“FAMILIES ADOPT, ADOPTEES ADAPT”
A LOOK AT TRANSRACIAL KOREAN ADOPTEES’
IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

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Elizabeth Anne Kidd Nguyen

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“FAMILIES ADOPT, ADOPTEES ADAPT”

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Department of Sociology
Abstract

of

“FAMILIES ADOPT, ADOPTEES ADAPT”

A LOOK AT TRANSRACIAL KOREAN ADOPTEES’ IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

by

Elizabeth Anne Kidd Nguyen

Over 100,000 Korean adoptees have migrated to the United States since 1958, making them one of the largest adoption populations in the country. Using the concept of racialized ethnicity, I explored 1) what kinds of ethnic experiences influenced Korean transracial adoptees’ ethnic identity and 2) whether and how the adoptees’ ethnic identities were racialized. Based on data collected by semi-structured interviews, findings revealed that many Korean adoptees were raised and socialized in families that were predominately white, but were seen and treated as racial (“Asian”) and ethnic (“Korean”) minorities in American society. This disparity caused a variety of issues in terms of ethnic and racial identity development for the adoptee who often saw themselves as “white” or “American.”

_______________________, Committee Chair
Aya Ida

_______________________
Date

iv
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I would like to thank my parents, Charlie and CJ, who have been the best role-models and support to me since the first moment I arrived in the United States.
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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

There have been over 100,000 adoptions from South Korea since 1958 (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute 2007). In 1990, over 30% of all U.S. international adoptions were from South Korea. In addition, adoptions from Korea (see Figure 1) peaked in two periods -1970s and 1980s - before leveling off in the early 1990s due primarily to war, social and political pressures in Korea, and adoption policies (International Adoption Facts 2009; Shiao and Tuan 2008). Today, adoptees from Korea remain one of the largest groups of international adoptees in the United States (Song and Lee 2009). According to the United States Department of State (2009), intercountry adoption is defined as legally adopting a child from a different country and moving them to another country to live. Intercountry adoptions are typically transracial adoptions, in which adoptees are placed into homes where the parents are of a different socially constructed racial group than the adopted child (The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute 2007).

Transracial adoptees may struggle with their ethnic identity formation due to the disparity between their physical appearances and the dominant cultures in which they are socialized (Nam and Reid 2000). With high numbers of adoptions from South Korea, transracial adoption raises a variety of issues for the adoptees and the adoptive family, especially pertaining to their racial and ethnic identities. In this study, I investigated the racial and ethnic identity development of transracial adoptees. More specifically, I explored how international adoptees from Korea raised in a transracial family in the U.S. shaped their ethnic identities. The research questions that guided this study are: 1) how
transracial adoptees from Korea defined themselves ethnically and what influenced the process of ethnic identity development; and 2) whether the adoptees’ race impacted their ethnic experiences and identities.

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

There are at least three reasons why it is important to investigate the identity development of internationally and transracially adopted Korean Americans. First, through the process of growing up as an ethnic and racial minority, questions of identity may arise as the adoptee matures and explores his or her social world. Adoptees all have different experiences, and as they age, they are exposed to a variety of factors that influence identity development. This study conceptualized identities as changing throughout one’s life course under influences of many factors. Some considered identity a fluid construct that changes throughout one’s life course (Baden 2000), while other researchers believed that it is during adolescence when young people begin to develop their understanding of identity (Song and Lee 2009). Therefore, this study explored adoptees’ experiences and how they developed their ethnic identities as minorities socialized in a white society.

Second, research showed that parents and adoptees had very different ideas on a variety of topics, such as adoption and racial/ethnic identity (Rudolph and Holtzman 2010). Therefore, more attention should be paid to an in-depth understanding of the perceptual gap and its potential consequences on adoptees’ ethnic identity development. In a study of intercountry adoption, Ishizawa, Kenney, Kubo and Stevens (2006) found
that 53% of white parents adopted Asian children. Transracial adoptees are generally adopted into families where the adoptive parents are white and they are raised and socialized predominately in communities that differ from their own ethnic and racial group (Feigleman 2000). Additionally, adoptees may experience different levels of support from their adoptive families and communities in understanding, embracing, or forming their ethnic identities. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the discrepancy in perceptions between the parents and children. This gap between the adoptive parents and the adoptees may impact the adoptee’s identity development, because the adoptees may not receive adequate support in understanding their unique experiences as adoptees and ethnic and racial minorities.

Finally, while many studies focused on the adoptee’s experience and how they identified racially and ethnically, few examined how the adoptive parents’ actions influenced the adoptee’s identity development. Adoptive parents would be one of the key players in the identity development process and would remain influential even as the adoptee ages into adulthood. Some researchers believed that parent-child interaction was crucial in the creation of a racial and ethnic identity (Bratter and Heard 2009) and could influence how their child identifies in the future. Another study explored how adoptive parents utilized different techniques to aid their child in exploration of their birth cultural - either by encouraging exploration or by allowing the child to express interest (Song and Lee 2009). It is important to investigate the variety of techniques parents use in the transracial adoptee’s process of ethnic exploration and how the parent-child racial differences affect the adoptees’ identity.
This study used in-depth interviews with Korean adoptees to allow more flexibility in exploring similarities and differences between the individual respondents’ experiences. While most studies concentrated on the adoptee’s experiences in early adulthood and relied on responses from the adoptees themselves in understanding their ethnic and racial experiences (Meier 1999; Lee and Quintana 2005; Baden 2002; Mohanty, Keoske, and Sales 2007; Song and Lee 2009), other studies focused on adult adoptees and utilized quantitative measures, such as surveys (Song and Lee 2009; Baden 2002). Also, a few studies surveyed adoptive parents and analyzed their perceptions of their child’s ethnic and racial experience (Johnston, Swim, Saltsman, Deater-Dechard and Petrill 2007; Tan 2009; Fiegleman 2000). Finally, other researchers relied on both the parent and the child’s experiences (Randolph and Holtzman 2010; Nam and Reid 2000). Adoptees’ experiences vary considerably and surveys may not capture the individual story behind each adoption. This study utilized qualitative methods, namely semi-structured interviews, in order to learn as much as possible about each adoptee’s individual experience and their own process of identity development.

In sum, this study utilized a qualitative approach to fill the gap in the existing literature on Korean adoptees raised in the United States by paying close attention to their own views on race and ethnicity and the influential factors, such as role of adoptive parents, shaping the processes through which they define themselves ethnically.
CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers from various disciplines have investigated the process through which racial minorities, including transracial adoptees, built their ethnic identities. In this chapter, I define the key concepts in the study: race and ethnicity. Second, I describe the different aspects of the racialized Korean ethnic identity for transracial adoptees. Lastly, I discuss factors affecting identity development for transracial adoptees.

ETHNICITY AND RACE

In studying identity development for Korean adoptees raised in transracial families, it is crucial that ethnicity and race are defined clearly. Identity research is a popular topic across various disciplines, and race and ethnicity are used universally yet defined quite differently in studies on identity. Some researchers defined and used ethnicity, race, and/or culture as interchangeable concepts, recognizing the multi-faceted nature of identity (e.g., Meier 1999; Kibria 2000), or used them interchangeably while not defining them clearly (e.g., Baden 2000). Others, however, defined and treated concepts of race, ethnicity, and culture as independent constructs (e.g., Johnston et al 2007). While some researchers distinguished the idea of culture from race and ethnicity in research on Korean adoptees (Baden 2000; Johnston et al 2007), it is important to note that culture varies not only between racial and ethnic groups, but also within racial and ethnic groups and from family to family. With so much disagreement in the definition of race, ethnicity, and culture in previous studies, it is important to define these concepts clearly.
In this study, I define race and ethnicity as separate yet interrelated concepts. *Race refers to a group that was socially constructed and distinguished based on assumed similarities and differences of physical features among individuals, such as skin tone* (Higginbotham and Anderson 2009). Race is influenced through social interaction, which also impacts how people see and treat others (Baden 2000). *Ethnicity is defined as group membership based on shared culture and ancestry* (Higginbotham and Anderson 2009). While some researchers saw culture as an independent concept (Baden 2000), I chose to include culture in the definition of ethnicity. For transracial adoptees, their ancestry typically differs from that of their adoptive parents so they often have to seek out opportunities to learn about their birth culture, compared to other Koreans who are raised with the Korean culture. In addition, Baden (2000) recognized that an individual could belong to the same racial group and not share the same cultural identity. While looking Asian in terms of race, many adoptees grow up in predominately white American cultures and often feel closer to the culture of their American families than that of their birth culture. Therefore, it is possible that adoptees may accept a Euro-American ethnic identity rather than a Korean ethnic identity regardless of how they appear to others. Thus, distinguishing race and ethnicity is helpful in analyzing the experience of transracial Korean adoptees.

Kibria (2000) noted that ethnicity often relies on the existence of race to help guide social interactions. Since race - while socially defined - is defined based on skin tone and facial features (Higginbotham and Anderson 2009), it consequently acts as an “ethnic cue” and automatically shapes the way individuals see and treat others (Kibria
Ethnicity and race are not only interconnected, but also dependent on each other in order to continue to exist in American society. Therefore, those adoptees raised in an “American” culture in a predominately white family may experience confusion in regards to their racial and ethnic identities. While society may be quick to assume that the adoptees belong to Asian group based on race or the “ethnic cues,” such as skin color and facial features and consequently assume an Asian ethnic identity (e.g. Korean), they may not feel close to the Asian or Korean group as they grew up in predominantly white environment.

When exploring the identity development process for transracial adoptees, it is important to pay attention to the multi-faceted nature of the self that is unique to the experiences of the adoptees. The identity development process differs between adoptees (see Meier 1999) and non-adoptees (see Akiyama 2008). Some adoptees may first build their identity by drawing from his or her adoption experience, while others may attempt to identify with a different ethnic or racial group than that of their parents as they search for group membership (Grotevant, Dunbar, Kohler, and Esau 2000). Korean adoptees typically assume the ethnic identity of their adoptive families (Euro-American) rather than that of their birth country (Korean). However, it is not uncommon for the adoptee’s identity to change over time, as different experiences and factors influence the adoptee’s identity (Grotevant et al 2000).

In terms of the process of identity development, transracial Korean adoptees build their identities both racially and ethnically. Racial identity is defined as *one’s perception of self, derived from a socially defined group membership based on an individual’s*
alleged biological attributes, such as skin color and facial features (Tan and Nakkula 2004). Chavez and Guido-DeBrito (1999) also argued that as individuals develop their racial identity, they first surround themselves with others of a similar racial background and assume a racial identity based on that social interaction. In addition, Baden (2000) recognized that racial identity is a lifelong or long-term process that develops through the on-going process of recognizing and becoming a part of a racial group. Some of the factors researchers recognized to be influential in developing racial identities were exposure to racial diversity (Fiegleman 2000), experiencing racial discrimination (Grotevant et al 2000), and access to racial “survival skills” (Vonk 2001:251). Therefore, racial identity is not only influenced by the previously mentioned factors, but transracial adoptees may not have opportunities to develop a positive racial identity due to their socialization in a white family, because they are not given opportunities to interact and socialize with others of the same racial group.

Transracial adoptees grow up as racial minorities in predominately white families, which may complicate how they are treated and how they view race. Society creates and maintains the boundaries of racial groups, in which the dominant racial group (whites) often exerts power over others (non-whites) (Higgenbotham and Anderson 2009). These socially defined racial groups have the power to adopt the facade of social facts, which further supports the existence of racial groups (Park 2008). Since most Korean adoptees do not experience socializing with others of the same racial group as themselves, it is possible that everyday interaction with their white families, friends, and community influences how they perceive their racial identities. Interestingly, even though race is “a
social construction, not an attribute of certain groups of people” (Higgenbotham and Anderson 2009: 40), many use race to see and treat others differently. As a result, adoptees may struggle accepting their position as a racial minority (non-white), because they are typically socialized as a member of the dominant racial group (white).

Ethnic identity is not always socially assigned by assumed physical attributes like racial identity, therefore the process of creating an ethnic identity is different than racial identity. According to Tan and Nakkula (2004: 59), *ethnic identity represents an individual’s “attachment and sense of belonging to an ethnic culture.”* Thus, a transracial Korean adoptee’s Korean ethnic identity consists of his or her individual *perception of belonging* to the Korean ethnic group. However, Kibria (2000: 78) notes that ethnic identity requires the “on-going affirmation during social encounters,” such as socializing with family members or friends, or by meeting new people. For instance, many adoptees accept a Euro-American ethnic identity, rather than a Korean adoptee identity, as a result of their social interaction with family and friends. While not many people recognize the existence of “white culture,” it is often seen as the default “American” culture (Weisskirch 2005; Zhou 2004). These social interactions not only impact how one perceives others’ ethnic identities, but they also may alter how one negotiates his/her own identities. In sum, since ethnic identity is derived from one’s sense of belonging to an ethnic group that shares a common culture and ancestry, transracial adoptees may struggle with accepting a Korean ethnic identity, because they may not feel a part of that cultural and ancestral group due to limited social networks with other Koreans.
RACIALIZED ETHNIC IDENTITY OF ADOPTEES

Racial categories are powerful and determine how one is seen and treated in society, regardless of how they personally identify. If ethnic minorities are treated and identified according to racial categories, they experience *racialized ethnicity* (Kibria 2000). For example, when transracial adoptees identify as Asian/Korean, they racialize ethnicity (Kibria 2000; Grosfoguel 2004), because they apply certain physical characteristics and definitions of a racial category (e.g. Asian) to an ethnic group (e.g. Korean) (Park 2008). Grosfoguel (2004: 319) noted that racial categories (e.g. black, Hispanic/Latino, white, or Asian) are “used in the United States as an alternative to ethnicity.” Even if an individual has a strong ethnic identity, these racial categories maintain the differential treatment of various groups of people. According to Higgenbotham and Anderson (2009), both ethnic minorities and white ethnics, can be defined by physical appearances with assumption of characteristics - and thus be racialized - as long as that racial identity is seen and accepted by society. While these categories are ingrained into the culture of society and are accepted and seen as stereotypes, they complicate how people view race and ethnicity.

In addition, it is important to note that these racialized experiences are influenced by others around the adoptees. For example, adoptees may define “being Korean” using Asian stereotypes (e.g. Model Minority) (Park 2008), even though they may feel they have more of a Euro-American cultural identity. Kibria (2000) also wrote that race is one of the most obvious ethnic cues and that “for racialized minorities, ethnicity is not a freely exercised option, given their distinctive characteristics” (Song 2010: 58). Waters
(1994) found that Caribbean blacks’ ethnic experiences were racialized and they did not have much freedom to choose their ethnic identities; because of their physical characteristics, society assumed there were ‘black.’ Song (2010: 60) also wrote that Asian Americans were able to “counter claims of racialization by claiming an ethnic heritage,” however transracial Korean adoptees may not be able to claim an ethnic heritage, because they often do not have access to the Korean culture. On the other hand, even if adoptees feel Euro-American/white, society often denies acceptance of this identity, because the adoptees look Asian. As a result, Korean adoptees’ adherence to either the Euro-American or Korean ethnic identity may vary between individuals depending largely on their overall social experiences and how their racial and ethnic identities are accepted by others around them.

Therefore, for transracial adoptees, not only are they labeled as an ethnic minorities based on their racial characteristics, but also their experiences are racialized because they are given a racialized identity and treated as an Asian, regardless of how they feel about the identity. Even though the concept of racialized ethnicity has been applied to different ethnicities within a racial group (e.g. Korean, Japanese, Chinese, etc.), it has not been used to explore differences within an ethnic group, such as the experience of transracially adopted Korean Americans. Therefore, this study explores how transracial Korean adoptees’ ethnic experiences are racialized.

DEVELOPING AN ETHNIC IDENTITY

An important process that facilitates ethnic identity development is ethnic
exploration, which is how visible racial differences are for “an ethnic group and suggests the continuing significance of its social status” (Tuan and Shiao 2008: 1024). Tuan and Shiao (2008) found that adoptees explored ethnicity along two paths: through socializing with other Koreans and Asians or by learning more about their birth country (Korea). Ethnic exploration may differ significantly between Korean adoptees and their non-adopted counterparts, because many Korean adoptees are not raised in communities with racial diversity and do not have many opportunities to socialize with other Koreans, or even Asians (Feigleman 2000). Song and Lee (2009) found adoptees explored the Korean culture in many different ways, but also found that because adoptees are not usually raised in a household where the Korean culture is ingrained, exposure to cultural activities (e.g. eating Korean food or reading books about Korea) is superficial and not beneficial to a positive ethnic identity. In sum, even though ethnic exploration was seen as a convenient way to expose the adoptees to their birth culture, it did not contribute to the adoptees identifying more with the Korean ethnicity.

Tse (1999) stressed the importance of group membership for minorities in developing an ethnic identity, and Phinney (1990: 509) acknowledged that the strength of ethnic identity depends on an individual’s “relationship to the majority group.” This is particularly important for adoptees because while they have to actively seek out opportunities to explore their ethnic ancestry, they may not have the same experiences or outcomes as other ethnic minorities due to their majority group membership. Tuan and Shiao (2008: 1024) believe that “ethnic exploration exemplifies how the persistence of ethnicity can depend on the individual negotiation of racial inequality,” which not only
shows how important the discussion of race is for ethnic minorities, but since Korean adoptees are not usually exposed to racial diversity in their communities, it is less likely they would accept and maintain a Korean ethnic identity.

According to past research, there are at least three other factors that could challenge their Korean identity development: absence of family support regarding ethnic exploration, exposure to discrimination, and lack of racial diversity. First, absence of family support in ethnic exploration was one of the barriers in ethnic identity formation for adoptees. In one study, researchers found that regardless of varying cultures, family support was very crucial to all groups in terms of ethnic identity formation (Umana-Taylor, Bhanot and Shim 2005). For example, parents who provided “familial ethnic socialization,” meaning they educated their children on their ethnicity, had children who reported feeling better about their ethnic identities (Umana-Taylor et al 2005: 392).

Further, some researchers found that ethnic minority parents teach their children about race, ethnicity, and racial discrimination through cultural socialization (Johnston et al 2007). In another study on ethnic minority parenting, researchers acknowledged the importance of both racial and cultural socialization (Hughes 2000). Although the study focused on Latino and African American families, the cross-racial implications remained, indicating the importance of parental influence on minority children in learning about race and culture (Hughes 2000). Regardless, family support is one of the key influences on identity development for ethnic minorities and is therefore important for transracial adoptees.
Some researchers believe that adoptive parents were more likely to encourage ethnic cultural exploration rather than addressing issues about race because ethnicity and culture are easier to share and explore, while race is “especially hard for whites, who do not define themselves in racial terms, to relate to others whom race is a salient aspect of identity” (Shiao and Tuan 2011: 56). For instance, if adoptive parents only offer ethnic cultural socialization, the adoptees may only explore the ethnic Korean culture, rather than developing a racial identity. Other researchers attributed the adoptees’ identity confusion to the adoptive parents’ lack of ethnic and racial socialization (Song and Lee 2009), because transracial adoptees and their parents do not share the same racial status. Consequently, the adoptee’s racial socialization experience may differ from those who are adopted by parents of the same race (Lee and Quintana 2005), and transracial adoptees may also experience more difficulty in forming a positive ethnic identity due to lack of ethnic membership. As a result, an adoptee’s overall understanding of race and ethnicity relies on the adoptive parents’ understanding and acceptance of race and ethnicity.

Another factor that may have impacted an ethnic identity development was exposure to discrimination and prejudice. Lee (2003) found that discrimination was extremely common among Asian Americans and may impact their positive self-worth. In addition, Yoon (2004) believed that adoptees might suffer from lower self-esteem if they experienced difficulties formulating a positive racial and ethnic identity. These findings highlighted the importance of providing transracial adoptees the opportunities to learn and develop a positive ethnic identity. Most adoptive parents feel pressure from society,
because not only are they expected to raise their adopted children to be healthy and successful members of society, but they should also be knowledgeable about racial discrimination and prejudice in order to teach their children skills needed to survive in a diverse society (Vonk 2001). One researcher found that minority adoptees that experienced discrimination were more likely to report emotional difficulties (Fiegleman 2000), and another study found that some adoptees felt discriminated against by other Koreans, and felt like “second-class Koreans,” because they grew up without a Korean heritage (Meier 1999). Therefore, regardless of race or ethnicity, lack of cultural socialization can make it difficult for transracial adoptees to create a positive ethnic identity, especially when faced with issues such as racial bias and discrimination.

Another possible factor impacting positive ethnic identity development was lack of racial diversity in surrounding environment. The racial separation between the adoptee and his or her community may create frustration and confusion in regards to the self-identification process. In addition, many adoptees are socialized in predominately white communities and social groups, and as a result of the lack of interaction with non-white individuals (Meier 1999), they may not be completely comfortable with their ethnic or racial identity (Feigleman 2000). Also, Lee and Quintana (2005) believe that transracial Korean adoptees would benefit from exposure to racial diversity as a supplement to experiences with the Korean culture. Therefore it is important to acknowledge how the lack of racial diversity adoptees experience may affect their ability to develop a positive racial or ethnic identity.

It is important to recognize that some adoptive parents do choose to help their
children cultivate a positive ethnic identity by encouraging them to interact with members of the same racial or ethnic group (Grotevant 2000). This interaction might benefit adoptees, because it allows them to see others with similar physical and racial features. In addition, Meier (1999) found that adoptees with one or more Asian parents might feel more comfortable with their racial or ethnic culture than those who have white parents. Further, Yoon (2004: 86) found that adoptees with other adopted siblings of the same racial group provided support and helped “overcome negativity relating to racial identity.” However, not all adoptees had an Asian parent or sibling. Instead, if an adoptee is able to socialize with others in his or her racial or ethnic group, it may assist in forming and maintaining a positive ethnic identity.

Even though some transracial adoptees felt their adoption was a salient factor in shaping their ethnic identity development process, it is more likely that racial differences created more confusion for the adoptee’s identity development than the issue of adoption. A cross-racial group study on adoptees did not find significant emotional or behavioral problems between children adopted in families of a different racial background than their own, compared to those children who had parents of the same racial background (Fiegleman 2000). Further, Randolph and Holtzman (2010: 88-89) found that transracial Korean adoptees who attended heritage camps were “quite comfortable with their adoptions,” and the “difficulties they experienced were most associated with race.” Grotevant et al (2000) believed that a lack of racial diversity in an adoptee’s community may have placed more emphasis on the adoptive relationship between the child and parents, due to the racial differences. Adoptees differ from most Asian Americans, and
while they may belong to the same racial group (Asian), they are socialized by their adoptive family’s racial group (white) and view the world differently than other minorities. In sum, adoptees may not be prepared to navigate racism and discrimination if they are not given opportunities to socialize with members of their own racial group, which may impact their ability to formulate a positive racial or ethnic identity.

To study the experiences of transracially adopted Koreans and the processes through which adoptees develop identities, this study addressed two research questions. First, I investigate the ethnic exploration experiences (Korean and Euro-American cultures and ancestry) of transracially adopted Koreans and how these experiences affected their ethnic identity. Then, I examine how Korean adoptees’ ethnic identities are racialized.
CHAPTER 3 - DATA AND METHODS

In this chapter, I describe the sampling and data collection process, the demographics of the participants, and analytical strategy.

SAMPLING AND DATA COLLECTION

Eight self-identified Korean American transracial adoptees participated in the interviews from April 2011 to September 2011. The recruitment began using convenience and snowball sampling methods. Initially, in August 2011, I posted an invitation to two local support groups through email listservs for transracially adopted Koreans. I recruited ten participants, however only eight interviews were included in the end analysis. One participant declined audio recording, and another interview was not audio recorded, due to technical difficulties. Out of the eight recorded interviews, five adoptees responded to the email invitation and these individuals referred the remaining three participants. Although I initiated contact with several other members, not all were willing or interested in participating. In the resulting sample, I had seven female participants and one male participant. They ranged in ages from early twenties to mid-sixties, and while there was a wide range of ages, it is important to note that the participants were recruited only from the Sacramento and surrounding areas. After I contacted the participants, I arranged a meeting time, date, and place with them either through email or phone. Interview times ranged from mid-morning to late evening on various days of the week, depending on the participants’ schedules.
The data collection took place at locations chosen by the participants in the Sacramento and surrounding areas. Two interviews took place in a private setting: one interview at my home and another at the participant’s own home, and the rest occurred at public space: one on a college campus and the rest at restaurants or coffee houses. As for the data collection method, this study utilized a brief questionnaire and semi-structured one-time interviews. Surprisingly, most of the adoptees were very open and seemed eager to participate. Before the interview, the informed consent form was reviewed and signed by the participant. The questionnaire was also administered before the interview began and asked a range of demographic questions, including education, marital status, annual income, and family demographics (See Appendix A). Finally, after the participant completed the questionnaire, the semi-structured interview began. An interview guide with probing questions was used to explore the adoptee’s overall experiences, as well as factors that were important in constructing their ethnic and racial identities (see Appendix B). Semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to explore their experiences using their own words. The interviews lasted between 20-130 minutes.

At the beginning of each interview, I requested permission to record the interviews using a digital audio recorder. Out of the eight recorded and transcribed interviews, I wrote up a summary of what I could recall of each interview - particularly the parts I remembered and found interesting and notable. I later returned to these notes, or memos (Bailey 2009), after I began transcribing and continued to add specific details and quotes I found relevant to my original research questions. With the two interviews I was not able to audio record, I wrote copious notes about each interview, including my
observations and interpretations. I created audio recordings of what I could recall from the interviews on my way home to help with my memoing and notes. Despite my own notes, I did not feel comfortable using their stories and experiences in this study and decided to omit their interviews from the end analysis. Thus, the findings reported in this thesis are based on the eight interviews that were audio-recorded and fully transcribed.

In order to grasp each participant’s unique and individual experiences, I wrote a short narrative and/or summary for each participant to help build profiles for the interviewees. I used their questionnaires, my notes (memos) and their interview transcriptions to help give further background to each participant (See Appendix C). Seidman (2006) suggested creating a profile from the participant’s actual words, however I used a short narrative to describe the main characteristics of each adoptee and his/her overall experiences, rather than use the narrative as a form of data. All the names used in this study are pseudonyms. The next section discussed my analytical strategy for this study.

MY POSITIONALITY AND ANALYTICAL STRATEGY

In analyzing the data, I followed Charmaz’s (2006) analytical approach of grounded theory. According to Charmaz (2006), grounded theory was originally developed by Glaser and Strauss in the 1960s. However, she offered a more flexible and modern version of this analytical style that included influence from symbolic interactionism. Based on Charmaz’s approach, I first made sure to keep in mind during the data collection and analysis how my positionality as a researcher impacted the entire
research process. She believed that grounded theory was created “through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives and research practices” (Charmaz 2006: 10). Meaning, researchers cannot analyze data from a grounded theory approach without acknowledging their own experiences and preconceptions. Being a transracially adopted Korean, I had the advantage of being considered an “insider” and shared similar feelings and experiences as the participants. However, my insider position could have also presented a challenge, because it was easy to assume that I knew their individual and unique stories. Also, as a result of my close connection to the topic of transracial adoption, at times, I was greatly impacted by some of the adoptees’ experiences and felt emotionally drained after some of the interviews (Rubin and Rubin 2005). To overcome the possible limitations associated with being an “insider” of the community, I examined and acknowledged my own positions and views on the issue of transracial adoption and tried not to let my own opinions and experiences skew the analysis in one direction or another (Seidman 2006). Regardless, I felt that my status as a transracially adopted Korean allowed me to recruit and build rapport with the participants (Seidman 2006), as well as understand the data as an expert in the field.

After the audio-recorded interviews were transcribed, I reviewed each transcript carefully and coded them based on the initial codes I gathered from previous research. As I was going through the interviews, I looked for main ideas and thoughts to help designate appropriate codes (Charmaz 2006), and I then sorted the quotes into different themes (Rubin and Rubin 2005). Next, I began to note patterns within each code, and I then categorized the quotes into sub codes within each coding topic before sorting the
quotes into different categories (Rubin and Rubin 2005). According to Bailey (2009), a researcher develops themes rather than waits until a theme emerges automatically, which means they are influenced by the researcher’s objectives, observations and preconceptions. Thus, it is important to recognize that the themes/codes, derived from the data, were influenced by my own perception of the interviews. After the data were sorted and coded, I began to write and organize the results before making a reference to theory (Rubin and Rubin 2005). In writing the earlier draft of results, it became clearer that the experiences of Korean adoptees were often racialized and that their ethnic identity was influenced by the racialization. Therefore, I once again reorganized the findings returning to the original data and literature published in the past on racialized ethnicity.
CHAPTER 4 – RESULTS

Many adoptees from Korea struggle with how to identify in terms of race and/or ethnicity in the United States and the way in which they viewed themselves was largely based on their social experiences and interactions with others. Typically, transracial adoptees had at least one parent, if not two, who was white and was not raised with the Korean culture. In spite of this, other people often saw, classified, and treated them as “Asian” or even “Korean” based on their appearances. Thus, for transracial Korean adoptees, the ethnic culture they were raised in (often Euro-American culture) was different from the ancestral group into which they were born (Korean). Regardless, socially constructed meanings associated with their physical appearance (Asian/Korean) were powerful in shaping their experiences and how others treated them. This led to a struggle and confusion in how the adoptees identified themselves in terms of race and ethnicity. For example, the participants sometimes used “Korean” (and “Asian”) to refer to their race, and they also used the same terms to indicate their ethnicity. However, the context of the story they shared during the interview made it clearer whether they meant that the experience was about their race or ethnicity. The adoptees also used terms such as “white” and “American” interchangeably to refer to the racial and ethnic background of their adoptive family and community, which is a fairly common practice among Asian Americans (Akiyama 2008; Zhou 2004). Findings in this study emphasized how social interaction and social contexts defined racial and ethnic identities. Therefore, the process of developing a racial or ethnic identity is a complex process, because identities are flexible and fluid, rather than fixed or rigidly defined (Baden 2002).
In this chapter, I first summarize the different ethnic experiences of the adoptees. For the sake of clarity, I use “Korean,” “American” and “Euro-American” to refer to their ethnic heritages, based on shared culture and ancestry (Higginbotham and Anderson 2009). Then, I examine how the Korean adoptees’ ethnic experiences are racialized and how this racialization of ethnicity affects their ethnic and racial identity development. Even though “Korean/Asian” and “white” are used to represent the adoptees’ racial identities, adoptees often also used “Korean” to describe their ethnic identities in terms of ancestry and culture. In addition, adoptees are often assumed to share similar experiences with others in the “Korean/Asian” group based on their appearances even though they did not necessarily share the Korean cultural orientation with other members of the group who grew up in Korean families. This unique position of transracial adoptees represents a racialization of Korean ethnicity.

ETHNIC EXPLORATION AND ETHNIC IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

For ethnic minorities, claiming an ethnic identity assumes a sense of belonging to the cultural and ancestral group (Phinney 1990), yet many adoptees did not feel a sense of belonging to Koreans as an ethnic group (Meier 1999), which made it difficult for them to fully accept a Korean ethnic identity. In addition, research found that ethnic minorities typically adopt a stronger ethnic identity, due to their differences from the “average [white] American” (Weisskirch 2005), however adoptees were challenged in developing a Korean ethnic identity, because they were mostly separated from their
ancestral heritage after being adopted into their American families. In addition, even after reconnecting with the Korean culture, with the help of their adoptive parents during childhood, or through their independent exploration of the Korean culture as adults, they often found themselves split between their adoptive “American” ethnic identity and a Korean ethnic identity. Many adoptees often felt they did not belong to the Korean ethnic culture because of the lack of cultural socialization to the Korean culture and felt more “American” because of their cultural socialization to their adoptive families’ Euro-American culture. In sum, throughout their life course, adoptees attempted to find acceptance in two different ethnic groups: Korean and American.

Transracial Adoption and a Unique Position of Korean Adoptee

Many of the adoptees felt that they lacked opportunities to learn about the Korean culture, and thus did not feel a full member of the Korean ethnic group. Therefore, adoptees were careful in characterizing their ethnic identity. For example, when asked about ethnic identity, Laura identified herself as “Korean American,” but after a moment of silence, she carefully noted that she did not “have the ethnic Korean culture.” Since Laura identified as “Korean-American,” it showed that she acknowledged her ethnic heritage as Korean, yet she also pointed out that she did not identify with “the ethnic Korean culture.” It is important to note that even though each adoptee participant had a unique family constructed of different racial groups and ethnicities, all of the participants that were audio-recorded had white families, aside from one. Therefore, many experienced similarities with other transracial adoptees from Korea as seen in past research (see Song and Lee 2009; Feigleman 2000; Meier 1999). Due to the majority
growing up in a Euro-American culture, they typically were exposed to little, if any, Korean cultural socialization, which resulted in ambivalence and carefulness when choosing to identify as part of the Korean ethnic group.

**Being Socialized by Adoptive Parents**

Ethnic cultural socialization is important in building a stronger ethnic identity (Song and Lee 2009), and family is one of the most influential social groups in identity development for adolescents and children (Hughes 2000). Therefore, naturally many adoptees spoke about their adoptive parents when describing their Korean cultural socialization as children. Participants described their adoptive parents approaching ethnic exploration in a similar way as described by some researchers. According to Song and Lee (2009), adoptive parents took two different approaches to educating the adoptees about their ethnic culture: an active role by openly offering opportunities for their children to learn about the Korean culture, or a passive role by waiting for their children to ask. These two paths demonstrated the adoptive parents’ efforts and comfort with the Korean ethnic culture.

First, some parents took an active role in an adoptee’s Korean culture exploration and socialization. For example, Betty remembered her adoptive parents brought back “kimchi” - a traditional Korean food - for her and her siblings when she was a child. Betty shared her excitement in eating kimchi, perhaps because it reminded her of the time she spent in Korea. Being able to experience the Korean culture seemed important for Betty and she seemed grateful for her parents’ attempt in giving her that opportunity. While some parents focused more on the ethnic Korean culture, other parents gave their
children Korean ethnic socialization. For example, Theresa recalled attending cultural “Korean picnics” as a child. Interestingly, some researchers did not see the adoptee picnics as a “Korean cultural activity,” however adoptees considered it a cultural activity when the picnics were “attended by other Korean adoptees and their families” (Shiao and Tuan 2011: 58). Even though Theresa did not seem to remember the Korean picnic as a very memorable moment, she still saw it as a “Korean” picnic, which emphasized the difference between her Korean ethnic identity and her American identity. Therefore, even though some adoptive parents may have thought they were helping their children by exposing their them to Korean food or taking them to Korean picnics, the adoptees may not have seen their efforts as a positively influencing their Korean ethnic identities.

On the other hand, many of the adoptees reported that their parents took more of a passive role, and waited for them to show an interest in further exploration. Even though adoptees with parents who actively supported their ethnic identity development not only had better relationships with their adoptive parents, but also had higher self-esteem (Yoon 2004), some adoptive parents were unaware of the importance and did not encourage the adoptees to maintain or build their ethnic identity. For example, Katie mentioned that her adoptive parents did not offer her opportunities to learn about Korea in an active manner, but instead waited to see if she developed her own interest.

“I was just completely brought up American, or white and not really any Korean culture or heritage. My parents did include some, especially when I was younger but kinda left it up to me as I got older to explore it if I wanted to, and I never really did.” (28 years old, adopted before turning one year old)
By taking the passive approach, Katie’s parents chose not to participate in the growth of Katie’s Korean ethnic identity. Betty’s parents were slightly different in their passive approach. Despite the twelve years Betty spent in Korea, when she came to the United States, she quickly forgot her ethnic Korean culture because of the assimilation efforts by her adoptive parents.

“I don’t think they knew very much about Korean culture, because once we moved here we were just concentrated everything the way it was celebrated here and the life here, they kinda, I think, I don’t think they meant to make us forget, but uh, that’s what happened.” (63 years old, adopted at 12 years old)

Betty’s experience showed that her adoptive parents lacked knowledge of the Korean culture and as a result of their unfamiliarity; they were not able to support the growth of her Korean ethnic identity. Betty’s experience demonstrated the integral role that the adoptive parent’s cultural competence plays in his/her child’s ethnic socialization (Vonk 2001). Betty assimilated to the American culture as she gradually lost Korean cultural orientation, because her adoptive parents did not or could not give her opportunities to continue practicing the Korean culture or language. While some adoptive parents offered opportunities for their children to explore their ethnic Korean culture, others chose to assimilate them to the white American culture, but either way, the adoptive parents influenced the adoptees’ ethnic identity development.

Some adoptees shared that they felt a sense of guilt in wanting to pursue their Korean heritage because they did not want to upset their adoptive parents. For example, Laura did not want her parents to “feel like [she was] trying to replace [them]” (40 years
old; adopted before turning one year old), and Katie admitted that she avoided the topic of her adoption in front of her adoptive parents, because she did not want to offend them. “I haven’t really talked to them about my curiosity about anything in Korea... I think I’m very hesitant to bring it up because I don’t want them to think I’m not satisfied with the job they’ve done...” (27 years old; adopted before turning one year old).

Both Laura and Katie felt guilty in wanting to reunite with their birth family, because they felt like they may disappoint their adoptive parents (also documented by Gladstone and Westhues 1998). Despite the sense of guilt, Laura had a very close relationship with her adoptive parents, which may have encouraged her to explore her Korean ethnic identity (Mohanty et al 2007). On the other hand, Katie’s feelings of guilt towards her parents hindered her ethnic exploration and, consequently her ability to develop a Korean ethnic identity.

Adoptive parents were very influential towards which path an adoptee chose to pursue, but adoptees also made an active choice: either towards learning more about their ethnic Korean culture or by rejecting it. Since most adoptees were raised in a mainstream white community (Fiegleman 2000), even if adoptees had opportunities to learn about their ethnic Korean heritage, many openly rejected it. For example, as a child, Katie recalled rejecting the opportunity to learn Korean, “because [she] was going through that ‘I don’t wanna be Korean’ stage” (27 years old; adopted before turning one year old). Perhaps in an attempt to fit in her family, Katie may have feared learning Korean would have further isolated her (Berquist 2003). In addition, some researchers believed that
transracially adopted Chinese children may choose to reject their Chinese heritage in an attempt to counter rejection from dominant society (Tan and Nakkula 2005). Therefore, while adoptive parents were influential in shaping an adoptee’s cultural socialization and exploration processes, the adoptee also made the decision to pursue certain paths in their journey of ethnic identity exploration.

Learning Korean Language and Feeling Accepted by Other Koreans

Ethnic minorities are more likely to claim an ethnic identity when they feel a sense of acceptance by that group (see Phinney 1990). Research showed a relationship between language and ethnic identity: if the adoptee did not know the Korean language, she/he was less likely to feel Korean and claim that identity (Khanna 2004). For example, Laura felt that “[she did not] really...fit in [with other Koreans] because [she did not] speak the [Korean] language” (40 years old; adopted before turning one year old). Since Laura was unable to speak Korean, she felt that she did not “fit” with other Koreans, and therefore did not identify ethnically as Korean. By not speaking the Korean language, some adoptees felt further isolated from other Koreans and the Korean ethnic group.

Some adoptees felt that by learning Korean language, they would interact more with other Koreans and as a result would identify more as Korean. Steve shared that “[he] tried to learn Korean. And [he] had made some like Korean friends to try and help [him learn].” (24 years old; adopted before turning one year old). Through his attempt to learn to speak Korean, Steve was able to socialize with other Koreans, which may have helped him develop an ethnic identity (Song and Lee 2009). Furthermore, other adoptees felt that they were able to find a sense of belonging by interacting with other Koreans. For
instance, Betty felt that learning to speak Korean at a local Korean church made her feel like “[she was] really really Korean” (63 years old; adopted at 12 years old). Betty’s experience with the Korean church was interesting because it was not only learning Korean language that made her feel more Korean, but also the interaction she had at the church that made her feel accepted as a Korean individual (similar findings in Song and Lee 2009). In sum, by learning the Korean language, adoptees were able to interact with others in the Korean ethnic group, and interaction with other Koreans may have allowed the adoptees to feel accepted by Koreans, which therefore helped in the development of a Korean ethnic identity.

Traveling to Korea

Being raised in an American culture, another way some adoptees choose to explore the Korean culture in order to learn more about their Korean heritage is through traveling to Korea on homeland tours/motherland tours. Adoptees chose to travel for various reasons, and the trips impacted identity development differently for the adoptees (Song and Lee 2009). First, some adoptees felt a renewed interest in learning more about their ancestral ethnic heritage after visiting Korea. For example, Steve traveled to Korea with an adoptee group, and while he still had many questions, he felt he learned a lot about where he came from.

“I don’t think it answered everything but it gave me a starting point. Cause like before I didn’t really know...too much about myself, but when I went there I sorta like, uh found something, I guess you could say. …like before when I was growing up I just didn’t know...what I wanted, or what type of person I really
was, which is pretty common, I guess. And after I went there...something inside was telling me this is what I want now and then.... like reborn again, I guess.” (24 years old; adopted before turning one year old)

Steve brought up an interesting point, that before his trip to Korea, he “didn’t really know...too much about [himself]” and that after his trip he felt “reborn again.” Steve was primarily referring to a rebirth of interest about his ethnic heritage and the trip gave him a visual representation of his birth country as well as a starting point for further ethnic exploration. Therefore, the travel to Korea served as an impetus in learning more about who he was as a Korean individual.

Trips to Korea not only allows some adoptees to learn more about a Korean ethnic identity, but it also helps them explore what it means to be a Korean adoptee (Bergquist 2003) through meeting and interacting with other adoptees during the trip. On one trip back to Korea, Laura completed a documentary on adoption. Although she did not focus on her own individual story, it still gave her the opportunity to explore her Korean ethnic identity as an adoptee, because “[she was] able to talk to other adoptees in [her] adoptee group about their experiences” (40 years old; adopted before turning one year old).

Laura’s work creating the documentary allowed her to develop both her Korean identity through learning more about Korea and its culture and an adoptee identity through her interviews with other adoptees. As Laura discovered, Randolphp and Holtzman (2010) documented that it is very important for Korean adoptees to include social interaction with other Korean adoptees because it helps them develop their own unique Korean ethnic identity.
Interacting with Other Korean Adoptees

Outside of birth family searches or traveling to Korea, some adoptees feel that interacting with other adoptees during childhood and/or adulthood helps to cultivate their Korean ethnic identities. For example, Katie recalled growing up with a Korean adoptee friend throughout her childhood and felt their relationship was built off their common ancestry and shared adoptee experience. She recalled talking “about being adopted,” and how she felt “comfortable” being around “someone who is similar” (27 years old, adopted before turning one year old). Kevin also shared that other adoptees helped him find a niche – a sense of belonging:

“If you look at the bond adoptees have, uhm, I don’t know if its just the fact we are all abandoned and we all adoptees, we’re all adopted, like similarities, but like thoughts and feelings that even your closest friends, even if you have a close personal relationship with you family, that there are thoughts and aspects of our stories and feelings that we won’t share with any of them. But then within the first five minutes of meeting a fellow adoptee, that total stranger, but you’re spilling your guts to them. So therapeutic.” (36 years old; adopted at 5 years old)

Both Katie and Kevin’s experiences captured the essence of camaraderie some researchers believe adoptees share with each other. Similar to how adoptees felt at adoptee camps, Randolph and Holtzman (2010) believed that adoptees share a sense of familiarity in experience that translated to comfort and likeness. By knowing other Koreans or even other adoptees, some adoptees were able to develop and accept an ethnic identity specific to Korean transracial adoptee.
In summary, the participants in this study showed that transracial adoptees have a unique position in society. Many of the adoptees struggled in identifying fully as a Korean individual, even after acknowledging their Korean ancestry, because they were socialized in a Euro-American culture. Many adoptees felt their transracial adoption helped define who they were and influenced how they ethnically identified. Adoptive parents were either actively or passively involved in their children’s Korean culture exploration processes. In addition, familiarity with the Korean language was one of the cultural aspects that allowed adoptees to accept a Korean ethnic identity, and language proficiency facilitated interaction with other Koreans. Some adoptees recalled rejecting opportunities to explore the Korean culture given to them by their adoptive parents, while others took initiative by traveling to Korea and/or participating in motherland cultural tours. Such trips not only provided them with more opportunities to learn about the Korean culture, but also allowed them more interaction with other Korean adoptees, which aided further ethnic exploration and affirmed their unique position in society. Finally, other adoptees felt socialization with other adoptees helped them develop an ethnic identity by allowing them to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance.

RACIALIZED KOREAN ETHNICITY

Racialized ethnicity refers to the tendency in which ethnic minorities are identified with racial characteristics and treated based on racial stereotypes created by dominant society (Kibria 2000). In addition to the ethnic exploration mentioned earlier,
transracial Korean adoptees’ ethnic identities are partly molded by their encounters with incidents that represent the racialization of Korean ethnicity. According to Song (2010), racial minorities are not given the option of picking an ethnic identity, but their ethnicity (i.e., culture and ancestry) is often presumed through socially constructed racial characteristics. In addition, Park (2008: 555) found that “in an environment where the cultural mainstream is implicitly white,” people may generalize “a presumed Asian culture rather than [recognizing] specific Asian cultures.” Consequently, these minorities may not be able to escape racial labels and stereotypes and do not have the freedom to choose ethnic identities (Kibria 2000). Therefore, a racialization of the transracial adoptees’ experiences may have influenced how the adoptees chose to identify ethnically.

Findings in this study also imply that racialization could impact ethnic identity (i.e., ancestral and cultural identification) held by transracially adopted Koreans. Other people assumed that the adoptees had “Korean” ancestry simply because they possessed Asian features, even though almost all of them were socialized in a white family and felt distant from the ancestral identification. Simultaneously, society encouraged adoptees to assume an ethnic Korean culture – like other Koreans raised in Korean families. In other words, society determined that physical racial characteristics establish one’s place in the socially defined racial groups and therefore controlled how the adoptees were seen and treated by others.

*White Inside and Asian Outside*
Even though Korean adoptees are socially categorized into a racial group “Asian” by how they looked, they often belonged to and identified more closely with their adoptive parents’ racial group: whites. For example, Laura explained, “I see myself as white on the inside and Asian on the outside, half the time I forget I am Asian until I look in the mirror” (40 years old; adopted before turning one year old). Most of the participants in this study shared that they felt white inside and Asian outside: a closer identification with white/Euro-American culture, while looking Asian. However, the adoptees encountered incidents that made them more aware of the social meanings and stereotypes attached to their physical features. A lack of freedom in claiming a Euro-American ethnic identity (Song 2010) was a result of adoptees facing such reminders about their Asian appearances in their everyday lives. Similarly, Waters (1994) found that second generation Caribbean blacks in the United States also struggled in maintaining a Caribbean ethnic identity, because they were assumed to be “black.” Even though this research focused on the racialization of blacks, it pertained to the experience of transracial adoptees, because their ethnic experiences were also racialized due to their Asian features. Thus, adoptees were confused about how they should identify ethnically. The constant reminder of their racial differences caused adoptees to want to ethnically identify, and in a few cases, racially identify, as white, while fully understanding it would not be accepted or reinforced by society. As a result, adoptees felt their Asian appearance guided their options for ethnic identification.
Asian features: reminders of being different. Despite a closer identification with Euro-American culture growing up in white family (and often predominantly white community), the adoptees were often reminded of their Asian appearances in daily lives. One such reminder was noticing the racial incongruence between themselves and their adoptive families. For example, Laura shared that during her childhood she felt self-conscious about her appearance, as she did not share any physical similarities with her adoptive parents.

“I remember, and thinking back to it I wondered if I looked different…and I think I was self-conscious of how I looked. Because my older brother looked like my dad, and my younger brother looked like my mom.” (40 years old; adopted before turning one year old)

Even though Laura was not treated differently, she felt different from her family and was aware that she did not look like her adoptive parents. Interaction with others of the same racial group had been found as a source of racial identification (Chavez and Guido-DeBrito 1999). Since most adoptees did not have much interaction with other Koreans, not only did their differing racial statuses contribute to confusion regarding their racial identities, but also served as a reminder of their adoption and their racial minority status in their families and communities (Grotevant et al 2000).

While a few adoptees sought an Asian partner to find comfort and acceptance in Korean ethnic exploration, adoptees with a white spouse shared how being with him/her sometimes made their Asian identity salient. Many of the adoptees married whites – which was not surprising considering they were raised and socialized in that dominant
racial group (Bergquist 2003). Katie shared that having a white husband made her feel different from her adoptive family.

“I also feel that I always notice, or I’m always conscious, you know, if I go out to dinner with my parents and [my husband], people probably perceive [my husband] as being their child and I’m his wife, married into the family.” (27 years old; adopted before turning one year old).

Katie was self-conscious of how she appeared when with her husband and her adoptive family, who looked white. Even though Katie spent most of her life with her family, she felt her husband looked more like her family than she did. Having a white significant other may have influenced the adoptees racial identity development, because it may have caused them to feel even more different from their adoptive families. Phinney (1990) believed that individuals defined “a sense of belonging to one’s own group…in contrast to another group,” in other words, adoptees were more likely to see themselves as Asian, when they were with their adoptive families, because the racial differences were apparent (Mohanty et al 2006). Even though adoptees had varying comfort levels with their Asian racial identities, adoptees with white partners were more aware of the racial differences between themselves and their adoptive families.

Another constant reminder that restricted the adoptees’ Euro-American/white ethnic identity was racial discrimination and stereotyping. The adoptees faced discrimination because their race was typically different from that of their adoptive families and community (Grotevant et al 2000). For instance, Katie recalled feeling
different from her adoptive family when people asked her, “are you adopted...[or] they
would see one parent and...[ask] is your other parent Asian?” (27 years old; adopted
before turning one year old). Even though other people did not discriminate against her
openly, she felt isolated and different from her family when others questioned her
belonging to her adoptive family. In addition, some other adoptees actually experienced
racism. Laura shared that her classmates made fun of her and called her “flat-faced or
stretched their eyes.” In addition, the teasing made her feel “sad...mad about it” and she
“[felt] different” (40 years old; adopted before turning one year old). Laura felt
“different,” because the teasing distanced her physically and emotionally from her family
and friends. Her adoptive mother helped her develop a means to cope with the racial
discrimination, or “survival skills” (Vonk 2001), by giving her a book about adoption and
racial differences. By experiencing and talking about stereotypes and discrimination, the
adoptee could become more aware of society’s racial assumptions and how these racial
boundaries impacted their position in racialized groupings in society.

Some adoptees acknowledge that Asian stereotypes serve as point of reference in
defining them in relation to the Korean ethnicity. For example, Katie felt confused and
wondered if others perceived her with Asian stereotypes, such as being “good at math or
really studious,” and treated her differently because she looked Asian.

“I do wonder a lot if I go into a store...I have a question for someone or I’m
asking, I wonder how that person is perceiving me...I wonder if they think along
the lines of [stereotypes]. And I think, do I fit those stereotypes, and some ways yes and a lot of ways no.” (27 years old, adopted before turning one year old)

Importantly, Katie discussed that stereotypes influenced not only how others viewed her, but also how she viewed herself ethnically by utilizing them as references to how she should identify. Racial minorities’ identities were influenced by “internalized racialism” - the process of “identifying with or internalizing positive and negative stereotypes” about a particular racial group (Cokley 2005: 518). According to Park (2008), by accepting the racialization of certain ethnic stereotypes (e.g. “good at math or really studious”), Asian Americans are reinforcing the existence of racialized ethnicity. Therefore, by the existence of stereotypes in society, adoptees internalized the socially constructed images of Asians without fully understanding how the stereotypes impacted their own identities. By using the stereotypes in an attempt to define themselves ethnically and racially, adoptees thus reinforced racialized Korean ethnicity.

Transracial adoptees’ perception of the Asian racial group was built based on stereotypes from mainstream society. Even though Laura may not have understood what her classmates’ actions meant as a child, the teasing highlighted the existence of the social boundary between whites and Asians. The teasing also made her become aware of being raised in a “white” social group, yet possessing the stereotypical “flat face” or slanted eyes society assumes Asians look. Additionally, Katie talked about her internal dilemma of feeling pressured to “fit” into the Asian stereotypes, even though she was raised in a purely ‘American’ culture without Korean cultural beliefs or values. These stereotypes may be particularly confusing for the adoptees, because they learned that the
forced existence of separate and distinct ethnic identities (e.g. Korean and American) was paramount - based on race - rather than allowing the flexibility to accepting a blending of both.

Finally, even Korean adoptees of mixed race (e.g. White and Asian) could not pass as whites and were often reminded of their membership with the Asian racial group through discrimination and stereotyping. Researchers argued that mixed race adoptees have their own unique experience in identity development, because at times their race or ethnicity may not be as clear or obvious (Shiao and Tuan 2011). Susan, who was a mixed race adoptee, characterized herself as “Amerasian” representing “half white and half… Korean.” However, Susan was reminded about her Asian group membership when she visited her boyfriend’s home.

“[My boyfriend’s dad] said I don’t allow chinks in here. And I told him, excuse me, if you want to get it right it’s gook.” (55 years old, adopted at 5 years old)

Susan’s discriminatory experience highlighted her Asian appearance and caused her boyfriend’s father to assume her Asian ancestry, which therefore implied she also had a Korean ethnic identity. Another mixed race adoptee, Theresa also shared that during her childhood “one of [her] brothers would always tease [her],” by calling her names such as “gook” or tell her she “[worked] in the rice paddies” (53 years old, adopted at 2 years old). Although she did not seem to be offended by the teasing, she recalled feeling “different.” When identifying, mixed-race Asians often cited the influence of how others identified them, both other Asians and non-Asians (Khanna 2004), meaning if others saw them as Asian, then they would identify as Asian.
As Susan and Theresa’s experiences showed, mixed-race adoptees were still subject to racialization and their ethnic identities were constructed based on racial discrimination. For Susan, others in her community saw her as Asian, and even treated her differently because of her race. Consequently, she was not able to let go of the identification as Asian. In addition, even though Theresa was raised in a multi-racial family and had both Asian and white physical features, her brother’s teasing highlighted her racial distinctiveness and assumed her Korean ethnic identity. Theresa felt that she would only be able to “find out more about [herself]” by focusing on her non-white side. Theresa added that after returning to Korea she felt motivated to learn more about her ethnic background. Although both Susan and Theresa were half-Asian and half-white, and technically had more flexibility with their racial categories (Khanna 2004), they were subject to the same racial treatment as other “full” Koreans because they were adopted from Korea and had Asian appearances recognizable to others. Findings in this study demonstrated the difficulty of escaping racialization even for racially mixed individual.

*Internalizing racialized Korean ethnicity.* Receiving reminders that they should belong to Asian group, most adoptees feel their physical racial features ultimately shape the options they have in constructing their ethnic identity (similar argument found in Kibria 2000). Regardless of how the adoptees felt (e.g. ‘white on inside and Asian on the outside’), many adoptees internalized a racialized ethnicity by attaching stereotypical Asian characteristics (e.g. physical features or aspects of culture) to the Korean ethnic group and to themselves (Kibria 2000). For example, Jenny identified herself as “Asian... Korean Asian,” and while she seemed hesitant about her choice, she answered, “because
that’s what [she looked] like.” Jenny accepted a racialized ethnic identity, because she relied on her physical “Asian” features to identify her as being “Korean.” Even though the majority of adoptees had little to no interaction with other Asians, they still identified ethnically (Korean), according to their presumed racial group (Asian), based on how they appeared to others.

Being racialized in everyday lives, many adoptees feel closer to a Korean identity and develop a desire to learn more about the Korean culture. Most importantly, Asian appearances were something that needed to be accepted in order to accept a Korean ethnic identity. For instance, Katie said,

“When I was younger, it was like, ‘yeah I’m adopted’ and that was about it. And then it was like ‘I don’t want to be Asian, I wanna be white, I wanna be white, I wanna be white’ to ‘well whatever, it is what it is’ to now where it’s kinda like, ‘well I am kinda curious about Korea, I don’t necessarily need to deny that part of who I am because try as I might, I am always going to look Asian…” (27 years old; adopted before turning one year old)

Katie seemed to have developed her interests in learning more about Korean culture because her Asian features identified her socially as a member of that ethnic group. In addition, even though Katie was raised in a white culture and may have felt closer to a white/Euro-American ethnic culture, she realized as an adult that she was “always going to look Asian.” Therefore, adoptees may have felt pressured to learn more about their ethnic Korean heritage, because they were already labeled as Asian by society.
Even though some adoptees struggle with the dichotomy of “looking Asian” and “feeling white,” others feel that they became more comfortable accepting an Asian identity through interaction with other people who looked Asians. For example, regardless of being raised in a white family, Katie still found herself “[gravitating] towards people who were also Asian,” which was interesting, because she “[did not] really identify [herself] as being Asian” (27 years old; adopted before turning one year old). Studies on racial socialization cited the importance of interacting with others of the same race to develop racial identities (Chavez and Guido-DeBrito 1999). While Katie felt she did not “identify [herself] as being Asian,” she still “gravitated” towards other Asians, which implied that racialization of Asians encouraged her to develop social networks with other Asians. This also has been found to be a source of ethnic identity (Phinney 1990), and even though some adoptees did not necessarily feel Asian, they still felt more comfortable being classified as Asian, which represented an internalization of racialized ethnic identity.

In addition, some adoptees choose to be with other Asians as a way to avoid scrutiny and questions about their ethnicity from society. According to Lee (2003), some ethnic and racial minorities chose to socialize and interact with other minorities as a way to combat discrimination (Lee 2003). For example, Theresa shared,

“It wasn’t because [my husband] was Asian, our personalities really just… but it is nice in a sense being with another Asian…and not…that I’m proud to be Asian, and not that I don’t want to be feel like I’m white or Caucasian, but it is comforting in a sense…you don’t get questions as much, and just people assume
so many things, and so…comfort wise. It is nice in that sense” (53 years old; adopted at 2 years old)

According to Kibria (2000), racialized ethnicity referred to the merge of various ethnic cultures into one single “Asian” culture. Clearly, Theresa accepted such homogenization of Asian ethnicities. Theresa and her husband had different ethnic heritages, but by choosing to be with him, she was not seeking to develop a Korean ethnic identity, but rather trying to escape the “questions” arising from her lack of racial and ethnic cultural socialization as a transracial adoptee. Increased interaction with Asian individuals could have an impact on their ethnic exploration processes (Phinney 1990), and even though adoptees may have felt more comfortable with a “white” culture, due to the prominent influence of race, some adoptees chose to socialize and interact with other Asians as a way to find acceptance.

In conclusion, many adoptees felt white on the inside, but Asian on the outside, due to racial differences from their adoptive families, however most adoptees acknowledged that their physical racial features influenced their identity development even though they may have been unclear as to what being “Asian” meant. While many adoptees belonged to the Asian racial group, not all felt they could identify racially as Asian (or ethnically as Korean), due to their socialization to the white American culture. Finally, despite feeling more comfortable with a “white” or “American” identity, due to their inability to escape racial labels and ethnic stereotypes, many accepted a racialized Korean ethnic identity. In conclusion, adoptees held a unique place in the study of
racialized ethnicity, due to their experience racially as an ethnic minority, and culturally as part of the dominant group.
CHAPTER 5 – DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

This thesis investigated the factors that influenced transracial Korean adoptees’ ethnic identity development and the role their race played in the process. While the transracial adoptees’ identities continued to change and were influenced by various methods of ethnic exploration, their race was powerful in shaping their identities and experiences, supporting the concept of racialized ethnic identity. The racial differences between the adoptee and his/her family or community were a constant reminder to the adoptee that they were different and will always look Asian and consequently impacted their ethnic identity development. Even though some adoptees identified more closely with their “Euro-American” ethnic identity, society labeled them as Asian/Korean, which made it difficult for them to fully accept either identity. Many adoptive parents took a passive approach in raising the adoptees, but at times, this parenting style led to the adoptees feeling uncomfortable talking about their racial or ethnic identity and unknowledgeable about the Korean ethnic culture. This finding mirrored that of Shiao and Tuan (2011) that adoptive parents typically encouraged Korean ethnic exploration, but were less likely to discuss the impact of their different racial groups. Since race was the most salient social identifier outsiders noticed about adoptees, most adoptees had a difficult time claiming an Asian identity, because it was not openly discussed or appreciated during their childhood. Not surprisingly, physical differences between the adoptee and the adoptive family were one of the leading factors influencing the ethnic identity development.
Korean adoptees’ ethnic identity was more complex than that of other racial and ethnic minorities. Park (2008) and Kibria (2000) discussed the racialization of Asian ethnicities into a pan-Asian identity, and they did not recognize the assumption of homogeneity within a single ethnic group (e.g. Korean), but the findings of this study imply that there is an important difference between ethnic identity of transracial Korean adoptees and that of Koreans who were raised by Korean parent(s). Even though adoptees chose to identify as “Korean,” most meant it as born in Korea (Higgenbotham and Andersen 2009) emphasizing the ancestry aspect of the ethnic identity rather than its cultural aspect, because the majority of adoptees grew up with little to no Korean cultural socialization (Song and Lee 2009). While many of the participants felt drawn to learning more about their birth heritage, there was still a general understanding that ethnically they would always remain separate from other Koreans (Meier 1999) as a result of their transracial adoption. Even though all the participants had unique and individual experiences, they still shared a common experience that singled them out from other Koreans or Asians: their adoption. Since this thesis did not focus entirely on comparing the Korean adoptees’ experiences to Koreans raised in the Korean culture, the findings do suggest that the experiences of racialized ethnicity would vary between these two groups. Future studies would benefit from comparing and contrasting the experiences of racialized ethnicity between transracial Korean adoptees and Koreans who grew up in Korean families.

Although it is beyond the scope of this study, adoptees who were adopted during the first wave (1950s-1960s) may have different ethnic and racial experiences than those
adopted in the third wave (1970s-1980s) as race and ethnicity are social constructs that are defined and redefined in certain political and social climate throughout history (Higginbotham and Andersen 2009). Thus, researchers must carefully take into account the cohort effects in examining experiences of transracial Korean adoptees. Historically, the first wave of adoptions from Korea was in the 1950s, which paved the way for future Korean adoptions to the United States (Shiao and Tuan 2011). In this thesis, the participants were from a wide range of ages born between the 1940s-1980s. The youngest adoptee was in his mid-twenties and the oldest adoptee was in her mid-sixties (See Appendix D). One limitation of this study – and much of the past research – is that there were not any participants adopted in the 1990s or later. Most of the current research focuses on adult adoptees, so those born in the 1990s are now just entering adulthood. Interestingly, adoptions from Korea dropped in the 1990s (See Figure 1), due in part from international and political changes in Korea (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 1999). In future research, it would be beneficial to continue examining transracially adopted Koreans’ experiences while cohorts into account and interview adult Korean adoptees born in the 1990s and later to explore how their ethnic and racial experiences differ from those in earlier cohorts.

Mixed race Korean adoptees may have also had different racial and ethnic experiences than non-mixed race adoptees. Many Korean adoptees born in the first wave (1950s) were mixed-race adoptees - having Korean mothers and American fathers – and were born during the Korean War (Shiao and Tuan 2011). Despite being born in Korea, these children were seen as American children and, because of their biological father’s
race, they were not accepted into the Korean society (Park 1995). Consequently, these children were sent over to the United States. During this first wave, 54% adoptees were considered mixed-race. As historical events shifted adoption policies, the demographics of the adoptees shifted as well and by the 1970s less than .05% were considered mixed-race children (Park 1995). Due to the historical trends of transracial adoption from Korea, most of the mixed-race adoptees are older adoptees, born between the 1940s-1950s. The sample of this study included only two mixed-race respondents. This thesis generally suggested that race is an influential factor shaping the adoptees’ ethnic identity even for mixed-race adoptees, but further research is still needed to examine whether and how mixed-race or racially “more ambiguous” Korean adoptees’ experience differs from other adoptees who appear “more Korean.”

Adoptees adopted at an older age may have had a different process of ethnic identity development than those who were adopted at a younger age, as a result of cultural retention from their birth country (Song and Lee 2009). Most of the adoptees in this thesis were under a year when they were adopted, however there were a few who were between the ages of 2-5, and one who was over the age of 12 (See Appendix D). Past research showed that there seemed to be a difference in experience by the age the participant was adopted (See Shiao and Tuan 2011). Statistically, in the 1970s, 31% of all adoptees were over the age of 2, and in 1990s, the number dropped to 15% (Park 1995). While these differences were beyond the scope of this study, future studies should take into account the adoptees age at the time of adoption when exploring racial and ethnic identity development.
In this study, the female participants greatly outnumbered the male participants. Historically, more female Koreans have been adopted than the male counterparts (Park 1995). Some researchers also explored a possible influence of gender on adoptee experiences (Meier 1999), however not many studies explore the role of gender on the adoptee’s experiences and how it may impact their racial and ethnic identity development. This would also be another interesting area for future research to see how ethnic and racial identity development of adoptees differed between genders.

It is important to note that this study did not account for experiences of adoptees with one or more Asian parents. Some research showed that exposure to those of the same racial background is beneficial for ethnic and racial identity development of adoptees (Lee and Quintana 2005; Grotevant 2000), and another study found that adoptees with one or more Asian parent were more comfortable with their ethnic and racial identity (Meier 1999), but few focused on the experiences of adoptees with one or more Asian parents. While I recruited for adoptees with parents of a different racial group than the adoptee, one adoptee I interviewed had at one Asian parent (another participant had two Asian parents, however I was not able to record her interview, and thus the case was excluded in the analysis). Nevertheless, the findings of this study cannot describe the potential differences if the adoptees were with parents who shared racial similarities, but this would be an interesting group of Korean adoptees to study in the future to see how their racial and ethnic experiences differed from adoptees with white parents.

By recruiting from local support groups for transracial adoptees, the participants
had at least a minimal invested interest in an adoptee sub culture. Therefore, findings of this study are not applicable to Korean adoptees who are not involved in such support groups. In addition, because the participants were recruited from the larger Sacramento area, many of the participants may have had a wider range and availability of racial diversity than other areas in the United States. While this study was not generalizable, it provided an in-depth picture of how transracial adoptees built their racial and ethnic identities.

In sum, a transracial adoptee’s identity is not only multi-layered, involving ethnic experiences, race relations, and other factors (Tan et al 2005), but it is also complex and varied based on their individual adoption story. Even though adoptees were raised in a Euro-American/white culture according to socially defined racial groups (Kibria 2000), they were seen as Asian. Adoptees may have reinforced the racial boundaries by acknowledging the existence of their ancestral Korean ethnic group, however, in a racially stratified society, their ethnic identification with Euro-American culture can easily be ignored by others based on how they look, supporting the concept of racialized ethnicity. Therefore, the process transracial adoptees underwent in developing their racial and ethnic identities was not only unique and individual, but was also heavily influenced by a racially divided and structured society. Findings of this study would be beneficial to transracial adoptees and their families in handling issues surrounding racial and ethnic identity development. Further, this study provided information that can be used to educate prospective adoptive parents, future adoptees, and social workers. While it is difficult to say whether or not transracial adoptees from Korea will ever be accepted
as having a white and/or Euro-American identity, as society changes and assumptions about race and ethnicity shift, perhaps one day transracial adoptees – and other ethnic minorities - will be able to choose which racial or ethnic identity they wish to have.
APPENDIX A: Questionnaire

1. I was born in the year _______________
2. I was adopted in the year _________
3. Where (in what city/state) did you grow up? _______________
4. Where do you currently live now? _________________________
5. What racial or ethnic group does your adoptive mother belong to?
   a. White
   b. Black
   c. Asian
   d. Latino/Hispanic
   e. Other (Please Explain): ________________________________
6. What racial or ethnic group does your adoptive father belong to?
   a. White
   b. Black
   c. Asian
   d. Latino/Hispanic
   e. Other (Please Explain): ________________________________
7. Do you have any siblings?
   a. Yes
   b. No
8. How many, if any, of your siblings are adopted? _________________
9. If answered question 8, what are their racial and ethnic backgrounds?
10. Do you have any children?
    a. Yes
    b. No
11. How many, if any, of your children are adopted? _________________
12. Are you currently married?
    a. Yes
    b. No
13. What is your partner or spouse’s racial or ethnic group?
   a. White
   b. Black
   c. Asian
   d. Latino/Hispanic
   e. Other (Please Explain): ________________________________

14. Have you ever participated in post-adoption services (camps, picnics, birth family searches, support groups, adoptee gatherings, etc)?
   a. Yes
   b. No

15. What is your highest level of education?
   a. High School or Less
   b. Associates Degree
   c. Bachelors Degree
   d. Graduate Degree (or higher)
   e. Other (Please Explain): __________________

16. In what group does your annual salary fall?
   a. 0-20,000
   b. 20,001-30,000
   c. 30,001-40,000
   d. 40,001-50,000
   e. 50,001 and higher
APPENDIX B: Interview Guide

1. If someone asked you who you were, how would you describe yourself?
2. People say that the U.S. is a diverse society that has various racial and ethnic groups. In terms of race and ethnicity, how would you define yourself?
   a. What does race mean to you?
   b. What does ethnicity mean to you?
3. Please tell me about your peer group/school friends growing up?
4. (Family relationships) Now I’d like to ask you a little bit about your family.
   a. How would you describe the racial and ethnic characteristics of your parents?
      i. If you were to describe your relationship with your parents, how would you describe it?
      ii. How would you describe the racial and ethnic characteristics of your siblings?
      iii. Could you describe your relationship with your siblings?
   b. Would you like to share a little bit about your relationship with your other relatives?
5. How do you think your family and friends affected how you chose to identify racially and ethnically?
6. Now, let me ask you a little more about your family. Think about day-to-day things you do on holidays…
   a. How much do you feel that your parents know about the Korean culture?
   b. How much importance do you feel your parents place on you knowing the Korean culture?
   c. (If interviewee has children) Please tell me about your OWN family’s cultural traditions?
7. In general, what kind of experiences have you had with the Korean culture?
   a. Do you seek opportunities to explore more about the Korean culture? Could you give me some of the examples?
8. Have you ever participated in post-adoption services (camps, picnics, birth family searches, support groups, adoptee gatherings, etc)?
   a. If so, please tell me more about your experiences with each?
   b. How do you think your participation has affected how you view yourself today? Your family?
9. (If relevant) How do you feel about transracial adoption and the families it creates?
10. Please tell me about an event in your life that made you feel different from your family?
    a. How did that make you feel?
    b. Do you have any other examples/experiences?
11. Is there anything else you would like to share?
APPENDIX C: Participant Profiles

BETTY is in her mid-sixties and was adopted from South Korea when she was about thirteen years old, along with her younger sister and brother. Her situation is very unique, because of the age she was adopted, as well as being adopted with her biological siblings. She currently resides in the city she grew up, which is in the greater Sacramento area. Both her adoptive mother and father were White. Interestingly, on her questionnaire she only listed two siblings (her biological brother and sister), however her adoptive parents had two biological children of their own. She also has a younger sister who is still in Korea. She is currently married and her husband is white. They have three children, two sons and one daughter. Her oldest son also adopted two Korean children from the same orphanage she was adopted from. She has participated in post-adoption services, and has traveled back to Korea two times to visit her younger sister. She is also learning Korean at the local Korean church.

JENNY is in her late thirties and was about one year old when she was adopted. She grew up in the Bay Area, and currently resides in the greater Sacramento Area. Both her adoptive mother and father are white and she has one older brother who is also adopted from Korea. She has two sons, and is currently married. Her husband is also Asian. She has participated in post-adoption services.

KATIE is in her mid-twenties and was adopted when she was about six months old. She grew up and still resides in the Sacramento area. Her adoptive mother and father are white and she has one older brother, who is her adoptive parents’ biological child. She
does not have any children, but is currently married. Her husband is white. She has participated in post-adoption services.

KEVIN is in his late thirties and was adopted when he was about five years old. He grew up in the Northwest and currently resides in the Sacramento area. His adoptive mother is white and his adoptive father has a Cherokee background. He has one older brother and one older sister, who are his adoptive parents’ biological children. He is unmarried, but has 3 daughters (one is Hispanic, one is Korean/French, one is Japanese). He has participated in post-adoption services. Kevin’s case is interesting, because he was reunited with his birth family in Korea. Although his birth parents are separated, he was able to connect with both. He has four half-siblings in Korea, two brothers from his birth father, and two sisters from his birth mother.

LAURA is in her early forties and was less than one year when she was adopted from Korea. She grew up in the Bay Area and currently resides in the greater Sacramento area. Both her adoptive mother and father are white and she has one older brother, who is her adoptive parents’ biological child. She has two daughters and is currently married. Her husband is also white. She has participated in post-adoption services. She has traveled back to Korea and has also created a documentary on her adoption experience.

STEVE is in his mid twenties and was adopted from South Korea when he was about one year old. He grew up, and still resides, in the greater Sacramento area. His adoptive mother is Asian, which is fairly unique among transracially adopted Koreans. His adoptive father is of “mixed” heritage. He is an only child, is unmarried, and has no
children of his own. He has participated in post-adoption services and recently traveled back to Korea. He has also learned to speak Korean, and he is currently in college.

SUSAN is in her mid-fifties and was adopted from South Korea when she was about five years old. She grew up, and currently lives, in the surrounding Sacramento area. Both her adoptive mother and father were white. She has four siblings. Her youngest sister is also adopted from South Korea; and her two older sisters, and one older brother, are her adoptive parents’ biological children. She is currently married and has one daughter. Her husband is White. She has not participated in post-adoption services, but is taking Korean classes at a local Korean church. She is considered Amerasian: half white and half Korean.

THERESA is in her mid-fifties and was adopted when she was about two years old. She grew up in Southern California and currently lives in the greater Sacramento area. Her adoptive mother and father are white and she has six siblings, two older brothers who are her adoptive parents’ biological children, and four younger sisters, who were all adopted domestically. She is currently married and her husband is Asian. She has two children, one son and one daughter. She has participated in post-adoption services and has traveled back to Korean twice. She is of mixed heritage, however she is not sure what her complete racial/ethnic background is.

AMY is in her mid-forties and was adopted when she was about one year old. She grew and currently resides in the greater Sacramento area. Both her adoptive parents are Asian and she has one older brother who is also adopted from Korea. She is currently married,
her husband is white, and she has one daughter. She has participated in post-adoption services. Unfortunately, Amy’s interview was not recorded, due to her personal request.

MATT is in his early thirties and was adopted when he was about five years old. He grew up in the Midwest and currently resides in the greater Sacramento area. His adoptive mother is Asian, which is also unique, and his adoptive father is white. The number of siblings he has is unknown, however they are his adoptive parents’ biological children. He does not have any children and is not currently married. He has participated in post-adoption services. Due to technical difficulties, I was not able to record Matt’s interview, and therefore no transcription is available.
APPENDIX D: Participant Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age at Interview</th>
<th>Year Adopted</th>
<th>Age at Adoption</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>About 5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Less than 1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>Less than 1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>About 2 years*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Less than 1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>About 5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>About 12 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Less than 1 year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Theresa shared details from her trip from Korea to the United States, indicating she may have been older than 2 years at the time of her adoption.
FIGURE 1: Graph of Number of Adoptions from Korea by Year

The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2007
REFERENCES


(http://www.goal.or.kr/eng/?slms=room&lms=1&sl=6&ls=17).


