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Biographical sketch: John D. Palmer, a.k.a., Park Sukchul, was adopted from Masan, South Korea at the age of 13 months. Before entering his Ph.D. program in Planning, Policy and Leadership Studies at The University of Iowa, John spent three years in Seoul, Korea, where he graduated from Yonsei University as a M.A. Korean/East Asian Studies student and worked as a research associate at The Syngman Rhee Presidential Research Center. In July 2001, he accepted a Postdoctoral Fellowship at Peabody College, Vanderbilt University.

Abstract

The experiences of Korean adopted young women in predominantly white communities were explored through the use of open-ended interviews and participant observations. While the participants indicated challenges of acceptance in both the Korean/Korean American and white communities, they generally identified more closely with the white culture. Moreover, they typically denied their Korean identity due to wanting to gain acceptance in their white environments. However, within the Korean adoptee community, they seemed to establish a connection with their Korea, Adopted, and American identities. These young women's lives are depicted in this paper in an attempt to gain a broader understanding of issues dealing with gender, racial issues, and Asian American experiences.

By most accounts, gender equity for women in the U.S. has continued to improve throughout the 20th Century and into the 21st Century (e.g., equal opportunity in the workforce, college education in fields once predominantly attended by males, etc.). As we enter a new millennium, however, it is clear that gender equity--while considerably improved--continues to be a goal, not a fact, in the lives of many women and schoolgirls. A 1991 study/survey, commissioned by the American Association of University Women determined that beginning in middle school, schoolgirls generally display a decline in their academic achievement. In a follow-up study, the American Association of University Women Educational Foundation and Wellesley College Center for Research on Women (1992) concluded that a direct link between academic decline in middle schoolgirls and a distinct drop in their self-esteem and confidence. These studies "awakened the nation" and inspired educators, journalists, and psychologists to further investigate the consequences of gender bias in U.S. schools (American Association of University Women and Greenberg-Lake Analysis Group, 1991, p. 4).

The American Association of University Women and Greenberg-Lake Analysis Group (1991) and the American Association of University Women Educational Foundation and Wellesley College Center for Research on Women (1992) reports, like many before it, chose to divide schoolgirls into three distinct and predictable categories: Latina, African American, and White. While Asian American young women and schoolgirls are certainly susceptible to the

same nature of gender bias experienced by the others considered for these studies, they were absent from the dialogue.

In an attempt to add to the existing literature on gender and education, this paper explored the educational and social experiences of Asian American young women. Specifically, the research focused on Korean adopted young women's (university students and schoolgirls) experiences in their schools, communities, and families and how gender bias and racism affected their racial identity development.

Introduction

Korean adopted young women face a number of challenges in their attempts to overcome gender bias and racism in U.S. society. In particular, their unique backgrounds may compel these women to decide which culture to identify--either Korean or White American. Their choices on which group to identify appear to be limited. In the white community, where the majority of these adoptees live, they tend to be viewed as racial minorities--different based upon their physical appearance. And in the Korean/Asian American community, they generally lack sufficient knowledge of Korean/Asian American culture. Thereby, one of their most difficult struggles seems to be in their attempts to gain acceptance (fit in) in either one of the communities (as well as other communities represented in the U.S.).

The majority of Korean adoptees are likely to be left little choice in constructing their racial and ethnic identities. They may feel obligated to join the white majority culture by virtue of their white, middle class nurturing (Mullen, 1995). At the same time, most adoptees lack the cultural foundations to completely join their birth culture. This may be due, in part, to an insufficient amount of awareness and understanding of their Korean ethnicity (Kim, 1977, 1978).

Families who adopt transculturally/internationally typically have little knowledge of their child's racial and ethnic heritage, leading some parents to disregard this aspect in their child's life (Kim, 1977, 1978; Kim, Hong, & Kim, 1979). The neglect of a transculturally adopted child's ethnic heritage could be conceived as an attempt on behalf of the white adoptive parents to convert their child into an "American" as quickly as possible so that she is able to adjust and feel secure in her new environment.[1] I recognize that some parents attempt to expose their adopted child to their birth culture. However, because parents' efforts are usually sporadic and the parents possess limited knowledge of their child's racial heritage, the child is often unsuccessful and/or unwilling to embrace their birth culture (Kim, 1995).

While the majority of Korean transcultural adoptees adjust well to their new environment, most are uncomfortable with their appearance, feel ashamed of their origin, and/or show little desire to learn about their ethnic culture. Consequently, they have a tendency to disassociate themselves from their Korean heritage (Kallgren & Caudill, 1993; Kim, 1978; Kim, 1995). Disassociation may be attributed to the inadequate amount of positive exposure adoptees have to Korean culture. Further, the inferior status Korean and other racial minorities typically are ascribed to in the U.S. may attribute to adoptees' negative ideals of Korea and Korean culture (Kim, 1978; Kim, 1995). As a result, most seem to hold little pride in being Korean and tend to exhibit an inclination to join the white dominant culture (Kim, 1978).

In my discussions with adoptees, both prior to and during this study, most described themselves as a banana; yellow on the outside (appearance) and white on the inside (culture).

This self-identity may come as a result from the social pressures they experienced from the time of their adoption in which they grew up learning white dominant attitudes and behaviors, yet society constantly stereotyped them as Asians who were foreign-born and have little or no claim to the rights of a white American citizen (Du Bois, 1969; Tuan, 1997). In a sense, this feeling of being marginalized by society relates to Du Bois' (1969) double-consciousness, where the adoptee is usually "looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (p. 45). This notion of double-consciousness may deprive adoptees of their choice to identify as an "American" or "Korean."

Through this exploratory research project, I attempted to acquire a greater understanding of how Korean adopted young women developed a racial identity as they experienced gender bias and racial issues in their communities. In order to gain further insight into their lives, I conducted eight open-ended interviews with Korean adopted young women and girls ranging in age of 14-22 years old. The interview schedule was broad enough to allow the respondents the freedom to discuss their experiences they faced in middle school, high school, and universities. The university women were requested to recall situations of their middle and high school years as well as discuss their present circumstances. The schoolgirls were asked to discuss their present situations and their lives as elementary and middle school students. In addition, I spent time with the participants in their homes, schools, and communities.

At the end of each day, I withdrew from the community to transcribe notes and interview tapes. The transcripts and fieldnotes were coded using multi-colored post-its. Sentences, phrases, paragraphs, and whole sections were coded using a specific colored post-it. As patterns began to emerge from the data and as I continued to sift through the data, these codes were modified as more fieldnotes and transcripts were analyzed. Some of the codes were blended into one, some were eliminated completely, and new codes emerged. Using these strategies and the coding methods, I reasoned that I was able to reach conclusions “that responds to the question that guided the study in the first place and that is sufficiently coherent and comprehensible so that it can be communicated to a variety of audiences" (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 148).

The eight participants in this study live in the Midwest region of the U.S. Michelle, Catie, and Ana were sophomores in three different high school. Christine, Sarah, Sophie, and Julie all attended the same predominantly white university. Emma was the only middle school student. The young women in this study were successful in their academics and active in extra-curricular activities in their schools and universities. For the most part, they did not recognize any differences between themselves and any other students except for their Korean adoptee background. Some of the young women displayed signs of an acceptance of their Korean ethnic background, while others continued to struggle with their racial identity.

The following sections delve into four main topics for discussion: 1) understanding/ encountering racial issues; 2) isolation and invisibility; 3) finding acceptance; and 4) accepting Korean, Adopted, and American identities. These topics were not the only ones discussed by the participants. However, they were the topics that the participants chose to talk about more frequently than others. More importantly, these topics imply significant factors that educators, parents, and community members should be aware of in order to provide a safe and comfortable learning/developing environment.

Understanding and Confronting Racial Issues

One of the overall themes that emerged from the data was the respondents' confrontation with racial issues in their schools and communities. Derman-Sparks and Phillips (1997) believe that racism "is measured by its outcomes for people of color, rather than its intentions" (p. 22). They continued by stating that:

> *While racist behavior does not exist outside the system of institutionalized racism, the system cannot exist outside of individual actions. Human beings are products of the society into which they are born, but they are also actors who bring institutional relationships to life and hence have the potential for influencing and changing these relationships. Individuals thus contribute to both the maintenance and the evolution of a racist system. In these dynamic interactions lie the mechanism for either perpetuation of racism or its transformation*. (pp. 22-23)

Similarly, Scheurich and Young (1997) conclude that racism exists on four levels: overt/covert (individual); institutional; societal; and civilizational. The young women in this study frequently discussed encountering individual acts of racial harassment in their schools, communities, and in their extended families. However, through theses discussions, it appeared that the participants were unaware of how issues pertaining to race affected their lives on a broader scale. For example, the young women did not appear to be able to conceptualize how "institutions or organizations, including educational ones, have standard operating procedures (intended or unintended) that hurt members of one or more races in relation to members of the dominant race" (institutional racism) (Scheurich & Young, 1997, p. 5). Moreover, they did not converse with me about how "societal or cultural assumptions, norms, concepts, habits, expectations, etc. favor one race over one or more other races" (societal racism) (p. 6). They possessed awareness that U.S. society favors whites over that of other races. They appeared to be accustomed to the norms of whites because they essentially grew up living under white dominant cultural practices in their homes. As a result, they typically believed in white values. Moreover, they were, for the most part, unable to determine "the privileging of one view over others" because their points of view were usually shaped by the privileged (whites), typically through their parents' and community's teachings (p. 6).

Most acts of racism that the participants chose to talk about were non-violent, subtle acts, which were typically racial slurs thrown directly at them or racial taunts towards other people of color in the their presence. More often then not, these overt acts of racism were from male peers, yet the young women's closest female friends were more prone to committing subtle acts of discrimination.

Racial harassment often times left the young women feeling ashamed of being Korean. As a result, it appeared that their self-esteem and confidence were directly affected by these racial attacks. Typically the participants talked about how they were unable to confront their harassers because they were usually alone when one or more boys were harassing them. For example, Michelle elaborated on a story where two white boys harassed her while she was alone in front of the school waiting for her father to pick her up after band practice. She shared:

> *They [two boys] were saying "Chinks," and they were calling me all these names. They kept on me and I was thinking to myself, "No, I don't want to hear this, you're wrong." And they just kept going at it, just kept following me around. I tried to get as far away from them and leave them behind me and not believe what they said.... I kept trying to think that it's because they don't understand [racial differences]. Therefore, I should not believe them…. They were hurting me. I was crying.*

Harassers were typically people the participants went to school with yet, at times, their closest friends also made racist remarks in their presence. It seemed as though some of the young women were able to question their peers' racist attitude when remarks were not thrown directly at them. Emma, for example, described a time when she was able to confront her peers who were making racist comments. She stated that:

> *There are people that I'm not really friends with, who are really judgmental. They never say anything directly to my face, but if they make fun of somebody else that's a different race, I'll be thinking, "What difference is that from making fun of me?" ... Some of my friends, they'll make jokes about Chinese people and I get really mad about that. I tell them, "Guys, that's really mean." And they'll be like, "Well, we're not making fun of you." And I'll be like, "But I'm Asian too, so in a way you are."*

While Emma was able to speak out against her peers making derogatory statements about Asians, most of the time the participants talked about situations that did not allow them stand up against their peers who were either directly harassing them or making insulting statements about Asians in general. The young women in this study talked about how they felt as though they could not confront their peers who were belittling Asians. These overtly forms of harassment appeared to hurt the participants' self-esteem and confidence. However, unlike the majority of other young women of color, Korean adopted Americans found little refuge from the predominantly white environment in which they were immersed because they were being raised in white households. This loneliness began in their families as they felt that their parents were not able understand how they really felt when confronted with racism in their schools and communities. Michelle stated that sometimes she tried to talk with her parents about being racially harassed but felt that they could not do anything about. She stated, "If I told my mom, she'd be like, 'Well, just ignore them or tell them that you're not a chink.'" This was a typical response from the participants' parents, which in the minds of the participants was not sufficient. Catie also believed that by talking with her mother about racial taunting at school would not comfort her because, "She'd say, 'Oh, well some people are just like that.' And I wouldn't really say anymore because you can always say you understand but I don't think she would have."

For the most part, the participants realized that their parents were not able to understand what being a member of the minority felt like, especially in a predominantly white environment. They were able to recognize that their parents were members of the dominant white race and therefore were not able to relate to their experiences of being racially harassed. As a result, some of the participants attempted to seek advice from their white peers.

When the participants attempted to talk with their white friends about racism, they also found little comfort. Ana best described the mixed feelings she had with her white friends and her need for acceptance in the group as well as recognition of her Asian heritage. She revealed that:

I tell my friends that I'm having trouble at school because I don't think people accept me because I'm different. [They say,] "Why [Ana]? Everybody thinks of you as not being Asian." I'm always telling them I don't feel as good as everyone else because I'm Asian and they're always telling me, "But we don't look at you as Asian. We just look at you as [Ana] and you're like us." And I'm like, but I'm not like you. I guess that bugs me after they say that…. When I hear the word "gook" and things like that used for Koreans and Asians in general, I don't feel very good because I always think that they are saying it towards me. Even though they always saying "[Ana], it's not towards you. We're just talking about Asians." "Well, I am Asian."

Catie also felt as though her white friends were unable to understand racism because they could not possibly feel the pain that came with being ostracized because of their race. She stated, "They [her friends] say, 'Oh I totally understand.' But, No you don't, you've never been called a chink, you're white, and you belong."

Unable to feel secure in talking with their parents and white friends about how racism negatively affects their lives, some participants were left to resolve their problems on their own. Racism added to their confusion about where they "fit in" and some began to feel as though no place was right for them. The following section delves into the isolation these young women felt inside their school, community, and at times in their homes.

Isolation and Invisibility

The Korean adopted young women in the study lived in or grew up in small towns or middle sized cities with few other Asian Americans. In addition, four of the participants were the only Korean children in their homes, while the other four had at least one other sibling adopted from Korea. The participants were quick to point out their isolation within their schools and communities with statements like: "There was only one other Asian girl in my class"; "There's only two other Asian people in my grade"; and "I'll usually notice 95% of the time that I'm the only Asian or especially if I'm the only minority." However, since the young women were all adopted at an early age (all before the age of 10), most of their close friends appeared to accept them as "one of them," an American.

With an acceptance of being considered "one of them," also came invisibility for most the young women in the study. The Korean adoptees' friends and peers often did not acknowledge that there was an Asian American in the classroom. For example, Julie stated, "We were talking about minorities in my social studies class and one of my classmates said, 'We have a minority in the class.' Which one boy replied, 'Where?'" Furthermore, some of the participants believed that with their childhood friends typically felt as though their Korean background did not make much difference in their relationships. As a result, a comfort zone was established. This comfort zone was where the young women felt as though they were accepted by closest their peers for who they were and not based upon their racial and adopted backgrounds.

Catie talked about being accepted by her friends as though she was no different from them. She shared, "We knew each other well. They accepted me and I accepted them. They didn't make a big thing out of me being different. It's just like, 'You're just like one of us, and there's no big deal about you being Korean.'" Along the same theme, Julie reflected upon her time in high school. She told me that:

I was pretty much accepted as being Asian. I don't think that I felt much different from many of the other students. With the friends I was with it didn't affect me so much being Asian. I was in a group of friends that accepted who I was. We lived in our own little world, our own little bubble. I could be Asian and it didn't matter.

When these young women left their comfort zones, (e.g., leave for college, a trip out of town, a move to a new school district) they believed that their Asian physical features were noticed before all their other qualities. For example, in their middle schools and high schools, the participants talked about how they were able to identify with certain groups, certain cliques among their friends (i.e., Emma, the cheerleader or Michelle, the violinist) and felt somewhat comfortable in their closed environment. Outside of their comfort zones, they talked about being stared at and bombarded with numerous inquiring questions about their racial and adopted backgrounds. The following excerpt from Michelle's interview exemplifies the fear of moving out of her comfort zone and into a new environment. She shared that:

They [peers in elementary school] knew me and it wasn't that bad. I grew up with them. But then when I [moved to another school] I began thinking, "Now I'm going to have to go to another school with a whole bunch of other people and I'm going to have to start all over again, with the questions about being adopted. I don't want to have to always answer those questions. I didn't have to in elementary school.

Christine referred to her time when she first arrived on her college campus and how difficult it was for her to find a new identity away from her high school and hometown community. She stated that:

It [Korean identity] just really has hit me since I've entered college. In high school it wasn't that big of a deal. I didn't really notice my Koreanness that much, just because everybody pretty much accepted me as an American. There weren't any other Asians for them to stereotype so they just accepted me as American, but she looks Korean, kind of thing. But when I arrived at college, there are so many different stereotypes, and now I'm surrounded a lot more by Americans. In high school and middle school, you always had the group, that certain clique. But now that I'm at college ... no one.

By growing up in communities that were predominantly white and living in a household headed by two white parents, these young women talked frequently about having little choice but to assimilate into the white dominant culture. During this assimilation process, they told me that their closest friends tended to reinforce the belief that they were no different from the majority of people in the school and community. However, the young women were aware of their racial differences from the majority of the population. As a result, they had a tendency to want be as invisible as possible so as not to draw any attention to their differences. Especially in their schools they rarely spoke out in their classes or drew teacher attention.

Most of the young women in this study were quiet in their classes, almost invisible to their teachers. Sadker and Sadker (1986, 1995) discussed the importance of teacher-student relationships and the need for girls to have their opinions heard in class. Research has also determined that schoolgirls gradually learn to feel self-conscious about their role in the classroom and begin to understand that speaking out may bring more negative repercussions than

positive responses (American Association of University Women and Greenberg-Lake Analysis Group, 1991; Orenstein, 1994; Sadker & Sadker, 1986, 1995). Accordingly, schoolgirls may be fearful to join discussions due to the harassment and embarrassment in the occurrence of a wrong answer. Therefore, their speech becomes filled with qualifiers (e.g. I don't know or I guess so) as their confidence in expressing their opinions diminishes and is some cases nearly vanish (Orenstein, 1994; Sadker & Sadker, 1986, 1995).

Research has further shown that schoolgirls tend to lose their voice as the boys attempt, and are usually successful at, gaining the majority of the teacher's attention (American Association of University Women and Greenberg-Lake Analysis Group 1991; American Association of University Women Educational Foundation and Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, 1992; Orenstein, 1992; Pipher, 1992). Moreover, middle and high school boys have a tendency to gain control of the classroom, leaving schoolgirls to become the observers rather than participants (Eder, Evans, & Parker, 1995). In the following situation, Ana described a situation where several white male students and her teacher made derogatory comments about Asians in the classroom. She told me that this experience negatively affected confidence in herself and respect for her teacher. She painfully shared:

> *In history class we were learning about the Tao Dynasty--Korea and China. We had to watch a video about China. The whole time there was that Asian music playing, like those chimes and things. I felt really uncomfortable because the white guys were making fun of it and everybody was laughing at their jokes but I was just sitting there looking down. And the teacher was even making fun of it. I felt so small.... The whole time they were just making fun of Asians. But my teacher was laughing and that's what really bothered me.*

Subtle acts of harassment left Ana, as well as the other young women, feeling as though they were unable to confront this type of negative behavior in the classroom. As a result, Ana told me that she felt as though she was "trying to hide" in the classroom, rather than express her opinions because she did not want her classmates to notice her--she did not want to stand out more than she was already. Thus, similar to most other schoolgirls' experiences, where they feel marginalized in the classroom, the participants also felt as though they lost their "voice" in the junior high and high school classroom (e.g., American Association of University Women and Greenberg-Lake Analysis Group, 1991; American Association of University Women Educational Foundation and Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, 1992; Orenstein, 1992; Pipher, 1992).

The Korean adopted young women's loss of voice may have stemmed from how their peers sent mixed messages to them. On one hand they treated them as Americans. But, at the same time, their friends made negative remarks about Asians. The following explains one of the reasons why Catie did not want to participate in classroom discussions and activities. She commented that:

> *I try not to stand out. I feel like I stand out so much already because I'm Korean. And I feel like, from middle school and elementary school, that whenever I did something or if I did something wrong people would always use being Korean as the excuse. If I'd start talking about something else then they'd be like, "Well, you're a chink." So I guess, habitually, I just try not to draw attention to myself.*

Michelle believed that part of her wanting to remain quiet in the classroom was due to her already being a student who “stood out” from the rest. She stated, "It felt weird, different, because I was the only one. I stood out and everyone would know who I was because I was basically the only Asian girl in my whole class.”

The participants also talked about wanting to conceal themselves from the questions asked by their peers and/or teachers when the topic of Asia was being discussed in the classroom. Margolis and Romero (1998) argue that “the paradoxical uniqueness of being both isolated and a spokesperson for one’s group add to the hardships that women of color must endure during their graduate work” (p. 17). Similarly, for Korean adoptees, their isolation, mixed with an expectation of representing Koreans and Asian Americans, added to their frustrations and feelings of inadequacy in the classroom.

The respondents revealed that they did not possess enough knowledge of Asian cultures and histories to feel as though they could answer the many inquiring looks and questions they received from their classmates and teachers when Asian topics were being discussed. Michelle solidifies this point when she talked about her sense of self-shame for not knowing about Korean culture. She stated that:

> *It’s always when we’re talking about Korea, if they [classmates] say something wrong they would ask, "Michelle, is that right?” And I’d answer, “I don’t know.” It’s like I’m ashamed, because I don’t know the answer. It’s like I’m separate. I’m Korean but then I grew up in this white society.... And I just feel really ashamed that I can’t answer their questions.*

Ana also described her feelings when her class was discussing topics about Asia. She told me that:

> *When we started studying about Japan, or any other Asian country, I would get so nervous.... I’d be afraid that everyone would look at me or ask me questions about the topic. I was afraid the teacher would ask me to say something about it and I would not know the answer because I wasn't taught about Asian cultures in my home, just like the other American students but they some how expected me to know the answers.*

The young women in this study were looking for a place where they felt comfortable in their every day lives similar to most girls who want to find comfort in their personal relationships (Griffiths, 1995). However, their unique backgrounds, as transcultural Korean adoptees, added to their isolation within their schools, communities, and families. For the most part they were alone in their search for acceptance in both the white and Asian/Korean American communities. They talked about how they were viewed as Asians in the white community, which they believed excluded them from certain privileges (see McIntosh, 1988). On the other hand, in the Korean/Korean American community they believed that they lacked the language and cultural skills, which hindered their sense of belonging in this social group.

The pressure to be accepted by peers begins to control girls' decision-making process in a variety of ways (Pipher, 1994). The American Association of University Women Educational Foundation and Wellesley College Center for Research on Women (1992) discovered that “girls in sixth and seventh grade rated being popular and well-liked as being more important than being perceived as competent or independent” (p. 11). Moreover, according to Eder et al. (1995),

popularity becomes more of an issue among girls than boys since popularity for boys stem from athletics and academic performance, while girls are judged almost solely on their appearance.

The contradictions are difficult for young women to decipher. Adhering to the pressures to find acceptance, Pipher (1994) discussed how some girls involve themselves in types of behavior that are both dangerous and socially unacceptable, which could lead to incarceration, hospitalization, pregnancy, and death in exchange for their happiness in being a part of a group. For the young women in the study, these contradictions also rang true in their lives. Although none of them talked about getting into "serious" trouble, some discussed their eating habits, wearing stylish clothes, and even participating in activities that were dangerous in order to find acceptance with their peers.

The pressure to find acceptance seemed to be difficult for the participants. They believed that they were not fully accepted by the white community because of their race. Additionally, they did not feel accepted by the Korean community because their adopted status did not allow them to understand Korean culture, rules, and behaviors.

Searching for Acceptance

The young women in the study talked about the overwhelming need to fit in. Some of them attempted to dress in certain name brand clothing to find acceptance with the popular group, others chose to gain entry through participating in deviant activities, while others joined school related extra-curricular activities (e.g. cheerleading, band, chorus, sports, orchestra) to find a group of friends that would accept them. Their stories were not unlike those of other young women growing up in the U.S. as described in the gender related research (Orenstein, 1994; Pipher, 1994).

For example, Ana, who liked to dress in what she called the "preppy look," often talked about buying new clothes, the latest fashion, in order to gain some sense of belonging with a group of friends. Ana stated that, "My biggest challenge is just fitting in because every day I go to school I worry what someone is going to say about my hair or my clothes." However, when she felt as though clothes and style were not enough she experimented with deviant because she felt as though the “popular group” did not accept her because she did not fit the white, blonde hair, blue eyed look that they all tended to have. She revealed that:

> *I just wanted to fit in and that’s when I started to hang out with more of the [deviant students]…. I’m not proud of that in any way but I guess I felt more relaxed when I did because I felt more accepted. Then when I grew out of it at the end of my freshman year, I just thought why did I do that? I wasted my whole freshman year trying to be something I’m not and I never wanted to be and then like the whole summer I was just trying to get back to being me.*

Ana's story reflects that of other young women discussed in Pipher's (1994) book *Reviving Ophelia*. However, Ana, as well as the other respondents, felt an added pressure to fit in because their racial appearance and transcultural adopted background excluded them from feeling as though they were full members of their social groups. The young women discussed situations where they wanted to find acceptance as a full member of their family or group of friends, rather than being singled out as the “adopted one” or the “Asian one.” Sarah exemplified this point

when she stated, "'Beautiful China doll' they [family relatives] would say. I would cringe. I hated any reference to my obvious differences in the family. All I wanted to do was fit in." Sophie also recognized her differences and why she did not fit into the white community, "I felt like I didn't belong. I felt like I shouldn't be here. I felt like my life sucked. It kind of dawned on me that I'd never be white and that does matter to some people."

Finding acceptance may add to the dilemma of trying to maintain one's true self (Eder et al., 1995; Griffiths, 1995; Orenstein, 1994; Pipher, 1994). Some participants believed it was their Korean heritage that prohibited them from completely entering the "white" world. As a result, some began to hate their physical traits. In addition, they understood that to be white brought certain privileges and to be Korean equaled second-class citizenship. Thereby, some Korean adoptees wanted to "be white;" just like their friends, parents, and community.

For some Korean adoptees, losing their true selves not only applied to their feminine selves; they must further surrender their true racial selves to find acceptance with their peers. Pipher (1994) believes that "girls can be true to themselves and risk abandonment by their peers or they can reject their true selves and be socially acceptable" (p. 38).

The following accounts bring to life some of the harsh realities that these young women faced as they felt impelled to relinquish their Korean background to gain friendships. Often times, the participants talked about how they believed that if they were white then all of their problems would disappear. They also felt that they would be fully accepted in their schools and communities.

Christine believed that she was not as good as her white friends because of her Korean background. When she realized that being Korean separated her from the popular group, she began to hate her Korean racial features. She stated that:

> *I felt very inferior. I felt that I wasn't good enough for them [whites]. And being popular was my goal. That's the only thing that I focused on at that time [in middle and high school]. I wanted to be in the popular group but they wouldn't accept me. I think in middle school I hated being Asian. I just didn't like it because in the popular group, no one was Asian. No one else was different. Everyone was Caucasian. I wanted to be Caucasian. I felt like, "Well, if I wasn't like this [pointing to her face], maybe they wouldn't look down upon me." or "If I looked just like them, if I dressed like them, and then I was American [white] just like them, then they would accept me." It was like a big identity crisis. I didn't want to be Korean at all. It just made me feel a lot of insecurity because I wasn't very confident in myself.*

Ana also thought that if she would be free from being separated from others in her school and from racist attacks if she were not Korean. She stated, "So many times I think it would be so much easier if I were Caucasian. If I was Caucasian I wouldn't have to be so worried about being made fun of by my peers."

The young women in this study also felt as though their Korean heritage and physical traits led some of their peers to ignore them. Sophie, for example, believed that people ignored her because of being Korean.

> *Oh, if I were white, they'd talk to me more often.... They were probably like "Oh, she doesn't know because she's Korean." They wouldn't really talk to me because they didn't*

know about [being Korean and adopted]. If I had been like them, then maybe I would have had more friends or had more confidence about myself ... maybe.

Another factor that plays a part in the women's lives is the desire to have dating partners (Orenstein, 1994). For many women, having a person interested in them, as a dating partner, was another form of feeling accepted and wanted (Griffiths, 1995; Pipher, 1994). The young women in the study were also seeking dating partners, however, they felt that they were not necessarily "ideal" partners. The participants talked about how some whites did not believe in interracial dating, especially in a predominantly white community. The young women also believed that that there was too much of a cultural difference for them to "get along well."

Christine believed that she would have more white males interested in her if she were white. She stated:

When I am in an American group I feel very inferior like I can't match up or something. And it's more American with guys. But I still feel inferior with girls too. I think every girl compares herself to other girls and wishes they were just as pretty as her or wish they had her height or whatever. But I have one thing added on--my Asianness. You know, it's like I have to deal with my Asianness too and compare my Asianness to this American [white] girl and now I feel really inferior.

The stereotypes of Asian in the popular media also had a negative impact upon Korean adopted young women's lives. These stereotypes consist of the model minority, academically inclined achievers, quiet, forever foreigners, non-English speakers, martial arts experts, etc. (Lee, 1996; Tuan, 1997). The stereotype adds to the difficulties Asian American young women face as they attempt to be recognized and have their voices heard.. Specifically, for Asian women, the stereotypes typically relate to their sexuality with emphasis on being submissive and exotic. These stereotypes may add to the overall belief that they are "ideal" partners, especially in comparison to the more "liberated" American (Western) woman. For the young women in the study, they recognized these stereotypes that inhibit Asian American women. However, they also seemed to feel as though interracial and cross-cultural dating might not allow them to be "ideal" partners in their predominantly white communities.

As the young women in this study began seeking dating relationships, most of them talked about how these stereotypes affected their decision-making and attempts to build relationships with white men. They felt more compatible with white men rather than Asian men due in part to their cultural upbringing. However, since the media portrays Asian women in a negative light, far distant from that of which they considered the "ideal" partner, these young women expressed difficulty in building relationships with white men. Again, Christine remarked upon the different way people look at her because of her Korean background.

I've realized that Asians have this stereotype, through the media, that Asians are not looked upon as these awesome people. They're looked upon as nerds. I feel like every time I meet someone I think that they think of me as: "Oh, she's Asian, I'm better than her." Throughout the media it's just like white people are the dominant race.... If I were American [white], maybe [white] guys would be more interested in me. I just don't think that I'm good enough for American [white] guys. Like they don't want interracial dating.

I know that that's probably a major issue with American [white] guys. So I feel like they're not going to pay attention to me.

Ana felt as though Asian women were portrayed in the media as easy targets for men, which did not make her feel very good about herself. She stated, "I think [white] guys would actually want to date Asian women because they [men] want someone different and easy to get.... It makes me feel like people view me as a little slut." Catie exemplifies how negative Asian women stereotypes pushed her to believe that to be Asian was not considered a positive attribute in her life. She shared that:

In the media, Asian women are looked at as submissive. That they'll do anything for the guy and it drives me crazy because I'm not submissive. I'm confident enough that I'm not going to be submissive to a guy. They're going to have to treat me as an equal. But that's just how Asian women are looked at. They really don't have any personality, they're not very funny, they're just these people that cook your food and are completely submissive to the guy…. I also put these stereotypes on Asians. How do I get out of putting these stereotypes on Asians? I catch myself doing that because of the media and the way I grew up in American [white] society. So I feel very American. And again, I feel like I'm an American trapped in an Asian body. So I'm going to think the same way an American is going to think. I don't know how to stop this. Until I finally have my identity and stop watching TV, I don't' think I can stop this way of thinking. I think I'm just going to quit watching TV.

Catie's above statement portrays the dilemma that most Korean adopted young women in this study dealt with in their lives. They were raised in a white cultural household, surrounded by white cultural beliefs, which seemed to result in believing in the same Asian stereotypes. This may have led some of the participants to not only having negative attitudes about Asians in general, but more significantly they may have possessed negative self-attitudes. Furthermore, because of these negative self-attitudes as well as feeling as though they were Americans, some of the young women in the study talked about how they wished they were white. However, society often reminded them that they were different, not real Americans. It was typically during these instances that the participants' sense of belonging suffered the most (Kim, 1978).

In addition, the racist assaults that were described above led some of the participants to determine that they were not exclusively accepted in their white settings. Wanting to be white, but not finding acceptance, forced some adoptees to search for acceptance in their local Korean communities.

In an attempt to gain some knowledge of what they had lost due to their transcultural adoptee experience, some participants discussed ways in which they attempted to venture into the Korean community. Inside the Korean community, adoptees talked about how they felt some sense of security because everybody around them finally shared similar physical traits. However, culturally these young women had little knowledge of Korean values, norms, and ethics. Therefore, they were once again left to feel like an outsider in a community they were attempting to fit into.

Michelle, Catie, and Emma all resided in an urban setting where there was a local Korean church. Ana lived about one hour from a Korean church. The four university women, Sophie, Christine, Sarah, and Julie, resided on a college campus where there was an active Korean

community.[2] Some participants discussed the reasons why they chose to enter the Korean community. For the most part they wanted to find some connection with their Korean background. Some felt that maybe this group would accept them because they shared the same Korean background. Other participants talked about how they felt shunned by the Korean community because of their adopted background. They also told me about how they felt uncomfortable with "Korean" people. They felt that Koreans also looked down upon them because they did not know Korean culture (e.g., how to speak and act Korean). This was one of the main reasons why some of the participants opted to remain removed from the Korean community. The following passages describe the participants' experiences and feelings of highs and lows in their endeavors to join the Korean community.

When Sophie first arrived on the college scene she told me that she had thoughts of attempting to make friends with other Asian students. She did not feel as though she belonged with this group of students. However, after sometime, she was able to meet other Korean adoptees on campus through the Asian American Women's Group. She stated that:

> *It's just that I see a group that might be Asian and it doesn't feel like that's my group. I don't really want to go to them and I'm not really welcome into it. I don't feel like I'd fit in. I don't know exactly what that is, if it's my own personal thing about not being comfortable or am I making this up? Is it just in my mind? I feel like they're looking at me a little strangely.*

In view of not having access to other Koreans/Asians for the majority of their lives, not feeling a connection with Koreans/Asians was not an uncommon feeling for many Korean adoptees. To walk into the unknown could be a frightening experience for anyone and for some it is easier to remain with people who are more like them. In the case of Korean adoptees, they were associated with other Koreans and Asian Americans because of their appearance. However, culturally they were white, middle class Americans. Therefore, they did not feel culturally connected with Koreans/Asians.

Some of the participants discussed the dilemma of looking Korean, but not understanding what Korean meant and how this made them feel uncomfortable. Catie, for example, shared that:

> *I like going there. I think, this is who I am or this is where I can belong. I really like to see all these people and learning about the cultural stuff that I missed out on. It's like I missed out on learning how to speak because I was adopted. Therefore, I like going to the church for Korean language class. However, I can't fully feel like I belong there because they know the traditions; the way they talk, they know all these different things, but they don't know about the adopted part. They know about the Korean part but they don't know the adopted part so therefore we [Korean adoptees] can't really belong there.*

Most of the participants felt as though they were unable to make a connection with Koreans because of a cultural divide. This made some of them believe that they could not feel accepted in the Korean community. However, Michelle described her feelings of being connected with some Koreans because they assisted her in feeling proud about being Korean. She stated that:

> *At the church you can only feel comfortable about the Korean part. I like going there and I still want to go there…. There is a part of me that wants to learn the Korean way.*

Because just seeing how some of the people that were in the youth group, they were role models. And just to see how they acted towards things in school and it didn't affect them that much that they were Korean. And I was thinking that maybe I shouldn't make a big deal out of it and maybe that helped a little too to not feel as bad in school.

The Korean church was one way for the young women to gain an inside look into what Korean and Korean American culture resemble. Moreover, the church gave them an opportunity to see positive Korean role models, which were typically absent in their schools and communities. These role models, in the opinions of some participants, were confident and proud of the Korean heritage.

While the Korean church was one way in which some participants attempted to gain Korean cultural knowledge, Julie was able to spend some time with a Korean family. During the time of this study I introduced Julie to the Kim family--Mr. and Mrs. Kim and their three children ages 13, 11, and 9 years old. Mr. Kim was studying for his Ph.D. in Higher Education at the local university, while his children attended elementary school.[3]

Julie spent time with this family over the weekends. Each gathering was marked with Korean food and long conversations over a variety of topics. During her visits she learned how to cook some Korean dishes, some Korean language speaking skills, and overall a sense of how a Korean family functions on a daily basis. Mrs. Kim and the eldest daughter Hyunyee were especially helpful in their attempts to make Julie feel at home. They would often speak to her in English (something Mr. Kim had trouble remembering that Julie could not understand Korean), and often asked if she needed anything.[4]

Julie, nevertheless, felt somewhat out of place in this environment. She told me that she felt uncomfortable sometimes because she often felt like an outsider when she was with the Kim family. She tried to justify her loneliness by stating there exists a language and cultural barrier between them. Moreover, she revealed that:

In a way I feel like they [the Kim family] look down upon me. I know that they accept me as Korean but they put me in a separate category--this other category of, you're the one that doesn't speak Korean. That's really hard. That almost makes me feel like I don't even want to deal with trying to learn Korean culture. I don't want to go back to my Korean identity. I just want to reject it. Because, when I'm with the Koreans, it just hits me in the face that I don't know Korean culture and therefore I am American…. Now I realize I can do something about it and I'm going try to do something. It's put a lot more motivation into me. But I need to do something about this because before I was thinking that I don't know Korean. Whenever I am with the Korean group I always wonder what it would be like if I spoke their language and was part of that culture. Sometimes I resent the fact that I was adopted. I wish that I could be a part of this culture. But I can't. I can't be a part of it, because I didn't grow up in it. And it wasn't my fault. But I sometimes resent being adopted. If I'm Korean, I want to be part of that culture.

Julie's attempts to make connections with Koreans characterized the dilemma most of the other participants had when they attempted to enter into a Korean community. In the beginning, they talked about feeling excited about "seeking" out their Korean roots. However, after awhile, the differences between them and the Korean community only proved that they did not belong in this group.

Some of the young women began to resent being adopted because it kept them separate from the people who they shared a racial background. They seemed to understand that it was not their fault that they were adopted into white homes and nurtured differently from Koreans, but they tended to believe that Koreans and Americans would "never" understand their unique experiences and situations.

Some of the participants talked about their experiences with other Korean adoptees and how being with others who shared their same background allowed them to find some comfort and acceptance in with their lives. In the presence of other Korean adoptees, the participants discussed how they felt that they were now full members of group. They revealed that they were no longer worried about being rejected because of their race or their cultural background. They were able to immerse themselves into a culture where the majority of them shared a similar history--a transcultural adopted background. The following section delves into the idea of how some of the participants "emerged" from their white surroundings and comfort in being Korean, Adopted, and American.

Accepting Korean, Adopted, and American Identities

As a result of some of the participants building relationships with other Korean adoptees, an acceptance of their unique backgrounds and experiences evolved. These relationships were mainly established while they were attending an annual Korean Culture Camp for Korean adoptees. They described their time at camp as the only period out of the whole year where they truly felt confident in themselves; where they found personal contentment and tranquility in knowing that they were not alone in the world. The following accounts give insight into how these young women felt once in an environment that appreciated them for who they were rather than based upon their outer appearance. They were not worried about racist attacks from the white community nor were they concerned about being ostracized by the Korean community because they were unable to speak and act Korean. They were in an environment where they felt as though their life finally had some meaning and connection, and more importantly they felt as though they were not alone in the world.

Most of the young women talked about how they felt free from the pressure to find acceptance from their white peers and were able to enjoy just being themselves in the presence of other Korean adoptees. Ana stated, "I appreciate being there [Korean Culture Camp] because that’s the only time I feel 100% welcomed and wanted. I’m the same as everyone. I only have to worry about, what I am I going to do today." Emma also talked about how she felt as though she no longer had to be somebody else. That she could finally be herself. She shared that:

> *I wouldn’t stand out in anyway and just because of that reason I can actually 100% be myself… And camp, the people there are just like you, they understand you, and you feel comfortable.... You can’t go to school and have a place where everyone is like that because at school you’re different. But at camp, you have this thing in common--being Korean adoptees…. Just being able to act anyway I want and not feel as though I might say something wrong was a wonderful feeling.*

Julie exemplified the feeling of being fully accepted during her time at camp and how this made her believe that camp was the best place for her. She stated that:

I was just so happy that I could be myself. I never felt inferior. It was just my place of identity where I felt like this is where I fit in, this place right here. I finally had someplace where I fit in. I can't completely fit into American society because I feel too inferior. I can't fit into Korean society, language and cultural barrier.

What's hard for me is that that it [Korean Culture Camp] takes place only once-a-year! I finally get to go to a place where I feel safe, where I feel comfortable, where I feel like I'm around people that understand me.… If I would have been able to grow up that way, and if I always had those role models to say, "You're Korean, be proud of yourself" instead of always feeling "I'm American, I don't know what that means," I think I would have been a little more confident.

The importance of camp in the participants' lives is illustrated in the following examples where the young women discussed how camp changed their outlook on life and how they would be devastated if they could not attend the annual camp. Michelle stated:

If I ever have to go one summer without being able to go [to camp], I wouldn't be able to focus. I wouldn't be able to know that someone is adopted.... My mom told me that we might have to start school in July. I would skip school because I wouldn't care about the attendance policy. I wouldn't care if I'd have to take the final exam early because that week is the most important thing to me. My final exams would be secondary. Even grades would be second after that…. If I wouldn't be able to go, I'd just die. I wouldn't be able to, because it's like you end your school year, and then you go to camp. It's the thing you do before you go to school next year. It's to boost your spirits up or self-confidence by yourself before you have to go back to school.

Along the lines of missing camp for one summer, Catie talked about how it would be to go to camp throughout the entire year. She commented that:

We [other campers] made up this thing about how we should go to Camp for school and have those classes be our classes. And we had this all planned out. We believed that we could just live there year round. When we're together at camp I wish I could just live there.

Following this theme, Emma stated that:

[Camp] was my only place, anywhere, where I felt I had some connection, like there were people out there just like me going through the same struggle, the same situations. I would go home every time camp would be over and I would fall asleep thinking of how badly I wished that my whole life could be just like that, like I could live my life at that camp, be around those people, and be around those role models.

The major problem the Korean adopted young women talked about was the need to find acceptance in their daily lives and as a result they felt that there was little choice of which group to identify with. Some of the young women tended to find comfort in their white communities because it was culturally easier to belong in this group. However, throughout their lives, they typically believed that the white dominant community would continue to remind them that they are not white and therefore they did not fully belong. The Korean community, on the other hand, did not embrace the Korean adopted young women because they did not possess cultural

understanding and/or language skills. Attending Korean Culture Camp and being around other Korean adoptees provided opportunities for the participants to find a group of people in which they could identify.

Researchers have concluded that most Korean adoptees have auspiciously assimilated into white middle class homes, have shown little mental health problems, and are successful in their schools (Kim, 1977, 1978; Kim, et al, 1979, Kim, 1995). Kim (1995) states that the Korean adoptees "may be so integrated that they may not face psychological dilemmas of identity formation, especially ethnic identity" (p. 152). Conforming to white American society has lead researchers to believe that the transculturally adopted children encounter few problems in their lives and therefore the general U.S. public views these children as normal average children.

The majority of U.S. families adopting internationally are white middle class with little knowledge and/or contact with their adopted child's ethnic heritage. Some families may attempt to "Americanize" their adopted child as quickly as possible so that she can feel accepted in her new environment (Kim, 1977, 1978; Mullen, 1995; Trolley, Wallin, & Hansen, 1995; Zuniga, 1991).

Some parents make efforts to include parts of their child's Korean identity in the family (Mullen, 1995). However, for the most part, Korean adopted children are raised in contradiction. On one side they are rejected by the white dominant society because of their minority status. And on the other side they are isolated from their own ethnic (Korean) community due to lack of cultural and ethnic knowledge and understanding (Kim, 1978). In this respect, Kallgren and Caudill (1993) state that these children often lack the "skills to interact with society that still fosters racial stereotypes and prejudices.... [In addition,] children who are raised in homes where their racial identities are denied typically develop an unhealthy emotional attitude towards their ethnic origins" (p. 552). Kim (1978) concludes that during the assimilation process, adoptees' racial-identity can suffer and may eventually lead them to feel ashamed about their ethnic heritage and those who are not "equipped with any ethnic identity and cultural heritage at all tend to suffer more as they grow older and participate in a broader societal process" (p. 483).

Through this research project, and talking with other adoptees about their experiences, many Korean adoptees have negative self-images, often complain about their Asian features, and more alarming wish that they were not "Asian" (Kim, 1978; Kim, 1995). In reference to the identity development models, which are discussed below, the participants showed signs of living the majority of their lives in the early stages of these models.

Since the late 1960s, racial and ethnic identity theories have been produced to gain a deeper understanding of how individuals journey through their lives in discovery of their ethnic, cultural, and racial selves (Derman & Sparks, 1997). Identity theorists believed a person in the early stage seeks acceptance in the white world and disengage herself from her ethnic and racial heritage. As an individual moves through the identity development stages, most scholars conclude that she will experience an identity crisis, with roots in the conflict of two or more cultures (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1993; Banks, 1994; Cross, 1971; Gay, 1978, 1985, 1999; Kim, 1981; Tatum, 1992). This crisis usually begins with a person's awareness and acceptance, that she is a minority, different from the majority, which may lead to her interest in exploration and search of her own ethnicity. As an individual progresses and becomes more confident and secure in her identification, she may "immerse" herself into her racial and/or ethnic group.

Further, she may attempt to rid herself of her white cultural foundations. Following this immersion stage, she may move towards becoming a bicultural being, where she usually does not desire to either identify with or against whites (Cross, 1971; Gay, 1985; Kim, 1981). For instance, Gay (1985) states that, "As individuals move through the transformation or reidentification process, they become more self-assured about their own ethnicity, and more embracing towards the ethnicity of others" (p. 49). Therefore, an individual might be able to blend her ethnic and/or racial identity with other ethnic and racial groups. As a result, she may move from her ethnic culture into a different culture with relative ease and without surrendering her ethnic and/or racial selves (Kim, 1981).

For the most part, I gained the impression that the identity models assumed that individuals made choices as they progressed through the stages. Such that, they were able to decide whether or not to immerse themselves into their own ethnic or racial group. However, for the participants, they talked about how their choices were limited because the groups they wanted to join either rejected them or they could not feel as though they fully belonged.

Feeling as though they did not belong in either the white group in which they live and the Korean/Asian group in which they were born, some of the participants seemed to have found some comfort in their relationships with other Korean adoptees. From the above conversations about the importance of Korean Culture Camp in their lives, as well as other codes from the study, there appeared to be a distinct ethnic identity among Korean adoptees. Often times, the young women talked about being "caught between two cultures," a feeling that they were not accepted by Koreans and Americans. This identity appeared to resemble an acceptance of their three distinct characteristics: Korean, Adopted, and American identities.

Closing Remarks

There are unique circumstances that should be addressed by educators and communities to recognize the issues that are of concern for Korean adopted young women in their endeavors to find acceptance in their communities and achieve in their schools. Specifically, in this paper, I discussed how the participants had difficulty in gaining acceptance in both the Korean community and the White community. Through this project, I intended to provide information on how these young women were contemplating their lives as culturally white, yet physically Korean.

I implied, through using the young women's own words, that they felt as though they were isolated and invisible in their schools and communities. Often times, it appeared as though teachers and peers perceived them as the same as everybody else in the school. However, when issues of Asia or Korea came up in the classroom, the young women in this study were disgruntled with the fact that they were looked upon to answer these types of questions. Moreover, they were more upset that they did not have any, or very little, knowledge about their ethnic heritage.

Being perceived as "different" from other Asians may have provided some comfort for the young women in this study. While it appeared as though they were accepted in their white communities, there were a number of times when the participants were racially discriminated against in their classrooms and communities. Further, even their closest friends, at times, made comments that hurt the young women in this study. These incidents seemed to be reminders to

the young women that they were not truly accepted and wanted in the white community and as a result some of them sought acceptance in the Korean community. However, because they did not have Korean cultural knowledge they often felt more like an outsider with Koreans than with white Americans.

The greater portions of these adoptees' lives were influenced by their white surroundings with little or no exposure to their ethnic background. Accordingly, the adoptive family normally did not acknowledge nor attempted to have interaction with their adopted child’s culture that were both appropriate and beneficial (Kim, 1978). In addition, these children may feel uncomfortable in discussing issues with their parents due in part to the belief that their parents would not and/or could not understand. Kim et al. (1979) determined that the family’s interaction and acceptance of Korean culture might result in a positive psychological development of the Korean adoptee. However, some families of Korean adoptees provided little, if any, exposure to their child’s birth culture. Kim (1978) cites two main reasons for this response: 1) the families were not being provided with the resources and support groups to assist them in dealing with building a positive racial-identity in their child; and 2) “They saw ‘no color or race or nationality’ in their adopted foreign children and felt they were ‘just like our own’” (p. 482).

By developing an idea of how Korean adopted young women's identity development looked slightly different from the existing models, I hope to better inform educators on how they can better relate to their the transculturally adopted students. Ethnic and racial identity development models implied that as educators became more accustomed with these models, they would be able to create better race relations amongst racially diverse groups, better educate students of color, and understand the importance of identity development in each individual. Moreover, McAllister and Irvine (2000) concluded that these models "can assist educators in three areas: understanding teachers' behaviors (including resistance), sequencing course content, and creating conducive learning environments" (p. 5). Therefore, by making educators aware of how the Korean adopted young women in this study were unique and different from other Asian American students as well as other schoolgirls, I hope to provide new insight on how to provide a better learning environment for these young women.

This research also implies that parents of transculturally adopted Koreans should provide substantial and consistent exposure to Korean culture. I discussed in this paper how some of the young women were given tastes of Korean culture through entering the Korean church, spending time with Koreans, and attending Korean Culture Camp. However, I hope that parents, educators, and the Korean American community will attempt to acknowledge that Korean culture should be a part of Korean adoptees' lives. While I applaud and believe in the efforts of Korean Culture Camp, this once-a-year exposure is not enough. Furthermore, the Korean and Korean American community needs to recognize these individuals as a part of the Korean experience and should make strides to bring them into the group, rather than making them feel as though they are less Korean or non-members.

Through consistent and positive exposure, I hope that these young women will have a stronger tie to their Korean ethnic background and better understand their unique position in the U.S. As a result, I hope that they will build a stronger self-esteem and have more confidence, which may result in higher academic and social achievements.

Notes

[1] I recognize that "Americans" are made up of a variety of ethnicities, races, and multiethnic individuals. However, the term "American" throughout this paper will be used synonymously with "white." I base this decision on two main reasons: 1) whiteness is deeply ingrained throughout the U.S. (see Scheurich & Young, 1997); and 2) the participants in this study mostly used the term "American" to describe whites.

[2] The Korean community was mostly made up of students who were from Korea. These "international" students had little contact with other Korean Americans and Asian Americans on campus. In addition, there were two Korean churches in their community (again mostly attended by students from Korea); however, none of the women in the study attended either of these churches.

[3] The Kim family returned to Korea, at the end of the Spring 1998 term, upon Mr. Kim's graduation.

[4] These weekly gatherings continued for about three months. After the Winter break, Julie returned to the house a few times. The Kim family offered Julie an open invitation to stay at their home in Korea at any time and that they would help her find a part-time job teaching English. Julie initially seemed excited that she now had a place to stay in Korea, as well as a support system to assist her while she was there. I offered to introduce the other university women to Korean families in the area. However, they did not seem too enthused about the idea. Sarah visited the Kim household once.

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