic" in-group members provides a sense of belonging that contributes to one's overall psychological well-being (Phinney 1990). The fact that Asian adoptees are raised within White families and are culturally assimilated into the American mainstream yet are marked as Asian creates what psychologist Richard Lee (2003) calls a "transracial adoption paradox." In this sense, "adoptees are racial/ethnic minorities in society, but they are perceived and treated by others, and sometimes themselves, as if they are members of the majority culture (i.e., racially White and ethnically European) due to adoption in a White family" (Lee 2003: 711). However, their "honorary" membership with Whites is often challenged and tempered once adoptees enter public spaces. Whereas White family and friends accept adoptees as "us," White strangers often mark them as outsiders or "them." Many contestations to an "honorary White" status take the form of racial teasing and bullying or imposed ethnic assumptions. How adoptees negotiate these circumstances and whether they develop a sense of belonging with Asians is a central focus of this study.

Asian Adoption as a Part of Asian America

International transracial adoption occurs when parents and children from different racial groups and countries are joined together in a legally binding adoptive family (Hollingsworth 1999; Silverman 1993). Although transracial adoption can technically occur with any racial combination, it is almost invariably White parents adopting children

of color. In 2005, 85 percent of all transracially adoptive families were created through international means, with China and Korea accounting for the bulk of adoptive children (Lee 2003). And while Korean adoptees cross both racial and national borders in this form of family making, they represent an overlooked "quiet migration" (Lee 2009; Tuan and Shiao 2011; Weil 1984) and engage in often tenuous relationships with larger Asian immigrant communities (Lee 2003). Such ambivalence exists even as international adoptees comprise 15% of Chinese and 10% of Korean documented immigrants entering the U.S. annually (Lee 2009).

Given the unique circumstance of first-generation Asian immigrants raised in predominantly White families and neighborhoods, Tuan and Shiao (2011) recently examined how adoptee experiences compared to those of predominantly second-generation Asian Americans. In general, they found Korean adoptees throughout the life cycle were often ambivalent about their racial and ethnic identities, preferring to self-identify ethnically rather than racially when pressed. Yet, adoptees attached little meaning to being Korean other than as a factual description of their genetic make-up and as a means to placate questions about their heritage.

Asian adoptees' early experiences in childhood and adolescence did not vary significantly from one another or from later generation non-adopted Asian Americans (Tuan and Shiao 2011). Adoptee childhood and adolescent socialization was grounded in cultural assimilation and from a White racial perspective. And while many Asian Americans are in practice often as acculturated as White Americans (Tuan 1998), they attached more meaning to their racial and ethnic identities.

Greater differences between adopted and non-adopted Asians were evident during adult years when non-adopted Asian Americans explored their racial and ethnic identities to a higher degree than most adoptees (Tuan and Shiao 2011). While often symbolic, non-adopted Asian Americans' racial and ethnic identities still structured their lives to a greater extent than amongst adoptees. In particular, Korean adoptees throughout the life cycle were less likely to be involved in Asian social networks and to have Asian spouses or life partners than their non-adopted counterparts. Yet, the extent and shape of adoptee racial and ethnic exploration was often contingent upon their exploratory behavior in previous life stages.

So, what position do adoptees as Asian Americans occupy in the U.S. racial hierarchy? Theorists have recently proposed alternatives to the historical White/non-White social divide, namely an emerging Black/non-Black (Yancey 2003, 2006, 2007) or a more complex trichotomous racialization hierarchy as seen in Latin America (Bonilla-Silva and Embrick 2006). While both perspectives argue a preference by White Americans for non-Blacks over Blacks, a trichotomous hierarchy states that lighter-skinned non-Blacks with higher socioeconomic status, i.e. East Asians such as Korean Americans and Chinese Americans, occupy a secondary or "buffer" position between Whites and Blacks. However, this secondary status as "honorary" means Korean transracial adoptees "will still face discrimination and will not receive equal treatment in society" (Bonilla-Silva and Embrick 2006: 47).

This honorary location and status is where I position Korean transracial adoptees. Despite their White families and cultural socialization, Korean adoptees' exclusion from who constitutes a "real" American is based in their racial categorization (Kim 2007). As

previously argued, Asians regardless of generational status, cultural literacy, or socioeconomic status are positioned not as "second-class Americans [as with Blacks] but as the *not*-Americans" (Kim 2007: 562). Their "successful" integration has not granted Asians full-fledged and unquestioned social citizenship as Americans but in many ways exacerbated their tenuous acceptance and construed them as an economic threat (Kim 2007). Adoptees' experiences with racial bias specific to Asian Americans, such as "foreigner" epithets and expectations to be an "authentic ethnic" (Kibria 2003), highlights adoptees' status as *a part* of Asian communities.

Although international[10] adoption is often portrayed as the ultimate symbol of humanitarianism (Dorow 2006), current research on Korean transracial adoptees illustrates the limits of such a colorblind discourse (Quiroz 2007). In contrast, a Black/non-Black hierarchy whereby White parents accept and prefer Asian over Black adoptees (Shiao et al. 2004; Tuan and Shiao 2011) emerges as a dominant trend. Asian adoptability is often constructed in relation to Black undesirability mired in "images of damage, irredeemability, and marginalization" (Shiao et al. 2004: 8). Whereas Asian difference in relation to Whiteness is "strange but adaptable" (Dorow 2006: 41), "exotic but assimilable" (Shiao et al. 2004: 7), and built on a perceived solid work ethic and family values, Black racialization is laden with negative images of cultural deficiency, family dysfunction, "welfare dependency, criminality, and ingratitude" (Dorow 2006: 42). This "relative positioning" (Ong 2003: 11) portrays Asian women who relinquish their children as selfless victims of an undeveloped patriarchal society. They have no

[10] International adoption occurs when a child from one nation is adopted by parents from another. Most international adoptions have been transracial as well because many of the sending nations have been in Asia and Latin America, with the exception of Eastern European countries. My use of the terms Asian transracial adoption and adoptees throughout this study refer to adoptions that are both international and transracial in nature.

choice but to give up their parental rights to ensure a better life for their children. Such a positive view of life circumstances is often incorporated into adoption narratives told by adoptive parents.[11]

Interracial Families and Racial Ideologies

Contemporary research on multiracial families and racial socialization of mixed race individuals employs a systemic approach to identity formation whereby human agency is constrained by structural, institutional, relational, and individual factors (Rockquemore et al. 2006). Such studies have found that regardless of one's self-defined racial and ethnic identities, phenotypic characteristics such as skin color, facial features, and hair texture constrain the possible racial categories from which individual's can choose. Through interactions with "external socializing agents" (Rockquemore et al. 2006: 204) beyond the family, such as peers, teachers, strangers, and institutions in their communities, mixed race children's self-defined identities are either accepted and validated or challenged.

Similarly, Korean adoptees must negotiate their self-identification with, or even as, Whites in public spaces. Behavioral expectations of ethnic authenticity and racial bias communicate to adoptees the limits of their "honorary Whiteness" and the resiliency of their racial visibility. Their Asian features negated their self-defined White identities and

[11] Further support of a non-Black preference by White adoptive parents in transracial adoption can be seen in a recent and intriguing pattern. While numbers of Asian international adoptions have continued to rise, African American children available for adoption have simultaneously been placed internationally with White families in Canada and Western Europe (Quiroz 2007). Breaking from its historical role as a receiving nation in international adoption, the U.S. is currently exporting African American adoptees because White Americans are not adopting them. Rather, they are seeking to adopt internationally from Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe, and even Africa most recently in spite of the larger costs and longer waiting periods associated with international adoption.

served as markers that structured social interactions, especially with strangers unaware of their White families.

Although most Korean adoptees are raised in de facto multiracial families and some are mixed race, their identities and experiences are unique. Unlike other interracial families, transracial adoptees often do not have an adult of color in their family to serve as a positive role model who can counter derogatory images and messages in mainstream American culture. Adoptive parents cannot fully understand experiences of being a person of color in the U.S. The family environment and socialization strategies continue to play critical roles in shaping children's racial and ethnic identities because that is where they first learn about their location in the racial hierarchy and develop racial attitudes.

Parents' racial ideologies,[12] or the way they view race relations, affect the strategies they enact when socializing their own interracial children. On one end of the continuum exists a colorblind ideology that denies the salience of race and racial inequality (Bonilla-Silva 2003). From this perspective, acknowledging and discussing race relations and politics are seen to perpetuate rather than eliminate inequalities. At the other end, a race-conscious ideology involves proactive parental attempts "to encourage positive racial identity by providing their children with positive cultural images and messages about what it means to be [a person of color]" (Tatum 1997: 55). Race is overtly acknowledged and consciously included in socialization strategies under this ideology and is seen to prepare children of color for the identity negotiations they will inevitably face in a racially hierarchical society.

[12] Racial ideology refers to "racially based frameworks used by actors to explain and justify the racial status quo" (Bonilla-Silva 2003: 9).

Most Whites use a perspective that normalizes Whiteness[13] whereby only people of color are seen as having a racial identity (Frankenberg 1993; Rockquemore et al. 2006) to racially socialize[14] their children. White invisibility is a specific form of racial privilege where the benefits are unacknowledged, and racism is conceptualized as "isolated incidents of individual prejudice" (Rockquemore et al. 2006: 209). In this sense, a White racial perspective minimizes or denies the material and psychological effects of racial discrimination or bias and obscures Whites' privileged location in the racial hierarchy. It is from this perspective that White adoptive parents raised their Asian children.

According to Shiao et al. (2004: 9), White parents often used a colorblind racial ideology and essentially ignored racial differences, "re-cast[ing] their Asian children as honorary Whites." These families had not lived in racially diverse neighborhoods or socialized in racially diverse circles or networks (Tuan and Shiao 2011). Because Korean adoptees were re-fenced[15] as Whites, neither parents nor adoptees were prepared when this status was challenged outside the family context. As many Korean adoptees had internalized this "honorary White" status, they often expressed White racial attitudes that functioned to distance themselves from both Asians and other people of color (Bonilla-Silva and Embrick 2006; Yancey 2006). Rather than enacting anti-racist challenges to the

[13] I use Frankenberg's (1993) definition of Whiteness as "a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced and, moreover, are intrinsically linked to unfolding relations of domination" (6).

[14] Racial socialization encompasses the processes whereby "*all* parents teach their children specific racial attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors…about how to understand themselves racially" (Rockquemore et al. 2006: 206).

[15] Re-fencing as applied to Asian transracial adoptees was first discussed by Shiao et al. (2004) to describe a strategy employed by White adoptive parents. In this process, parents with racially discriminatory beliefs were able to accept and love their children of color without having to question or change their own racial ideologies.

current racial hierarchy, Korean transracial adoptive families, in actuality, often reproduced the status quo.

I situate this project in the tradition of a long line of racial and ethnic identity formation studies of racialized ethnics (Kibria 2003; Song 2003; Tatum 1997; Tuan 1998; Waters 1990; 1999). Such studies have generally been age-constrained, often highlighting negotiations during adolescence or early adulthood. Korean adoptees, like all individuals, encounter a variety of social factors both within and outside the family environment that influence their identity formation. Focusing on early family socialization remains important due to its influential foundation on how an adoptee views the world, but adoptees grow and age just as the rest of the general population. Therefore, adoptee stories are not complete without examining identity negotiations and its significance during the different stages of adulthood.

Using a Lifecourse[16] Perspective

A lifecourse stage model is a logical framework for this study because it "emphasizes the interaction of historical events, individual decisions and opportunities and the impact of early and middle life experiences on [the] determination of later life outcomes" (Kronenfeld 2006: 503). According to Erik Erikson (1968), individuals seek a sense of wholeness through "an exploration of one's abilities, interests, and options, leading to a commitment to a personal identity that will serve as a guide to future action" (Phinney 1993: 62). The paths chosen during identity development often build upon how earlier stage-specific challenges were processed and resolved. Early life environments

[16] Though some scholars analytically distinguish between the terms lifecourse and life cycle (Kronenfeld 2006), I use the two term interchangeably.

provide a foundation, though malleable, for likely racial and ethnic saliency in mid- or late adulthood.

This perspective builds upon existing racial and ethnic identity theories (Cross 1991; Phinney 1990; 1993) which posit that experiences in earlier life stages affect how individuals interpret the world around them and the particular needs that may arise in later stages. According to this perspective, specific conditions and challenges affecting the saliency of racial and/or ethnic identities for adoptees vary according to life stage: 1) childhood; 2) adolescence; 3) young adulthood; 4) mid-adulthood; and 5) later adulthood. Erikson (1968) outlined specific needs that must be met during different developmental stages and the challenges in meeting. Early childhood is characterized by the need to develop trust with primary caretakers while also developing a sense of self or autonomy from their parents. For transracial adoptees, these identity negotiations are heightened by the fact that they are obviously biologically and physically different from their parents. Key challenges during this life stage include securing a sense of family integration while simultaneously acknowledging and even celebrating their racial and ethnic differences. While such a task seems contradictory, research has found that an open acknowledgement of family differences often leads to open communication and more positive feelings about being adopted (Kirk 1984; Tuan and Shiao 2011; Tessler et al. 1999).

During adolescence, many teens, whether adopted or not, begin to question who they are, where they come from, and who they will become in their adult lives. Primary concerns include developing both: 1) autonomy and independence from their parents and 2) a sense of belonging or fitting in and being accepted as authentic members of their

peer groups (Phinney 1993). In fact, adolescence has consistently been found to be "the most difficult time for adoptive families" (Barth and Miller 2000: 452). For all adoptees in this study, their peer groups were predominantly, if not all, White due to the communities and social circles in which they were raised. As a result, adoptees may not want to participate in interactions, activities, and/or programs that highlight their racial, ethnic, or adoptive differences in an effort to sustain their desired belonging with Whites. Past studies have found adoptees in general, regardless of race, have been reluctant to seek out and use post-adoption services for fear of being labeled "different" within their families and peer groups (Ryan and Nalavany 2003). These types of decisions are likely affected by their exposure to other people of color, and other adoptees specifically, two factors that remain primarily dependent upon their parents' choice of residential location, social circles, and networks.

However, as adoptees enter early adulthood and possibly attend college, they are likely to experience more diversity and opportunities for contact with other Asians. Such new life experiences may trigger a previously dormant or nonexistent cultural interest. These racial and ethnic identity negotiations can create "crises" that induce adoptees to question their salient identities and racial ideologies. Erikson (1968) identifies these crises as natural components to an individual's search for a sense of wholeness: "in order to feel wholeness, [people] must feel a progressive continuity…between that which he conceives himself to be and that which he perceives others to see in him and to expect of him" (91). These crises may be initiated by, for example, increased knowledge about the racial discrimination people of color face in the U.S. or by merely greater exposure to racially and ethnically diverse people.

Middle adulthood can be characterized by what Sheehy (2006: 29) identifies as "predictable crises of adulthood." During this time, individuals confront developmental life changes that are often pivotal in nature, such as increased social responsibilities and a realization of mortality. Addressing these physical, psychological, and social changes and their resultant needs (Parham 1989; Sheehy 2006) often requires a restructuring of one's life. People tend to focus on institutions such as family, work, church involvement, etc. due to their increased responsibilities and commitments. Adoptees may want to explore their birth culture as a family experience and celebration with their own life partners and children. Furthermore, they may be required to respond to negative events during these stages, for example, helping their children cope with racial discrimination at school and fielding cultural expectations from strangers. Such encounters are often accompanied by high levels of intensity because of a person's personal investment in the above institutions.

Yet, Korean adoptees may not have the skills required to negotiate these often unexpected and emotionally stressful encounters, especially if they have not engaged in earlier identity exploration. Concern over such circumstances may stimulate an empowering desire to learn about their respective racial and ethnic groups' histories in the U.S. and/or about their birth countries and culture, even if only for their children. Additionally, as people accept life's inevitable mortality, they self-reflect on their lives during late adulthood (Parham 1989). With advancing years, adoptees may be able to dedicate more free time to explore because they have fewer responsibilities as children transition out of the home and careers wind down. While racial and ethnic identities may

have had little salience during most of an adoptee's life, they may feel regret as they assess their lives during this later stage.

Post-Adoption Services from a Lifecourse Perspective

Until fairly recently, adoption agencies either terminated or increasingly decreased their contact and working relationships with adoptive parents and families after placements had been legally finalized (Cole and Donley 1990). Continued involvement by agencies and professionals was thought to interfere with the family's integration and a sense of belonging for adoptees (Watson 1992). Such assumptions arose from the normalization of biologically formed families as the ideal and prevailing "matching"[17] policies in adoption.

Though a few post-adoption services have existed since the 1940s for adoptees placed at older ages, they were neither readily available nor regularly used until the 1990s (Barth and Miller 2000). The use of post-adoption services was often mired down with a stigmatization of deviance and inadequacy. For instance, agencies once assumed that only adoptees with negative adoption experiences searched for their birthparents rather than a universal curiosity in a society that highly values biological ties (Watson 1992). The few services that existed prior to the shift in adoption in the 1970s to openly acknowledge family differences addressed families at risk of disruption.[18] These families were largely viewed as pathological with adoptees suffering from attachment disorders

[17] Adoption agencies placed children with families according to similar racial, ethnic, religious, socioeconomic status, etc. backgrounds.

[18] A disruption "occurs when the agency removes a child from an adoptive family and makes another plan, even though the intent at placement had been for the child to grow up in that adoptive family" (Watson 1992: 7).

and were referred to local mental health services (Watson 1992). Post-adoption services from this perspective were mainly concerned with preserving high-risk adoptive families.

One could argue that post-adoption services for transracial adoptees specifically emerged as a response to the vehement opposition to transracial placements raised by the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) in 1972. Integrationist reforms to the child welfare system that resulted from the Civil Rights Movement challenged the prevailing matching policies that inhibited transracial adoptions (Cole and Donley 1990). However, the NABSW argued that placing Black children with White families constituted an act of "cultural genocide" (Abdullah 1996):

> Black children belong physically and psychologically and culturally in black families where they can receive the total sense of themselves and develop a sound projection of their future. Only a black family can transmit the emotional and sensitive subtleties of perceptions and reactions essential for a black child's survival in a racist society. Human beings are products of their environment and develop their sense of values, attitudes, and self-concept within their own family structures. Black children in Whites homes are cut off from the healthy development of themselves as black people (quoting the NABSW, Hollingsworth 1998: 105).

In this sense, transracial adoptions were seen to divorce communities of color from their most precious assets, their children, and therefore constrain cultural and political community continuity (Baden 2002). Such a perspective problematized what constituted "successful" adoptions, including racial and ethnic identities as appropriate evaluative indicators along with self-esteem and other outcome assessments. Whether such concerns apply to Asian transracial adoptees adopted internationally has only recently been studied rigorously (Baden 2002; Dorow 2006; Shiao et al. 2004; Tessler et al. 1999; Tuan & Shiao 2011).

As a result of the issues raised by the NABSW, transracial pre- and post-adoption services have often attempted to educate adoptees about their ethnic cultures to fill this assumed void (Boylston 2001). This type of post-adoption services constitutes "agency-

initiated services" given that they are "offered to adoptive families [and adoptees] on a planned basis in response to developmental needs" (Watson 1992: 9). While most post-adoption services currently available target only transracial adoptee youth, i.e. culture camps and family picnics, an adoptee's interest in ethnic exploration and racial awareness is likely to fluctuate throughout the life cycle. As previously discussed, belonging to one's family and community are primary concerns during childhood and adolescence and may inhibit any desire to participate in racial and ethnic identity exploration. Post-adoption services that do not take into account these particular life stage challenges may not seem relevant or desirable. Additionally, Motherland tours, online chat rooms or groups, and limited record searches make up the bulk of post-adoption services currently available to adult adoptees. A limited focus on young adoptees and their parents may leave adult adoptees without direction or resources for racial, ethnic, or adoptive identity exploration.

What's to Come

In this chapter, I have shown that despite their White families and American cultural literacy, Korean adoptees are racialized as Asian Americans and confront the same exclusion as their non-adopted counterparts. Yet, their White cultural socialization and networks consistently limited their community belonging with other Asians. How adoptees negotiated their marginal position as *a part* of *yet apart* from White, Asian, and even Korean adoptee communities is the central focus of this study.

In Chapter II, I discuss the methodology and sample used in this study. The Midwest represents a unique environmental context for Korean transracial adoptee

identity development because of the unusually large concentration placed in the region, particularly in Minnesota. The study's representative sample attempts to control for selection bias often found in convenience samples. Every adoptee that fit the study's demographic criteria had an equal chance to participate. In-depth interviews allow adoptees the space to fully discuss the intricacies of their racial and ethnic identities. Additionally, as a Korean transracial adoptee myself, I illustrate how my insider status created on balance more benefits than drawbacks.

Chapter III explores adoptive family negotiations in creating full group membership with White family members, peers, and communities during childhood and adolescence. During this life stage, fitting in as an authentic group member is a primary concern, and most adoptees were smoothly integrated into their families with only a few minor interruptions regarding their difference. The vast majority of adoptees were consciously aware of being "different" and most desired specifically European features as a result of racial bias. Many developed an aversion to Asian imagery and people as a strategy for blending in with White peers. However, it was typically adoptees who were accepted as full family members, had experienced intermittent and minimal racial bias, and had sustained, informal social exposure to other Korean adoptees who were more comfortable with their racial and ethnic differences.

In Chapter IV, I concentrate on early adulthood and whether adoptees examined the significance of their racial and ethnic identities. During this life stage, adoptees began their adult lives as they left their parental homes. Opportunities for contact with other people of color, and Asians specifically, were often available for the first time independent of their parents' socialization strategies and influence. College and adoptee

groups or programs proved to be the most common institutional settings in which adoptees explored their ethnic and racial identities. Modest exploration, while generally enjoyable, often highlighted adoptees' difference from non-adopted Asians. In comparison, those with sustained social exposure to non-adopted Asian friendships and organizations generally had more salient racial identities. Korean adoptee organizations and informal friendships provided adoptees, when used, with a community in which their belonging was unquestioned, even if individual experiences varied.

Chapter V addresses racial and ethnic identity saliency and racial attitudes in mid- and later adulthood. Interestingly, many adoptees that had not explored their racial and ethnic identities in early adulthood had done so as they entered mid-adulthood. However, for most, their ethnic and racial identities continued to play a symbolic and modest role at best in structuring their lives. Many adoptees who had explored substantially in early adulthood had diminished their participation during mid-adulthood. While adoptees predominantly resided in White neighborhoods, there was significant variation according to residential region. In general, those who moved to the West coast tended to live in more racially diverse areas, included more Asians in their social circles, and incorporated more racial and ethnic specific behaviors and activities in their daily lives in comparison to their Midwest counterparts. As previously, Korean adoptee involvement provided safe spaces to explore the interconnections of their racial, ethnic, and adoptive differences and to give back to their community of fellow adoptees.

Finally, Chapter VI provides concluding remarks about the significance of Korean adoptee racial identities and ideologies on the contemporary racial hierarchy. For the vast majority of adoptees, ethnic identities were more palatable and easily celebrated than

their racial difference from Whites. Often adoptees conflated race and ethnicity and felt remarkably more comfortable discussing ethnic issues versus racial ones; some even refused to reference race when directly asked. Thus, rather than ambassadors of multiculturalism and greater racial harmony, the adoptees in this study often exhibited colorblind and even anti-Black racial attitudes from a White perspective. They clearly identified a trichotomous racial hierarchy whereby they valued and continually negotiated their identity as "honorary Whites." In this sense, Korean adoptees continued to occupy their tenuous group belonging that has existed throughout their lives, that they remain *a part yet apart*. I conclude with a discussion of recommendations for post-adoption services that address the specific life stage needs adoptees experienced.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

> [The interview] *had more of a special meaning because… you tell me that you also are Korean and adopted*… [emphasis added]
>
> -- Sandy Peabody, a forty-eight year old mother and homemaker

When I first began designing this project I knew that survey data would not sufficiently answer the questions I wanted to ask, namely how Korean transracial adoptees construct and understand their racial and ethnic identities and how these vary over the life course[19]. Therefore, I used semi-structured open-ended interviews because they provided the necessary space for respondents to discuss in-depth *how* they understood their different identities and *what* influenced these developmental processes. The conversational style I employed for interviews minimized, though not completely eliminated, the unequal power relations between myself as the researcher and respondents as participants (Wolf 1996). Having a semi-structured conversation together rather than a formalized question and answer format balances the more traditional one-way flow of information. Within this dialogic format I situate myself as an active participant in the discussion "shar[ing] responsibility for finding the words and concepts in which ideas can be expressed and lives described" (Wolf 1996: 26).

[19] While surveys tend to allow for larger sample sizes than interview-based studies, in general a desirable goal, respondents must reduce their experiences to best fit the choices available. Whether the choices provided actually represent respondents' experiences cannot be addressed as respondents fill out their survey. Even when there is space for write-in comments the room provided in essence delineates the length and depth of any respondents' given elaboration. Therefore, full discussions explaining *how* and *why* respondents feel particular ways are constricted by the very nature of survey design. Responses that only reflect socially desirable answers are harder to detect because of this lack of elaboration.

I began by mailing recruitment letters inviting adoptees to participate in the study. To make the experience as comfortable as possible, I conducted most interviews in their homes or a comparable private location. While the letter did not declare my insider status, my physical appearance as Asian combined with my Italian last name prompted most adoptees to ask about my own history and background before beginning our conversations. Phone interviewees also questioned my interest in transracial adoption prior to discussing their lives. Respondents were free to ask me personal questions throughout our conversation. Although this strategy required redirecting the conversation back to my line of inquiry at times, I believe the overall support and appreciation I gained outweighed potential risks.

My "insider" status as a Korean transracial adoptee served to validate my research interest for respondents. Our discussions about my own adoption history and experiences functioned to build rapport with respondents. Our similar life circumstances provided a foundational level of trust that facilitated discussing potentially very emotional and personal experiences with a stranger. My interview with Sandy Peabody captures this element well.

> [The interview] had more of a special meaning because when you tell me that you also are Korean and adopted and that you speak [English well] which you do, it's like, oh, *I'm talking to somebody who, who really kind of deeply understands, who doesn't look at somebody else like you're clueless*. Why don't you speak your mother tongue, uh, the expected things that society thinks you should, just upon the visual, so. [emphasis added]

While a positivist critique might view these procedures as "tainting" the data, I would argue that the benefits gained from employing my "insider" status outweighed this particular risk. Furthermore, an unavoidable "interviewer effect" is inevitably involved with all interviewing.

Sharing my own life experiences when asked showed my commitment to respondents' role as active participants in shaping our dialogue and to respecting their comfort level during our interactions. My conversation with Justin Werden, a forty-two year old probation officer, exemplifies this relationship.

> **Justin**: Can I ask you a couple of other questions?
>
> **Interviewer**: Sure.
>
> **Justin**: Did you date other Asians, White people…?
>
> **Interviewer**: You know, I'd say by and large most of the people that I dated were White. I met, I started dating my husband when I was 19, so there wasn't…
>
> **Justin**: So there's a little bit of space in between the, the seventh grade and 19…
>
> **Interviewer**: When we were in fifth grade probably is when kids started going steady and stuff like that, and so most of the people were White up until around, I'd say eighth grade to my sophomore year in high school. I mean, I really kind of struggled more with fitting in. I was part of the popular crowd, but I never felt like I belonged. So kind of at that point, I had an experience in seventh grade that, for me, definitely at the time was very traumatic. And so.
>
> **Justin**: Can I ask what […?]?
>
> **Interviewer**: It was like I had a lot of friends and I broke up with a boyfriend and he had all the boys start calling me Chink and Gook. And like all my friends, my girlfriends, all stuck up for me and supported me, but it really affected me.
>
> **Justin**: Sure. [That event] let you know that you were different, you know, and it goes back to what you said when you're trying to blend in, and now all of a sudden you're called out on it. Yeah, I mean I could see that as being an eye opener.

Openly sharing my struggles of belonging provided common ground for Justin to divulge his own memories of feeling different and dating during adolescence. Justin may have experienced only occasional teasing, i.e. knowing kung-fu and being good at math, but the events were reminders that his racial visibility marked him as different regardless of his fully acculturated behaviors. While on balance the benefits outweighed the

drawbacks, I address possible concerns with being an insider interviewer later in the chapter.

While I originally intended to conduct all interviews in person, challenges in research locations geographically, lack of time, and financial limitations precluded such a design. Though phone interviews lack nonverbal cues evident in face to face interactions, digital recordings picked up verbal prompts such as pausing, stuttering, etc. Additionally, I developed rapport and trust with my respondents in the same manner as with in-person conversations, by assuring them they could ask me personal questions throughout and could add any aspects I might have missed at the conclusion of the interview. Because I used a semi-structured format and interview schedule that ensured that specific topics were addressed with each respondent (Berg 2007), the content of the two types of interviews were not qualitatively different.

The interview schedules used by Tuan (1998) in her study of Asian American's racialized ethnic options and Tuan and Shiao's (2011) study of Korean transracial adoptees provided the basis for my own questionnaire construction[20]. As a life history questionnaire, it followed a chronological order from early childhood into mid-adulthood. Interviews addressed five main themes: 1) family cultural and racial socialization; 2) racial and ethnic identities; 3) racial attitudes; 4) current lifestyle practices; and 5) involvement and interest in post-adoption services.

The first section of the interview explored *early family socialization*, the strategies adoptive parents used to address racial, ethnic, and adoptive difference and the social environment through adolescence. I purposely began interviews with more neutral and factually based questions to ease respondents into our conversation and build trust before

[20] See Appendix

probing into more sensitive topics. Specifically I asked whether their adoption was an open topic, if it was celebrated regularly, and if they talked about birth families and searching.

To examine racial and cultural socialization, I asked about the extent of exposure adoptees had to Asian or Korean culture, to other Asians and Korean adoptees specifically, and how attitudes formed regarding other Koreans. I paid particular attention to how social context, age cohort, and family structure shaped adoptees' opportunities for contact and attitudes regarding their racial and ethnic differences from their White families. This first section of questions addresses 1) the significance the family played in providing the social context of initial opportunities for Asian, Korean, and Korean adoptee contact, cultural exploration, and discussions of the social consequences of race; and 2) how such exposure affected adoptees' racial and ethnic identities and their willingness to explore.

The second section addressed *early social interactions outside the family in schools and communities* through adolescence. I examined how local demographics of the larger community, neighborhood, and inner social circles shaped adoptees' racial and ethnic identity development. Again, I explored the nature of Asian contact and ethnic exploration, whether such exposure occurred with other Korean adoptees or non-adopted Koreans or Asians. In particular, I examined how developmental pressures to fit in influenced adoptee negotiations of their ethnic and racial differences from White peers and strangers. The questions from this part of the interview explored the role local place, i.e. region, city, and neighborhood demographics, played in influencing childhood racial, ethnic, and adoptee identities.

The middle portion of the interview focuses on *postsecondary years* and explores adoptees' lives after high school. Most either attended a traditional four year college or established their independent adult lives and homes. I examined, again, how place and social environment, namely increased exposure to diverse people and ideas, structured adoptees' opportunities and openness to racial or ethnic exploration. Specifically, I asked adoptees about the racial and ethnic composition of their social networks, their interest in acquiring cultural knowledge, and whether developmental life stage pressures guided their behavior. The questions in this section explored whether exposure to new people and environments provided the necessary impetus for initial ethnic exploration or Asian contact and inclusion.

The fourth section, *current adult experiences and ethnic practices,* examined adoptees' ethnic exploration and contact with both Korean adoptees and non-adopted Asians. I asked whether adoptees practiced specific Korean traditions and the significance they attached to such behavior. For those who displayed cultural interest, I probed into the impetus behind their exploration. Dating histories and racial preferences for eligible life partners were used as a measure of perceived social distance and racial attitudes. Additionally, the cultural and racial socialization strategies adoptees enacted in their own families gauged the saliency of their racial and ethnic identities during this life stage. This portion of the interview addressed the literature on racial and ethnic group membership, boundary maintenance, and racial social distance.

Societal perceptions and current personal identities are examined in the final part of the questionnaire. I measured adoptees' group belonging and social distance from other Asians through their self-defined identities and the significance of those labels in

relation to alternatives. I explored how adoptees' interpretations on current race relations, transracial adoption in general, and on their location as Asians in the U.S. racial hierarchy. I concluded interviews with questions regarding whether adoptees felt commonalities with other Korean and transracial adoptees in general and gauged their interest in particular post-adoption services geared for mid- and later adulthood. These questions addressed the literature on racial hierarchy, racial attitudes, and social distance.

Study Sample

Over the course of 11 months from May 2009 to April 2010 I conducted 77 in-depth, semi-structured life history interviews with adult Korean transracial adoptees raised in the U.S. Midwest[21]. The representative sample consisted of 48 women and 29 men, with 51 interviews conducted in-person and 26 via the telephone. 28 of the in-person interviews occurred at the adoptee's home, 21 came to my hotel, and I met two respondents at their place of work. A minimum age requirement (25 years or older) helped to ensure that respondents had the opportunity to encounter and reflect upon many of the life experiences explored in the study. I mailed a total of 4700 recruitment letters to Asian transracial adoptees[22] with 263 responding to participate. Because I was operating on a fixed timeline, I accepted participants on a first come, first serve basis until I reached my planned sample size. The response rate was actually higher than expected due to the personal nature of the topic and the time required. Interviews lasted on average between 1.5 to 4 hours in length and were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim.

[21] I operationalized the Midwest as including the following states: IA, IL, IN, MI, MN, NE, OH, and WI.

[22] Recruitment letters were sent to all Asian adoptees who fit the sample requirements but only three Vietnamese adoptees responded. I excluded these cases from the analysis due to the constrained generalizability of such limited numbers.

With the exception of recent scholarship (Baden 2002; Dorow 2006; Meier 1999; Shiao et al. 2004, Tuan and Shiao 2011), studies have often relied on adoptive parents or young adoptees in childhood and adolescence as respondents (Feigelman 2000; Feigelman and Silverman 1983; Simon and Altstein 2002; Tessler et al. 1999). Such a design resulted in essentially portraying adoptees as "perpetual children, with views easily dismissed as 'angry,' 'ungrateful,' or 'bitter" (Quiroz 2007: 62). I add to the growing literature that privileges adult adoptee experiences for gauging their own racial and ethnic identity formation. Representing adoptees as adults highlights the various needs that occurred at different life developmental stages and can inform future post-adoption services geared at adoptees.

I mailed recruitment letters to all Korean adoptees placed in the Midwest by Holt International Children's Services before 1984. While Chinese adoptees have ranked as the primary sending country in international adoption since 1995 in the U.S., Korea had dominated international adoption for decades and currently ranks third amongst sending nations (Tuan and Shiao 2011). Harry and Bertha Holt revolutionized adoption practices in 1955 when they first adopted eight children orphaned by the Korean War. Following these placements, the Holts founded the Holt International Children's Services adoption agency and economic and military relations between the two countries facilitated such placements. Given that Korean transracial placements have occurred since 1955, the population in the U.S. currently ranges from infants to those in their 50s and comprise the largest portion of adult international and transracial adoptees in the U.S. The study sample reflects this demographic reality in international adoption.

I limited the scope of the study to the Midwest for several reasons. Past research has explored racial and ethnic identity formation in Korean transracial adoptees placed on the West Coast (Shiao et al. 2004; Tuan and Shiao 2011). To contribute to the existing literature on Korean transracial adoptee identity development, I examined whether experiences and interpretations varied by place (Meier 1999) and by geographic region specifically. As previously discussed, Minnesota has an unusually large Korean adoptee population (Larsen 2007; Meier 1999); twenty-seven adoptees in this study were, in fact, raised in Minnesota. Because of their larger numerical presence, adoptees placed in Minnesota, in particular, often lived in communities with other Korean adoptees and had greater access to post-adoption services throughout their life cycle. With such a context, the Midwest was more conducive than other geographic regions for developing and sustaining a salient *Korean adoptee* identity. Thus, a Midwestern sample best explored how a normalization of Korean transracial adoption and prevalent resource availability influenced the shape of adoptees' intertwined racial, ethnic, and adoptee identity development.

Additionally, the West coast in general has a much larger Asian/Asian American population when compared with the Midwest. Institutional settings on the West coast, such as college campuses and office buildings, have more Asians present with whom adoptees interact. This unequal distribution exists even given the emerging Asian immigrant, and specifically refugee, settlement patterns in the Midwest. In this sense, one can argue that the Midwest is actually more representative of the nation as a whole given these demographic distributions.

I chose Holt International Children's Services as my research population because of its prominent position as the oldest and largest international adoption agency. My relationship with Holt International formally began in 2005 when I conducted a small study on their pre- and post-adoption services. This provided my initial entre into the organization and fostered key relationships with several program directors. I proceeded to analyze preexisting survey data and reported the findings to their department directors. In addition to providing these services, I believe my status as a Korean adoptee assisted me in gaining access with Holt International for future projects.

Based on this relationship, Holt International granted me limited access to their placement records for participant recruitment. According to their stipulations, Holt staff mailed recruitment letters to all Asian adoptees placed with Midwestern families before 1984. This procedure functioned to maintain clientele confidentiality and, thus, protect the privacy of adoptees and their families. Additionally, the introduction page from Holt International that accompanied the recruitment letter granted yet another type of legitimacy. The actual invitation to participate was sent to the last known address of the adoptive parents. I requested that parents forward the recruitment letter to their children which included a study description that informed adoptees of the average time required. Adoptees were then requested to contact me regarding whether they wanted to participate.

The interview style was chosen to create the most conducive environment for sharing personal experiences with a stranger. The conversational method used allowed respondents to discuss topics as they felt comfortable. Often this involved not strictly following the order of my interview schedule, but I ensured every topic was addressed by

taking notes. At times, I redirected interviews to my original questions if we veered off topic for a prolonged period. To conclude, I provided space for adoptees to incorporate pertinent information they felt I missed. Post-interview notes concerning the rapport and flow of the conversation enhanced my interviewing skills to enrich future discussions.

I used an iterative coding process whereby I formulated analytic themes both deductively from relevant theories and inductively according to topics that emerged during the conversations. To maintain code consistency throughout, I repeatedly read and coded each interview multiple times. By using the data analysis software NVIVO, I highlighted and reassigned or refined particular passages with given themes. I also included a description for each code to compile an "audit trail" (Westphal 2000: 9) or a record tracking the development and progression of my thoughts. Themes were not operationalized as mutually exclusive.

Ethical Considerations in the Field

I first studied Korean transracial adoption as an undergraduate in 2001 and the interest continued into graduate school. I am personally and emotionally connected to this topic due to my insider status as a Korean adoptee raised in the U.S. Midwest. Although I was not placed through Holt International, I was born in Pusan, Korea and placed with a White family in suburban Wisconsin in 1978. I was in my early thirties during the fieldwork phase of the project, the same age cohort as most of the respondents. As all who conduct insider research must contend, I had to be self-reflexive about my dual roles as an academic researcher and a female Asian transracial adoptee placed in the late 1970s.

This dual identity presented unanticipated dilemmas. Unlike outsiders, insider researchers are often held more accountable by their research communities (Zavella 1996). In-group members participating in studies may expect more favorable analyses based on the researcher's insider status or presumed sameness. On the other hand, my visible markers as a middle class, Asian American academic signaled an outsider status to my respondents in unexpected ways (Zavella 1996). For example, I used the term Asian American in constructing some of my questions. However, not all participants identified with that term and often had very different conceptualizations of Asian American group membership than myself. This term and the very nature of my questions regarding in-group racial contact and ethnic exploration sometimes created distance with more politically conservative respondents. These questions and terms signaled me as someone who overtly marked race and imbued it with significance. Their reactions to this difference, at times, shaped the tone and content of their answers.

Although our similar status as adult Korean adoptees provided a platform to build rapport, a primary concern was to remain self-reflexive and not impose my own interpretations onto adoptee experiences. I had struggled in childhood and as an adolescent with my own racial and ethnic identity development; this personal battle was in fact what initially spurred my focus on post-adoption services. Likewise, though sharing my own experiences often led to enhanced trust, this procedure may have contaminated the data by influencing how adoptees interpreted their past and present experiences upon reflection. There were times when this strategy in effect shut my respondents down regarding the given topic. However, I still felt overall that the potential benefits outweighed possible risks.

While it included an applied component, this project was not designed as participatory action research. I alone maintained analytic control in the final analysis. This asymmetrical power relationship between myself as the researcher and respondents was heightened when our perspectives differed. Rather than confront our differing perspectives, I consciously used the strategies of smiling, nodding, and probing with follow up questions to encourage adoptees to continue talking. I used these techniques as a means to honor adoptees' experiences and voices, a top priority epistemologically, methodologically, and ethically.

Study Limitations

I acknowledge that this study, like all research, has certain limitations. I had initially designed a comparative study of Asian, Latino, and Black transracial adoptees' racial and ethnic identity development. A more ethnically diverse group of Asian adoptees was desired to compare experiences *between* different Asian ethnic groups, but given the historical predominance of Korean adoptees in international adoption and the age restrictions of the study, such a sample was not possible at the time.

Additionally, Holt International only conducted international adoptions. African international adoption is still a relatively young population, as the practice did not gain popularity until the 2000's. Since Holt does not domestically place African American children, their records could not have provided an age appropriate population from which to draw a random sample. Rather, I would have had to contact state adoption agencies or relied on a convenience sample based in adoptee or adoptive family networks. Such a selection bias for Black adoptees limits any definitive claims or comparisons that can be

made regarding that group. Thus, I opted to postpone group comparisons with Black adoptees for a future study.

In terms of the populations Holt has placed, only 40 Latino adoptees met the sample restrictions compared to 4700 Asian adoptees. While I forged ahead with my initial plan to recruit Latinos for a comparative study, none replied. This lack of participation was likely the result of numerous factors, namely the smaller number included in recruitment or that such issues were not salient for these particular adoptees. For lighter skin Latinos, their racial visibility as people of color may not have been as physically evident as was for Korean adoptees. Without the visible demarcator of eye shape, some Latino adoptees may have bypassed the feelings of difference exhibited by Asian adoptees. Latino adoptees with darker complexions, in contrast, would probably have faced similar circumstances as Korean adoptees but with different imagery, stereotypes, and ethnic expectations.

I initially became interested in comparative studies of transracial adoptees across racial groups as a resource to structure pre- and post-adoption services for adoptees and their families. It was my belief that transracial adoptees, regardless of their actual racial categorization, shared more commonalities across their experiences than not. I believed that their status as people of color in predominantly White families and neighborhoods would trump individual group differences. Unfortunately, despite initial ambitions, I was unable to examine such issues in this study and must reserve those inquiries for future research.

Finally, as with all retrospective data, questions regarding the validity and reliability of life history narratives exist. Accounts of occurrences can be corrupted by the

passage of time and memory loss or by respondents' wish to provide socially desirable answers congruent with current mainstream socio-political beliefs. Events and interpretations of those experiences are often understood differently in adulthood than in the present moment. However, this retrospective viewpoint can also provide invaluable insight generally not accessible to adoptees in the given moment, especially during life stages characterized by high levels of emotional intensity such as adolescence. The removal from past events, actions, and feelings may also provide more comfort for adoptees to disclose uncomfortable or potentially embarrassing information.

Feminist Epistemology

From the beginning I have structured this project on a foundation of feminist epistemology and methodology. In making such a claim I followed a tradition of "situated knowledges" (Haraway 1988) whereby all scientific knowledge inherently "reflect[s] the various categories of gender, class, race, and nationality of the researcher" (Wolf 1996: 14). Because of this, self-disclosure and reflexivity by the researcher is essential for evaluating any work. Rather than trying to avoid my own subjectivity, I embraced my status as a Korean adoptee as an asset. In addition to building rapport, my experiences were valuable for constructing questions about, for example, family integration strategies.

In these ways, my "insider" position allowed not for a more legitimate perspective but for one that includes insights gained through experience that may be inaccessible to "outsiders" (Wolf 1996). To be clear, I do not advocate a privileging of insider produced knowledge as I build from the invaluable theorizing and insights into Asian adoptee

experiences and identities by non-adoptee scholars (Lee 2003; Tessler et al. 1999; Shiao et al. 2004; Tuan and Shiao 2011). Neither perspective is more authentic or legitimate but rather provide different vantage points from which to view the transracial adoption phenomenon. In such a paradigm, multiple viewpoints "where partiality and not universality is the basis for knowledge claims" (Wolf 1996: 14) encourages a scope beyond essentialist binary oppositions between insider/outsider knowledge production.

I center Korean transracial adoptees' lived experiences or subjectivity as a site for my inquiry and an invaluable source of knowledge (DeVault 1999). I privileged adoptees' perspectives rather than adoptive parents' for this study because of my belief in lived experience as an authoritative voice for understanding the meaning racial and ethnic identities have in adoptee lives. Adoptive parents may not have been privy to all the feelings and experiences adoptees encountered throughout the life cycle. Yet, "incompleteness" also characterizes adoptee voices for they are situated within their own given positions as well. For example, while I asked adoptees whether they believe their parents would have adopted a Black child, I acknowledge their answers are only a speculation. Thus, while multiple perspectives are required to fully understand the transracial adoption phenomenon as a whole, the benefits from hearing adoptee voices better fit this study focus.

As Asians raised and living within White families and communities, adoptees occupy unique social locations that disrupt the dominant mainstream narratives about familial, racial, and ethnic group membership and belonging in the United States. Korean transracial adoptees often learn at some point that they are simultaneously *a part yet still set apart* of both White and Asian communities in ways that often induce contradictory

socialization patterns and identities. These “outsider-within positions” of marginality (Collins 2000: 12) allow for a unique lens into the processes that place Korean transracial adoptees as “honorary Whites” and shape the negotiations necessary to maintain this often tenuous position.

While uncovering common challenges faced by Korean adoptees, I tried to remain sensitive to not universalize experiences and, in the process, silence some voices (Collins 2000; Smith 1987). To achieve this, I have identified the main trends while still highlighting exceptions when they occurred. Adoptees’ reactions to these “recurring patterns of differential treatment” (Collins 2000: 26) are what “characterize [U.S. Korean transracial adoptees’] group knowledge or standpoint[s]” (Collins 2000: 25). These standpoints are based “in part by [transracial adoptees’] exclusion from the making of cultural and intellectual discourse and the strategies of resorting to our experience as the ground of a new knowledge, a new culture” (Smith 1987: 107).

As previously stated, my focus on post-adoption services has applied components that can hopefully help structure new and available services based on this grounded knowledge. While I realize that reciprocity does not eliminate unequal power relations inherent in research, it has been proposed as one means of mediating this chasm (Wolf 1996). Many adoptees I interviewed expressed a desire to give back to the larger adoptee community and to help younger adoptees specifically through telling their stories. Kristin Dillingham, a thirty-eight year old lawyer, illustrated this desire while reflecting on her motivations for participating in the interview.

> I'm like, you know, if it can help other people with understanding what international adoptees have gone through, then that would be good. So it was mainly wanting to help in that sense…*It's like, me telling you my story, it almost in a way validates who I am…It's like it's out there now, and it's like it's not like,*

> *yeah. So I'm like, I don't care if it's read by one other person or, and I didn't know you were a Korean adoptee also, so that makes it that much better*. [emphasis added]

For adoptees such as Kristin, the international adoption community was one with which they felt connected and had full-fledged membership due to common life circumstances. Kristin's concern with the state of the adoptee community at large as an in-group member illustrated her belonging and identification with adoptees. Participating in the interview was seen as one means to shape the future contours of racial, ethnic, and adoptee identity socialization within their own community.

CHAPTER III

GROWING UP A KOREAN ADOPTEE

> I think it's, the looks more so. But I think there was always the underlying feeling that I didn't fit in anywhere…It's like I don't feel like I belong anywhere…So I think when people made fun of how I looked or whatever, it just kind of reiterated the fact that I don't belong…I don't even have eyelids. That was the one thing too…I [always wished] I had eyelids, with the crease.
>
> -- Kristin Dillingham, a thirty-eight year old lawyer

In this chapter, I discuss the different communities adoptees felt *a part* of *yet apart* from during primary socialization in their parental homes and within childhood communities. I examine if, and to what extent, adoptees explored their racial, ethnic, and adoptive identities[23] during this life stage and the significance of such exposure for their sense of group belonging.[24] I argue that "place" plays an influential role in shaping strategies for family and community integration, providing opportunities for Asian or Korean exposure, and structuring adoptees' racial and ethnic attitudes.

My findings on family socialization and childhood experiences most closely mirror those found in Tuan and Shiao (2011). This is due to the similar foci, sample family structure, childhood racial and ethnic environments, and the life stage pressures found in the two studies. Confirmation of their findings supports my central argument of adoptees' marginal belonging as *a part* of *yet apart* from White, Asian, and even, at

[23] I conceive identity as the negotiation between external social impositions and actors' individual agency. As such, I employ Erickson's (1968) conceptualization of human growth and identity development as a process involving "conflicts, inner and outer, which the vital personality weathers, re-emerging from each crisis with an increased sense of inner unity…and an increase in the capacity 'to do well' according to his own standards and to the standards of those who are significant to him" (92).

[24] A sense of belonging is defined as "the extent to which an ethnic person attributes importance to an dis emotionally attached to his or her ethnic group" (Sodowsky et al. 1995: 137).

times, Korean adoptee communities. Regardless of regional variation, processes of Asian racialization and group boundary maintenance operate in ways that similarly shape adoptees' experiences as people of color in White communities. However, adoptees in this study varied from Tuan and Shiao (2011) along two significant dimensions in childhood and adolescence: 1) their parents were significantly more likely to at least modestly acknowledge their ethnic "difference" (72), and 2) they had experienced substantial, intensive exposure to Korean adoptees and Korean adoptee culture (52).

The unique context of, at times, being the only person of color in their White families and communities often heightened developmental pressures for adoptees to blend in, especially with peers. Kristin Dillingham in the opening quote had intensely experienced a sense of existing in-between groups, of belonging completely with neither Whites nor Asians. Racial and ethnic differences were virtually ignored and her "honorary Whiteness" was unchallenged in her family. Rather, it was consistent racial bullying in her suburban community that highlighted her exclusion from Whiteness and dampened her overall sense of belonging. An aversion to Asians and zero family support left Kristin alone to process, and subsequently, internalize the racism she faced.

The study sample consists of adoptees raised in the U.S. Midwest, and as discussed previously, Minnesota represents a unique case due to its historical tradition and unusually large numbers of international Korean placements in the state (Larsen 2007; Meier 1999). Such a regional context, especially with younger cohorts, creates an environment where Asian adoptive families are more normalized and understood (Meier 1999; Tuan and Shiao 2011). With greater numbers, the Midwest also provides more opportunities for exposure to fellow adoptees and post-adoption services. This is

particularly significant given 1) the smaller non-adopted Asian populations in the region and 2) adoptive parent's propensity to interact with other adoptive families rather than non-adopted Asians (Dorow 2006; Tessler et al 1999; Tuan and Shiao 2011).

I use childhood to refer to the age at adoption up through twelve years of age. Adolescence follows childhood and ends at the age of eighteen when young adults begin to assert their own independence; thus, high school experiences are included in this life stage. During childhood, parents must integrate adoptees as family members in spite of their racial, ethnic, and biological differences. Adoptees are predominantly dependent on their parents' cultural socialization[25] for exposure to and comfort with racial and ethnic diversity. Yet, adolescence marks the developmental stage when adoptees first develop and assert identities independent of their families. It is also during this time that adoptees first interact independently with "external socializing agents" (Rockquemore et al. 2006: 204) outside of the family such as peers and teachers. Peer acceptance as "authentic" group members, in particular, preoccupies adoptees' focus during this life stage (Phinney 1993). How adoptees' and their families negotiated perceptions of *sameness*, *difference*, and group membership are the foci of this chapter.

Family Socialization Patterns: Addressing "Difference"

H. David Kirk's revolutionary social role adjustment theory of adoption (1984) provides the foundation for understanding parental strategies that address the racial, ethnic, and biological differences inherent in transracial adoption. Although Kirk did not

[25] Cultural socialization for people of color in the U.S. includes "the transmission of cultural values, beliefs, customs, and behaviors from parents, family, friends, and community to children that foster racial/ethnic identity development, equip children with coping strategies to deal with racism and discrimination, and encourage prosocial behavior and appropriate participation in society" (Lee 2003: 720-1).

specifically attend to transracial adoption in his seminal work, I follow in the tradition of contemporary adoption scholars who have employed this logical extension (Dorow 2006; Lee 2003; Tessler et al. 1999; Tuan and Shiao 2011). According to Kirk (1984), adoptive parents address family differences through 1) *rejection* strategies that engage in "a kind of withdrawal from, perhaps a denial" (Kirk 1984: 58) of the biological, racial, and ethnic differences; or 2) *acknowledgement* strategies which openly normalize and celebrate these unique family circumstances. The latter strategies involve the challenging and seemingly contradictory aims of differentiation and integration (Kirk 1984). Yet, it is acknowledgement efforts, in particular, that can create the optimal outcome of a *shared fate* whereby "sentiments of [family] belongingness are strengthened when members are engaged in mutual aid arising from mutual needs" (Kirk 1984: 157).

Brian Hansel, a twenty-nine year old actor, never questioned his acceptance as a full family member regardless of his adoptee status. Challenges to the legitimacy of Brian's family actually strengthened bonds between members.

> It was just when other people would approach us in the mall, "Who is that? That can't possibly be your child." But then in those points, *we banded together because of our mutual interest in the relationship*, and I think my parents [were] just as taken aback as we were. [emphasis added]

With a Korean adoptee brother, adoption was normalized in Brian's family. Their family fate was intertwined as a multiracial adoptive one where "mutual aid [arose] from mutual needs" (Kirk 184: 157) to protect and defend their family form.

Adoptees' visible racial difference from their White families generally prevented an absolute denial of their adoption; three families, however, had completely ignored the topic. As Linda Taylor, a forty-four year old mother and insurance employee, put it, "I guess, you know, for me, my family couldn't really hide the fact that I did not look like

them." Visible differences created additional stressors, or "environmental events that produce undesirable consequences for [adoptees]" (Brodzinsky 1987: 5), that made a seamless integration into the family more challenging. How adoptive families negotiated or coped[26] with the various dimensions of differences provided the environment within which adoptees first began to develop their familial, racial, and ethnic identities.

What's to Come

The structure of the present chapter addresses the multiple dimensions of difference adoptees negotiated within both their White families and communities during childhood and adolescence. I begin with discussing adoptees' adoptive, ethnic, and racial differences from their White families. While family approaches to adoptive difference were not the main focus of this study, a brief overview is important to set the stage for adoptees' acceptance of and willingness to explore their ethnic and racial identities.

I follow with separate discussions regarding whether adoptive families acknowledged adoptees' Korean heritage and Asian visibility and how the strategies used influenced adoptees' sense of group belonging. Race and ethnicity are examined independently due to their differing conceptualizations in mainstream society. Whereas ethnicity is often celebrated and seen as inclusive, race is typically perceived as divisive (Bonilla-Silva 2003). I include a discussion of adoptees' exposure to other Korean adoptees as a specific type of racial and ethnic identity exploration which produced different responses than non-adopted Asian or Korean contact.

[26] Coping refers to "constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person" (Brodzinsky 1987: 6).

Lastly, I address how adoptees constructed their sense of in-group belonging with community members outside of the family context. Their experiences with their White peers and their responses when exposed to other Asians influenced the racial groups with whom adoptees identified and their willingness to explore their racial and ethnic identities.

Adoptive Difference in the Family

Forty-six adoptees in the study were accepted as full-fledged or "real" family members. Family structure was a primary variable which affected their level of family integration. The nineteen whose siblings were all fellow adoptees, usually Korean, were the most likely to have felt accepted as full family members. The sixteen who were the only adoptee in their family with their parents' biological children were the least likely to have experienced unconditional acceptance. While many had a curiosity about their birth families, these adoptees viewed the ones who had raised and cared for them as their *real* families. They largely had not experienced crises or negative feelings regarding their relinquishment, and their adoptive status was not an obstacle to full family integration. In contrast, the thirty-one adoptees who experienced a constrained or limited acceptance had largely received differential treatment or were isolated, for example, during physical comparisons between biologically related family members. Predictably, limited acceptance produced more struggles with issues of abandonment.

Acknowledgement of adoptive difference generally produced what Kirk (1984) described as a "shared fate" that normalized and celebrated adoption. However, twenty-eight adoptees with acknowledger parents felt isolated or excluded from their nuclear

(19) and extended families (9). This finding can be partially explained by what Brodzinsky (1987, 1990) identified as an *insistence of difference* strategy, whereby parents recognized adoptive differences to an extent that it challenged and negated full-fledged family membership. In particular, references to "adopted children" or expectations of gratefulness isolated and positioned adoptees as "second-class" family members.

Interestingly, eight parents ignored adoptive differences even as they acknowledged adoptees' ethnic differences. While seemingly contradictory, exposure to Korean culture is often interpreted as celebratory and fun whereas adoption and relinquishment are difficult issues to engage. This is especially true during childhood and adolescence when adoptees are seen to be developmentally immature.

Ethnic Difference in the Family

Seventy-four sets of parents acknowledged, at least nominally, adoptees' ethnic or racial differences. In adoptees' conceptualizations, ethnicity and race were intertwined and often perceived as synonymous with one another. Recognition predominantly consisted of consuming token aspects of Korean culture and had not significantly altered the general cultural assimilation approach used by parents. The main exception was exposure to fellow Korean adoptees and the larger adoption community in general. Adoptees generally appreciated their parents' efforts to honor their Korean heritage, though levels of attachment varied from a deep emotional connection to one of relative neutrality with exposure accepted as a normalized activity lacking much significance. A few, however, rejected any association to their Korean heritage.

Similar to Brodzinsky's (1987, 1990) findings, most parents varied their integration strategies depending on the stage of adoptees' lives. The thirty-nine parents used a child choice strategy (Tessler et al. 1999) with initial exposure to Korean cultural opportunities "to instill ethnic awareness, knowledge, pride, values, and behaviors, as well as promote a positive ethnic identity" (Lee 2003: 722). However, as adoptees matured, parents "[became] more ambivalent…and adjust[ed] their socialization efforts according to their children's interests and wishes" (Lee 2003: 723). If they showed no interest or resisted, their parents retreated from the subject. Adoptees, thus, effectively determined their degree of socialization during the tumultuous stage of childhood and adolescence.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Forty-six adoptive families in the study had token Korean, or at times Asian, artifacts in the home, typically art, dolls, or clothing adoptees wore when they first arrived from Korea. Twenty-five adoptees felt emotionally attached to these objects as connections to their Korean heritage or representations of their physical likeness. Adoptees such Erin Thornes, a thirty-seven year old part-time educator, had appreciated her Korean and Asian dolls and viewed them as "exotic" and beautiful. As a child, she had gravitated towards her Asian Barbie due to these positive associations and the physical likeness between herself and the dolls.

While fifteen accepted open displays of Koreanness in the house, such as artifacts or books, with unemotional neutrality, six adoptees vehemently disliked them because they served as reminders of difference. Junjae Ogden, a forty-one year old university employee, was preoccupied with visually blending in during childhood and adolescence.

So when her mom displayed her Korean dolls, Junjae complained until she removed them. The dolls' racial and ethnic visibility threatened her sense of "honorary Whiteness" that tied her to her White family.

> I didn't want to see them a lot. My mom would have them out and then I'd be like, "Why are they out?" "Oh, because they're nice." And, so, they weren't out a lot…I just wanted to fit in so I didn't want to see other things. *It was ok for me to see traditional Swedish or Norwegian [things] because that was what my whole family was…but then when I saw Korean dolls I'm like, it just, it looked out of place. It just looked strange.* [emphasis added]

Rather than embracing a celebration of her Korean ethnicity as inclusive, Junjae read it as divisive and further heightened her feelings of difference since Whites, rather than Koreans or Asians, were her self-identified group. Distancing herself from visible displays of Koreanness and emphasizing her Scandinavian cultural familiarity were strategies for blending in as a full family member.

Twenty-two adoptees had names, predominantly middle ones, derived from their Korean names. Twelve were proud of their names and willingly shared them with peers. Kathleen Carter, a thirty-four year old sales representative, had always felt ethnic pride concerning her Korean adoptee identity. Experiencing only minor concerns about blending in racially and culturally, she loved to share her Korean name with others.

> I was always the one who wanted to tell everybody that I was adopted…I'd just tell them "I was adopted, here's my story, and this was my Korean name." I was very proud of it.

In Kathleen's experience, her Korean name was interpreted through the lens of being a Korean adoptee and the two identities were intertwined. The infusion of her Korean name with her European one maintained a connection to her Korean heritage that she valued. Her adoptive and Korean statuses were not only unthreatening to her familial belonging but coexisted together to strengthen her family bonds.

In contrast to Kathleen's experience, ten adoptees in the study disliked their Korean names. Their ethnic and racial difference, manifested in their names, highlighted their Asianness in contrast to White families and peers. In particular, all three adoptees who had Korean first rather than middle names had intensely struggled and were targeted for racial teasing throughout childhood and adolescence. And though Korean names were points of contention with parents, it was with peers that these highlighted differences challenged full group acceptance. Korean names were perceived as "weird," "ugly," and "foreign," in a word, different. These names were sources of embarrassment and even shame; therefore, adoptees often resented them and avoided telling their peers when possible.

Twenty-two sets of parents consciously exposed adoptees to non-adopted Koreans or Asians either in public spaces (15) or through more personal relationships (7). However, only seven appreciated such efforts at the time while five felt neutral. Public exposure occurred at Chinese restaurants,[27] Asian grocery stores, Chinatowns, or cultural festivals whereas personal interactions were often with first-generation Asian immigrants through their parents' social networks.

"Cultural consultants" (Tuan and Shiao 2011), or resources that taught adoptees about Asian culture and experiences, were usually from within parents' preexisting social networks. For Richard Letandre, non-adopted Koreans provided a link to his ethnic heritage and past that his parents were unable to accomplish alone.

> My mother was always open about that. And in fact she even really encouraged,…was really good about making sure that she had that stuff available

[27] Chinese culture was often used by parents as an equally valid substitute for Korean exposure. Such strategies were usually employed out of convenience; the U.S., and the Midwest specifically, had smaller Korean populations with a less recognizable and readily available culture, especially given the time period in which adoptees came of age.

> and invited people…Korean students…over and gave them the kitchen to cook whatever they wanted to… I thought it was kind of cool…And so as a young kid I really, it really was kind of an exciting time whenever students were around because it meant that I might have a chance to eat stuff that I would never get otherwise.

As an adoptee placed at nine years of age, Richard retained memories of Korea, the sounds, smells, and tastes. Rather than an immediate abandonment of his past life, Richard's mother had used the available resources for transitioning him into his new White family and community. Her concerted effort to maintain a connection to his past through others outside of her social circles signaled that Korean culture was valued, despite his family not being in-group members themselves.

Ten of the twenty-two adoptees who had non-adopted Asian contact distinctly defined such interactions negatively. Interestingly, whereas adoptees typically enjoyed interactions with "cultural consultants," nine felt "uncomfortable" when in public spaces. Other Asians' racial visibility heightened their own racial difference when under the gaze of Whites outside their family confines. According to Goffman (1963: 51), management of a stigmatized identity "pertains mainly to public life, to contact between strangers or mere acquaintances" where stereotypes are more likely to guide people's behavior and their expectations of others. Additionally, "cultural consultants" were family friends rather than strangers and had previous knowledge about their family status. Thus, they were unlikely to question adoptive families' legitimacy, adoptees' White cultural socialization, and interactions typically occurred within the privacy of family homes.

REJECTION

As previously shown, difference was acknowledged primarily through token or abstracted efforts void of sustained involvement with co-ethnics or Asians in general.

These parents had technically acknowledged ethnic differences but only superficially and essentially culturally assimilated their children. While a handful of adoptees had wanted a more substantial incorporation of their Korean heritage into parental socialization strategies, only two questioned their family belonging as a result of this ethnic denial.

Forty-three adoptees appreciated their Westernized names that had zero reference to their Korean names. Especially for adoptees who were given family names, a complete break with their Korean past was interpreted as full integration. Joseph Braun, a twenty-five year old teacher, knew his parents had wanted to name their first son Joseph. Thus, their use of that name for him, an adoptee, illustrated that his authentic family belonging was unconditional, that he was their "real" son regardless of biological differences.

The other common rejection strategy involved teaching adoptees ethnic traditions from adoptive parents' backgrounds with little to no mention of Korean culture (7). Nicole Kiehl experienced a smooth transition into her White Dutch-American family based, in part, on their inclusion of her in family traditions that spanned generations.

> Like my biological heritage doesn't mean as much to be as my, my family heritage. And so like I, I know a lot about being Dutch (chuckles), um, because that's what my family is. Um, I know a little Dutch song from childhood and stuff like that, but I don't know a little Korean song, um, and that doesn't really bother me.

Through participating in ethnic practices, Nicole adopted her family's heritage as her own. Rather than in-group ethnic exposure, it was having cultural familiarity with Dutch culture as the rest of her family that formed a cohesive bond based on a shared knowledge rather than ancestry.

In contrast to past research (Lee 2008; Scroggs and Heitfield 2001; Tuan and Shiao 2011), fifty-one sets of parents in this study made concerted efforts to substantially expose their children to other Korean adoptees and adoptee-centered information. An additional nine used more modest and impersonal forms of exposure, such as Holt International's newsletter, that had not required interacting with other adoptees. As noted previously, the prevalence of Korean adoptees in the Midwest provided greater regional opportunities for contact through both informal social networks and formally organized groups or programs. Ramona Chan, a twenty-five year old intern, recalled the large presence of adoptees in her childhood community. "Especially around Minnesota cause I guess it's really high, like a huge population. Um, pretty much all the Asian kids that I know, in Minnesota, are adopted." Parents were often friendly with other adoptive families in the immediate area and consciously cultivated relationships between their children.

Korean adoptee groups and programs provided non-threatening opportunities to interact with families that physically mirrored their own. Instead of extending their social circles to include non-adopted Asians, White adoptive parents chose people and settings within which they were culturally familiar, namely with other Whites. Formal events and gatherings were typically organized by Holt International, the anchor for many families to the larger adoption community, and encouraged mutual support and cultural education. However, the culture created and celebrated was a *Korean adoptee culture* (Tuan and Shiao 2011) rather than Korean per se. Intertwined issues of adoption, race, and ethnicity were stressed while generally ignoring the experiences of Koreans within an American framework (Volkman 2003). Specifically, exploring Korean culture was understood as

any activity “when it was attended by other Korean adoptees and their families” (Tuan and Shiao 2011: 58). Adoptees responded to Korean adoptee contact through 1) appreciating the support system and identifying with other adoptees or 2) resisting and avoiding involvement when possible.

Twenty-nine adoptees were either neutral towards or disliked formalized Korean adoptee exposure[28] while only thirteen felt so about informal contact. Surprisingly, nine adoptees placed in the 1980s interpreted both informal and formal participation as unnecessary or unwelcome. Given the growing mainstream appreciation of multiculturalism both within mainstream society and the adoption community, I had expected this group to have the highest rates of appreciation. However, these adoptees expressed a lack of interest or need for such contact and perceived it as artificial.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Those who appreciated their involvement with other Korean adoptees identified with them as fellow Asians with similar life circumstances and experiences. Being in the presence of other families and Asians that mirrored her own experiences provided a space for Sierra Canning where her racial and cultural marginality from Whites and Asians respectively were not evidence of her marginality.

> I think in those kind of settings, it just, it's kind of comfortable because it's people you know and in similar things, and so you weren't sticking out…Everything's all about fitting in…*You always want to fit in and that's probably what we struggle with is, you know, you always kind of fit in where you don't stick out.* [emphasis added]

[28] While neutrality was not negative per se, I included these adoptees in the “apart” category because their assessment precluded a sense of belonging with other Korean adoptees. Their involvement with Korean adoptee culture was an accepted reality of their family but not necessarily appreciated.

Mutual needs for support were based on external perceptions of adoptees' seemingly contradictory racial visibility and cultural familiarity with White American culture. Adoptee sameness was emphasized along lines that in other contexts highlighted their difference. Forming emotional attachments based on interconnected fates created a shared identification and shifted adoptees' "in-group attraction" (Lee 2003b) towards Korean adoptees.

Similar to the findings of Tessler et al. (1999), thirty-nine adoptees in the study who experienced extensive Korean adoptee exposure terminated their involvement in adoptee networks and programs prior to or upon entering adolescence. Most commonly other adoptive families had moved, competing activities took precedence, or travel-time was too intensive to maintain. The twelve exceptions who sustained participation into adolescence typically had parents with formalized positions in adoptee organizations or those who had remained closely connected to Holt International, or another local adoption group, throughout the formative years. Interestingly, three adoptees placed in the 1960s participated in adoptee picnics extensively, ranging from between seven to ten years. Given the time period, fewer opportunities to interact with adoptees existed. As an example of more intensive involvement, Jason Schlicht, a twenty-six year old youth pastor, annually attended a summer Korean culture camp for ten years. His mother was president for a local organization and had maintained their family's connection into his teens. Participation, especially when sustained over years, extensively acknowledged the value behind connecting to a larger adoptee community.

Twenty-seven adoptees who maintained informal relationships with other adoptees and families had enjoyed and appreciated them. All thirteen adoptees who were

placed in the mid-1970s fell into this category. Interactions typically lasted for a couple years and occurred through family-centered activities, such as dinners, vacations, reunions, and adoptee play-dates and friendships. Play-dates were generally used during early childhood and were abandoned prior to adolescence in contrast to family socializing that usually continued into adolescence. Adoptees identified with one another and welcomed their interactions. Most were simply friends or "second families" they looked forward to seeing, but interactions were imbued with more significance because they occurred with other Korean adoptees. Matthew Harmon, a thirty-nine year old non-traditional student, eagerly anticipated seeing the Korean adoptee daughter of his parents' friends over their ten to fifteen years of regularly getting together. With zero adoptee or Asian contact in his community, these incidences were his only outlet for belonging based on similar racial, ethnic, and adoptive circumstances. The mere knowledge that he was not alone dampened his feelings of isolation.

Other avenues for involvement were through adoptee organizations and programs, such as Holt International's newsletter (15), picnics (24), heritage camps (13), and Motherland Tours (3). Seventeen adoptees, overall, positively assessed the connection, a significantly smaller number than with informal contact. This was largely due to the level of familiarity and comfort with friends in comparison to strangers. Families, in general, attended events or programs for a couple years and then terminated their involvement as adoptees aged.

Witnessing a large population of "honorary White" adopted Asians normalized their own circumstances; in these contexts, adoptees were neither visibly nor culturally different. They experimented with Korean food, dance, martial arts, and music with peers

who were visibly similar and also lacked familiarity with Korean culture as they had. Heritage camps, in particular, provided a safe and supportive environment to process the social consequences of being Asian. During childhood and early adolescence in particular, Jason Schlicht had developed an emotional connection to other Korean adoptees at camp. In this space, adoptees discussed identity issues with not only peers but older adoptee mentors with more life experiences and different perspectives. Since adoptees' home lives consisted largely of White social circles, camps were often the only settings for exposure to peers who were likely experiencing similar issues.

Sierra Canning had extensively explored her ethnic identity with non-adopted Koreans but had been criticized and pitied for her adoptee status. Korean adoptees, on the other hand, were Koreans she identified with because of their shared family circumstances.

> I mean, at that time in your, in your life as an adolescent you're searching so much for connections that any, anyone, anyhow…*This [camp] helps a little bit more just because you have at least that one thing in common.* You know that you're all, you're all Korean and you know, and I think at that age, um, especially the discussions about…like how to deal with like discrimination and things…that we do not look forward to…are helpful…*You at least know that it's not just you, like you're, you know, it's not just you out there that this is happening to.* [emphasis added]

Rather than cope with issues such as racial discrimination alone, Sierra saw the Korean adoptee community as an outlet for support. The mere knowledge that their experiences were labeled "normal" by other adoptees created a sense of group cohesion and emotional attachments that resulted from their interconnected fates. This was especially significant for Sierra during a developmental stage with heightened pressures to fit in and with no one in the family who could personally relate to racial exclusion. From these

interactions, combined with her exclusion from non-adopted Koreans, Sierra emerged with a more salient Korean adoptee identity.

INSISTENCE

Adoptees' aversion to Korean adoptee exposure was primarily due to their strategy of disassociating from their "Asianness" as a way to strengthen their bonds with White family and peers. They preferred White culture and values, and Korean adoptee exposure was interpreted as uncomfortable, staged, and forced for typically three reasons: 1) no interest or relevancy in their lives; 2) other adoptees were strangers; and 3) an aversion to Asians. Seeing Korean rather than his White rural Nebraskan culture highlighted was, as Joseph Braun succinctly put it, "weird." Adoptees in this subgroup failed to identify along common family circumstances or racial difference and resented expectations that they would. They usually acquiesced, at least temporarily, to their parents' requests to maintain Korean adoptee relationships and attend picnics or camps but eventually refused and terminated contact.

Adoptees who felt *apart* from Korean adoptee communities were uncomfortable with their parents' insistence of ethnic and racial difference. Having lived in a neighborhood with multiple Korean adoptees, Eva Martin, a thirty-three year old professional and mother, felt pressured and obligated to interact with them at the expense of White friends.

> I remember like when I was little my mom sent, um, me and my sister to Korean camp. And so then, *I think that bugged me more than anything cause it's like I felt like they were forcing me to be with people that looked like me and*…I didn't care what people looked like. I just wanted to play…I just didn't feel like I always had to be with Korean people. [emphasis added]

While Eva had Korean adoptee friends, she asserted an individual, personal identity rather than a group affiliation. Her colorblind perspective conflicted with the more ethnic, and even racial, awareness of her parents. Bonds that were based only on being Korean adoptees were too superficial to have lasting significance for adoptees such as Eva.

Racial Difference in the Family

While fifty-two parents avoided racial difference until confronted with adoptees' racial exclusion, this strategy typically did not weaken strong family bonds. Instances of racial bias typically occurred for a limited time and, therefore, had not required much attention. Only six adoptees had appreciated their parents' virtual silence concerning race. Any discussion would have placed them outside the boundaries of White group experiences. While adoptees generally needed more preparation, support, and were left to cope with their exclusion alone, they typically had not negatively appraised their parents. Since parents were a part of the White racial majority, few had expectations of assistance in negotiating racism.

Parents typically used a colorblind ideology[29] during racial socialization (Lee 2008; Tuan and Shiao 2011). They promoted a humanistic view of society and encouraged their children to think of themselves as "individuals" rather than as members

[29] Bonilla-Silva (2003: 28-9) provides a useful outline of the four frames that constitute a colorblind racial ideology: 1) *Abstract Liberalism*: uses the ideas of political ("equal opportunity") and economic liberalism (e.g., individualism and choice) to explain existing race relations. Preferential group treatment and even group affiliation is seen as the primary source of continuing racial issues in society; 2) *Naturalization*: explains racial phenomena such as racial segregation as a natural occurrence in which all groups participate. For example, all groups naturally or biologically want to be around each other rather than seeing these patterns as effects of structural factors; 3) *Cultural Racism*: argues that groups are to blame for their own location in society because their cultures are deficient and hold them back from succeeding in society rather than any structural impediments; and 4) *Minimization of Racism*: the stance that racial discrimination no longer plays a foundational role in structuring one's life chances. While some individual acts of racism may still occur, structural factors such as unequal employment and residential opportunities are no longer issues.

of a racialized group, i.e. Asian Americans. Acknowledgement of racial differences, or of race in general, was interpreted as perpetuating racism in society (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Tuan and Shiao 2011) rather than a necessary component in dismantling or disrupting oppressive systems. Whiteness was seen as "unmarked, [and having an] unnamed status" (Frankenberg 1993: 6). Therefore, when parents socialized Korean adoptees to be "individuals," they essentially "e-raced" (Tuan and Shiao 2011) their visible difference and remarked them as "honorary Whites." Parents actively ignored their children's racial categorization and expected others to as well. While this strategy left adoptees unprepared for racial encounters, it reaffirmed for many that their differences, racial or otherwise, were not defining characteristics.

This was in stark contrast to, as Rockquemore et al. (2006) found, the strategies Black parents used to prepare their children to negotiate a racially stratified society as members of a devalued population. To accomplish this goal, Black parents try to instill 1) a sense of racial and cultural pride, 2) knowledge of racial group history, and 3) a set of practical coping skills to deal with racial bias and discrimination (Rockquemore et al. 2006). These differences, in turn, affect the racial messages parents of interracial children impart.

Only one set of adoptive parents in the study attended classes regarding the racial implications of transracial adoption prior to adopting. These classes prepared Lilly Vibbard's parents to acknowledge and negotiate racial challenges: "I remember my mom saying that when they were going through the adoption process, that they would then become an interracial family and are prepared for that." Because of her parents' openness regarding her racialization, Lilly, a social worker, always felt her parents actively

supported her against acts of discrimination rather than minimizing the effects of bias. “I think as children you always feel, um, good when your parents stick up for you…[and] it's different when it's a behavioral thing, versus, um, racism or any kind of discrimination.” Because her parents ideologically acknowledged unequal racial privilege in society, Lilly developed a broader societal perspective from which to understand the racial teasing she experienced rather than internalizing negative appraisals.

Most discussions that had occurred in families generally followed an incident of racial teasing or other form of discrimination. Typically these conversations were little comfort for adoptees, and they quickly learned their parents were uncomfortable with and unprepared to discuss such topics. However, nine adoptees without preparation received comfort and support when processing encounters with parents afterwards. Parents’ discussions validated adoptees’ emotions and secured their place in the family as a loved and valued member.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Sixteen parents had acknowledged the racial challenges adoptees were likely to face prior to instances of bias. That adoptees placed in the late 1970s had a 50% chance of receiving preparation for negotiating racial events while all other cohorts were in the 15 -20% range was an unexpected finding. This trend may have been a delayed response to the racial concerns initially raised by the National Association of Black Social Workers in 1972 that subsided with the politically conservative climate of the 1980s. Adoptee experiences and interpretations were validated, even though family members had not personally endured the same type of exclusion. Anti-racist strategies that parents used “explicitly acknowledge[d] the racialized power structure at the center of U.S.

society and articulate[d] some ways to disrupt it" (Feagin and O'Brien 2003: 90). Parents felt responsible for proactively preparing their children with concrete strategies to cope with discrimination and aiding them during or after racial encounters.

Two sets of parents read their daughters the book "Chinese Eyes" during early childhood as a way to open dialogue concerning racial differences and potential teasing. Similarly, Melissa Barnes, a forty year old public relations professional, was not only emotionally comforted by her father when she encountered racism, but he had also intervened on her behalf.

> One time when I was up for home coming queen my senior year…I didn't win…But then I found out…that I won, but the principal thought it would be better if it was someone else that represented the school. And I was like, heartbroken, so I told my dad. He was so pissed. I remember he ran up to the school…It didn't change…but I remember my dad was very, very, very, very mad…I don't know what he ever said or what conversation, but I remember that I've never seen him run faster.

Instead of Melissa's issue to face alone, her father rose to her defense. The incident had required "mutual aid [that arose] from mutual needs" (Kirk 1984: 157) as a multiracial family. Most parents, however, opted for a conversation in which they warned of possible exclusion and regularly checked-in to monitor the situation. Adoptees were encouraged to process racial confrontations with parents and to not negatively internalize their difference.

Older siblings were also protective of Korean adoptees, defending them verbally and physically during racist encounters. These siblings, similar to Melissa's father, viewed confrontations as shared offenses. Courtney Marks' older brothers and mother had discussed amongst themselves the racial challenges she had faced. Rather than

waiting for instances to occur, her brothers were proactive: “They would do something, you know, behind the scene, like, ‘Leave her alone.’”

In contrast to the “shared fate” described above, three parents had verbally recognized that adoptees’ racial difference marked them as outsiders but failed to offer support or advice. Comments such as these only highlighted adoptees’ racial difference as a stigmatized status. Without accompanying strategies or emotional support to negotiate instances of bias, adoptees in these families internalized the negative associations with being Asian. Predictably, an *insistence* of racial difference through teasing or nicknames such as Courtney Marks’ of “Chinese chunk noodle,” though rare, isolated adoptees and heightened marginality from White families.

REJECTION

Sixty-one parents in the study ignored, diminished, or, in extreme cases, rejected family racial differences. Fifty-two of these parents were unequipped to provide adoptees with the needed support and advice in coping with racial discrimination. When Kristin Dillingham’s parents made comments such as, “We don't think of you as Korean - we think of you as our daughter,” it irritated and invalidated her experiences as an Asian American. Rather than comforting, this colorblind response often signaled that White parents were incapable of understanding adoptees’ experiences as people of color. As Jamie Fisher, a forty year old pharmaceutical employee, described it, “Oh, no, I didn't talk to anybody. It was just my own little dark secret I guess is the way to put it.”

When adoptees received advice, it was typically ineffective. Instructions to “turn the other cheek” or ignore racist remarks were for Jonathan Mann, a forty-one year old teacher, inadequate: “I guess when you're a kid that saying stop that, I don't like it,

nobody ever listens to you, so." In these ways White parents inadvertently "negate[d] or nullifi[ed] the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of [adoptees as people] of color" (Sue et al. 2007: 274).

Thirty-four adoptive parents held specifically anti-Black attitudes. These circumstances isolated adoptees despite family members having "re-fenc[ed]" (Tuan and Shiao 2011) them as "honorary Whites." As expected, these remarks severely highlighted adoptees' racial difference and created schisms where bonds could have formed. Beth Sorensen tried numerous times to engage her mother in discussions about the racism she experienced and her subsequent feelings of loneliness and sadness. However, accepting her daughter as a person of color would have required Beth's mother to examine her own racial perspective.

> She didn't want to talk about it or else she just, she didn't acknowledge it…She would just say, you're not Korean. I mean it's amazing. I mean…when I would date like, um, an African American or a different, a Korean or someone of a different, um, ethnicity my mom would get very upset. She's like, you know, I don't like these bi-race, when you're [in a], you know, biracial marriage or relationship. And I'm like, well, whenever I date someone who's Caucasian, it's a biracial. And she's like no it's not. It's like well yeah it is.

In addition to her mother's silencing of conversations, Beth had also learned her parents were not allies in negotiating her marginality due to the explicitly racist attitudes they frequently expressed. Seen as an extension of her White family, Beth's racial identity as a person of color had little bearing on her parents' racial ideologies.

Racial Difference in White Communities

All adoptees were White-identified and only temporarily conscious of their Asianness in moments of seeing their reflections or during racist confrontations. The few

instances of racial bias were typically dismissed as ignorance and as normal developmental challenges that had not threatened an overall sense of belonging. Adoptees' first confrontations with racial bias were typically as they entered school and began interacting with "external socializing agents" (Rcokquemore et al. 2006) in their communities. At times, adoptees were the only people of color in school during elementary years. As they transitioned into high school, eighteen encountered greater racial diversity; however, similar to Adams et al. (2005), a larger presence of Asians or people of color in general had not altered adoptees' racial reference group away from Whites. Instead, most maintained largely, if not wholly, White peer groups and remained strongly White-identified.

As past research found (Meier 1999; Tuan and Shiao 2011), sports, in particular, were a common avenue for male adoptees to minimize their racial visibility. The camaraderie of team membership eased their integration into White communities by providing a commonality from which to bond regardless of racial differences. Additionally, aligning themselves with symbols of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995), for example excelling in athletics or Tae Kwon Do, challenged the stereotypically feminized depictions of Asian men (Said 1979; Tuan 1998).

Living in small towns and suburbs in the Midwest, and specifically in Minnesota, meant that community residents had either a personal connection to or a general knowledge of adoptive families (Meier 1999; Tuan and Shiao 2011). Most communities accepted White families as the "social anchors" (Tuan and Shiao 2011) for adoptees' belonging and their "honorary Whiteness" was unchallenged. Having friends "forget" they were Asian was interpreted as evidence of their full-fledged acceptance. Thus,

adoptees displayed colorblind perspectives whereby Whiteness was synonymous with being "unmarked" or "normal" (Frankenberg 1993). Peer acknowledgement of racial differences typically set adoptees apart and tempered perceptions of full acceptance. Sierra Canning, who had appreciated her Korean adoptee contact, had still wanted to diminish her racial visibility and its significance.

> I remember friends telling me sometimes…like as a compliment they thought, "Oh, sometimes I forget that you're, I even forget that you're Korean. You know, I think it's so funny that sometimes – I always think of you as just White."…And especially…when I was very young I, *I was almost kind of like cool, you know, like I felt…yeah, I must be doing something right where they don't see me as Korean*. [emphasis added]

In these circumstances, race and culture were conflated whereby Sierra's "honorary Whiteness" was based in her cultural familiarity with White American culture. Being an "exception" compared to other Asians signaled her "real" belonging with Whites.

Only one adoptee embraced his friends' insistence of his difference, and interpreted his racial nickname as a symbol of his belonging. While Brad Foster was initially slightly offended by the highlighting of his racial difference, he quickly accepted the name "Fuji" as a self-identified label. Instead of representing his marginality, "Fuji" became a signifier of his White peers' acceptance of him despite his racial difference. However, Brad was clearly the exception rather than the norm.

RACIAL TEASING AND DISCRIMINATION

All adoptees reported feeling "different" from their White peers at some point during childhood and adolescence and only three escaped overt acts of racial slurs, teasing, and discrimination. Earlier cohorts generally confronted more aggressive forms of discrimination, though such treatment extended across age groups. Erin Thornes, for

example, was placed in the mid-1970s but had encountered relentless exclusion in her White rural community which she hid from her parents.

> Like I couldn't cover up the fact that our house was TPed…When boys at school would bump into me in the hallway, they'd have to spray themselves off, "Ew, you touched Erin, you touched the Chink," you know, kind of thing. And that I absolutely had no hope of ever having a love life until I moved to a different town because nobody would date the Chink.

With little social support, Erin internalized these attacks and responded with embarrassment and shame. Her racial difference overwhelmingly shaped her everyday life experiences, and she struggled daily with fitting in with White peers at school. While Erin represented an extreme case, she highlighted the isolation caused by microassaults[30] or deliberate acts of overt racism on an individual level (Sue et al. 2007) when unaccompanied with any social support.

Most instances of racial bias were intermittent in nature and involved racial teasing and name-calling rather than violent attacks. However, this varied as expected, with earlier cohorts and male adoptees more likely to have experienced the latter form. Though references to skin and hair color occurred, exclusion largely focused on facial features such as “slanty eyes” and flat noses or faces. For example, Emily Becker, a forty-year old accountant, had struggled with her racial visibility and desired to blend in physically with White peers: “I always wanted to change my eyes…I thought if I could just have that surgery I wouldn't look so Asian.” In fact, sixty-four adoptees in the study had at one point explicitly wished they were White or that they had White features. Eye shape and hair color, specifically blond hair and blue eyes, were the most commonly desired features, as was expected given communities’ racial compositions.

[30] Microassaults, a subcategory of microaggressions, are “explicit racial derogation characterized by primarily verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions” (Sue et al. 2007: 274).

Though Jonathan Mann was only conscious of his racial difference when negotiating racist confrontations with peers, he had still wanted to alter his physical features.

> Teasing…just feeling different, you know, and not understanding why…It was feeling excluded, um, and not understanding why, other than the fact that [I looked] just a little different. Well, that would solve everything if I just looked [different]…the slanty eyes, you know, [I] wish I had different eyes. That was the primary one. [emphasis added]

Jonathan's racial difference, specifically his eye shape, was an underlying impediment of his acceptance with Whites. "Chinese-Japanese" songs and "ching-chong noises" also reinforced Asians' "foreignness" and adoptees' position outside the boundaries of Whiteness.

DATING

Most adoptees blended into their local dating pools without issue despite the occasional racial teasing; however, race continued to structure their behavior as exemplified in labeling only Whites as desirable. Given the high level of intimacy involved, dating visibly manifested adoptees' acceptance or rejection by White peers. Adoptees across age cohorts measured themselves and potential partners against White standards of beauty; thus, non-Whites were disregarded. Asians were defined as "unattractive" by both sexes, but females named, in particular, Asian men's smaller physical stature as causes.

Renee Gunderson for example, a thirty-six year old teacher, felt excluded from the early years of dating. However, when the opposite sex began to show interest, it was her Black peers. Having a strong White-identification, Renee avoided the attention. The fact that other racial groups viewed her as a potential partner was inconsequential.

> Boys started to become interested in me…and it was the Black boys in my school. And I did not like that. I was really, not happy with the fact that these Black boys were showing me their interest because I didn't want anything to do with them. I wanted the White boys to like me. And, that wasn't happening [laughs]…I thought, so, they finally like you and it's not the ones you want to like you…Um, and I just wasn't attracted to them…I didn't identify with the Black kids. I identified more with the White kids.

Renee's sense of belonging was firmly entrenched in White social circles. The social proximity to having a non-White boyfriend would have placed her outside her White-identified racial community and further stigmatized her racial visibility.

However, both female (2) and male (6) adoptees had perceived their racial visibility as the most salient factor when they experienced fewer dating options. These adoptees dated only superficially in high school, if at all, when compared to their White counterparts. Dave Cortese, a thirty-eight year old repair technician, felt frustrated during high school due to his perpetual categorization as a "friend."

> I wished I was taller…a lot taller…I wished I was somebody else, not Asian…I was never real popular with girls…I had a lot of friends, but none of them really saw me as, you know, like a boyfriend/girlfriend kind of a thing…I don't know if it's because, you know, being Asian, or being short…or what the deal is…. They didn't really come out and say, "Hey, it's because you're Asian or you're different." It's like, "No, I don't really see you that way."

The adverse effect of Dave's shorter height compared to his non-Asian counterparts intensified his marginal or limited acceptance with White peers in regards to dating. He was *a part* of their White social circles but still set *apart* from their eligible romantic partners. In contrast to overt acts of racism, Dave's exclusion from dating exemplified what Sue et al. (2007) described as a microaggression or "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target

person or group" (Sue et al. 2007: 273). Yet, the effect was still one of isolation and difference from White peers.

Racial Sameness in Asian Communities

Adoptees' predominantly White neighborhoods and schools restricted opportunities for exposure to Koreans, Asians, and other people of color in general. However, for those who had experienced more contact, larger Asian populations, namely Hmong, Cambodian, and Vietnamese refugee communities, had generally not shifted adoptees to an Asian-identification. Rather, fifty-six adoptees in the study viewed Whites as their reference group and failed to identify with non-adopted Asians on any level during childhood and adolescence. Racial visibility was typically stigmatized and diminished to the greatest extent possible through avoidance and disidentification. Similar to Pyke and Dang's (2003) findings on internalized racism amongst second-generation Asian Americans, racism adoptees faced structured how they perceived themselves in relation to Asians in general. Though degrees differed, my findings highlighted the extensive internalization of White standards as the ideal by adoptees.

Non-adopted Asians, in particular, represented the antithesis of what adoptees desired: foreignness and outsiders. However, seven turned towards Asians in negotiating their marginal status with White peers. As with other forms of exposure, adoptees typically responded in one of two ways: 1) increased contact and identification with Asians; or 2) a retreat into their preexisting White circles. Reactions largely depended on the nature of contact, whether adoptees had been accepted as "authentic" in-group members or were further marginalized for their White cultural socialization.

For adoptees who experienced shifts in their racial attitudes, relationships with Asians, whether adopted or not, provided a sense of belonging based on a physical sameness which eluded them with White peers. This was particularly significant given the nearly universal experiences with racial bias and feeling different during this life stage. Rather than internalizing the negative associations of "Asianness," adoptees' racial visibility was embraced and imbued with positive connotations. As expected, the greatest racial exploration occurred amongst adoptees placed in the 1980s. Scott Falke, a twenty-eight year old accountant, gravitated towards Asians, specifically Thai and Lao, beginning at fourteen years of age. Ethnic distinctions were secondary in significance to their common racialization as Asian Americans.

> I think what happened around that time was, I started realizing that even the White kids who were my so-called friends weren't acting like my friends, I guess. I remember one time, my friends had a sleep over, which, you know, high school or whatever, and I wasn't invited…But I think that was part of my move, because *when I hung out with other Asian people, I didn't feel so different than them,* even though they necessarily were not Korean. [emphasis added]

Scott's racial visibility, which had once been a marker of his difference, had shifted to become the foundation of an empowering identity. He explored his friends' ethnic heritages as components of a larger Asian American culture and identity of which he was *a part* by virtue of his racial categorization and marginalization from White America.

Most responses, however, were more ambivalent in nature. Interactions were often described as fun or interesting but also uncomfortable. Sierra Canning, for example, had extensively explored her ethnic heritage during this lifestage. However, this contact had only highlighted her cultural marginalization from non-adopted Koreans.

> They were the first ones who would, who brought up the words like Twinkie to me and things like that…They were just like, "*Oh, that's what we would call someone, um, someone like you*." [emphasis added]

Interactions clearly placed Sierra outside Korean in-group boundaries. In contrast to Scott, Sierra experienced what Tuan (1999) identified as the "authenticity dilemma," whereby her cultural illiteracy challenged her "real" or full-fledged group belonging. As a result, her cultural familiarity determined her sense of group belonging to a greater extent than her racial visibility or ethnic heritage.

DISIDENTIFICATION

As discussed previously, adoptees confronted imposed "foreigner" (Tuan 1998) labels that induced them to reaffirm their Americanism during interactions. Mere association with other Asians presented the risk of being lumped together and set *apart* from White communities as Kristin Dillingham illustrated.

> And I think as far as certain identity problems, not so much being adopted, but I did not like how I looked…I didn't like being around other Asian people, and like I avoided them like the plague. And it just wasn't comfortable for me. I think, and that's because I associated them with who I was.

Seeing her physical appearance reflected reminded Kristin of her stigmatized racial difference. Adoptees' internalized images of Asians conflicted with their White self-concepts or as Nancy Albright put it, "They were assuming I was one of them, and I knew I wasn't. Don't count me as one of you because I'm not." Additionally, growing Asian refugee populations in the region intensified pressures for adoptees given mainstream culture's negative evaluation of such groups (Zhou 1997).

Rather than challenges to unequal social processes and relations that mark Asians as outsiders, disidentification coping strategies "[broke] up an otherwise coherent picture

but in this case in a positive direction desired by [adoptees], not so much establishing a new claim as throwing severe doubt on the validity of the virtual one" (Goffman 1963: 44). In contrast to non-adopted Asian Americans, adoptees only had an assimilated, White cultural socialization to display, i.e. language, clothing, values, and social behavior. Thus, a strategy of avoidance was, in fact, the most commonly cited means to disassociate from Asians for it only required adoptees to maintain their preexisting White social circles.

Dave Cortese, who had been excluded in dating, used a more extreme tactic for disidentification. Rather than merely avoidance, he and his White friends verbally targeted Asians for exclusion.

> I think we used to make fun of him, fun of the other Asian nerdy kids because they were just like, you know, they were like either, you know, super, super smart and nerdy kids and, you know, they just dressed weird, whatever…*I just tried to fit in and be normal with everybody else*. [emphasis added]

Dave firmly identified with Whites and used his "honorary Whiteness" to distance himself socially from Asians. He clearly employed a strategy of "defensive othering" whereby "subordinates who seek membership in the dominant group" (Pyke and Dang 2003: 152) uphold racist stereotypes but remove themselves from the impositions as "exceptions." By explicitly labeling Asians as outsiders and un-American through denigration, he reaffirmed his sameness with White peers and carved out a positive self-image for himself from within the confines of the existing racial hierarchy.

Conclusion

I have shown throughout the chapter that Korean adopteees were *a part* of *yet apart* from White, Asian, and even Korean adoptee communities during childhood and

adolescence. While adoptees generally interpreted acknowledging adoptive difference positively, ethnic and racial differences were markers they tried to ignore and diminish. Almost all had experienced some form of racial teasing or bullying which separated adoptees from Whites peers and family who were not confronted with the same type of exclusion. Most were distinctly White-identified and had internalized negative racial and ethnic attitudes towards Korean and Asians. Parents' virtual silence on the social consequences of race left adoptees alone to cope with their marginal belonging and generally resulted in an ambivalence or aversion to non-adopted Asians in particular.

The context of the exposure adoptees experienced significantly influenced their interpretations. In particular, informal forms were consistently favored over formalized interactions. Korean displays in the home and contact with neighborhood or family friends were contained within one's family's life where ethnic difference was typically acknowledged and accepted if not embraced. Respondents with fellow Korean adoptees in their neighborhoods were generally more open to ethnic exposure and contact with one another than adoptees without. In comparison to these normalized activities, public and formalized interactions heightened adoptees' racial marginality with White peers and families because the connection was based solely on their racial and ethnic difference.

In short, as Tuan and Shiao (2011) found, it was specific types of acknowledgement with only intermittent racial teasing that created relatively smooth transitions for adoptees into White families and communities. Routine exposure to other Korean adoptees normalized the contact and fostered an emergent Korean adoptee identification based on similar life circumstances and marginal belonging. These findings point to the significance such communities play in providing social support for adopees

and a space where they can simultaneously process the ways their multiple identities intersect to influence their life experiences with others in the same position. In the following chapter, I turn to adoptee experiences in early adulthood. As with family socialization, life stage-specific developmental pressures and the context of exposure structured opportunities for and openness towards ethnic and racial exploration.

CHAPTER IV

KOREAN ADOPTEES IN EARLY ADULTHOOD

> *I think it's important that every individual learn about their ethnic background or heritage…It empowers their individual identity.* One thing I learned when I was going through college, as I learned more about Asian history and Asian culture, I could then combat stereotypes and I could also just have conversations, very serious conversations and also very straightforward conversations with those individuals that questioned. If I don't know about it, then I'm basically, I feel inferior, incompetent, maybe not as good. And so knowing that I have to stand up for myself and understand who I am and where I come from, *it made me proud of who I am and where I come from*. [emphasis added]
>
> -- Terry Schultz, a thirty-six year old small business owner

Early adulthood, the late teen years through the mid-twenties, marks a significant transition in the life cycle. In contrast to the dependency characterizing childhood and adolescence, individuals gain personal independence as they leave their parental homes and begin developing the direction in which their adult lives will proceed. Issues of peer and community belonging, though still relevant, begin to lose their primary significance in structuring decisions regarding whether to explore their racial and ethnic identities. During childhood and adolescence, most adoptees in the study learned that their ethnic and racial difference from their White families, peers, and communities could temper full-fledged acceptance as "honorary Whites." Such exclusionary messages were often communicated through comments about people of color in general or becoming targets of bias themselves. As a strategy to strengthen their "honorary White" status, most actively disidentified from Asians and developed an aversion to anything that would highlight their racial difference.

As adoptees in the study left the communities in which they were raised, they experienced greater opportunities for exposure to racial and ethnic diversity in general, to Asians specifically, and to new ideas or perspectives. How they responded to these new opportunities and the significance attached to ethnic and racial exploration are the central foci of this chapter. Did these opportunities for contact and exploration heighten adoptees' racial and ethnic identity saliency, and if so, to what extent? How did developmental growth particular to early adulthood affect adoptes' openness to ethnic exploration and Asian contact? And lastly, how did "place" affect both opportunities for exploration and feelings about such behavior?

It was during early adulthood that adoptees typically began engaging with issues of personal growth and "defining for themselves and others who they [were] – what they [thought], the values they hold, their place in the world beyond the ones in which they grew up" (Kibria 2003: 103). Through this maturation process, adoptees who explored their racial and ethnic identities became more comfortable in their Asian skin. The once prevalent desires to alter their racial appearance or specific features such as eye shape began to recede during this period and were replaced with a general acceptance, if not appreciation, of their "Asianness."

Terry Schulz's identity shift to a more salient Asian racial identity in the opening quote illustrates the transformative power that ethnic exploration and racial group contact had on his racial attitudes. Though his parents virtually ignored his ethnic and racial differences in childhood and adolescence, Terry seized multiple opportunities in college to explore racially and ethnically: taking courses in Korean and Asian American history, intensive involvement with the Asian American student association, and studying abroad

in Korea. This exposure to diverse people and ideas initiated a conscious reinterpretation of his previously unquestioned White worldview, and he reorganized his social network to consist primarily of Asians. Whereas Terry had always felt a tension in White environments, he was at ease in these new Asian-majority settings.

Terry's experience was rare, however, since most adoptees in this study continued to inhabit predominantly White social circles and networks. Family socialization patterns had not significantly influenced adoptees' decisions to explore. Rather, age cohort played a more substantial role in predicting adoptees' level of ethnic exploration, namely that those placed in the 1960s and early 1970s were significantly more likely to have abstained from any involvement during early adulthood. Adoptees placed in the mid-1970s through the 1980s, in comparison, participated at more intensive levels with close Asian friendships and membership in racially or ethnically-based groups.

As shown in Chapter III, "place" also structured the opportunities available to adoptees for ethnic exploration and Asian contact. Those who attended college or had moved to the West coast were more likely to have close friendships with non-adopted Asians than their Midwestern counterparts. Such a pattern is understandable given the larger and more diverse Asian populations on the West coast in comparison to the Midwest. Contact with second or multi-generation Asian Americans, in particular, fostered connections based on similar experiences of being marked "Asian" in the U.S. College campuses, even in the Midwest, also had higher concentrations of Asians and provided more opportunities for contact than was present during childhood and adolescence.

In this chapter, I discuss the different communities adoptees felt *a part* of *yet apart* from after they left their parents' homes in early adulthood. The meanings adoptees attached to their exploration varied greatly as did their levels of involvement. Those that explored substantially were more likely to have experienced significant shifts in their racial attitudes and perspectives in comparison to modest explorers who were generally more ambivalent about their participation and often returned to their White social circles. Korean adoptee exposure, in particular, provided unique opportunities for both modest and intensive exploration that differed in content and emotional significance from non-adopted Asian or Korean contexts.

Ethnic and Racial Exploration: Identity Development Models

Phinney (1993) and Cross (1991) provide multi-stage models describing the processes of ethnic and racial identity development[31] in which individuals learn how these statuses structure their lives and "make decisions about [their] role[s] in their lives, regardless of the extent of their ethnic involvement" (Phinney 1993: 64). Individuals are seen to progress from ethnic and racial identities that are largely symbolic in nature with little or no meaning to ones where individuals embrace and are self-confident regarding their racial and ethnic difference. These models explain the motivations powering these resocialization processes which transform identities and the meanings individuals attach to them.

The first stage of an *unexamined ethnic identity* (Phinney 1993) is characterized by a lack of interest in ethnic exploration. Ethnic and racial issues are seen as

[31] Phinney's model incorporates Cross's (1991) five-stage racial identity development model because while race and ethnicity operate differently with distinct social consequences in society, their influences are intimately intertwined for all individuals.

insignificant to adoptees' lives, and they abstain from ethnic involvement. According to Cross (1991), people of color internalize the dominant White racial worldview and identify with Whites in general. Individuals do not deny their racial visibility, but "the 'physical' fact is thought to play an insignificant role in their everyday lives" (Cross 1991: 190). White cultural values are adopted as the standards by which to measure oneself and others, and "race is a hassle, a problem, an imposition" (Cross 1991: 191) to be negotiated when faced with exclusion. If adoptees reject Korean or Asian cultures and contact, their parents often do not counter this disassociation by providing "positive models of ethnic pride" (Phinney 1993: 68) through passive socialization. Adoptees are typically raised within mainstream White culture, and thus, alternative socialization does not exist in their home lives.

While pressures to blend in with Whites subside in early adulthood, simply aging does not initiate exploration. Instead, it is the conscious decision to engage following an *encounter*[32] that characterizes the stage of *ethnic identity search* (Phinney 1993). Individuals begin to display signs of dissonance, a questioning of or "growing awareness that not all cultural values of the dominant group are beneficial to ethnic minorities" (Phinney 1993: 69). Rather than one single event, it is multiple "small, eye-opening episodes, each of which chips away at the person's ongoing world view" (Cross 1991: 200). However, encounters are not always negative but must merely push individuals to reexamine their current perspectives and begin engagement.

The vast majority of encounters for adoptees resulted from circumstantial experiences such as greater contact with other Asians on college campuses, in larger

[32] An encounter is conceptualized as "a shocking personal or social event that temporarily dislodges the person from his or her world view, making the person receptive to a new interpretation of his or her identity" (Phinney 1993: 69).

cities, and in Korea. As Tuan and Shiao (2011) note, social environment and institutional opportunities available were the most influential factors in determining the contours of exploration. Institutional sites and cities larger than childhood communities, in particular, were integral because they provided opportunities for contact in Asian-majority settings. Adoptees lacked Asian families and access to other Asian-majority communities with which to interact regularly in contrast to non-adopted Asian Americans who had such routes for contact (Kibria 2003; Tuan 1998; Tuan and Shiao 2011).

According to Cross (1991), it is during *immersion-emersion* that individuals begin to engage in ethnic or racially-based activities and social relations and reconfigure the roles these identities play in their lives. White racial world views and cultural norms are gradually replaced by, in the case of Korean adoptees, an Asian American consciousness. Various forms of racial and ethnic involvement are available to adoptees, namely formal classes about Korean culture, informal friendships with in-group members, adoptee groups or programs, and transnational homeland trips or temporary residence in Korea.

However, not all interactions during this stage can be classified as positive or encouraging further exploration. Intense, negative, or frustrating experiences during immersion can result in several outcomes: 1) individuals may lose interest, terminate their searching, and revert to their previous White racial frame of reference; 2) they may continue their involvement; or 3) individuals may "drop out" (Cross 1991). Rather than a reversion to "Whiteness," individuals who drop out may have internalized aspects of a new Asian consciousness and identity but suspended their interest and involvement with racial and ethnic issues, relations, and cultures. Some return to these concerns later for further engagement while others abandon interest entirely.

While an *achieved ethnic identity* is the "ideal outcome" (Phinney 1993: 71), not all individuals reach this final stage of the model. An internalization of an Asian American racial identity and consciousness characterizes this phase. Individuals are self-confident in the role their ethnic and racial identities play in their lives, although the level of salience will depend on their individual racial ideologies (Cross 1991). According to Cross (1991: 210), internalized racial and ethnic identities perform three primary functions in individuals' everyday lives: "1) to defend and protect the person from psychological insults that stem from having to live in a racist society; 2) to provide a sense of belonging and social anchorage; and 3) to provide a foundation or point of departure for carrying out transactions with people, cultures, and situations beyond the world of [Asianness]." Individuals exhibit a sense of pride regarding their racial and ethnic group membership and are no longer concerned with others' evaluations. With this new arsenal, adoptees are better equipped to negotiate their self-defined identities when challenged, as Terry Schultz had experienced in the opening quote. The final step of *commitment* is achieved by not only an internalization of one's racial and ethnic identities but also a "sustained interest and commitment" (Cross 1991: 220) to engage with racial issues.

Types and Sites of Ethnic and Racial Exploration

I borrow Tuan and Shiao's (2011) distinction between different types of ethnic and racial exploration: 1) cultural heritage and 2) social exposure. I include Korean adoptee exploration as a third type with unique implications for identity development. In this study, these two tracks were not mutually exclusive; in fact, many adoptees,

particularly intensive explorers, used a combination of strategies that crossed these rather artificial boundaries. Because of these conditions, I "double-counted" when totaling cases for specific activities used. Degrees of exploration varied from modest to intensive in nature along both tracks. *Modest* involvement often occurred independently, when convenient, and was intermittent as adoptees were able to abandon and reengage their interest at leisure. It at times consisted of static, romanticized representations of ethnic or racial groups rather than dynamic, contemporary social constructions. In comparison, *intensive* strategies by necessity required living and emergent cultures amongst which adoptees immersed themselves and required more personal investment and commitment (Tuan and Shiao 2011). Taking multiple classes especially over an extended period of time, sustaining Asian friendships and social networks, and visiting Korea, for example, were categorized as intensive given the high level of commitment required.

Adoptees required access to resources, such as books, the internet, or Asians, Koreans, or Korean adoptees with whom to interact, for exploration. Interest alone may have initiated an emergent dissonance but had not altered adoptees' ethnic behaviors or White social networks. Thus, personal intent was a necessary prerequisite for active engagement. Social context, and in particular *place*, largely influenced adoptees' opportunities and openness to examine their ethnic identities and group belonging with other Asians.

A *cultural heritage* emphasis typically consisted of reading books or articles, eating Korean food, taking courses about Korean history or culture, and the more intensive version of traveling abroad to Korea. Efforts were guided by a desire to connect to and learn about their birth country and birth culture, in effect, to create a connection to

their biological past. With the exception of classes, adoptees' cultural heritage exploration was not reliant upon institutional participation but could be accomplished independently.

Social exposure exploration involved in-group contact isolated from Whites and their dominant racialized perspectives. Adoptees must consciously seek out environments that include a large enough population of Asians with whom to engage (Tuan and Shiao 2011). Personal intent is of particular importance for Korean adoptees because without a concerted effort, they are likely to remain amongst Whites as in childhood and adolescence. Because of their "honorary" membership in White communities, adoptees often relied on specific social institutions such as colleges, the military, and adoption agencies to provide opportunities for in-group exposure and immersion. Participation took the form of taking classes on Asian American history or cultures, Asian acquaintances, sustained friendships, and belonging to ethnically or racially-based associations. However, when adoptees expanded their social circles to include Asians, they simultaneously maintained their White friendships rather than a complete substitution.

Korean adoptee community exploration often explicitly acknowledged adoptees' marginal position and was based on their unique life circumstances as both *a part* of *yet apart* from Korean, Asian, and White communities. Social consequences for adoptees as people of color in White families and communities, Korean culture, and abandonment issues were the main subjects during this exploration. Although exploration was not always entirely isolated from Whites, the interactions and program structures privileged adoptee perspectives and lived experiences. Korean adoptees, in particular, were valued

due to their shared birth country and birth culture, and thus, perceived common experiences. As with other types, this exploration existed at both modest and intensive levels. Involvement occurred through reading books, articles or memoirs about Korean adoptee experiences, adoptee acquaintances and close friendships, and participation in formally organized adoptee groups or programs. “Place” largely structured opportunities for Korean adoptee community exploration, with those in Minnesota specifically having greater availability to resources and outlets.

Higher education in particular has been shown to be a pivotal site for racial and ethnic identity development and exploration (Kibria 2003; Renn 2004; Tuan 1998; Tuan and Shiao 2011). For the middle class, traditional four-year college experiences were accompanied with expectations of self-exploration and identity development (Kibria 2002). Community colleges and vocational schools, by comparison, tend to focus more on specific skill development and training rather than self-discovery.

The military provided five adoptees with opportunities for intensive exploration. Service in Korea or with Korean national forces were the most common military contexts within which adoptees learned about Korean society and culture. Though levels of attachment varied, adoptees generally valued the “authentic” Korean cultural knowledge, i.e. the history, customs, and language, they were exposed to. One female adoptee, however, experienced consistent but uncomfortable contact with first-generation Korean wives of U.S. servicemen while living on a military base. Through these interactions, she was introduced for the first time to Korean cultural values and behavioral expectations.

Adoption agencies and organizations provided unique sites, such as heritage camps, panel discussions, mentorship programs, and transnational homeland tours, for

identity exploration. In these environments, adoptees were able to meet others with similar life circumstances and share experiences, sometimes for the first time. Unlike higher education or the military, adoptee organizational programs were geared specifically for adoptees' unique identity development, taking into account racial, ethnic, and adoptive "difference."

While fifty-two adoptees in the study took advantage of opportunities to explore their ethnic and racial identities in early adulthood, age cohort significantly influenced adoptees' level of exploration. Of the thirteen adoptees placed during the 1960s, nine refrained from any involvement and expressed zero interest. During the 1970s and 1980s, the prevailing cultural climate had not celebrated or embraced multiculturalism and racial diversity as a desirable goal to the same extent as today. In fact, social backlashes that responded to international economic shifts in manufacturing, as exemplified by Vincent Chin's murder, and Asians' general rise in socioeconomic status created often hostile environments for Asians (Dhingra 2003; Espiritu 1992; Kim 2007). Additionally, most college campuses in the Midwest had not provided as many opportunities as those on the West coast to learn about racial or ethnic cultures and histories through courses or student associations. And while later cohorts had greater access to these routes for exploration, informal friendships were preferred over other types across age cohorts.

The vast majority of adoptees in the study continued to inhabit predominantly, if not all, White social circles regardless of their level of exploration during early adulthood. They were at their greatest social ease with Whites largely due to the cultural literacy imparted by their White friends and cultural socialization. In the following sections, I discuss the extent of adoptees' racial or ethnic involvement and how such

exposure influenced the groups with whom they identified. Though most adoptees explored at some level, their racial and ethnic identities remained symbolic in nature and had not significantly altered their social networks or behaviors.

No Ethnic Exploration

Twenty-seven adoptees in the study abstained from any racial or ethnic identity exploration during early adulthood. Interestingly, sixteen attended four-year colleges and experienced the typical middle class maturation process thought to characterize this life stage. By comparison, eight attended either community colleges or vocational schools with non-traditional experiences and three had zero post-secondary education. Family responsibilities of being wives and mothers took precedence over self-discovery for two women with zero post-secondary education. Rather than a lack of opportunities, it was predominantly a lack of interest to 1) learn more about their racial histories and Korean culture or 2) interact with Asians whether adopted or not.

Sierra Canning was the sole non-explorer to have participated during adolescence at intensive levels in Korean cultural heritage and Korean adoptee community exploration. She had previously examined her ethnic and racial identities and felt secure about their roles in her everyday life. In this way, Sierra illustrated Phinney's (1993) *achieved ethnic identity* phase whereby she was proud of her Korean heritage despite her current lack of involvement. She had not experienced new developmental pressures that would have initiated a reexamination of her identities.

Typical non-exploring adoptees, however, most clearly fit Phinney's (1993) *unexamined ethnic identity* phase and were firmly rooted in their White social networks.

They continued to identify with Whites and positioned themselves as outside Asian group boundaries. Being in Asian-majority settings such as a Chinatown was generally perceived as undesirable or as Cheryl Diefendorf simply put it, “weird.” A colorblind perspective was most commonly used when describing decisions to forgo any exploration. Particularly employed was the frame of abstract liberalism whereby individualism and choice explained these adoptees’ personal identification (Bonilla-Silva 2003). Yet, with their strong desire to be recognized as individuals, non-explorers actually challenged ethnic expectations of cultural authenticity that were based on their racial visibility. They questioned assumptions that being Korean should hold special relevance or significance in their lives and referenced Whites’ “ethnic options” (Waters 1990) to claim an unhyphenated American identity to legitimize their perspectives.

Rather than explicitly expressing anti-Asian attitudes, Katie Baldwin, a forty-year old database systems trainer, simply had not included her ethnic and racial identities as a part of her consciousness. Because of her lack of literacy in Korean culture, she continued to view herself as essentially White and an exception to Asians and Koreans.

> I mean I never really felt different [even in childhood]…I mean like I said I was different. Um, it probably mattered more in college…I didn't want to be, seen as, Korean just because I wasn't. I didn't associate with that. So like when I was in, um, grad school…And they had us all together…[and] the rest were white. And [the photographer]…actually looked at me and said oh good we have…someone Asian. Or oh good, we have someone who's the minority. And I just remember thinking, but that's really not me.

Katie’s self-differentiation from Koreans was predominantly based in her self-perception as not “authentically” Korean rather than anti-Asian attitudes per se. Increased Asian contact had not only failed to shift her White self-concept but had, in fact, heightened her need to reinforce her “honorary White” membership. Katie’s White suburban cultural

familiarity and experiences had precluded her developing a connection with Asians based on their racial sameness. As such, Katie was hypothetically open to Asian friends at the time but had zero inclination to specifically foster such relationships and remained in her White social circles.

While the intensity had subsided, the desire to blend in with Whites continued to influence adoptees' behavior. Five non-explorers had maintained the distinct aversion to and negative imagery of Asians that developed during childhood and adolescence. Anti-Asian attitudes were internalized, and they actively disassociated from other Asians. Mark Dixon, a thirty-five year old personal trainer, expressed this "White-identified" (Phinney 1993: 66) perspective when confronted with increased Asian contact.

> But when I went to [college], there's a lot, there was a lot of Asians there…I was very rebellious against Asians, very rebellious. I was like, I was almost racist against my own people…I was not comfortable around other Asians, and I think it's because I was raised, I guess, around so many Caucasian… So then when I went to college…I didn't hang out with them. You know, all my friends were still white…so it was almost insulting [that other Asians would expect me to socialize with them].

Asians' designation of Mark as an in-group member threatened his "honorary Whiteness" rather than fostering an acknowledgement of sameness or commonality with other Asians. Social proximity highlighted the visual difference from Whites that he strove to minimize. From his White-identified perspective, Asians failed to measure up against White values and standards. Thus, aligning with Asians was perceived as accepting a less valued identity in mainstream society.

Modest Exploration

Fifty-two adoptees utilized opportunities to examine the significance of their ethnic and racial identities and illustrated what Phinney (1993) described as the *ethnic identity search* phase. A growing dissonance and acknowledgement by adoptees that they were *a part* of Asian and Korean communities had initiated exploration. Only fifteen adoptees chose modest types of exploration without any accompanying intensive involvement despite the relative availability of resources and noncommittal nature of modest exploration. Those that participated in formally organized opportunities, such as classes, or independently researched Korean culture through reading books and articles were generally neutral about this new knowledge. In contrast, adoptees who interacted with Asian or Korean acquaintances often confronted ethnic expectations that highlighted their cultural differences and set them *apart* from both Korean and Asian communities.

CULTURAL HERITAGE

Cultural heritage exploration most commonly occurred through independently researching Korean history, people, and culture and taking formal classes such as Tae Kwon Do or Korean language lessons. All but one adoptee ate Korean food when accompanied by their non-adopted Korean friends or during involvement with formal organizations. While ethnic food is traditionally categorized as cultural heritage, Korean food in this study was only consumed while participating in social exposure with other Asians.

Luke Ingraham, a thirty-five year old information technology specialist, experienced only fleeting interest in his Korean heritage during early adulthood. Although he had attended two years of college with a large Asian population, he had

preferred to read books about Korea at his convenience versus taking formal classes. Being Korean was not a conscious part of his everyday life, and despite his exploration, Luke remained emotionally and socially *apart* from non-adopted Asians and Koreans. Acquiring Korean cultural knowledge fulfilled his minor interest but had occurred isolated from his White social networks, and he had not incorporated Korean culture into his normal daily behavior and activities.

SOCIAL EXPOSURE

Modest *social exposure* exploration for twenty-one adoptees in the study consisted of having Asian acquaintances with which interaction was on an intermittent and isolated basis. They generally assessed increased racial and ethnic diversity positively but continued to feel most socially at ease with Whites due to the Asian ethnic expectations they could not fulfill. Asian acquaintances were often adoptees' first voluntary relationships with in-group racial members outside of their family's influence. This type of exploration had also not induced adoptees to incorporate Korean or Asian cultural knowledge or people into their daily interactions. Rather, Asians were isolated from adoptees' everyday White social circles. For example, Christina Bennett, a thirty-two year old police officer, expressed zero cultural interest, though she had developed a Japanese acquaintance during college. And while Christina appreciated connecting over their few shared experiences from being Asian, she maintained an emotional distance and interacted with her separately from her more intimate White friendships.

Similarly, Lisa Hawes, a thirty-six year old bartender, developed two Korean acquaintances in college in addition to taking an Asian literature course. Having felt as an outsider her whole life, Lisa felt drawn to Asian and Korean culture and wanted Asian

friends specifically as a means to develop an unconditional belonging she had been denied in White dominated social contexts. Her construction of Korean and Asian belonging were hinged on their visual sameness and racial categorization in the U.S. Lisa's "friendships" with Korean women held special significance because as co-ethnics, they served as "cultural consultants" by introducing her to Korean culture and translating her Korean name. However, when she failed to fulfill behavioral expectations of cultural literacy, a "facility in Korean language and history, Confucian norms, and styles of dress and comportment" (Kim 2009: 307), Lisa felt negatively judged and criticized for her White American socialization. In fact, Asians on campus would consistently ignore her when seen with her White friends and speaking English.

Such experiences highlighted what Tuan (1999: 106) described as the "authenticity dilemma" whereby adoptees' lifestyles were challenged by other Asians "as not being 'Asian enough' in the way they conduct[ed] themselves." This was especially problematic for adoptees who lacked passive Asian or Asian American cultural socialization to access when confronted with cultural assumptions based within dominant conflations of race, culture, and citizenship. Rejection as a "real" Asian was distressing for adoptees such as Lisa who had expected a full acceptance based on their shared racial marginalization in the U.S. Rather than internalizing her lack of facility as a personal deficiency, though, she responded with anger at being the target of judgment and prejudice within "her own" community and challenged her placement outside of Asian group boundaries.

Reading adoptee memoirs, online adoptee groups, adoptee acquaintances, and attending one adoptee event were the most common forms used to explore Korean adoptee communities. In contrast to other types, modest involvement typically strengthened a connection to Korean adoptees in general regardless of the activity structure. Three adoptees, however, responded more ambivalently to contact and mirrored modest cultural heritage and social exposure explorers in feeling *apart* from other Korean adoptees.

Whereas contact with non-adopted Asians was often marginalizing due to adoptees' cultural illiteracy, differing interpretations about Korean adoption separated these three from the larger adoptee community. Ramona Chan, a twenty-five year old student, had a Korean adoptee roommate with a distinctly negative perspective regarding the practice of Korean adoption in general. While Ramona had initially tried to connect with her roommate on the basis of their shared adoptee identity, their vastly differing perspectives created a wedge in the relationship that was never restored. As expected, adoptees who felt more accepted in White communities referenced negative perceptions of adoption as the most common deterrent against continued involvement through adoptee networks.

Intensive Exploration

Thirty-seven adoptees in the study engaged in some form of intensive exploration during early adulthood. Social exposure was again preferred over cultural heritage exploration, pointing to the greater saliency of their racial identities over ethnic ones. Yet, twenty-one intensive explorers had used specific forms from both tracks. Intensive

involvement generally resulted in an appreciation for blending in with an Asian-majority and adoptees feeling *a part* of Asian and Korean communities. However, cultural heritage exploration produced a simultaneous response of being culturally set *apart* from other Koreans. Social exposure with Korean adoptees was the single most used strategy of all intensive exploration (22). These findings again highlight the strong emotional attachment adoptees had to the larger Korean adoptee community and their comfort with examining their identities amongst Koreans adoptees similar to themselves.

CULTURAL HERITAGE

Fifteen adoptees participated in transnational homeland visits, the intensive form of cultural heritage exploration, that varied in formality: study abroad or teaching English (4), adoption agency provided tours (4), military service (2), and independently with family or friends (5).[33] Korea was complicated for adoptees and associated with emotional attachments as adoptees' birth country and "homeland" (Kim 2009). While the main impetus was to personally experience their birth country and culture, thirteen appreciated blending in racially even if their racial difference from Whites was not a salient issue in their lives. Formal opportunities through college, tours, or military service structured interactions and facilitated adoptees' in navigating being physically Korean but culturally White Americans. All five who visited Korea without a formal structure had traveled with either other Korean adoptees or non-adopted Koreans who spoke the language and were familiar wit Korean cultural norms.

[33] Three separate adpotees were awaiting their planned travel dates to Korea at the time of the interview. Two were traveling with their parents via Holt's Motherland Tour, and the remaining adoptee was packing to move to Korea for a one-year, position teaching English.

Junjae Ogden, who was introduced in Chapter III, substantially explored her ethnic and racial identities during college. Traveling to Korea through Holt's Motherland Tour proved to be a pivotal experience in altering her perspective.

> And so, I was nineteen, which is interesting, you know, because you're still trying to find out who you are and what you want to do in life and my own identity. *And so going back, I think, then, that was a turning point for me*. I think that's when I started realizing, oh, you know, I came from an interesting culture…The man that was doing the customs, he was talking to me in Korean, and…I just looked at him and I'm like, "I'm sorry. I don't understand what you're saying." And he just looked at me like, "What?"…At that point, I was kind of like, "Oh, I really wish I would have known a little more," you know, being able to speak Korean and a little more about the history and the tradition and the culture. *I think at that point I kind of started shifting, oh, some interest more*. [emphasis added]

Unlike others who interpreted assumptions of cultural competency negatively, Junjae had not internalized her inability to fulfill expectations as a personal deficiency. Instead, her interactions with "authentic" Koreans in her birth country spurred an emergent cultural interest and ethnic pride that strengthened following her trip. For two years afterwards, she took Chinese language and history classes as the closest alternative to Korean available. Thus, association with any Asian ethnicity, and in fact an emergent Asian American identity, was preferable to returning to a state of an *unexamined ethnic identity*.

Akin to Junjae's ethnic identity transformations, Terry Schultz's racial consciousness shifted considerably when he studied abroad for a year in Korea. In contrast to a vacation, Terry lived amongst and interacted with Koreans for an extended period. During this time, he developed a social ease that accompanied these first experiences of blending into the racial majority.

> There's this part of my back, top part of my back right behind my neck that always seemed to feel like it was tight, tense. And when I went to Korea, when I got there I was walking down the street one day and I realized that all that tension in the back of my neck was gone. And I was like, wow, that's like, feeling as though I was not on guard. And so that was the weirdest experience ever that I

> ever had. The funny thing is, when I got back to the States, I got the same tension back in my neck.

With his childhood experiences of substantial racial marginalization from White communities, Korea embodied a romanticized "homeland," a place where he could gain full acceptance as a racial and ethnic insider (Kim 2009). Yet, while Terry had internalized Korean cultural literacy expectations and felt embarrassed when he couldn't perform, especially in regards to language proficiency, the racial sameness overrode these uncomfortable moments. He had continued to explore his emergent Asian racial consciousness and ethnic identity through sustained, on-going commitments in Asian American campus groups and Korean adoptee services upon returning from Korea. In addition, Terry shifted to a predominantly Asian social circle and altered his cultural behavior as Asians became his new reference group.

Four adoptees, however, responded with ambivalence or expressed negative reactions to their time in Korea. Rather than creating a sense of sameness with Koreans, contact was interpreted as "uncomfortable" and reaffirmed adoptees' "honorary Whiteness" and difference from Koreans. Adoptees' "Koreanness" was challenged as they were "rendered culturally foreign for having a 'Korean face' but lacking facility in the Korean language and history, Confucian norms, and styles of dress and comportment" (Kim 2009: 307). Such was the case when Lilly Vibbard returned to Korea.

> And I think that even though that I physically appeared to be like them, I still feel, felt, stuck out. Because when we went to, um, the flea markets…they come up to you and talk to you…and then when you give them a look like what are you saying, um, and then you speak English, then they talk amongst themselves. *And so then you still feel kind of, different…so I still was different.* [emphasis added]

Lilly's "cultural foreignness" from native Koreans highlighted her partial group belonging and marked her as an outsider in Korea. Cultural familiarity, rather than simply

racial sameness, was a salient condition for full Korean membership (Kim 2009). Due to Korean conceptualizations of belonging, Lilly internalized expectations of language proficiency which, in particular, separated her from non-adopted Koreans. She interpreted assumptions as distinctly uncomfortable experiences in which she was unfairly judged and which further distanced her from Koreans. Thus, rather than a "loss of bearings" (Yngvesson 2005: 27), Lilly's American identity was reaffirmed.

Using American racial perspectives, adoptees such as Chloe Bennett assumed their Korean belonging was a given by virtue of their genetic make-up and that Korea was their birth country. Now a thirty-five year old graduate student, Chloe experienced heightened marginality as a result of her tenuous acceptance when she taught English in Korea for a year. Considering her "culturally incompetent," Chloe's Korean colleagues attempted to teach her about "appropriate" Korean behavior, such as codes of conduct with male faculty, and enfold her into their conceptualization of Korean belonging. However, she resented their cultural judgment and criticism that further highlighted her "othering" or her placement outside of Korean group boundaries. For adoptees such as Chloe that had expected full acceptance as "authentic" group members, this exclusion often stalled further racial and ethnic identity exploration, and adoptees delved further into their White networks.

SOCIAL EXPOSURE

Twenty-four adoptees socially immersed themselves extensively with non-adopted Asians through two main channels: informal friendships (11)[34] and formally

[34] Two additional adoptees had intensive contact with Blacks during college that spurred an examination of their own Asian racial and ethnic identities. Jason Schlicht, in particular, developed a general appreciation

organized associations or groups (13). Most who participated in formal organizations had simultaneously cultivated informal Asian friendships within as well as outside the organization. Few had joined as a direct result of previous friendships but rather had done so independently. Increased contact and involvement with other Asians had not resulted in a detachment from their White friendships but created "dual identities" rather than a complete substitution of adoptees' old self by an emergent one (King and DaCosta 1996; Mass 1996). A complete removal was particularly unlikely for adoptees whose families and primary social networks remained White. Instead, the majority isolated their Asian friendships, thus, creating two separate spheres of influence.

Brooke Marshall, a thirty-three year old insurance agent, widened her social circle while at her Midwestern university to include sustained friendships with non-adopted Asian men. At their encouragement, she attended a couple meetings of their local Korean American student association.

> When I was in college…I would have to say the first time that I really felt, um, these, these people were very much Korean, like Korean-American, and their parents spoke Korean and they spoke Korean most of them…*And they really, really did, I have to say, um, treat me as the outsider, because I didn't speak Korean, I'm not a real Korean*…I guess I'd never really experienced people not accepting me, because I'm, I am Korean, but I just don't have the same obviously Korean experiences that you do…I was the Twinkie that kind of thing. They were mean to me. (chuckles)…and honestly these girls (chuckles) just like did not want me around…*But also, I knew that I would never be like accepted by the group in general, so…I stopped hanging out with that group, but I did still hang out with my friends*. [emphasis added]

Growing up with other Korean adoptees and Whites, Brooke's Korean identity was simply a given due to her racial visibility. When confronted with a large population of non-adopted Asians, Brooke first confronted what Tuan (1999) identified as the

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for racial and ethnic diversity and a specific interest in Korean culture as a result of these friendships. This contact influenced a gradual shifting from Whites to people of color as his reference group.

"authenticity dilemma." In these new contexts, her once unquestioned White cultural socialization excluded her from a "real" group belonging with non-adopted Asians. Impositions of expected ethnic behavior, highlighted by the term "Twinkie," marginalized Brooke as *a part yet apart* from White and Asian communities, as simultaneously both but neither. Her lack of cultural familiarity (Kim 2009) and differing experiences from those of her non-adopted co-ethnics placed limits on her willingness for further formalized exploration. Yet, Brooke maintained her preexisting informal Korean friendships rather than retreating from social immersion altogether. She remained in the stage of dissonance rather than retreating back into an unexamined identity, a potential response when confronted with additional crises or encounters (Cross 1991; Phinney 1993).

While most adoptees who participated in social exposure had confronted and even internalized "foreigner" ethnic expectations, they simultaneously felt at ease with their non-adopted Asian friends and interacted daily with them on a substantial basis. The intensive nature of the exploration tempered most negative effects and had not significantly altered adoptees' willingness for continued Asian contact. Rather, they retreated from involvement in formally organized ethnically or racially-based associations. Predictably, adoptees who had moved to the West coast or New York City, in particular, had developed multiple Asian friendships. Social immersion became a normalized activity regardless of initial reactions to larger Asian populations. These findings again point to the significance of "place" whereby adoptees on the coasts had greater opportunities due to shear numbers.

Adoptees minimized awkward, and at times, embarrassing questions by avoiding sustained contact with Asian strangers. Ali Russell, for example, had predominantly Asian friends at her Californian college but consciously refrained from joining formally organized groups. She based her distinction on perceived cultural and experiential differences from her non-adopted counterparts due to primary socialization. And though her cultural familiarity (Kim 2009) remained with Whites, Ali avoided authenticity criticism due to her friends' knowledge of her family circumstances. In this sense, Ali's adoptive status functioned as a negotiation strategy for navigating the "ethnic bind" (Kibria 2003) terrain.

Terry Schultz, the adoptee who had lived in Korea for a year, experienced substantial shifts towards an Asian racial consciousness. While he had a simultaneous interest in cultural knowledge, it was same-race contact that he desired and produced the sense of belonging he had not felt in White dominated environments.

> It [gave] me a kind of sense of what I felt in Korea. I felt a kind of comfort. *Like the simple comfort of being around people that look like you.* I think that's something that I think, growing up as a child as well as through my high school years, I always knew that I looked, so that was probably my biggest weakness growing up, or my biggest hang-up growing up, is that I looked different from everyone, visually. *And so to be around people that look similar to you, it puts you more at comfort, at ease.*[emphasis added]

Terry's racial visibility, which had positioned him as marginal to and *apart* from White communities, provided the foundation for group belonging as *a part* of Asian communities. Because Terry had also intensively explored within the cultural heritage track, Asians' imposed expectations of "authentic" ethnic behavior had not deterred his exploration as with Brooke. Rather, interacting with Asians had become normalized to

the extent that his White American cultural familiarity had not nullified his Asian racial identity and involvement with Asians.

KOREAN ADOPTEE COMMUNITY

Twenty-four adoptees had intensively explored Korean adoptee communities through informal friendships with other adoptees (15),[35] formally organized adoptee groups or events (3), panels for adoptive parents (4), adoptee camp counselors (4) or mentors (3), and taking Motherland Tours (3). Nine adoptees participated in intensive social exposure with only other Korean adoptees while thirteen were exposed to adoptees in addition to non-adopted Asians. With similar backgrounds, adoptees' White American socialization and marginality from both Asians and Whites was normalized and provided the foundation for their sameness. Thus, Korean adoptee communities were less threatening environments than non-adopted contexts in which to explore. Travis Schenck illustrated how a salient Korean adoptee identity functioned to mediate his marginal position as both a part yet apart from Asian and White communities.

> *Yeah I'm Korean, but then I'm also Korean adoptee.* So I break it down in three levels of just being Korean. You're Korean from Korea, you live, Korean family, you live in Korea, you're Korean. You're Korean-American, you have probably a Korean second-generation, or you have Korean parents that speak some English but they're mainly influenced, 80% of their lives are in Korean. You were born here. You're Korean-American, you have Korean friends, you can speak both languages, but on a specific level your Korean sucks, you know, and that's Korean-American. *But then there's Korean adoptees that, we're Korean but we have all white privilege.* See the Korean-Americans still live in Korean communities and have Korean social networks, but *Korean adoptees have only specifically white networks. And we have, we can…have more of a difficult [time] transcend[ing] into Korean networks.* [emphasis added]

[35] One additional adoptee had desired specifically Asian adoptee friendships in college though he failed to develop any. His motivations were based on assumptions of shared experiences with other adoptees that were not recognized with non-adopted Asians.

Travis's explicit acknowledgement of internal diversity within Korean communities was somewhat of a rarity amongst adoptees who largely imposed "foreigner" assumptions onto non-adopted Asians. He had gained this valuable insight from substantial exposure to both non-adopted and adopted Koreans and Asians through informal friendships and belonging to formally organized groups. Thus, while he recognized social constraints on adoptees' belonging with non-adopted Koreans, Travis still maintained the legitimacy of his Korean identity regardless of his White American cultural socialization.

Participants immersed themselves in adoptee social networks and organizations during exploration. Shifts towards specifically Korean adoptee identities and consciousness were evident as they altered their social circles to include intimate friendships with in-group members, involvement on educational panels, and as mentors and camp counselors. Particularly significant to adoptees were peer interactions that often validated and normalized their own experiences. For Joseph Braun, a twenty-five year old youth program director, being surrounded by Korean adoptees as a heritage camp counselor was a new and welcomed experience.

> Um, it was really, uh, really amazing for me…I found out Holt does these adoptive camps, I jumped on the chance…*I drove in there and there's just tons and tons of Asians. And I'd never seen so many in my life and I just got really excited for it.* Um, and all the counselors came up to me and they said hi and *I was just immediately accepted in*. [emphasis added]

Though Joseph enjoyed interacting with younger adoptees, it was his exposure to other camp counselors in an Asian-majority setting that transformed his emotional attachment to other Korean adoptees. Based on a foundation of a shared Korean adoptee identity, Joseph felt a full-fledged acceptance that he had been denied as *a part* of *yet apart* from

both Asian and White communities. Thus, he developed his Korean adoptee identity alongside a low level of comfort with non-adopted Asians.

One option for transnational homeland visits was through adoption agency sponsored tours. Lynn Ackerman, a forty-one year old homemaker, participated in Holt's Motherland Tour to Korea at the age of twenty. It was because of her cultural unfamiliarity with Korea that Lynn appreciated the structure and assistance provided by an organized tour.

> And Holt hand held us as much as we wanted, which was so great. And just planned all these excursions, planned, and it was, I really loved being hand held. At the same time, we had some free time to go do your own, which was great. *So here we are trying to catch taxi cabs in a town that nobody speaks English, we're like, okay. We can do it. Let's figure it out.* (chuckles) It's great. I love it. [emphasis added]

Having other adoptees with which to negotiate a foreign culture, language, norms, and ethnic assumptions of authenticity tempered feelings of marginality and exclusion in Korea. Authenticity issues were confronted as a group in the same social position rather than alone. And while a shared adoptee status had not guaranteed a connection with everyone, the group environment provided Lynn with a support system against criticism of being a "cultural foreigner" (Kim 2009). Thus, a Korean adoptee context provided a qualitatively different experience for Lynn than if she had visited Korea independently. The interconnectedness of her racial, ethnic, and adoptive identities functioned as conditions for group belonging rather than marginality and fostered an emergent Korean adoptee identity.

Formally organized groups or programs provided opportunities to participate in the larger Korean adoptee community as "experts" due to adoptees' lived experiences. Jamie Fisher, a thirty-nine year old pharmaceutical company employee, intensively

explored the Korean adoptee community following college as a mentor to younger adoptees for seven years. The mentorship program, in fact, was the only aspect of Also Known As (AKA) that held any interest for him. For adoptees like Jamie, involvement in formally organized programs was a conscious strategy for "giving back" to the larger adoptee community.

> **Jamie**: It was fun. It was, it was really interesting to be, and I can purely see the little kids, um, definitely had a good time and were, were clearly, if I had that growing up, that would have been great. Because it would have been a little bit of an eye-opener that at that young age that oh, maybe it would be kind of interesting to know Korean or something like that. So I think it was, it was good. Overall, it was a very positive experience.
>
> **Interviewer**: Do you remember why you decided to join the mentorship program?
>
> **Jamie**: Because that was actually something I believed in is that, you know, as an adult adoptee that I can actually have a positive experience with someone at a younger age…

Jamie's concern with larger issues outside his personal history illustrated his identification with Korean adoptees and signaled a shift in his consciousness. His ability as a mentor was partially based from on-going discussions he had with adult adoptee peers about the social and personal significance of their racial, ethnic, and adoptive differences.

Conclusion

The majority of adoptees in the study explored and experienced modest shifts in their racial and ethnic identities in early adulthood. Non-explorers, in contrast, remained firmly immersed in White-dominated communities and were typically White-identified with colorblind racial perspectives.

For explorers, newly diverse environments induced most to acknowledge their racial and ethnic difference, and they gained an acceptance, even if only marginally, of being *a part* of Asian or Korean communities. Informal social exposure strategies were the most preferred type of exploration, though most intensive explorers used a combination across tracks. Modest explorers, in particular, responded to the authenticity dilemma (Tuan 1999) by delving back into their White social networks. Failure to meet these ethnic expectations was met with challenges to adoptees' "real" belonging with non-adopted Koreans or Asians. Intensive explorers, by comparison, generally negotiated their space within Asian communities despite a lack of cultural literacy. Yet, intensive exploration along the cultural heritage track typically resulted in adoptees feeling *a part* of *yet apart* from Korean communities while intensive social exposure produced a more salient belonging as *a part* of Asian communities. Thus, cultural expectations from co-ethnics heightened adoptees' difference precisely because they were assumed to have a greater degree of connection to or sameness with Koreans than with Asians in general.

Due to such conditions, Korean adoptee community exploration provided safe environments where adoptees' racial and ethnic marginality from White, Asian, and specifically Korean communities provided the foundation for connections and a Korean adoptee culture. In contrast to other types, both modest and intensive forms of Korean adoptee exploration largely resulted in feeling *a part* of Korean adoptee communities without corresponding feelings of exclusion. The high rate of participation in formal adoptee organizations illustrated 1) the cultural familiarity and ease adoptees had with one another; 2) their emotional investment in the larger adoptee community; and 3) the greater availability of Korean adoptee resources in the Midwest and to later age cohorts.

These findings point to the significance of Korean adoptee communities in providing adoptees with opportunities to explore and develop a sense of full-fledged group belonging.

Yet, regardless of exploration, the vast majority of adoptees in the study remained in predominantly White social circles and environments and continued to identify predominantly with Whites. Adoptees' racial and ethnic identities were largely symbolic and descriptive in nature and had not significantly altered their social behavior or social networks. In turn, the trajectories adoptees followed in early adulthood influenced the role their ethnic, racial, and adoptee identities played in later adulthood, namely whether it structured choices regarding marriageable partners, where to reside, socialization strategies for their own children, and involvement in post-adoption services.

CHAPTER V

KOREAN ADOPTEES IN LATER ADULTHOOD

> Other than maybe just thinking about, you know, more of my friends having kids…I'm certainly I think more interested and more open to, to wanting to know more about Korea than probably I ever have been before…And, then I think I'd probably…would be maybe more inclined to learn more and want to do more.
>
> -- Cheryl Diefendorf, a thirty-nine year old social worker

Growing up, Cheryl's parents had essentially ignored the fact that she was racially and ethnically different from Whites. Having minimal contact with Asians and experiencing racial teasing on a daily basis, Cheryl was preoccupied with blending in and explicitly wanted to be White. Her White-identified perspective extended into college and throughout early adulthood, and it wasn't until mid-adulthood when Cheryl's friends began having children that her own ethnic interest developed. Seeing them reach such a pivotal developmental stage and their ability to reminisce about specific details of their children's birth initiated her to reconsider the meaning of her adoptive, ethnic, and racial identities. Her newly emergent interest rested primarily on having a cultural heritage to teach her own children in the future.

As Cheryl's case demonstrates, adoptees transitioning into the middle stages of adulthood face new institutional responsibilities and priorities in the family and work. This period was often characterized by a stabilization of the rather provisional and experimental nature of early adulthood life. New social contexts again presented stage-specific motivations for adoptees to examine their identities that had not previously been relevant. Yet, increased institutional involvement often limited their contact with others

outside of these particular settings. Children and career usually occupied top billing for people's time and energy. Most additional free time was invested in either church or neighborhood activities. Thus, personal relationships were primarily with people from these pre-existing social realms. In this sense, the choices adoptees made during previous life stages, particularly early adulthood, impacted not only their motivations but also opportunities for identity examination in mid-adulthood. This occurred predominantly through the racial and ethnic composition of their social circles and residential neighborhoods.

In this chapter, I discuss how the emergent responsibilities adoptees confronted during mid-adulthood influenced their decisions about whether and how to explore their racial, ethnic, and adoptive identities. I operationalized mid-adulthood according to Sheehy's (2006) conceptualization as beginning at thirty years old and extending into one's sixties. Sixty-seven adoptees in the study fell within this age group; the remaining ten respondents were still in their mid- to late twenties at the time of the interview. Again, I "double-counted" the cases when describing the types of exploration used because thirty-three adoptees had participated in multiple tracks regardless of intensity level. This addresses a central concern on whether, and in what ways, specific types of exploration altered adoptees' racial and ethnic attitudes and identities.

Adoptees during this life stage remained *a part* of *yet apart* from Asian, White, and Korean communities. Most in the study structured their lives from within White communities, namely through their choice of life partners, residential location, childrearing socialization, and institutional involvement. Yet, thirty-three continued to explore at an intensive level while the number of modest explorers had risen from fifteen

in early adulthood to twenty-two in mid-adulthood. Correspondingly, only twelve adoptees abstained from exploration during mid-adulthood compared to the twenty-five in early adulthood. Most significantly, twenty-nine adoptees used modest forms of cultural heritage whereas only six had done so in early adulthood. While consuming Korean food was previously brokered, adoptees independently incorporated it into their lives during this stage. Apart from food consumption, Korean adoptee community exposure was the single most preferred method of exploration in the study and again highlighted the strong emotional connection to one another (19).

"Place" continued to affect the types of opportunities available to adoptees and the extent of their ethnic and racial exploration. Adoptees that lived on the West coast, in particular, generally participated in more racially diverse communities both physically and socially. Rather than a concerted effort to attend ethnic specific events, these adoptees simply interacted on a regular basis with their Asian friends and, in some cases, families. In contrast, those in the Midwest had maintained their White social circles and living spaces, and thus, exposure to Asians typically required a conscious effort. Predictably, those that lived in cities versus rural areas were also more likely to experience diversity in their everyday lives.

Middle Adulthood: Variation Within

Racial and ethnic identity exploration are lifelong processes (Parham 1989) with stage-specific issues in mid-adulthood (Sheehy 2006).[36] The concept of "recycling"

[36] All individuals are seen to experience psychosocial issues as they enter middle adulthood: "1) achieving a sense of self-utilization; 2) increased awareness of physical vulnerability; 3) modified time perspective; 4) planning for further accomplishments in life; and 5) taking stock, structuring, and restructuring life experiences" (Parham 1989: 201-2).

describes the cyclical nature of identity formation or "the reinitiation of the racial identity struggle and resolution process after having gone through the identity development process at an earlier stage in one's life" (Parham 1989: 213). From this perspective, an internalized Asian racial identity does not eliminate the potential need for future exploration. Adoptees may progress through the various developmental stages at one point in their lives as Sierra Canning did in adolescence. Yet, as they age, new life stages present different responsibilities and opportunities that may trigger additional racial and ethnic identity examinations. Adoptees may cycle through multiple racial and ethnic identity searches "that continu[e] throughout the life span and…[therefore] racial attitudes are subject to continuous change over time" (Parham 1989: 223).

Sheehy (2006) identifies life events specific to various stages *within* mid- and later adulthood which induce a reexamination of personal identities. Developmental pressures delineate the various phases that begin in the early thirties and extend into the sixties (Sheehy 2006). As adoptees enter a particular stage, "marker events" (Sheehy 2006), such as marriage, child birth, and caring for aging parents, present new challenges and responsibilities. Old lifestyles and perspectives are no longer practical, useful, or desired in this phase of life and are reassessed "in relation to others" (Sheehy 2006: 30). For example, Brad Foster, a forty-nine year old factory production employee, only initiated an exploration of his racial and ethnic identities when his teenage daughter's interest in Japanese anime pushed him to attend a Japanese heritage group. Altering his own racial and ethnic perspectives from a strong White-identification was significant for supporting his daughter's interest and self-discovery.

It is particularly as adoptees enter the stage of "Rooting and Extending" in their early thirties that their lives begin to gain stability (Sheehy 2006). They redirect their focus to career and family development and make important decisions regarding who to choose as life partners, where to reside and purchase a home if possible, and how to socialize their children. Social relationships outside the family decline in frequency, and the significance of peer acceptance often diminishes in saliency. For many adoptees, having children initiates a once dormant or nonexistent interest in acquiring more cultural knowledge and literacy. Yet, whether they actively engage during this life stage largely depends on available opportunities, time, and adoptees' racial ideologies.

Adoptees enter what Sheehy (2006) describes as "the Deadline Decade" as they approach the ages of thirty-five to forty-five. During this life stage, people reassess how their lives have progressed and the identities they have formed (Parham 1989). This appraisal can create emotional distress, and it is during this period that mid-life crises typically occur. Feelings that were once suppressed become acknowledged and are often resolved during this life stage. During reexamination, adoptees decide to either continue their present ethnic and racial trajectories or shift their perspectives and behavior in an alternative direction. Life changing decisions made during this stage allows for time to rebuild; yet, as time progresses, monumental shifts in one's life, such as a career change or having children, becomes more difficult and less likely. In addressing once buried and "even unwanted parts, [adoptees] prepare at a gut level for the reintegration of an identity that is [theirs and theirs] alone – not some artificial form put together to please the culture" (Sheehy 2006: 43) or peers. Included in this reassessment are decisions about

how salient adoptees' racial and ethnic identities will be in structuring their social behavior.

Adoptees experience a new stage of relative stability and equilibrium as they transition into the stage of "Renewal or Resignation" (Sheehy 2006). They take stock of their life experiences and accomplishments in their mid-forties through their sixties as they come to terms with their own aging processes. Institutional participation shifts away from career and childrearing to church and retirement-related institutions, i.e. retirement residences and communities (Parham 1989). Family and work-related constraints decrease and once hectic schedules slow down. Isaac Dobratz, a father and husband with two jobs, has multiple life responsibilities that left little time for self-exploration.

> I have my church life, my this life, my that life, you know, and I don't feel like I have a like a life where I really do a cultural thing everyday or very often at all. Um, so it's just one of those, you know, I have to keep the family well, and keep things moving along here. Yeah, for whatever reason, I always saw that more as I slowed down and just got kids out of the house, and, um, had more time to look at something like that. Again, a lot of that has to do with time management and priorities and things.

With fewer family obligations in later adulthood, adoptees such as Isaac have not only more time but usually increased financial means to explore their identities. Without children for whom they must provide, adoptees can financially pursue their own interests. Intensive forms of ethnic exploration, such as transnational homeland visits, are often too expensive for families to undertake together but become accessible as other expenses diminish.

I turn now to the strategies adoptees used to explore their racial and ethnic identities in mid-adulthood. As was seen previously, Korean adoptee contact played a consistent and unique role in shaping the in-groups with which adoptees identified.

No Ethnic Exploration

Twelve of the sixty-seven adoptees had zero involvement in any exploration during mid-adulthood. Only four had explored their identities in prior life stages and most involvement had been modest and intermittent in nature. Connections to Asians or Koreans were weak and had failed to sustain an interest past early adulthood. Brooke Marshall, who was introduced in Chapter IV, was the sole exception who had intensively explored her identities in college through friendships with non-adopted Asians. However, after she was no longer involved with the university, Brooke lost contact with her Korean friends.

More commonly, non-explorers consistently abstained from involvement throughout the life cycle and remained in a stage of *unexamined ethnic and racial identities* (Cross 1991; Phinney 1993). They had zero commitments to Asians, Koreans, or Korean adoptees and were unconcerned with ethnic or racial issues. They strongly identified with their all White social relationships and expressed no interest in expanding their circles to include Asians. All twelve lived in all or predominantly White communities, and racial and ethnic diversity was either irrelevant or avoided. Abby Wilson, a thirty-nine year old registrar, questioned the unequal expectations imposed solely because she was Asian. Whiteness, by contrast, was normalized, and thus, White ethnic and racial identities were rendered invisible. White Americans, in contrast to Asian Americans, were able to claim a generic “American” identity without any ethnic affiliation. While all these adoptees acknowledged the physical reality of their Asian categorization and Korea as their birth country, their identities were solely physical

descriptors. And while being Asian failed to carry the same level of stigma or shame often associated during childhood and adolescence, these non-explorers were in "acceptance of white values, beliefs, standards, and [saw] Whites as [their] reference group" (Phinney 1993: 66).

Katie Baldwin, a forty year old database systems trainer, neither felt like a "true" Asian nor identified as a racial minority. Although she was exposed to Korean adoptees during childhood and adolescence, she abstained from any independent racial, ethnic, or adoptee exploration as an adult. That she was born in Korea had not altered its relevance for her. Instead, Katie constructed Asians as diametrically opposed to what she represented, being American. Strongly identifying as "American" when asked about ethnicity, she preferred living amongst Whites and disliked any association, even symbolic, with Koreans or Asians. Rather than challenging Asian stereotypes, Katie reproduced them but distanced herself as an exception.

While they acknowledged their multiethnic heritage, non-explorers had not marked their children's physical appearance as Asian. Because of their biracial background, adoptees essentially saw their kids as White. Their lack of "Asian eyes" and lighter complexion allowed adoptees to ignore their children's biracial background without many social costs, if any. While four adoptees stated that teaching their children about their Korean heritage was theoretically important, they opted for a child choice strategy (Tessler et al. 1999) and zero participation had occurred at the time of the interview. Thus, they continued the tradition started by their parents of socializing their children from a White-identified perspective.

Modest Exploration

In contrast to non-explorers, adoptees who examined their racial and ethnic identities during mid-adulthood developed a growing racial and ethnic awareness and interest. These adoptees exemplified through their involvement at least an initial recognition that they were *a part* of Asian and Korean communities, even if only symbolically. Yet, the primary focus during exploration on external indicators, the "observable social and cultural behaviors such as language usage, media preference, friendship pattern, spousal choice, and so on" (Lien et al. 2003: 470) led adoptees to simultaneously feel set *apart* from non-adopted Asians and Koreans as well. The pivotal event of having children was often a catalyst for adoptees who had not previously explored to begin examining their identities.

As discussed in the preceding chapter, ethnic and racial identity exploration can be categorized according to two different paths. A *cultural heritage track* was characterized by an active attempt to acquire knowledge about their birth country and birth culture. In contrast, a *social exposure track* typically included sustained, personal relationships of varying degrees with other Asians, Koreans, or Korean adoptees. While adoptees often absorbed new racial perspectives and cultural diversity during their personal interactions with their Asian networks, many interacted on a purely social basis rather than a concerted effort to accumulate cultural knowledge.

Again, adoptees used a combination of strategies from both tracks. Much of this exploration was contingent upon opportunities available in their physical communities. However, the internet had also made exploration more accessible to even those in rural communities. Predictably, those who participated in extensive Asian networks in mid-

adulthood were more likely to have explored their ethnic and racial identities in early adulthood. This was true for involvement with both adoptee and non-adopted Asians.

Developmental maturity during mid-adulthood provided many explorers the necessary self-confidence to actively examine their ethnic identities. Patrick Frisby, a thirty-eight year old private equity businessman, expressed such a perspective: “I mean it was just more acceptable and comfortable to recognize and kind of highlight your differences as I became older, versus, you didn't really want to focus on your differences as differences [when younger].” Thirteen non-explorers in early adulthood began exploring their ethnic and racial identities to some extent in mid-adulthood. Seven of these new explorers had been placed in the mid-1970s and were in “The Deadline Decade” (Sheehy 2006) at the time of the interview. Thus, they were exploring alternative approaches to their racial and ethnic identities at a life stage when once suppressed issues are brought to the fore and engaged. Twelve adoptees shifted from a prior intensive level of exploration in early adulthood to modest in mid-adulthood also as a result of changes in institutional involvement and life responsibilities.

CULTURAL HERITAGE

Twenty-nine adoptees participated in some form of modest cultural heritage exploration. Reading articles, books, or online information about Korea and Korean culture were the most convenient forms. Because they could peruse these items at will during their free time, adoptees appreciated not being required to invest large commitments of time and energy. With their own children and family responsibilities, sustained involvement in groups, programs, or activities was not a viable option for many. Three adoptees used journals and online services as their primary means of

exploration, yet, participated in additional activities as well. For example, Claire Dunston consistently read Korean Quarterly but had also participated in a one-day Korean culture camp as an adult. Thus, she mixed Korean culture and Korean adoptee culture in her ethnic and racial exploration interchangeably.

Nine adoptees consumed Korean food as their only form of exploration; one additional adoptee ate Korean food as their primary ethnic involvement but had also made numerous visits to Chinatown. Korean food was not incorporated as a weekly staple in their diets, but consumption was a conscious effort, even if only occasional in nature. "Authentic" food was a relatively safe way to connect to adoptees' ethnic heritage as they "attempt[ed] to align oneself with the ethnic Other and to realize an 'Authentic Self'" (Kwan 2003: 2). However, Korean restaurants continued to create uncomfortable situations for adoptees when faced with behavioral expectations such as language proficiency and using chopsticks. Yet, the cultural impositions had not carried the same weight as during earlier life stages. Their developmental maturity enabled them to negotiate these ethnic expectations with less emotional distress than evident in previous life stages. Seven of these adoptees wanted their children to develop an interest in their Korean heritage; yet, only four had introduced them to Korean food. Thus, though these adoptees expressed multicultural ideals, they had yet to alter their family practices.

Methods for language acquisition varied from simply buying language tapes or books (2) to taking language classes (2) and learning phrases or conversational Korean, i.e. Hangul, from co-ethnic exposure (13). Thus, again, informal interactions were preferred to formal settings. Adoptees' interest in language proficiency, more than any other cultural characteristic, was seen as a strategy to redraw Asian and Korean

boundaries that included them as “authentic” in-group members. Independent attempts to learn the language were too difficult and quickly abandoned. And while language classes required more investment than independent study, adoptees abstained from additional enrollment. Stephanie Ross, a forty year old production designer, had legally changed her name to include her Korean name when she turned eighteen. Her burgeoning ethnic pride that began in early adulthood extended into mid-adulthood through learning Korean and consciously exposing her son to Korean restaurants from an early age. At this life stage, Stephanie fully accepted her Korean heritage, but it remained largely at a symbolic level. She continued to live within White social circles and resisted her Korean label as a defining characteristic for her personal identity.

SOCIAL EXPOSURE

Three adoptees used excursions into a Koreatown, or more commonly a Chinatown, as their only ethnic or racial exploration. Chinatowns were simply more accessible, especially in the Midwest, and ethnic affiliation mattered little. Rather, it was the exposure to Asian people and culture in general that attracted these adoptees. In contrast to other forms of social exposure, these trips generally required minimal commitment since adoptees were able to browse the stores and restaurants at will as tourists. And while all enjoyed the experience, they felt uncomfortable or intimidated being in contact with such large populations of Asians.

Dave Cortese, the adoptee who verbally targeted other Asians in high school, had his first taste of Korean food when he visited a Koreatown in mid-adulthood. Simply having his wife accompany him, even though she had not experienced the same assumptions being White, minimized some of the discomfort that originated in his

inability to read, write, or speak Korean. Yet, the culture and people remained completely foreign to him and contrasted with his White identification. While his ethnic identity was only a descriptor of his biological background, Dave claimed a "Korean" identity to distance himself from Asians, having always felt like a White person trapped in an Asian body. Because of his disassociation, Dave had only visited this community once.

In contrast to consuming Asian or Korean culture, six adoptees maintained intermittent but on-going contact with non-adopted first-generation Koreans who functioned as "cultural consultants." Unlike deep personal friendships, these relationships were less consistent and more formal in nature. Adoptees, in general, interacted with these "consultants" in public spaces, i.e. drycleaners, nail salons, etc., and often when convenient.

Emily Becker's relationship with her cultural consultant was somewhat of an exception. Living in a predominantly white suburb, her neighbor was a first-generation Korean woman and took an immediate interest in Emily's Korean adoptee status. It became her neighbor's personal mission to educate Emily about Korean history and culture. For Emily who had previously rejected her Asian and Korean identities, these conversations, combined with her husband's interest and encouragement, sparked a once dormant cultural interest and burgeoning ethnic pride. Learning new positive associations of Korea as a country and culture allowed her to understand her birth country and adoptive history from a new perspective of understanding. In the initial stages of *dissonance*, Emily's interactions were gradually transforming her ethnic and racial statuses from marks of stigma to ones she could embrace. While she theoretically wanted Asian friends with whom to connect over their shared racial categorization, Emily

maintained predominantly White social networks and had not actively sought these relationships.

KOREAN ADOPTEE COMMUNITY

Twenty-three adoptees explored their racial and ethnic identities through involvement with a Korean adoptee community; sixteen of these had not participated in early adulthood. However, seventeen included Korean adoptee community exploration along with more traditional forms of ethnic and racial exploration. Most involvement in formally organized activities was at an intensive level, for example through transnational homeland visits and informal friendships. Picnics (3) and reunions or gatherings (3), by comparison, were typically attended once without sustained commitments. Modest explorers illustrated an emotional attachment to the larger adoptive community in general but with low levels of commitment. Justin Werden, a forty-two year old probation officer, was exceptional in that he attended a Korean adoptee picnic but deemed it important enough to require his children's participation as well.

Witnessing younger generations and their families embrace their Korean heritage was an emotional experience for Michelle Palmer, a forty-four year old teacher, who attended a picnic with her mother, sister, and daughter. Having been raised in a climate of cultural assimilation, Michelle had felt isolated and alone. The impact of a large concentration of proud Korean adoptees was intensely powerful and emotionally cathartic for Michelle who had struggled with her own racial and ethnic differences as a child. While she still identified with Whites, the shame she internalized as a child had shifted to pride even though her ethnic identity was symbolic in nature. Michelle's cultural interest

continued following the picnic, but additional forms of interpersonal exploration were not accessible in her rural White community.

Seven adoptees used online services during this life stage via Holt International's website or adoptee blogs (4) or facebook adoptee groups (3). Online services in general allowed for reading and connecting to adoptee experiences without large requirements of personal commitment, investment of time and energy, or pressure to divulge their own personal information. Renee Gundersen received regular emails about adoptee issues and events from a Korean adoptee facebook group she joined. With such an impersonal "do as you like" structure she could read the emails at her convenience or not at all. While some of the Korean adoptee events sounded appealing, she acknowledged it was simply easier to be inactive due to her time-consuming family responsibilities. For Renee, identifying as an "adopted Korean" was an important distinguisher that positioned her socially closer to Americans, i.e. Whites, than non-adopted Asians.

Intensive Exploration

Intensive exploration, such as transnational homeland visits and close personal friendships with Asians, consisted of higher levels of commitment and emotional attachment to one's ethnic and racial in-groups and illustrated the *immersion/emersion* (Cross 1991) phase of ethnic exploration. Thirty-three adoptees participated at an intensive level while fourteen of these used a combination of modest and intensive forms. Intensive explorers, in contrast to modest, had experienced more substantial identity shifts or a "redirection to [an] Asian American [and Korean identified] consciousness" (Phinney 1993: 70). Rather than remaining at a descriptive or symbolic state, racial and

ethnic identities were more significant for structuring intensive explorers' social behavior.

CULTURAL HERITAGE

Eleven adoptees participated in transnational homeland visits to Korea during mid-adulthood. Two additional adoptees were in preparation for their imminent trip to Korea but had yet to travel.[37] In contrast to Nadia Kim's (2007) findings on second-generation Korean Americans, most adoptees had expressed reservations about how native Koreans would categorize them: whether as in-group members or as cultural outsiders. While non-adopted Korean Americans had assumed a racial belonging in Korea, adoptees were generally neither Korean nor Asian-identified prior to their trips. They carried weaker expectations for social belonging based on their Korean heritage due to their White socialization and cultural marginality from non-adopted Koreans in the U.S. Adoptee apprehension was largely based within cultural assumptions Koreans would impose, specifically in regards to language, and how such expectations would manifest. Those with non-adopted Korean friends had forewarned them about Korean constructions of in-group belonging and negative associations with adoption.

While impressions of Korea varied in intensity, all appreciated the experience. Four adoptees strongly connected to Korea and its people. Paul Morris, a thirty-two year old minister, immediately identified with Korea as "his place." Paul's experience represented the more traditionally familiar searching for one's "roots" that is characterized by a "story of belonging and of lost belongings in which an alienated self

[37] Both of these adoptees were accompanying Holt International's Motherland Tour with their adoptive families.

must be reconnected to a ground…that constitutes its identity" (Yngvesson 2005: 32). Since his trip was specifically to meet his birth mother, it carried a more personal and emotional element than for other adoptees who had visited as a way to culturally explore their Korean heritage. Though Paul identified with Koreans and is ethnically proud, his attachment was mainly on a symbolic basis and disconnected from his everyday life; for example, he routinely cheered for Korean American athletes due to their shared ethnicity. His internalization of "authentic" ethnic expectations continued to guide his behavior and perspective, for instance, by avoiding Korean restaurants and feeling guilty for not returning to Korea before his thirties.

Six adoptees traveled to Korea independent of an established organization. Four were accompanied by friends or family members. Rather than searching for their "roots" or birth relatives, these adoptees viewed these trips to Korea as merely vacations to be enjoyed mainly from a tourist perspective. The fact that Korea was their birth country held only minor sentimentality versus other vacation destinations.

Four of the eleven adoptees who visited Korea imbued the experience with special significance for their children as well. Two had taken their children to Korea while the other two had plans for the future. Personally experiencing the country where their parents were born was part of more elaborate plans to educate their children about their Korean heritage. Rather than following the cultural assimilation model of their adoptive parents, these adoptees sought to integrate Korean culture, i.e. food, language, and dress, into their children's lives. That their children appreciated Korea and Korean culture gratified adoptees and held special significance since they had rejected their own racial and ethnic backgrounds during childhood and adolescence.

The military structure provided two additional adoptees with opportunities to acquire cultural knowledge. Jonathan Mann cultivated relationships with non-adopted Koreans during his military service that extended beyond the casual, and at times uncomfortable, contact that often characterized other adoptees' interactions. Having been deployed twice with members of the Korean army, Jonathan bonded with Korean soldiers over their shared ethnicity. He welcomed their enthusiastic sharing of authentic knowledge about Korea and Korean culture and had more sustained interactions over a greater span of time than most because of the military structure. And while he had not maintained contact following his service, the relationships had been more intimate and had a longer lasting effect than was evident with other adoptees and their cultural consultants. As a result of his ethnic exploration and social exposure, Jonathan appreciated blending in racially with other Asians and valued the presence of other Korean adoptees and families in his community.

Predictably, adoptees most proficient in Hangul had previously lived in Korea, particularly during military service, or were married to Korean women. Kyle Shaw was somewhat of an anomaly in regard to his high-level language competency. Kyle had been stationed in Korea for two years and married a first-generation Korean woman he met during that time. Combined with his firsthand experience in his birth country, his daily interactions with his wife furthered his communicative ability. With strong Asian and Korean identifications, his social circle consisted of predominantly Asians. His children's bicultural socialization whereby they "acquir[ed] the norms, attitudes, and behavior patterns of their own and another…ethnic group" (Rotheram and Phinney 1987: 24) was a source of pride for him. Given that his interactions were predominantly with first-

generation immigrants, Kyle preferred international Asian exposure to contact with domestic racial diversity. While he maintained a level of social comfort with Whites, Kyle felt an automatic acceptance from Asians regardless of ethnic expectations of authenticity.

SOCIAL EXPOSURE

Intensive social exposure explorers most closely exemplified transformations towards an *achieved ethnic identity* (Phinney 1993) "characterized by a clear, confident sense of one's own ethnicity [and racial identity]" (Phinney 1993: 71). Adoptees in this phase of identity development have accepted and internalized their Asian and Korean identities (Cross 1991). Their racial visibility, once a marker of social stigma, was now a badge of pride. Racial and ethnic identities were understood as flexible rather than as biologically fixed constructions. And while many still desired to acquire cultural knowledge, their self-identification as Asian was not dependent upon it.

Eighteen adoptees identified and interacted with Asian American communities, though their levels of involvement varied. Those who had previously participated in extensive Asian networks in early adulthood were more likely to have sustained them into mid-adulthood versus constructing entirely new ones. Even if their involvement diminished, their previous exposure had created opportunities for continued examination and participation.

Only male adoptees expressed an Asian preference for their mate selection, and four had married Asian women.[38] These men consciously decided to date only Asian

[38] Three additional male adoptees who were placed during the 1980s and dating Asians were not included in the analysis for mid-adulthood and life partners. Only one specifically dated only Asians as he found

women following increased exposure and opportunities. Interestingly, three of these adoptees had been adopted after they were three years old. Terry Schultz had struggled with dating and never felt physically attractive in the U.S. He first experiences of being labeled desirable occurred when he lived in Korea and was part of the racial majority. Similarly, Jamie Fisher, who experienced intense exclusion and left his childhood Iowa community as soon as he became an adult, specifically wanted to marry an Asian woman to ensure his children were "100% Asian." For adoptees such as Terry and Jamie, exposing their children to Asian or Korean culture was highly valued and implemented into their lives through their Asian wives. Their strong Asian or Korean identifications in early adulthood had created opportunities for them to continue along the same trajectory in mid-adulthood.

Consistent throughout life stages, adoptees were more likely to participate in social exposure with other Asians than to engage in activities focused solely on cultural knowledge. As with Chinatowns, it was Asian exposure or racial sameness that was significant rather than specifically Korean contact. Adoptees' marked Asian visibility structured their experiences as similar regardless of ethnic affiliation. Lynn Ackerman, a forty-one year old mother and homemaker, felt more her "true" self with her Asian friends. They provided support based on their shared experiences and interconnected fate as Asian Americans that her White friends could not personally understand, for example, commiserating over being taunted with racial slurs. As such, her Asian identity was salient whereas her ethnic identity, though interesting, was rather symbolic in nature. She consciously chose to live in a racially diverse rather than racially homogenous

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greater acceptance amongst them. Interestingly, Brian Hansel, introduced in Chapter III, was dating another Korean adoptee, the first Asian he had dated, and had one of the most salient Korean adoptee identities in the study.

neighborhood. Yet, as with most adoptees in the study, Lynn's Asian friendships had not completely replaced her White networks. Her husband was White and, in fact, all her neighborhood Asian American girlfriends were also married to White men.

Friendships had a convenience factor as they were part of adoptees' everyday lives rather than requiring separate time inserted into already hectic schedules. This was especially evident amongst those who resided in larger metropolitan areas outside the Midwest (8) and particularly within the Los Angeles area (4). City residents within these areas had abundant everyday contact with Asians; yet, even those who lived in suburban neighborhoods had more opportunities given the larger Asian populations and East Asians' general socioeconomic "success" (Bonilla-Silva and Embrick 2006; Kim 2009; Massey and Denton 1995; Yancey 2006). Such a pattern was due largely to the regional history of Asian immigration, and thus, the larger presence of Asian immigrant and Asian American communities.

Ten intensive explorers had numerous Asian friends with whom they communicated or saw on a regular basis, and for five adoptees, Asians comprised the majority of their friends. Nick Edwards, a thirty-nine year old military serviceman, had married a second-generation Korean American woman he met while stationed in Korea. His intensive exploration continued when he returned to the U.S. in early adulthood and immersed himself in specifically second-generation Korean American communities. His level of involvement outside the family declined in mid-adulthood due primarily to life stage responsibilities and having to relocate for work, but his Korean and Asian identities remained salient for structuring his and his family's life. With a Korean-American wife, his immersion was a normalized, everyday activity, and was proud his children were

receiving a bicultural socialization. Rather than just giving them Korean middle names, Nick had plans to enroll them in Tae Kwon Do and spend a summer in Korea as a family. As one of the few adoptees who identified as “Asian American” and “Korean American,” Nick felt equally comfortable with Whites and Asians in social situations but had a strong ethnic pride.

While they often participated in cultural activities such as eating Korean food, many intensive explorers made concerted efforts to sustain contact with Asians for both themselves and their families. This entailed structuring their physical space such as living in racially diverse neighborhoods, attending Korean churches, and participation in Asian or Asian American organizations or groups. Mary Lauer, a pastor in her mid-thirties, participated extensively when she worked at a Korean church.

> Especially when I was first there, maybe the first couple of weeks, people would come up, especially the elders, I would say almost as an excuse that I was adopted. "Oh you're adopted" kind of that, "That's why you don't know." It was still one of the best experiences to have introductions to the culture, people.

While Mary had experienced cultural assumptions, the benefits of the exposure outweighed the discomfort she felt. At this life stage, she had not internalized the expectations as personal deficiencies, and they failed to negatively shape her continued contact. Through this experience, she had become more Korean-identified regardless of still feeling *apart* culturally and therefore different from non-adopted Koreans.

The remaining intensive explorers all felt most socially comfortable with Whites regardless of their continuing friendships with other Asians. In this way they mirrored most non-exploring *and* exploring adoptees as they identified with White communities despite their level of involvement with Asians or Koreans. Interestingly, one adoptee with predominantly Asian friends and who lived in a racially diverse neighborhood was still

most socially comfortable with Whites rather than Asians. This was primarily due to the "authenticity dilemma" (Tuan 1999) that created uncomfortable situations when she failed to meet cultural expectations with, for example, her boyfriend's Asian mother.

KOREAN ADOPTEE COMMUNITY

The intensive forms of Korean adoptee community exploration used by adoptees in the study were Holt International's Motherland Tour (4), mentorship programs (2), and informal friendships with other Korean adoptees (14).[39] Most used a single type of post-adoption service; however, eight had participated in two or more forms. Involvement declined in mid-adulthood, with the sole exception being the maintenance of informal friendships.

Social exposure to other Korean adoptees and an emergent Korean adoptee identity served to ground adoptees to a community where they "authentically" belonged based on their shared marginality from non-adopted Asians, Koreans, and Whites. As Yngvesson (2000: 94) noted, Korean adoptee culture was constructed within a "narrative of liminality, of not belonging *anywhere*, and thus of not being *real*, together with other adoptees." Thus, Korean culture was not the focus, per se, but rather it was predominantly the social exposure aspect, the bonding over shared social locations, which held the most value. Interactions were, again, defined as racial and ethnic exploration by virtue of it occurring with other Korean adoptees.

[39] Twelve adoptees in the study befriended specifically other Korean adoptees; one had Asian adoptee friends in general, and another had a Black adoptee friend.

Five adoptees participated in transnational homeland visits via Holt International's Motherland Tour.[40] Loraine Cooper, a forty-six year old mother who went in her mid-thirties, appreciated the organization and support the tour provided. With an ever-present guide and transportation on hand, Loraine was able to explore Korea's history and culture in what was for her a safe and comfortable environment. The additional support she received from experiencing Korea with other adoptees and sharing stories about their lives in the U.S. strengthened an identification with Korean adoptees as a group. Occupying the same social position allowed them to bond over being culturally "incompetent" in Korea and lessened feelings of rejection when confronted with cultural expectations or hostility from native Koreans. In contrast to non-adopted Asians, Loraine connected to other adoptees as Asian who not only looked similar physically but were the same culturally as well, i.e. they spoke English. Yet, Loraine's Korean adoptee identity was built on dominant conceptualizations of Asians, even multi-generational Asian Americans, as foreigners rather than challenging them and constructing a place within the larger Asian or Korean American community.

In-person interactions, when available, were viewed as the most conducive environment for connecting with other adoptees. This was particularly preferred when discussing potentially sensitive and emotional topics as relinquishment, birth families, and racial and ethnic identities. Formally organized exploration had not precluded maintaining informal social relationships with other transracial adoptees as well, and in fact, most friendships formed independent of these institutions. For eight explorers, informal adoptee friends with whom they saw or communicated regularly was the only

[40] Two of these adoptees, Edward Haas and Catherine Augustine, had both visited Korea three times; however, they only participated in the tour for their first trip.

method used. These relationships were imbued with special significance based on their common life experiences of being defined as outsiders or not "real" in-group members from both White and Asian communities.

In contrast to the typical experience, six adoptees had formed salient Korean adoptee identities in addition to identifying with non-adopted Asians and Koreans. Amber Markhardt, for example, experienced a renewed cultural interest and ethnic pride when she married her Korean adoptee husband. Interestingly, Amber was the sole female adoptee who had an Asian life partner. While she recognized similarities between Korean adoptees and appreciated sharing experiences, she relied on native Korean conceptualizations of in-group membership that conflated physical appearance with cultural attributes. Thus, as Loraine had, Amber utilized existing paradigms of race and ethnicity and placed herself within these communities. However, in constructing a connection to "authentic" Koreans using "positive" traits, she reproduced foreigner stereotypes of Asians rather than challenging them.

Four adoptees asserted Korean adoptee identities as a response to their continued *difference* from Whites specifically. However, only two adoptees in the study who were Asian-identified and had extensive Asian networks actively participated in activities or friendships with other Korean adoptees during mid-adulthood. Though Lynn Ackerman had predominantly Asian friends in mid-adulthood and lived in a racially diverse neighborhood, she maintained a connection to Korean adoptees, and specifically Holt International, as well. Having recently adopted a Chinese daughter through Holt, Lynn's strong Asian American identity existed simultaneously with her Korean adoptee one. In fact, she recently sent her biological daughter to a Korean adoptee culture camp with her

Korean adoptee cousins. Thus, while Lynn had alternative resources available, Holt International, post-adoption services, and other adoptees continued to play an integral role in hers and her family's lives.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined the ways in which adoptees explored their racial and ethnic identities during mid-adulthood. For most, their primary level of comfort continued to rest with Whites, regardless of exploration. Even so, adoptees had, in general, developed a self-confidence and appreciation for their ethnic identities that had accompanied developmental maturation. Shifts in mainstream culture towards a greater appreciation of multiculturalism also made self-identifying racially or ethnically more palatable and less threatening to their American identities. The fact that fifty-five adoptees in the study explored at least modestly illustrates their general acceptance, to some degree, of their Asian and Korean categorization.

Modest exploration during this life stage predominantly occurred through consuming Korean food independently or with their families. Similar to Tuan and Shiao (2011), intensive exploration with non-adopted Asians, on the other hand, occurred as an extension of previous exploration in earlier lifestages. More sustained involvement, whether with adopted or non-adopted Asians, led to a stronger and deeper identification with that group. This continued involvement often occurred at a diminished rate, though, due to increased responsibilities with work and family. Yet, having children was often a motivator for adoptees to explore their ethnic identities, in particular, in order to inform their socialization strategies.

There was generally a link between certain types of ethnic and racial exploration, or lack thereof, and the communities adoptees felt both *a part* of *yet apart* from; however, this relationship was not deterministic and variation existed. Predictably, adoptees who abstained from exploring were fully ingrained within White communities and generally viewed themselves as diametrically opposed to non-adopted Asians. Modest explorers experienced low levels of attachment to other Asians or Koreans. However, as was seen previously, contact often produced uncomfortable situations to negotiate that involved imposed cultural expectations adoptees failed to fulfill. Being Korean and Asian was still largely understood as genetically factual and symbolic in nature. They were visibly Asian and felt emotionally connected to Korea as their birth country, but those identities had not significantly structured their lives. Rather, their history of belonging and living within White communities played a larger determining factor on social behavior. For the vast majority, the labels such as Korean or Asian American held little meaning except for describing their factual categorization on official forms.

In comparison, intensive explorers, especially along the social exposure track, were the most likely to have developed an Asian American identity whereby they strongly identified with Asians and were concerned with racial issues which affected them as a group. Their intimate social circles and networks consisted primarily of non-adopted Asians and same-race interactions were a part of their everyday lives. Intensive exploration along the cultural heritage track generally created a limited connection with non-adopted Koreans but simultaneously highlighted their cultural difference which set them *apart*. Because they were co-ethnics and adoptees were technically first-generation

immigrants, Korean interactions were often more contentious and emotional than with non-adopted Asians in general.

Korean adoptee community exploration, as in previous life stages, provided unique opportunities for racial and ethnic exploration through the lens of transracial adoption. Such findings highlighted the significance of *place* in providing opportunities for adoptees to interact on a personal level with others who shared similar life circumstances. Such contexts provided safe spaces to explore racial, ethnic, and adoptive identities for those who had previously avoided non-adopted Asians. Adoptees often found commonality, sometimes for the first time, with a larger community based on their shared feelings of exclusion or being in-between groups, never a "real" in-group member. While most explorers had used Korean adoptee community exploration in conjunction with other forms, increased exposure had only produced a sense of belonging rather than setting them *apart* from one another. These findings illustrate the marginality commonly experienced with non-adopted Asians and how social exposure to other adoptees and post-adoption services can intervene.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

In this concluding chapter, I reexamine the initial proposition that Korean transracial adoptees are both *a part* of *yet apart* from White, Asian, and at times, even Korean adoptee communities. As adoptees aged, interpretations of their *sameness* and *difference* within Asian, Korean, and Korean adoptee communities generally shifted from ones of ambivalence and shame to acceptance and even pride. Through specifically sustained, intensive social exposure to other Asians, whether Korean or not, explorers began to identify with their racial and ethnic in-groups. Throughout the life cycle, though, many participated in Korean adoptee communities as a means to negotiate both the inclusion and exclusion produced by their racial and ethnic "displacement" (Kim 2005) in White families. However, revisiting the question of where and how Korean adoptees position themselves with the U.S racial hierarchy sheds light on their persistent othering in U.S. society and how Korean adoptee communities, in particular, intervened to challenge conflations of race and ethnicity.

"Honorary Whiteness" Revisited

Although I have asserted that Korean adoptees occupy an "honorary White" position in the U.S. racial hierarchy, I follow in the tradition of scholars who examine the specific forms of exclusion Asian Americans consistently face (Dhingra 2003; Espiritu 1992; Kibria 2003; Kim 2007, 2009; Lee 1996; Lee and Zhou 2004; Min and Hong 2002; Min and Kim 2002; Prashad 2000; Pyke and Dang 2003; Said 1979; Song 2003; Tuan

1998, 1999; Tuan and Shiao 2011; Zhou and Bankston1998). Asian Americans' social exclusion from a full American social citizenship structure the "everyday racism" (Essed 2002) Korean adoptees confront as "foreigners." As with all Asian Americans, this occurs despite East Asians' high levels of acculturation and socioeconomic status (Kim 2007). Korean adoptees as Asian Americans were unable to erase their racial visibility regardless of self-identifications. "Honorary Whiteness" highlights adoptees' position in between Whites and Asians as *a part* of *yet apart* from both. Thus, with their conditional belonging, adoptees were still vulnerable to instances of racial bias (Bonilla-Silva and Embrick 2006). Examining adult Korean adoptees' racial ideologies illustrates how social distance and perceptions of *sameness* and *difference* were negotiated to maintain their self-defined identities.

Traditional measures of social distance such as residential segregation and rates of interracial marriage suggest a non-Black/Black or a trichotomous social divide whereby Asians and Latinos are more likely to live and intermarry with Whites than Blacks (Bonilla-Silva and Embrick 2006; Massey and Denton 1995; Feagin and O'Brien 2003; Yancey 2003, 2006). This was the case for Korean adoptees who participated in the study and overwhelmingly lived their lives amongst, married, and identified with Whites. Because adoptees experience a qualitatively different form of racial exclusion than Blacks, "it be[came] easier for them to accept the racial perspectives of dominant group members" (Yancey 2006).

For example, Kyle Shaw, who is married to a first-generation Korean woman, used the colorblind frame of cultural racism (Bonilla-Silva 2003) to explain the existing

U.S. racial hierarchy. From his negative experiences with Blacks during childhood and in the Navy, Kyle developed racial attitudes that perpetuate mainstream ideas of race:

> I have a lot of heartache with black culture, the culture of victimhood where they, from my perspective, they like to play, this whole victimhood syndrome where they blame everyone except themselves. It's always someone else's fault…And to be honest from my perspective, they were lazy…The primary difference between success and failure is the value that each one places on education…Because Asians place a fanatical emphasis on the value of education…Whites, I think, are second…Hispanics…place a neutral value on education. "Hey Mom, I just got into Harvard." "Oh that's nice, Dear." "Hey Mom, I just dropped out of high school and I'm pregnant." "OK, that's nice Dear. Don't you go too far from home, OK?"…And until that changes, until they see education as more valuable, then I just don't see them going up any further. Now Blacks, education is actually negative in their culture. It is a massive deterrent…If there's any Black kid really growing up in the 'hood, if you do anything that even remotely resembles academic achievement, what do they say? "What are you trying to do, act White? Who do you think you are?"…That's just one of my many complaints…And what upsets me is that when they end up at the bottom of the barrel, given that view of education, and they talk all that shit about Asians…they like to blame everyone except themselves.

From this perspective, racial groups are responsible for their own location in society because their cultures are deficient and prevent socio-economic success rather than a result of structural impediments. Kyle's experiences with racial bias were the most intense with Blacks and left a lasting impression on him. As he put it, "I have a bad taste in my mouth because they were the ones who were the least tolerant. They were the most cruel." Combined with his salient Asian and Korean identities and memories of the 1992 L.A. uprisings, Kyle clearly placed Asian and Black experiences as diametrically opposed to one another.

Racial Ideologies

All adoptees placed Asians as an intermediary group between Blacks and Whites in the racial hierarchy and often cited "model minority"[41] stereotypes in relation to negative characteristics of Blacks as explanations for the present divide. Regardless of ethnic exploration, most explorers and non-explorers replicated the dominant colorblind (Bonilla-Silva 2003) and multiculturalist (Davis 1996) ideologies imparted by their parents and society in general.

Adoptees generally minimized the existence and effects of racism, whereby racism was defined as individual acts of prejudice, rather than as social systems of oppression. Thus, from this perspective, people need to stop using race as a "crutch," as Abby Wilson put it, for not achieving socioeconomic success or social inclusion into society. Adoptees' personal experiences with racial exclusion precluded a complete denial of racism; however, they measured other people of color's interpretations using their own intermittent experiences of racism as the standard. Racism, especially when involving Blacks, was interpreted through the lens of colorblind individualism and perceived as exaggerations and excuses for personal failures. Thus, struggling for racial justice as allies alongside traditionally discriminated groups was counter to their sense of belonging and identification with Whites (Yancey 2006).

With the minor exceptions of those who strongly identified as Asian American and had predominantly Asian American networks, adoptees were generally uncomfortable talking about race and preferred to frame race discussions in terms of ethnicity and culture. This trend towards a multiculturalist perspective attempts to

[41] Model minority refers to the "positive" attributes that explain Asian American "success" in assimilating into the American mainstream. Tuan (1998) describes these characteristics as "upstanding and high achieving individuals reputed for their work ethic and perseverance" (30).

"'overcom[e]' racism without necessarily shaking up the power structures that are expressed through and constitute the social context of racism" (Davis 1996: 43). Most explorers fell within this category, whereby they recognized the benefits of celebrating their ethnic heritage, often at a symbolic level, based on their own feelings of marginality from Korean culture and people.

However, explicit discussions of social inequality or strategies to dismantle the systems of oppression that produced their "in-betweenness" were generally absent in adoptees' lives. As noted previously, race was perceived as negative and divisive while ethnicity was a means to "positively" assert and celebrate differences (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Tuan and Shiao 2011). Thus, adoptees with salient Korean identities chose to participate in activities that focused on culture and socialized their children accordingly in the absence of racial discussions. In this way, they mirrored the strategies enacted by modest explorers, though at a heightened degree. Thus, consuming "authentic" Korean food, for example, was a means to address their own feelings of marginality and as a strategy to protect their children from similar feelings. Preparing their children for potential discrimination, in contrast, was seen to merely contribute to the problem, as highlighting difference and "planting" negative "seeds" about race relations.

In contrast, anti-racist perspectives "explicitly acknowledge[d] the racialized power structure at the center of U.S. society and articulate some ways to disrupt it" (Feagin and O'Brien 2003: 90). Predictably, eleven intensive explorers with salient Asian racial identities were more likely to have anti-racist ideologies. They were concerned with the history and experiences of Asians in America and were more likely to have taken college courses on race and ethnicity. Anti-racist adoptees in the study generally

had sustained exposure to non-Asian people of color, second-generation Asian Americans, and other Korean adoptees. Discussions about potential racism and equipping their children with skills to negotiate these encounters were seen as necessary based on their inability to erase their racial visibility. Of the eleven in this catgeory, all but one had intensively explored their racial and ethnic identities in adulthood, were Asian-identified, and nine had experienced intensive involvement with Korean adoptees as well.

Anti-racist adoptees, more so than multiculturalists, countered the concerns raised by the NABSW statement from Chapter I. Rather than divorced from their racial communities, these adoptees identified with Asian Americans as having an intertwined fate. However, since anti-racist adoptees were in the minority, the findings highlight the importance of social exposure to a diverse population of Asian Americans, including Korean adoptees, as well as other people of color to develop not only salient ethnic identities but racial ones as well.

Interestingly, regardless of adoptees' racial attitudes concerning the general society, they overwhelmingly supported a policy of mandatory classes about the social consequences for adoptees as people of color and their adoptive families as interracial ones as a prerequisite for transracial adoption. With the benefit of hindsight to reflect on her experiences, Melissa Barnes, for example, supported mandatory classes rather than a voluntary structure due to the challenges she faced coping with racism alone.

> Just from my own experience my parents were so naïve and…they didn't know themselves that they couldn't teach me, so you know, I just think it's better for the parents…you have to learn how to like feed a baby a bottle and change his diapers or whatever. Same thing when you have another race. They have to know.

Such views contrasted with the "hands-off," colorblind approach adoptees typically supported in regards to government intervention at a society level. This concern with

larger issues outside of their own personal adoption histories illustrated their sense of belonging to a larger Korean adoptee community.

Korean Adoptee Community

Korean adoptee community exploration produced qualitatively different responses than those who had not experienced such in-group contact. Most notably, increased social exposure heightened feelings of belonging or *sameness* with other adoptees without a corresponding response of being set *apart* or *different* from them. This was predominantly not the case with non-adopted Asian contact that highlighted adoptees' cultural differences and marked them as not "real" Asians. Thus, adoptees were significantly more willing to participate within formally organized adoptee programs or groups than with non-adopted Asian ones, especially in adulthood. Engaging issues of race and ethnicity with others in similar social locations that privileges adoptees' voices provided a safe environment free from dominant White and Asian perspectives. Explorers were able to relate on a deeper level to fellow Korean adoptees based on their similar life circumstances that they had not shared with non-adopted Asian friends. Rather than a heightened Korean ethnic identity, a specific Korean adoptee identity emerged that was distinct from, though not opposed to, more traditionally defined Asian or Korean identities.

Korean adoptee community and culture were based on the commonality of similar life circumstances as Koreans adopted by White families. Integral to this created community was the "narrative of liminality, of not belonging anywhere, and thus of not being real, together with other adoptees" (Yngvesson and Mahoney 2000: 94). Adoptees' "displacement" (Yngvesson and Mahoney 2000) that bonded them to one another was the

exact difference that fostered their marginal belonging in other racialized groups. In their own voices, adoptees were re-creating their images as "border identities" (Anzaldua 1999) that acquire meaning only in-between the two socially defined categories of Asian and White. Similar to "dual identities" (Rockquemore et al. 2006) in biracial identity literature, a Korean adoptee identity incorporates an explicit recognition of being a first-generation immigrant Korean embedded in a White American family without having to choose one affiliation over the other. This "unique hybrid category of self-reference" (Rockquemore and Brunsma 2002: 42), as simultaneously *a part* of *yet apart* from Asians and Whites, is transformed for adoptees into a badge of pride rather than a stigma.

Post-adoption services such as web sites, newsletters, adoptee camps, and mentorship programs provide "sites for collective articulation" (Kim 2005: 57) whereby issues relevant to adoptees themselves are discussed and imbued with significance. Adult Korean adoptees have been pivotal in remaking adoptee culture by focusing not only on birth culture but on issues of race and racial exclusion from Whites in U.S. society, especially through working at adoption agencies, adoptee camps, and as mentors (E. Kim 2005; Yngvesson and Mahoney 2000). This connection was a way to be an active member in shaping the contours of one's own community both currently and in the future.

Age Cohort

Age cohort shaped adoptees' available opportunities to explore their racial and ethnic identities in some unexpected ways. Adoptees placed in the 1960s were more likely to have attended Korean adoptee picnics in their childhood for an extended period

expanding over years, even as their parents ignored or even rejected their status as people of color. While they were more likely to have abstained during early adulthood, they had typically initiated exploration processes by the time they reached mid-adulthood. When they explored, they were more likely than later cohorts to maintain a strong White-identification and their ethnic and racial identities were strictly understood as a factual reality. The main exception was Edward Haas who was placed at seven years old, had communication with his biological sister and mother, and had traveled to Korea three separate times. He was the sole adoptee who had a more salient ethnic identity in his cohort.

Adoptees placed in the 1970s were most likely to have been exposed to Korean adoptees and adoptee culture during childhood and adolescence. However, there was more variation in responses from childhood through mid-adulthood. Adoptees placed in the mid-1970s generally explored their racial and ethnic identities but typically developed a deeper attachment to their ethnic heritage than their racial status. Their Korean identities remained largely symbolic in nature despite exploration.

Predictably, all variables held equal, adoptees placed in the 1980s were more likely to have developed salient racial identities and were proud of their Korean heritage, even if their attachment was only symbolic. They incorporated Asian friends into their close social circles. Interestingly, the majority of adoptees placed in the 1980s in the sample were men. Whether these identity negotiations are the result of age cohort, gender, or an intersection of the two needs to be examined further.

Place

Throughout, I have stressed the significance of place, or more specifically geographic region, in structuring both the opportunities for racial and ethnic exploration and adoptee interpretations of such contact as well. With the benefit of hindsight, I should have paid closer attention to the differences in rural versus suburban communities. Dani Meier (1999) notes that cities, with their greater ethnic and racial diversity and anonymity, were not always more inclusive than rural communities for adoptees. Small towns, by comparison, provided protection from racial bias "by a sense of familiarity and an unwritten code of respect" (Meier 1999: 41). However, adoptees in this study generally responded in similar ways throughout life stages regardless of this community distinction.

In contrast to Tuan and Shiao (2011), respondents in this study consistently participated in intensive social contact with fellow Korean adoptees. I attribute such variations to the greater normalization of Korean adoption and more access to organizations, programs, and adoptees themselves in the Midwest, Minnesota specifically, in comparison to the West coast. Additionally, with fewer Asians in the region and their level of familiarity gained from past contact, adoptees gravitated towards Asians and organizations with which they felt socially comfortable. Thus, future research should examine the variances in other regions of the country, for example, in the South and East coast.

Gender

Gender differences were not significant in shaping family experiences but had a greater effect on interactions outside the family. Men were more likely to have sustained intensive social exposure with Asians in early and mid-adulthood and therefore, developed stronger Asian identifications as a result. They were also more likely to have an Asian predilection for their desired life partners and predictably, a higher percentage had married another Asian than found amongst female adoptees.

Unfortunately, the present study sample was not equally weighted by gender. In addition, given the recruitment process used, findings should be understood within their limitations. However, important insights can still be gleaned. Because the feminization of Asian men positioned them outside mainstream definitions of physical attractiveness, male adoptees experienced a greater degree of marginalization, especially in regards to dating, than their female counterparts. Asian females, in contrast, have been the "beneficiaries" of being portrayed as "exotic," beautiful, and desirable. Additional research needs to explore whether the findings here are replicable and the implications for adoptive family socialization patterns specifically.

Age at Adoption

Eighteen adoptees in the study were placed with their families at the age of three years or older. In hindsight, I should have more rigorously included this variable throughout my analysis. During childhood and adolescence, half of these adoptees were open to Asian contact despite simultaneous desires to be White. Having personal memories of their lives prior to being adopted heightened their connection to Korea and

created more willingness to explore their ethnic and racial identities. Likewise, these adoptees were more likely than others in the study to intensively explore their racial and ethnic identities during early or mid-adulthood. Twelve of the eighteen immersed themselves in Asian social networks and took multiple classes on Korean or Asian history and culture. Seven had participated in transnational homeland visits while an additional adoptee was preparing for her trip at the time of the interview. Three of the four men married to Asian women had in fact been placed after the age of three. Thus, by and large, their Korean and Asian identities were more salient throughout their lives than adoptees placed before three years of age.

Limitations of the Cross (1991) Model

While Cross's model was analytically useful in this study for understanding adoptees' racial identity development over time, I acknowledge the limitations in extending his model to non-Black people of color. Cross (1991) specifically based his Nigrescence theory, or the "transformation of a preexisting identity (a non-Afrocentric identity) into one that is Afrocentric" (Cross 1995: 97) on the Black American experience. I have previously argued that Asian Americans' experiences as racial minorities in the U.S. qualitatively differs from those of Blacks whose exclusion has been shaped by the legacy of slavery (Bonilla-Silva and Embrick 2006; Kim 2007; Massey and Denton 1995; Yancey 2003, 2006). With their different experiences, Black identity transformations cannot be automatically assumed to apply to all people of color.

Though Cross (1991, 1995) notes in his latest revision that his developmental model describes transformations in reference group orientation, it is important to stress

that psychological health is not determined by level of exploration. An internalized racial identity may be the most socially healthy, but non-explorers are not inherently psychologically unhealthy. This may be the case especially for non-Black groups such as Korean adoptees who are more socially privileged than Blacks. Rather, it is explicitly anti-Asian attitudes for adoptees in the study which often signal psychological distress.

Recommendations for Post-Adoption Services

I turn now to recommendations for future post-adoption services based on the study findings. Post-adoption services geared towards specific life stage needs can assist adoptees in negotiating their place within U.S. society as people of color and Asian Americans specifically. For many in this study, Holt International specifically functioned as a "virtual homeland" (Ignacio 2005) that had anchored them to the larger adoption community through providing adoption-related information and opportunities for exposure to one another. Thus, Holt International and similar organizations can play crucial roles in sustaining lifelong relationships between adoption agencies, organizations, and fellow Korean adoptees which can support adoptees and their families negotiate the terrain of race and ethnicity.

RECOMMENDATION 1: STRUCTURE SERVICES TO ADDRESS AGE-SPECIFIC DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS

Throughout the life cycle, adoptee responses to their unique life circumstances have been shaped by developmental pressures and responsibilities. Pressures to blend in faded with age as new life events such as leaving their parental homes and having children initiated an (re)examination of their racial, ethnic, and adoptive identities.

1. *Childhood and Adolescence*: Acknowledgement strategies that were normalized and involved adoptees in early childhood continuing through adolescence were generally more accepted than attempts that began in adolescence. Due to the pressures specific to this life stage, adoptees given the choice to participate almost always opted out. Thus, a child choice (Tessler et al. 1999) strategy often inhibited connections with other Asians or adoptees in this study. Adoption agencies could educate parents on the different socialization strategies and the predictable responses to each path.
2. *Childhood and Adolescence*: Internet based services, such as chat rooms or forums, could engage adoptees in racial, ethnic, and adoptive issues with the safety of confidentiality, if not, anonymity. This structure could counter the potential fears induced by sticking out from peers while still connecting to other Korean adoptees at the same time.
3. *Adulthood*: Structure programs to include adoptees and their life partners and children. With specific life stage needs of raising children, adoptees may not have time available to participate independently in programs regardless of their level of interest. Additionally, they may not have the required knowledge to teach their children about their Korean heritage. Services such as family heritage camps and classes could provide safe spaces for family to learn and explore together.
4. *Adulthood*: Agencies could provide more ways for adult adoptees to actively participate in the larger adoptee community. Mentorship was the most commonly cited role adult adoptees wanted to play within the community. Even non-explorers who had not consciously sought adoptee exposure expressed a desire to

"give back" to the community through participating in this study. Providing opportunities would not only benefit younger adoptees by exposing them to role models who understood their unique life circumstances but would tap into adult adoptees as resources for future generations and foster lifelong commitments to the larger community.

RECOMMENDATION 2: ENCOURAGE A SHARED FATE APPROACH TO RACIAL AND ETHNIC FAMILY DIFFERENCES

Research has shown that colorblind ideologies generally resulted in adoptees feeling isolated and having to cope with racism without social support from their families (McRoy and Hall 1996; Tuan and Shiao 2011). While celebrating Korean heritage was an important factor in fostering ethnic pride, their exclusion outside of their families centered on their racial visibility. With non-adopted Asian Americans, ethnic identity's ability to protect against racial discrimination has been questioned (Lee 2003b). Thus, adoptive parents need to address the social consequences of being Asian for their children rather than only focusing on their Korean ethnicity.

1. *Pre-adoption*: Overwhelmingly, adoptees in the study supported instituting mandatory educational classes for prospective adoptive parents. Holt International has been a leader in this field with their Parents-In-Progress program that educates parents on the social consequences of race and the implications of being a multiracial family. Given adoptees' widespread belief in such programs, other adoption agencies could implement similar policies to provide more conducive environments for adoptees to digest and process their racial exclusion with a strong family support system.

2. *Childhood and Adolescence*: Services should take into account the pressure of blending in with families and peers. Structures inclusive of the entire family, rather than singling out just the adoptee, would encourage families as a whole to see themselves as multiethnic and interracial. The knowledge and experience gained would be valued by the family as a whole. Adoptees whose families regularly socialized with other adoptive families generally accepted or enjoyed the experiences as routine family behavior. Play-dates, by comparison, were interpreted as more forced and highlighted adoptees' differences from their White families and communities.
3. *Childhood and Adolescence*: Agencies could foster connections to non-adopted Asians and Asians Americans for not only adoptees but the entire family. For example, the Chicago Arirang Lion's Club, a Korean organization, annually organizes a Korean picnic for adoptive families in the area. Yet, interactions must represent the diversity within Asian Americans to counter essentialized racial stereotypes that many adoptees employed in their identity negotiations. Exposure to Asian Americans who focus on Asian experiences within the U.S. rather than a foreign country could provide a broader perspective on race relations and racial inequality.

Future Research

Korean adoptees, as the largest and oldest transracial adoptee population in the U.S., occupy a unique position in U.S. racial history. Studying their experiences sheds light on the multiple ways in which race continues to function as a master status within

which individuals must negotiate their self-identities. However, the present study findings produce additional questions that beg answers.

My original study design was a comparative analysis of transracial adoptees' experiences in the U.S. and how physical appearance and racial categorization shaped their identity formation processes and racial attitudes. Unfortunately, I was unable to complete such an extensive project at the current time. However, the questions still remain. Additional research is needed to examine the variation both within racial groups and between them as measures of social distance in the larger society. How do Black adoptee experiences compare to those of Korean adoptees? And what about Latino? How does the internal ethnic and visual diversity within the categories of Latino and Black affect adoptee experiences? Given the most recent domestic placements of African American transracial adoptions by Sandra Bullock and Kristin Davis in popular culture, how does this affect the racial preference of adoptive parents? Do parents use different socialization strategies depending upon adoptees' physical appearance, and if so, what is the effect?

According to Tessler et al. (1999), Chinese adoptive parents have employed a bicultural socialization that embraces and actively participates within Chinese culture from a multicultural family perspective. As the Chinese adoptee population ages, comparisons between Chinese and Korean adoptees can address the role family cultural socialization plays in structuring adoptees' racial attitudes and the effectiveness of ethnic identity for protecting against the negative effects of racism.

Lingering questions remain that the present study could not answer. Ramona Chan was the sole adoptee with one Asian adoptive parent, though he had passed away

during her adolescence. Ramona was more confident and secure in her Korean and Asian identities during childhood and adolescence than most adoptees in the study even though she had only modestly explored her ethnic identity. With greater numbers of Asian Americans adopting internationally (Tessler et al. 1999), future research should examine how parents' racial status influences the cultural socialization strategies they use. How does having an Asian role model present in the family affect adoptees' racial and ethnic identity development? Are they more willing to acknowledge and explore their racial and ethnic identities than adoptees with two White parents?

Further examination regarding the construction of Korean adoptee identities, communities, and culture is still needed. The present study did not rigorously examine the narratives and negotiations occurring within the actual "sites of collective articulation" (Kim 2005), i.e. the online forums, heritage camps, gatherings or reunions, and mentorship programs. Future studies should include ethnographic data from these sites.

Additionally, Lynn Ackerman was the only adoptee in the study who personally adopted internationally, in part, as a result of her salient Korean adoptee identity. Participating as an adult in the adoption process strengthened her adoptee identity and her ties to Holt International and the larger Asian adoptee community. Future research should explore how adoptees who have adopted themselves socialize their children. Are they more likely to replicate the socialization strategies their parents had used or to follow current trends of openly acknowledging both ethnicity and race? How do the racial and ethnic identities of children with Korean adoptee parents differ, is at all, from those with non-adopted parents? Are these "second-generation" international adoptees more likely

to embrace and claim an adoptee identity than “first-generation?” How are these new families influencing adoptee culture and communities?

Conclusion

In sum, Korean transracial adoptees provide a unique lens into examining the constrained nature of identity formation. Their marginality from both Whites and Asians, of being *a part yet apart*, highlights how a colorblind perspective can leave Korean adoptees, and I would assert all transracial adoptees, unprepared to cope with their racial exclusion and disconnected from their socially defined racial and ethnic in-groups. However, a Korean adoptee identity emerged as a strategy that positions adoptees as full-fledged members of their own self-defined community rather than marginal members based on racial and cultural exclusions.

APPENDIX

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for agreeing to do this interview with me.

If at any time during our conversation you don't want to answer a question, just let me know and we'll just move onto the next question. Or if you want to stop the interview at any time just let me know.

To start, I'd like to ask you about your early family experiences.

I. Early Experiences: Family

1. Please describe for me what you know about your adoption.

- In what year were you adopted? How old were you then?
- Do you know how you were given up for adoption? Found?

2. Do you know why your parents decided to adopt?

3. How did your parents tell you that you were adopted?

- How old were you?
- Was your adoption a regular topic of conversation, just a natural thing to mention? Why or why not?

4. Please describe for me your family that you grew up with?

- Parents → Race? Still married?
- Siblings? # of siblings? Your placement?
- Were any of them adopted also? From where?

5. Was there ever a time when you did NOT feel like a full member of the family?

- Your Immediate family?
- Your Extended family?

6. How did your family celebrate your adoption?

[If they **did** something]

- Did your family do anything special every year on this day? [gift, card, special dinner?]
- What did this mean to you?
- How did your siblings feel about this?

[If they did **not** do anything]

- Do you wish they had?

7. What did your family tell you about the country you were born in? It's culture? Values?

- How did they do this?
- Did they incorporate any aspects of your birth culture into your life?

[If YES] What were those?

- Did these aspects include the entire family? How so?
- What did this mean to you?

[If NO] Do you wish they had?

- What would this have meant to you?

8. Who could you talk to in your family about your birth family and/or adoption?

- Why them?
- How did you feel about talking about this?

9. Have you ever wanted to search for your birth family?

[If YES] What would it mean to you to find your birth family?

[If NO] Why not?

10. Have there been times when you wished you were of a different racial background?

[If YES] How often?

- When? Why?
- Did these feelings change over the years? How so?

11. What did your family say to you about discrimination or racism you might face?

[If YES] Who talked to you about this? How did they do so?

- Did they ever suggest ways to deal with such incidents?
- How old were you at the time?
- How did talking about this make you feel?
- What meaning did it have for you then?
- Has that meaning changed for you over the years?

[If NO] Do you wish they had? Why or why not?

- What would this have meant to you?

12. Did your family ever visit a historically Asian American area like a Chinatown or a Japanese American Internment site?

[If YES] How did you feel about this trip?

- What meaning did it have for you?
- Has this meaning changed for you over the years? How so?

[If NO] Would you have liked to? Why or why not?

- What would a trip like this have meant to you?

13. Was your family involved in support groups or friendships with other transracial adoptees and their families?

- How did you meet?
- What kinds of activities did you do together?
- How long did the relationship last?
- Why did it end?
- How did you feel about these interactions? [Like them? Felt obligated? etc.]

14. Are you involved in any now as an adult?

15. Were you ever involved in a formal group or organized activity that was offered by an adoption agency or organization?
[Heritage camps or picnics, ethnic schooling, a homeland tour, etc.]

[If YES] Please describe it to me.

- Was it group-based?
- Only for adoptees?
- At what ages were you involved?
- What activities did you do?
- How did you feel about your participation?
- Did other people in your family use the services or participate in programs? [parents, siblings, etc.]
- How did you feel about their participation?

[If NO] Do you wish you had been? Why or why not?

- Looking back now, do see any positive things that could have come out of participating in any programs or groups? Like what?

16. As an adult have you participated in any formally organized programs or groups?

17. Why do you think your parents wanted you to participate in these programs?

- What did you actually get out of it?
- Did your experiences match their expectations?

18. As you experienced them, would you recommend these programs or groups to young transracial adoptees today?

- Why or why not?
- What parts of the program would you change? Why?
- Would it have made a difference if the programs had been run by a person of color?
- By a transracial adoptee? Why or why not?

19. If services had been around when you were at this age, like mentoring by older transracial adoptees or chat rooms to talk to other adoptees about any issue, do you think you would you have used them?

- Why or why not?

20. Many adoptee programs and organizations are designed for individual ethnic groups like Korean adoptee groups and then separate ones for Chinese adoptees.

- If they were set up for racial groups rather than ethnic groups, would this appeal to you? Why or why not?
- Which structure would you prefer? Why?

21. Most post-adoption services for transracial adoptees focus on teaching adoptees about parts of their birth country and culture like fan dances or how to

cook traditional foods. Would this have been interesting to you when you were younger? Why?

- What about now? Why?

22. What if these programs focused more on racial awareness, the history of race and ethnicity in the United States, and how to understand racism.

- Would programs like these been appealing to you when you were younger? Why?

- What about now? Why?

II. Early Experiences: Neighborhood and School

Now I'm going to ask you some questions about where you grew up and the schools you attended.

1. a)Where did you grow up? (city)

1. b) What was the racial and ethnic make-up of the neighborhood that you grew up in?
[If more than one, the neighborhood you lived the longest]

- Any families of color?

2. How much contact did you have with other non-adoptee Asian Americans when you were growing up?

- Where did this happen?

- Who initiated it?

- How old were you then?

- How did you feel about these interactions?
- What meaning did they have for you?

3. So, your closest friends while you were growing up:

- What race were they?
- How did you meet them?

[If any SAME-RACE friends] Did you seek them out? Why or why not?

- Were they the same as your friends at school?

[If NOT same-race] Why not?

4. What was the racial make-up of the schools you attended kindergarten through 12th grade.

- The predominant racial group?
- Were the different cliques or social groups divided racially? How so?
- Which group did you belong to?

5. Did you ever feel that you were "different" when you were growing up?

- What made you feel this way?
- How often did you feel "different"?
- Did you ever fantasize about not being different?
- Did you have a picture in your mind of what you had wanted to look like?
- If you had been the opposite sex, how do you think growing up would have been different?
- If you had been adopted by a family that's the same race as you in your same hometown, would that have made a difference? Why?

6. When you were growing up, how often were you aware of your race? How often did you think about your race?

- What prompted this awareness?
- What made you first aware of your race?

- How old were you then?
- How did you feel about this awareness?

7. How aware were you of being specifically Korean?

    - What prompted this awareness?
    - How did your awareness of your ethnicity begin?
    - How did you feel when you thought about your ethnicity?

8. Did you ever experience unkind behavior like racism, discrimination, or stereotyping because of your race when you were growing up?

If **did NOT** experience racism → SKIP TO #10

[If **DID** experience racism]

- What happened? Where?
- How old were you then?
- How often?
- Who perpetrated this behavior?
- How would you respond to this behavior?
- How did your parents react to this?
- Do you wish they had done something different?
- What? Why?

[If YES] How did that make you feel?

9. Who were you able to talk to about these experiences with? Why them?

- What would they tell you?

- How did that make you feel?
- How did you feel talking about these experiences?

SKIP to #1 in next Section

[If **DID NOT** experience racism]

10. Did you ever hear about racism, discrimination, or stereotyping that happened to someone you knew?

- How did it make you feel? What did you think about it?
- How old were you then?

11. Who were you able to talk to about these stories or experiences with? Why them?

- What would they tell you?
- How did that make you feel?
- How did you feel talking about these experiences?

III. Postsecondary Years

So, now I'm going to move on to what you did after high school.

1. Did you go to college?

If NO → SKIP TO #4

[If YES] Where did you go?

- What was the racial make-up of the school when you went there?

2. How did you meet your closest friends in college?
[Dorms, Classes, Sports, Clubs or organizations, Sororities or fraternities, Work]

- What race were they?

- Did you ever want to make specifically Asian friends? Why or why not?

[If SAME RACE] How did you meet? Did you consciously seek them out?

- Do you think you had a preference? Can you explain that to me?

3. College has been said to be a time when people become interested in their ethnic and racial identities...

- How much does this apply to you?
- How so?

[If YES] What motivated that interest?

- How did you explore your identity? In what ways?
- [Take classes, join clubs, join certain sororities or fraternities, etc.]

SKIP TO #6

[If respondent **did NOT** go to college]

4. So, your closest friends after high school:

- How and where did you meet them?
- Race/ethnicity?
- Did you ever want to make specifically Asian friends? Why or why not?

[If SAME RACE] How did you meet? Did you consciously seek them out?

- Do you think you had a preference? Can you explain that to me?

5. During this time, what interest did you have in exploring your racial/ethnic identities?

[If YES interest] What motivated your interest?

- Sudden interest or there all along?

- What did you do to explore your identity?

[If NO interest] Why do you think you didn't have any interest?

[EVERYONE ANSWERS ALL QUESTIONS NOW]

7. Have you ever been in an Asian American (non-adoptee) support or social group?

- What was the group's purpose?
- How did the group address race and ethnicity?
- **What was the experience like for you?

8. Have you ever been to your Korea?

[If YES]

- When? How many times?
- What were your motivations for going?
- How did it feel for you when you were there?
- What meaning did this trip have for you?
- Did your actual experiences meet your expectations?

[If NO]

- Any interest in going? Why or why not?
- Would you have wanted to go with your parents? Why or why not?

IV. Current Adult Experiences and Ethnic Practices

OK, so now I'm going to ask you some questions about your current experiences and behaviors.

1. What do you currently do for work?

- Racial or ethnic make-up?
- How often do you come in contact with Asian/Latino/African Americans?

2. So, your closest friends these days:

- Where and how did you meet them?
- Race/ethnicity?

[If SAME RACE] How did you meet? Did you consciously seek them out?

- Do you think you had a preference? Can you explain that to me?

[If NOT same-race] Would you like to have friends that were specifically Asian American also? Why or why not?

3. What does being Asian American mean to you these days?

- How has this meaning changed for you over the years?
- How do you explore or express this?
- Do you belong to any race-based clubs or organizations?

[If YES] What were your motivations for joining?

[If NO] Any interest in joining? Why or why not?

4. What does being Korean mean to you these days?

- How has this meaning changed for you over the years?
- How do you explore or express this?
- Do you belong to any ethnic clubs or organizations?

[If YES] What were your motivations for joining?

[If NO] Any interest in joining? Why or why not?

5. How knowledgeable would say you are about Korean culture like food, language, holidays, customs, or traditions?

[If YES knowledgeable] What does it mean to you to have this knowledge? Why?

[If NOT] Interested in pursuing any of this knowledge?

- Why or why not?

6. Do you think this knowledge would have (or has) been useful to you in your everyday life? Why or why not?

7. How often do you find yourself in situations that are made up of mostly Asians? What about Koreans?

- How about where whites are not in the majority?
- Would you like more of these types of experiences?
- Why or why not?

8. What does being an adoptee mean to you these days?

- How do you explore or express being an adoptee nowadays?
- How much contact do you have with other (transracial/Asian) adoptees?
- How would you characterize those interactions?

9. How likely would you be to use anonymous services [such as reading articles, watching films, participating on online services like chat rooms] ?

What about services that would be face-to-face interactions [like support group meetings, informal get togethers or play dates, etc.] ?

- Why?

11. What about if programs or groups were organized for your whole family, not just for the adoptees?

- Would you have been interested in programs more as a child if they had been for your entire family [your parents, siblings, etc.] and not just focusing on you?
- Why or why not?

12. Have you used any services?

[If yes] Why did you choose those?

- What was participating in them like?
- As you experienced them, would you recommend these programs or groups to other transracial adoptees?
- Why or why not?

[If NO] Why not?

So, now I'd like to ask you some questions about your dating history.

13. What has been the racial or ethnic background of people you have dated?

- Any racial or ethnic preferences? (probe if preference emerges)
- Do you think your dating experiences might have been different if you had been the opposite sex?
- How so?

14. Are you married or currently in a committed relationship?

- What is the race/ethnicity of your partner?

[The following questions apply to current or last relationships]

[For those in INTERRACIAL relationships or marriages]

15. How did you meet your partner?

- How often does your racial and/or ethnic difference come up as an issue in your relationship? In what ways?

- How does it shape or influence the life you have created with your partner?
- How did your respective families respond to your relationship?

- How would they have responded had you chosen an Asian, Latino, or African American mate?

SKIP TO #18

[For those in INTRARACIAL relationships or marriages]

16. How did you meet your partner?

- How did your respective families respond to your relationship?

- To what extent does race or ethnicity shape the life you have created with your partner?

[ALL ANSWER FOLLOWING QUESTIONS]

17. Do you have children or plan to have children?

- How important is it to you that your children know about your ethnic background? Their own?

- What will you do/have you done to accomplish this?

- Will you speak or have you spoken with your children about racism or discrimination that they might face?

    - What would or did you say to them?

    - How did you know what to tell them?

    - Is there anyone you could turn to ask for advice about this?

- *What types of services would be useful for you*?

18. What about if adoption agencies and organizations had services that gave advice about how to talk to your children about these topics?

- Would this interest you? Why or why not?
- What if they were structured for your whole family to attend and not just you?
- Why or why not?

19. Would you ever consider adopting yourself?

- Why or why not?

[If YES] What kind of adoption/placement?

- *Would you be willing to take a required number of educational classes on race and racism in the US today if you adopted transracially*?
- Why or why not?

20. Please describe your current neighborhood's racial composition.

21. How did you decide to move there? What factors?

- Race/ethnicity?
- Schools?
- Families close by?
- Affordability?
- Close to work? etc.

V. Societal Perceptions and Personal Identity

Now I'd like to ask you some questions about the ways that you identify yourself and how others might identify you.

1. When you're asked what race you are, what do you say?

- What does this mean to you?
- Do you think being ____ is different from being just plain "American"?
- Would you ever consider calling yourself just "American" without a hyphenation?

2. What would you say for ethnicity?

- What does this mean to you?
- Do you think being ____ is different from being just plain "American"?

3. How has the way you identify yourself changed over time?

- What do you think influenced this change?

4. How common is it for people to comment on your racial or ethnic background?

- What do they typically say?
- How do you respond? The same way every time? Why or why not?
- How do these questions make you feel?

5. Have you ever been mistaken for a different ethnicity? Tell me about it.

- How did that make you feel?
- Do you think most Americans can tell the difference between different Asian and Latino ethnicities? Why or why not?

6. Have you ever felt out of place or uncomfortable because of your race or ethnicity?

- Where? When?

7. How often do people expect you to act a certain way because of your race or ethnicity?

- Do you think these expectations were more because of your race or because of your ethnicity?
- How do you feel when this happens?

8. Do you ever feel pressure to identify a certain way? Racially or ethnically?

- When?
- By whom?

9. Do you believe there is racial discrimination in the US today?

[If YES] How significant do you think it is for Asians?

- How does that make you feel?

10. There's been a lot of controversy over placing Black children with white parents. The main concerns are that adoptees are not connected to Black communities and Black people. What do you think of that concern?

- Do you think these concerns apply to Asian and Latino adoptees?
- Why or why not?
- Would your parents have adopted a Black child? Why or why not?

11. Looking back now, do you think growing up would have been different if your parents had been required to take classes on racial inequality before adopting you?

- Why or why not?

12. In terms of comfort, with which racial groups are you the most socially comfortable?

- Any ethnic groups in particular?
- How about the least comfortable?
- What makes them more or less comfortable for you?

13. Do you think your experiences are similar to other Asian transracial adoptees'?

- Why is that?

14. Do you feel your experiences as an Asian transracial adoptee are similar in any way to Latino and Black transracial adoptees' experiences?

- How so?

15. Would you be interested in participating in groups or programs that included transracial adoptees of any racial group?

- Why or why not?
- Do you think you would have been interested when you were younger?
- Why or why not?

16. Looking back over your life, what advice would you give a young adoptee who came to you for support?

17. Why did you decide to participate in this study?

18. What was doing this interview like for you?

- How did you feel?
- What did doing this interview mean to you?

19. Is there anything else you would like to add that I might have missed?

20. Would it be ok for me to contact you to follow-up on parts of the interview if I need to?

Well, thank you very much again for deciding to participate. And it was a pleasure to meet you.

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